

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

Expats in Vietnam benefit from their life abroad – especially financially.

- 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).
- Vietnam comes 10th out of 59 destinations in the Expatriate Insider 2021 survey. It ranks first worldwide for both personal finance and the cost of living, but the country performs poorly for its quality of life (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 *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.

Vietnam comes 10th out of 59 destinations in the *Expatriate Insider 2021* survey. Expats rate the country best in the world in both the Personal Finance and Cost of Living Indices (1st). While it also ranks in the top 10 of the Working Abroad Index (9th), it lands in a rather average 25th place in the Ease of Settling In Index. Lastly, Vietnam ends up among the bottom 10 worldwide in the Quality of Life Index (53rd). 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.



Vietnam in the *Expatriate Insider 2021* Survey

The Number One for All Things Financial

Coming in 10th place out of 59 countries overall in the *Expatriate Insider 2021* survey, Vietnam ranks first in both the Personal Finance and Cost of Living Indices. When asked what they like most about their life abroad, multiple expats in Vietnam answer with *“the cost of living”*. In fact, the majority of expats (85%) rates this aspect positively (vs. 48% globally). Additionally, 78% are satisfied with their financial situation (vs. 64% globally), and nine in ten expats (90%) say their disposable household income is enough or more than enough to cover their living expenses (vs. 77% globally).

Vietnam also does well in the Working Abroad Index (9th), with the vast majority of expats (86%) expressing overall job satisfaction (vs. 68% globally). Vietnam places first worldwide for this factor and fourth in the Career Prospects & Satisfaction subcategory. Additionally, 49% rate the local career opportunities positively (vs. 45% globally). Most expats are also happy with their work-life balance (78% vs. 66% globally) and their working hours (67% vs. 66% globally). Interestingly, expats with full-time employment in Vietnam work an average 44.5 hours per week, which is actually more than the global average of 43.2 hours a week.

Finding Friends Is Easy, Learning the Language Is Hard

Placing 25th in the Ease of Settling In Index, Vietnam does especially well in the Finding Friends subcategory (9th). According to 63% of expats, making local friends is easy (vs. 44% globally), and 67% find it easy to make new friends in general (vs. 48% globally). In fact, more than a quarter of expats in Vietnam (26%) are mostly friends with local residents (vs. 20% globally), while another 45% have a mixed circle of friends and acquaintances that includes both locals and expats (vs. 48% globally). It might help that the majority of expats (81%) finds the local residents generally friendly (vs. 69% globally). However, another 81% consider it difficult to learn the local language — almost twice the global average of 42%. Perhaps this is why 39% of expats do not speak it at all, compared to 13% globally. A Canadian expat shares: *“I do not like being unable to speak Vietnamese, but it is one of the hardest languages to learn.”* At least, 72% of expats find it easy to live in Vietnam without local language skills (vs. 54% globally).

The Only Major Downside? The Quality of Life

Despite its great performance in the overall ranking, Vietnam ends up among the bottom 10 in the Quality of Life Index (53rd). More than three in five expats (63%) rate the air quality in Vietnam negatively (vs. 20% globally), and 42% are unhappy with the water and sanitation infrastructure (vs. 12% globally). A Swiss expat shares: *“Plastic pollution is a major problem, especially along the coast.”* Vietnam also performs poorly in the Digital Life subcategory (54th): half the expats (50%) rate the availability of government services online negatively (vs. 21% globally), and one in four (25%) finds it difficult to pay without cash (vs. 9% globally). But despite the poor performance for the quality of life, the majority of expats in Vietnam (85%) is still generally happy with their life (vs. 75% globally).

The Impact of COVID-19 on Expat Life in Vietnam

Close to one in three expats in Vietnam (31%) have decided *not* to move back home in the near future due to the pandemic (vs. 18% globally), while less than half (49%) say the pandemic has not affected the time they are planning to stay abroad (vs. 63% globally). Additionally, the majority of expats in Vietnam (79%) is satisfied with the official communication regarding COVID-19 and related

regulations (vs. 66% globally). To stay up to date on COVID-19-related news, most survey respondents follow expat news and international media (45%), social media (43%), and official government channels (39%).

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 *Expats Insider 2021* Survey

For its annual [Expats Insider survey](#), InterNations asked 12,420 expats representing 174 nationalities and living in 59 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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