

Expatriate Insider 2021 Survey Reveals: The Best and Worst Destinations for Living and Working Abroad

Expats in Russia are unhappy with their working life, the quality of life, the ease of settling in, and their personal finances.

- Taiwan, Mexico, Costa Rica, Malaysia, Portugal, New Zealand, Australia, Ecuador, Canada, and Vietnam are the best destinations for expats in 2021.
- The worst countries for expats are Kuwait (59th), Italy, South Africa, Russia, Egypt, Japan, Cyprus, Turkey, India, and Malta (50th).
- Russia comes 56th out of 59 destinations in the Expatriate Insider 2021 survey. It ranks among the bottom 20 in nearly all indices, except for the cost of living (25th).

Munich, 18 May 2021 — For the seventh time, [InterNations](https://www.internations.org), the world's largest expat community with around 4 million members, has published its *Expatriate Insider* survey. With more than 12,000 respondents, it is one of the most extensive surveys about living and working abroad, sharing insights into expat life in 59 destinations. The survey offers in-depth information on expats' satisfaction with the quality of life, ease of settling in, working life, personal finance, and the cost of living in their respective country of residence. Additionally, the respondents share **how they have been experiencing the COVID-19 pandemic** and how it has impacted their life.

Russia comes 56th out of 59 destinations in the *Expatriate Insider 2021* survey. The country ranks particularly low in the Working Abroad Index (52nd), but it does not do much better in the Quality of Life (49th), Ease of Settling In (48th), and Personal Finance (47th) Indices. However, it lands in a solid 25th place in the Cost of Living Index. Overall, Taiwan, Mexico, and Costa Rica are the best expat destinations worldwide: all of them attract expats with their ease of settling in and good personal finances. On the other hand, the bottom three countries, Kuwait, Italy, and South Africa, all perform poorly in the Working Abroad Index. Additionally, Kuwait is the hardest country for expats to feel at home in, Italy is the worst for personal finances, and expats in South Africa do not feel safe.



Russia in the *Expat Insider 2021* Survey

An Unsatisfying Working Life for Expats

Out of 59 countries in the *Expat Insider 2021* survey, Russia (56th) lands in the bottom 10 — only ahead of South Africa (57th), Italy (58th), and Kuwait (59th). It performs worst in the Working Abroad Index (52nd), with 24% of expats rating the state of the local economy negatively (vs. 19% globally). Nearly a quarter of respondents (24%) are also unhappy with their job security in Russia (vs. 20% globally), and just 63% are satisfied with their job in general (vs. 68% globally). A large share of expats in Russia work in the fields of education (20% vs. 12% globally) and construction (12% vs. 3% globally).

On average, expats with full-time employment in Russia work 43 hours per week, just about the same as the global average (43.2 hours per week). However, one in five respondents in Russia (20%) still rates their working hours negatively (vs. 16% globally). Additionally, more than a quarter (26%) are unsatisfied with their work-life balance (vs. 17% globally).

A Low Quality of Life and a Challenging Culture

Narrowly escaping the bottom 10 in the Quality of Life Index (49th), Russia performs especially poorly in the Quality of the Environment subcategory (49th). Many expats are unhappy with the air quality (31% vs. 20% globally), the water and sanitation infrastructure (21% vs. 12% globally), and the natural environment (14% vs. 8% globally). *"I do not like the lack of any meaningful efforts or policies to reduce environmental pollution and to support basic recycling,"* shares a US American expat. Another factor that lowers the quality of life for expats in Russia is the climate and weather (53rd), which 40% of expats rate negatively, compared to just 17% globally.

With Russia coming in 48th place in the Ease of Settling In Index, 29% of respondents find it difficult to settle down in this country (vs. 22% globally). Just 57% feel at home in the local culture (vs. 63% globally), and 22% describe the population as generally unfriendly (vs. 16% globally). What is more, Russia ends up in the bottom 10 of the Language subcategory (58th), only ahead of Japan (59th). Nearly half the expats (48%) find it difficult to live in Russia's cities without speaking the local language (vs. 29% globally), and two-thirds (67%) find it difficult to learn Russian (vs. 42% globally). Interestingly, the majority of expats (81%) still speaks the local language at least a little (vs. 77% globally), even though Russian is not their mother tongue.

Low Income, Mediocre Cost of Living

The country also ranks low in the Personal Finance Index (47th), with 27% of expats dissatisfied with their financial situation (vs. 19% globally). Indeed, 34% of expats in Russia have a yearly income of fewer than 12,000 USD — more than twice the global average (15%). And just 21% earn between 25,000 and 75,000 USD a year (vs. 37% globally). More than a quarter of respondents (27%) say their disposable household income is not enough to cover expenses (vs. 23% globally). Nonetheless, Russia receives its best result in the Cost of Living Index (25th): 49% of expats rate the cost of living positively, which is, however, still just one percentage point above the global average (48%).

The Impact of COVID-19 on Expat Life in Russia

Fewer than three in five survey respondents in Russia (58%) state that the pandemic has not had any impact on the duration of their stay abroad (vs. 63% globally). However, 20% have decided to stay in Russia and not to move back home in the near future (vs. 18% globally), and 11% were planning to move to another foreign country but had to change these plans due to COVID-19 (vs. 8% globally).

More than one out of five expats in Russia (22%) expect the pandemic to mostly affect their work or business in the long run (vs. 16% globally). And lastly, just over half the respondents (51%) are satisfied with the official communication regarding COVID-19 and related regulations in Russia, compared to about two-thirds globally (66%).

The Best and Worst Destinations for Living and Working Abroad in 2021

According to the *Expatriate Insider 2021* survey, the top 10 destinations for expats are Taiwan (1st), Mexico, Costa Rica, Malaysia, Portugal, New Zealand, Australia, Ecuador, Canada, and Vietnam (10th). All these countries stand out with above-average results in the Ease of Settling In Index, with Mexico ranking first, followed by Malaysia (2nd) and Costa Rica (3rd). Moreover, half of these countries also rank among the top 10 in the Personal Finance Index. Taiwan (11th) and Portugal (14th) narrowly miss out on a top 10 spot in this index, while New Zealand (28th), Australia (39th), and Canada (50th) have a weaker performance in this regard.

The worst countries for expats are Kuwait (59th), Italy, South Africa, Russia, Egypt, Japan, Cyprus, Turkey, India, and Malta (50th). Besides Japan (21st), all these countries rank far below the global average in the Quality of Life Index. What is more, eight out of the ten worst-rated destinations are also among the bottom 10 in the Working Abroad Index — the only two exceptions being India (46th) and Malta (31st), which, however, also receive mediocre results at best. Lastly, India is the only country in the overall bottom 10 that performs very well in the Personal Finance Index (4th), while the others — such as Italy (59th), Kuwait (58th), and Cyprus (57th) — rank below the global average or even land among the bottom 10.

Expatriate Life during the COVID-19 Pandemic

On a global scale, 45% of survey respondents say that COVID-19 had an impact on their current stay abroad or their relocation plans: the **share of expats** who say so (**37%**) either decided to *not* move back home in the near future (18%), planned to move to another country but had to change these plans (8%), will move to another country due to the pandemic (6%), or will move back home sooner than originally planned (5%).

The **share of local respondents whose relocation plans were affected by COVID-19 (61%)** is a lot higher: some of them were living abroad but moved home sooner than planned (18%), others were planning to move abroad but had to change their plans (35%), and about one in ten have now decided to move abroad because of the pandemic (9%).

The Pandemic's Impact on Everyday Life

Of course, COVID-19 has not only disrupted the relocation plans of expats worldwide. When asked where they see the biggest impact of the pandemic on their personal life *right now*, the survey respondents point out its effects on personal travel (25%), social life (23%), and their work or business (16%) in particular. In the *long run*, respondents are still concerned about the impact of COVID-19 on their social life (17% of all respondents), and there are also considerable worries regarding personal travel (22%).

How Expats Stay Informed on COVID-19

Expats across the world mostly rely on official government channels (48%), local news (47%), and social media (40%) for news on the COVID-19 situation and the related regulations in their country of residence. Considering the importance of government channels, just **how satisfied are expats with the official communication regarding COVID-19 and related regulations?** Worldwide, not quite two-thirds (66%) rate this factor positively, with close to a quarter (24%) saying they are completely satisfied. The main complaint among expats who are *not* satisfied with the official communication on the pandemic is that the information is unclear, confusing, and/or contradictory (67%).

For further information on the global impact of COVID-19 on expat life, please take a look at the full press release in the download center of our e-mail.

About the InterNations *Expat Insider 2021* Survey

For its annual [Expat Insider survey](#), InterNations asked 12,420 expats representing 174 nationalities and living in 186 countries or territories to provide information on various aspects of expat life, as well as their gender, age, and nationality. Participants were asked to rate up to 37 different aspects of life abroad on a scale of one to seven. The rating process emphasized the respondents' personal satisfaction with these aspects, considering both emotional topics and more factual aspects with equal weight. The respondents' ratings of the individual factors were then bundled in various combinations for a total of 13 subcategories, and their mean values were used to draw up five topical indices: Quality of Life, Ease of Settling In, Working Abroad, Personal Finance, and Cost of Living. The first four of these indices were further averaged together with expats' general satisfaction with their life in order to rank 59 expat destinations around the world. In 2021, the top 10 are Taiwan, Mexico, Costa Rica, Malaysia, Portugal, New Zealand, Australia, Ecuador, Canada, and Vietnam. Moreover, expats were asked about how COVID-19 has impacted their life abroad; however, these responses did not influence the overall ranking.

For a country to be featured in the indices and consequently in the overall ranking, a sample size of at least 50 survey participants per destination was necessary.

About InterNations

With around 4 million members in 420 cities around the world, [InterNations](#) is the largest global community and a source of information for people who live and work abroad. InterNations offers global and local networking and socializing, both online and face to face. At around 6,000 events and activities per month, expatriates have the opportunity to meet other global minds. Online services include discussion forums and helpful articles with personal expat experiences, tips, and information about life abroad. Membership is by approval only to ensure we remain a community of trust. InterNations is part of the New Work SE, a group of brands that offer products and services for a better working life.

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