

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

Expats feel at home in Bahrain and appreciate the career opportunities.

- 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).
- Bahrain, the highest-ranking country in the Gulf region, comes 12th out of 59 destinations in the Expatriate Insider 2021 survey. It performs best in the Ease of Settling In Index, coming in 5th place.

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.

Expats in Bahrain find it easy to settle in and are happy with their local career opportunities. However, the country only comes in mid-field in the Quality of Life Index, as well as the Personal Finance and Cost of Living Indices. 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.



Bahrain in the *Expat Insider 2021* Survey

Easy to Settle Down in Bahrain

Ranking 12th out of 59 countries in the *Expat Insider 2021* survey, Bahrain performs best in the Ease of Settling In Index (5th) — just behind Colombia (4th), Costa Rica (3rd), Malaysia (2nd), and Mexico (1st). Most expats (87%) find it easy to live in Bahrain without speaking the local language (vs. 54% globally). Moreover, 77% of expats feel at home in the local culture (vs. 63% globally), and 70% say it is easy to settle down in Bahrain (vs. 62% globally). A German expat says: *“The people—locals and expats — are among the highlights of living in Bahrain.”* More than half the expats in Bahrain (55%) have a social circle that consist of both expats and locals (vs. 48% globally), but another 40% are mostly friends with other expats (vs. 32% globally), and just 5% mainly socialize with locals (vs. 20% globally).

Good Career Opportunities for Expats

With Bahrain receiving good results in the Working Abroad Index (15th), more than half the expats (54%) are happy with the local career opportunities, almost ten percentage points more than the global average (45%). A Pakistani expat shares: *“Bahrain offers an equal opportunity to everyone who wants to succeed and develop in any field of life or work. This is the place for anyone to try their luck.”* Additionally, 69% are satisfied with their job in general (vs. 68% globally), and 63% rate their job security positively (vs. 61% globally). In Bahrain, the most common fields expats work in are healthcare (11% vs. 6% globally), energy and utilities (9% vs. 2% globally), education (8% vs. 12% globally), and hospitality (8% vs. 3% globally).

Low Incomes as One of the Downsides

Placing 27th in the Quality of Life Index, Bahrain performs poorly in the Quality of Environment (43rd) and Leisure Options (42nd) subcategories. In fact, 24% of expats are unhappy with the natural environment (vs. 8% globally), and 17% are dissatisfied with the local leisure options (vs. 14% globally), placing the country among the bottom 10 for both factors (55th for both). On the upside, most expats are happy with the availability of government services online (83% vs. 63% globally), the country's political stability (84% vs. 64% globally), and the quality of medical care in Bahrain (81% vs. 71% globally).

With regard to the financial aspects of expat life, Bahrain comes in mid-field in the Cost of Living (26th) and Personal Finance (29th) Indices. Exactly half the expats (50%) rate the cost of living positively (vs. 48% globally). But while 66% of expats are generally satisfied with their financial situation (vs. 64% globally), another 31% say their disposable household income is not enough to cover all expenses (vs. 23% globally). In fact, 46% of expats in Bahrain have an income of up to 25,000 USD per year (vs. 30% globally), while just 8% of respondents report an annual income ranging from 25,000 to 50,000 USD (vs. 20% globally).

The Impact of COVID-19 on Expat Life in Bahrain

The COVID-19 pandemic has affected expats in Bahrain in several ways. Three in ten respondents (30%) are planning to stay in Bahrain rather than move home in the near future, which is about ten percentage points above the global average (18%). Another 14% plan on moving to another foreign country or back home (vs. 11% globally). However, just 5% were planning to move to another country and had to cancel these plans due to the pandemic (vs. 8% globally).

COVID-19 has had the biggest impact on the work or business of expats in Bahrain (25% vs. 20% globally), followed by their personal travel (21% vs. 28% globally), and their social life (18% vs. 24%

globally). The majority of expats (85%) is satisfied with the official communication in Bahrain regarding COVID-19 and related regulations (vs. 66% globally). What is more, 75% receive their information through official government channels, which is a much higher share than the global average (48%).

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.

Find more information about InterNations on our [press page](#), [in our company blog](#), or in our [magazine](#).

Press Contact

Caroline Harsch
Media Spokesperson

InterNations GmbH
Schwanthalerstrasse 39
80336 Munich, Germany

Email: press@internations.org
Homepage: <https://www.internations.org/press>