

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

Expats in China are happy with the local economy and their financial situation but unhappy with the quality of life.

- 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).
- China comes 22nd out of 59 destinations in the Expatriate Insider 2021 survey. The country performs best in the Personal Finance (6th) and Working Abroad (4th) Indices.

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.

China comes 22nd out of 59 destinations in the *Expatriate Insider 2021* survey, landing in the top 10 of the Working Abroad (4th) and Personal Finance (6th) Indices. While expats are also fine with the cost of living (22nd), China does not do as well in the Ease of Settling In (39th) and Quality of Life (43rd) 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.



## China in the *Expat Insider 2021* Survey

### A Highly Satisfying Working Life

China ranks 22nd in the *Expat Insider 2021* survey, receiving mixed results. It performs best in the Working Abroad Index (4th): 59% of expats are happy with their local career opportunities (vs. 45% globally), and a further 87% are satisfied with the state of the local economy (vs. 62% globally). In fact, an expat from New Zealand says their favorite thing about living in China is their “*general well-being and job satisfaction*”. Moreover, 68% of expats are happy with their job security, compared to 61% worldwide. China also scores high in the Personal Finance Index (6th), with 71% of survey respondents rating their financial situation positively (vs. 64% globally). Another 86% say that their disposable household income is enough or more than enough to cover their living expenses (vs. 77% globally).

### Low Air Quality and Restricted Access to Online Services

On the other hand, China only ranks 43rd in the Quality of Life Index, which pushes the country lower in the overall ranking. In fact, China lands in the bottom 5 for the Digital Life subcategory (57th), with 69% of respondents saying they do not have unrestricted access to online services (vs. 7% globally). An Australian expat shares: “*I do not like having no internet freedom.*” The country does not perform much better in the Quality of the Environment subcategory (54th): 46% of expats are unhappy with the air quality, more than twice the global average (20%). Additionally, 19% of respondents are not satisfied with the natural environment (vs. 8% globally).

### Easy to Make Friends

China also performs below average in the Ease of Settling In Index (39th), with 38% of expats finding it difficult to settle down in this country (vs. 22% globally). However, 64% of expats are satisfied with the ease of finding new friends, which is 16 percentage points above the global average (48%). In fact, more than half the respondents (51%) describe their friends and acquaintances as a fairly mixed group of expats and locals (vs. 48% globally). Another 35% are mainly friends with other expats (vs. 32% globally), and just 14% have mostly local residents as friends (vs. 20% globally).

### The Impact of COVID-19 on Expat Life in China

During the COVID-19 pandemic, 64% of expats in China are generally satisfied with the official communication on this topic, slightly less than the global average of 66%. More than half (53%) use expat news or international media to stay informed (vs. 32% globally). However, 29% of expats say they will not move back home in the near future because of the pandemic (vs. 18% globally), while only 10% plan on moving home or to yet another country (vs. 11% globally). Lastly, close to half the expats in China (49%) say that the pandemic impacts their lives largely when it comes to personal travel. This is 21 percentage points higher than the global average (28%).

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

According to the *Expat 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](mailto:press@internations.org)

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