

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

Expats rank Malaysia among the top five destinations 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).
- Malaysia comes 4th out of 59 destinations in the Expatriate Insider 2021 survey. It ranks among the top 10 countries in three out of five 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.

Malaysia comes 4th out of 59 destinations in the *Expatriate Insider 2021* survey. Expats are particularly happy with the ease of settling in and the cost of living, ranking the country second for both indices. While Malaysia also lands among the top 10 in the Personal Finance Index (9th), it performs not quite as well in the Quality of Life (19th) and Working Abroad (25th) 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.



Malaysia in the *Expat Insider 2021* Survey

In the Top 3 for the Ease of Settling In

Ranking 4th out of 59 countries in the *Expat Insider 2021* survey, Malaysia ranks above the global average in every index. The country does particularly well in the Ease of Settling In Index (2nd), where only Mexico (1st) ranks higher. A US-American expat says: *"It is easy to live here, and the people are wonderful."* In fact, most expats find it easy to settle down in Malaysia (77% vs. 62% globally) and to make new friends (66% vs. 48% globally). When it comes to their social circle, 64% of expats in Malaysia describe their friends and acquaintances as a mixed group of expats and locals (vs. 48% globally). *"Making friends is not difficult, and people here are generally honest,"* says an Indian expat. Malaysia ranks first worldwide in the Language subcategory, with 92% of expats finding it easy to live there without speaking the local language (vs. 54% globally). Indeed, over a quarter of expats (27%) do not speak any of the local languages in Malaysia (vs. 13% globally), but half (50%) speak them at least a little (vs. 30% globally). Moreover, 45% of expats consider it easy to learn the local language (vs. 39% globally). With Malaysia coming in third place in the Feeling at Home subcategory, 74% of expats also consider themselves at home in the local culture (vs. 63% globally).

Low Cost of Living, High Financial Satisfaction

Malaysia also does exceedingly well in the Cost of Living Index (2nd), where just Vietnam (1st) performs better. In fact, 82% of expats rate the cost of living in Malaysia positively, compared to just 48% globally. A Japanese expat shares that *"the very reasonable living costs"* as their personal highlight about living in Malaysia. What is more, the country performs well in the Personal Finance Index (9th). Almost three in four expats (73%) are satisfied with their financial situation (vs. 64% globally), and 85% say their disposable household income is enough or more than enough to cover their expenses (vs. 77% globally).

Above Average for Quality of Life and Working Abroad

The country ranks lower in the Quality of Living Index (19th), but still does well for a number of factors featured in this index. Most expats are happy with both their socializing and leisure activities in Malaysia (80% vs. 67% globally) and their life in general (85% vs. 75% globally). Additionally, 82% of expats rate the quality of medical care positively (vs. 71% globally), and 71% are satisfied with its affordability (vs. 61% globally). Most expats (82%) are also happy with the transportation infrastructure (vs. 76% globally). On the downside, Malaysia ranks 36th in the Safety & Security subcategory, with over a quarter of expats (26%) rating its political stability negatively (vs. 16% globally). The country does worst in the Working Abroad Index, but it still lands in an above-average 25th place: 72% of expats are satisfied with their working hours (vs. 66% globally), and 69% are happy with their job in general (vs. 68% globally).

The Impact of COVID-19 on Expat Life in Malaysia

A large proportion of expats in Malaysia (49%) rely on social media as a source of information regarding COVID-19 and related regulations (vs. 40% globally), followed by local news (47% for both Malaysia and globally) and official government channels (44% vs. 48% globally). Most expats (71%) are satisfied with the official communication regarding COVID-19 (vs. 66% globally), with more than half of them (55%) saying the information is clear and easy to understand. Exactly two in five respondents in Malaysia (40%) say the pandemic has had the biggest impact on their personal travel — a much higher share than the global average of 28%. However, a smaller proportion than average feels the impact in their working life (8% vs. 15% globally) or their social life (17% vs. 24% 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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