

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

Expats in Costa Rica enjoy the friendliness of the local residents and their excellent work-life balance.

- 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).
- Costa Rica comes 3rd out of 59 destinations in the Expatriate Insider 2021 survey. It ranks among the upper half in every index, performing best in the Ease of Settling In Index (3rd).

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.

Costa Rica ranks 3rd out of 59 destinations in the *Expatriate Insider 2021* survey. Expats are particularly happy with the ease of settling in (3rd) and their personal finances (7th). While the country also achieves an above-average 14th place for the quality of living and places 16th for working abroad, it only gets mediocre results in the Cost of Living Index (29th). Overall, only Taiwan (1st) and Mexico (2nd) rank ahead of Costa Rica in the *Expatriate Insider 2021* survey: 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.



## Costa Rica in the *Expat Insider 2021* Survey

### **An Easy Country for Settling In**

Costa Rica places 3rd out of 59 countries in the *Expat Insider 2021* survey — just behind Taiwan (1st) and Mexico (2nd). It also ranks among the top 5 in the Ease of Settling In Index (3rd), with 91% of expats describing the population as generally friendly (vs. 69% globally). What is more, 87% agree that the locals are friendly towards foreign residents (vs. 67% globally), and 70% find it easy to make local friends (vs. 44% globally). In fact, over half the expats in Costa Rica (57%) have a group of friends and acquaintances that includes a fair mix of local residents and other expats (vs. 48% globally). *"I love the social life and culture,"* shares a US American expat. Most survey respondents find it easy to get used to the local culture (82% vs. 65% globally) and feel at home in it too (80% vs. 63% globally).

### **High Air Quality and Happy Expats**

Costa Rica performs well in the Quality of Life Index (14th), coming in second place worldwide for personal happiness — just behind Mexico (1st). All things considered, 88% of expats in Costa Rica are happy with their life in general, compared to just 75% globally. The country comes 10th in the Quality of the Environment subcategory, with the majority of expats being happy with the natural environment (96% vs. 84% globally) and the air quality (91% vs. 66% globally). Additionally, 89% rate the climate and weather positively (vs. 66% globally). *"I like the beautiful natural spots,"* says a Venezuelan expat.

However, Costa Rica lands in the bottom 10 of the Travel & Transportation subcategory (52nd): 29% of expats are unhappy with the public transportation system, which is nearly twice the global average (15%). A Canadian expat shares: *"Traffic is terrible because of poor drivers, bad roads, and insufficient infrastructure."*

### **Amazing Work-Life Balance and Great Financial Situation**

Costa Rica makes it into the top 10 of the Personal Finance Index (7th), with 84% of expats considering their disposable household income enough or more than enough to cover all expenses (vs. 77% globally). A further 78% are happy with their financial situation, compared to just 64% globally. An Italian expat who was sent to Costa Rica by his employer says: *"I am glad that it was easy to move abroad before the pandemic hit — I do not have to spend that much money here."* More than a third of expats in Costa Rica (36%) have an income ranging from 25,000 to 50,000 USD per year (vs. 20% globally), while just 7% have less than 12,000 USD a year (vs. 15% globally).

The country also does well in the Working Abroad Index (16th), with 70% of expats being satisfied with their job in general (vs. 68% globally). Additionally, 63% rate their job security in Costa Rica positively (vs. 61% globally), and 69% are satisfied with their work-life balance (vs. 66% globally) — 42% even very much so (vs. 25% globally). Moreover, 68% are happy with their working hours (vs. 66% globally). On the downside, Costa Rica comes 51st out of 59 for the state of the local economy: 36% of expats rate this factor negatively (vs. 19% globally).

### The Impact of COVID-19 on Expat Life in Costa Rica

The pandemic has affected the relocation plans of 37% of expats worldwide. This also applies to 34% of expats in Costa Rica, with 16% having decided to stay in Costa Rica and not move back home in the near future (vs. 18% globally). The pandemic has also affected expats' lives in other areas: 30% feel the impact of COVID-19 with regard to personal travel (vs. 28% globally), 29% in their social life (vs. 24% globally), and 13% when it comes to their personal finances (vs. 8% globally).

For expats in Costa Rica, the main sources of information on COVID-19 are social media (50% vs. 40% globally), expat news and international media (48% vs. 32% globally), local news (36% vs. 47% globally), and official government channels (36% vs. 48% globally). The majority of expats (78%) is happy with the official communication regarding COVID-19 and related regulations (vs. 66% globally).

## 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.

## Expat 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](#).

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