

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

Kuwait is the worst-rated destination for expats worldwide.

- 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).
- Kuwait ranks last overall, coming 59th out of 59 destinations in the Expat Insider 2021 survey. It ends up among the bottom 5 countries in all indices aside except for the cost of living (53rd).

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 *Expat 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.

Kuwait comes in last place out of 59 destinations in the *Expat Insider 2021* survey. The country is rated worst worldwide for the quality of life and the ease of settling in. Furthermore, it ranks poorly in the Personal Finance (58th), Working Abroad (56th), and Cost of Living (53rd) 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. Together with Kuwait (59th), Italy (58th) and South Africa (57th) make up the bottom 3 together. They 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.



[www.internations.org/expat-insider](https://www.internations.org/expat-insider)

## Kuwait in the *Expatriate Insider 2021* Survey

### **Last Place for the Quality of Life and Ease of Settling In**

For the seventh time in eight years, Kuwait (59th out of 59 countries) comes in last place in the *Expatriate Insider 2021* survey. The country ranks last in the Quality of Life Index (59th), with especially poor results in the Leisure Options, Personal Happiness, and Travel & Transportation subcategories (59th for all). In fact, 58% of expats in Kuwait are unhappy with the local leisure options (vs. 14% globally), and half the respondents (50%) rate the climate and weather negatively (vs. 17% globally). A Lebanese expat says they do not like the “*very hot summer*”. Additionally, 29% rate their personal happiness in Kuwait negatively (vs. 10% globally), and just 45% are satisfied with their travel opportunities (vs. 84% globally).

Kuwait also places last in the Ease of Settling In Index (59th), with 46% of expats not feeling at home in the local culture (vs. 20% globally) and 45% finding it difficult to settle down in this country (vs. 22% globally). Moreover, 51% have trouble finding new friends (vs. 32% globally), and 62% find it difficult to make local friends in particular (vs. 36% globally). In Kuwait, 64% of expats are mostly friends with other expats, which is twice the global average (32%). The country also comes last for friendliness (59th), with 36% of expats rating the general friendliness of the population negatively (vs. 16% globally), while another 44% describe the people as unfriendly towards foreign residents (vs. 18% globally). On the upside, 58% of expats find it is easy to get by without speaking the local language (vs. 54% globally).

### **Working Life and Finances Are Also Sore Spots for Expats**

Placing 56th in the Working Abroad Index, Kuwait performs especially poorly in both the Work & Leisure (58th) and the Career Prospects & Satisfaction (57th) subcategories. Almost one-third of respondents (31%) are dissatisfied with their job in general (vs. 16% globally), and 34% are unhappy with their work-life balance (vs. 17% globally). The three most common fields that expats in Kuwait work in are education (23% vs. 12% globally), energy and utilities (9% vs. 2% globally), and healthcare (9% vs. 6% globally). Just over half the expats (54%) rate their working hours positively, compared to 66% globally. Indeed, expats with full-time jobs in Kuwait work longer hours than the global average (44.4 hours per week vs. 43.2 globally).

Kuwait is second to last in the Personal Finance Index (58th) — only ahead of Italy (59th). More than one-third of expats (34%) are dissatisfied with their financial situation (vs. 19% globally). Moreover, 35% state that their disposable household income is not enough to cover their living expenses (vs. 23% globally). A large share of expats has a yearly income ranging from 12,000 to 25,000 USD (19% vs. 15% globally) or even one below 12,000 USD a year (17% vs. 15% globally). The cost of living in Kuwait does not make the situation any better: 55% of respondents rate the cost of living negatively (vs. 34% globally). A Pakistani expat says the “*high living expenses and rent prices*” are their least favorite things about living in Kuwait.

### **The Impact of COVID-19 on Expat Life in Kuwait**

The pandemic has affected the relocation plans of 70% of expats in Kuwait — nearly twice the global average (37%). Out of the respondents in Kuwait, 20% have decided to stay there and not move home in the near future (vs. 18% globally), while 19% will move to another foreign country (vs. 6% globally). A further 14% will move home sooner than anticipated, which is again more than twice the global average (5%). Another 17% were planning to move to another foreign country but had to cancel these plans due to COVID-19 (vs. 8% globally).

To stay up to date on COVID-19 and related regulations, 53% of expats in Kuwait follow social media, which is 13 percentage points more than the global average (40%). About half the expats (51%) also receive their information from official government channels (vs. 48% globally), and 37% also rely on expat news and international media (vs. 32% globally). Close to three in five expats (58%) are satisfied with the official communication on COVID-19, which is, however, a smaller share than the global average (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.

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

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