

The Best and Worst Countries for Digital Life Abroad

Within the GCC States, Bahrain ranks far ahead of Qatar, the UAE, Oman, Kuwait, and Saudi Arabia.

- *Estonia, Finland, Norway, Denmark, New Zealand, Israel, Canada, Singapore, the Netherlands, and the USA are the best countries for digital life abroad.*
- *From Bahrain (12th) to Saudi Arabia (63rd), expats' satisfaction with digital life varies a lot in the GCC States: all five receive low ratings for the unrestricted access to online services.*
- *Myanmar, China, Egypt, India, Philippines, Saudi Arabia, Indonesia, Peru, Turkey, and Uganda are the countries where expats are the least satisfied with their digital life.*

Munich, 22 May 2019 — Over the last years, it has become impossible to imagine a world without digital communication, especially for globally mobile people: staying in touch with loved ones at home, mastering the administrative challenges in a new country, or working remotely as a digital nomad — the digital needs of expats are extremely diverse.

In its first [Digital Life Abroad Report](#), [InterNations](#), the world's largest expat community, identifies the best and worst countries to live a connected life. The results, which are based on the annual [Expats Insider survey](#), reveal that Estonia, Finland, Norway, Denmark, and New Zealand excel at offering a digital environment. Expats in these countries are very satisfied with their unrestricted access to online services and the possibility to pay without cash almost anywhere. At the other end of the scale, Myanmar, China, Egypt, India, and the Philippines are rated the worst countries for digital life. Expats in these countries struggle with a lack of government services online, difficult access to high-speed internet at home, or even restrictions in their use of online services.

Within the GCC States, Bahrain (12th) ranks far ahead of Qatar (28th), the UAE (37th), Oman (46th), Kuwait (56th), and Saudi Arabia (63rd). Expats in the area are particularly unsatisfied with the restricted access to online services, while the availability of online administrative/government services is rated positively in most of the states.

Digital Life in the GCC States



1 Estonia	10 USA	19 Hong Kong	28 Qatar	37 UAE	46 Oman	55 Vietnam	64 Philippines
2 Finland	11 Sweden	20 Austria	29 Czechia	38 Panama	47 Thailand	56 Kuwait	65 India
3 Norway	12 Bahrain	21 Chile	30 Costa Rica	39 Colombia	48 Kazakhstan	57 Italy	66 Egypt
4 Denmark	13 Taiwan	22 Ireland	31 Kenya	40 Ecuador	49 South Africa	58 Morocco	67 China
5 New Zealand	14 Australia	23 Spain	32 Poland	41 Belgium	50 Brazil	59 Uganda	68 Myanmar
6 Israel	15 UK	24 Romania	33 Cyprus	42 Malta	51 Japan	60 Turkey	
7 Canada	16 Luxembourg	25 Russia	34 Malaysia	43 Bulgaria	52 Greece	61 Peru	
8 Singapore	17 Switzerland	26 Mexico	35 France	44 Serbia	53 Germany	62 Indonesia	
9 Netherlands	18 Portugal	27 South Korea	36 Hungary	45 Dominican Rep.	54 Argentina	63 Saudi Arabia	

● Best digital life
● Worst digital life

Digital Life in the GCC States

12. Bahrain

Rated the best country for expats in 2018, Bahrain also performs well in the new Digital Life subcategory (12th out of 68 countries). It receives its best rating with regard to the availability of administrative or government online services (7th out of 68), with 84% of expats rating this positively (vs. 55% globally). Expats also find it easy to get a local mobile phone number (13th) and to pay without cash in Bahrain (15th). Over nine in ten (92%) find the latter easy (vs. 78% globally). However, Bahrain ranks just 49th for unrestricted access to online services (e.g. social media): while 80% of respondents say they are happy (the same as the global average), just around half the expats (51%) are *completely happy* with this factor (vs. 58% globally). While this is a low ranking globally, Bahrain is still ahead of all other GCC States surveyed, which rank among the bottom 10 countries for this factor. *"Compared to the UAE, Bahrain has more freedom"*, explains an expat from Kenya. *"We have Skype and WhatsApp calls, which also helps us to communicate with friends and family more easily."*

28. Qatar

Qatar has slightly improved its ranking for quality of life (46th out of 65 in 2017 vs. 42nd out of 68 in 2018), which is partly due to its good 28th rank in the Digital Life subcategory. Like the majority of the GCC states, Qatar is listed among the bottom 10 countries for the unrestricted access to online services such as social media (64th). Only the UAE (65th) and Saudi Arabia (67th) rank worse in this region. In fact, just over half the expats in Qatar (54%) are happy with their access, which is 26 percentage points below the global average (80%). Qatar does somewhat better for other factors concerning digital life, such as the ease of paying without cash and the access to high-speed internet at home (22nd for both). More than four in five expats (83%) are satisfied with the latter, compared to 75% globally. Qatar receives its best ratings for providing administrative or government services online (79% positive ratings vs. 55% globally), joining fellow GCC States Bahrain and the UAE in the top 15 for this factor.

37. United Arab Emirates

Similarly to Bahrain, the UAE seems to excel in making administrative or government services available online (11th out of 68), with 80% of expats rating this factor positively (vs. 55% globally). However, expats are not very satisfied with their access to high-speed internet at home (33rd) and the ease of getting a local mobile phone number (45th). Just around half the expats find it *very easy* to get a local number (54%), compared to 58% globally. The main reason for the UAE's average overall ranking is the restricted access to online services, with the expat hub coming in 65th place worldwide, only ahead of Turkey, Saudi Arabia, and China. While only 10% of expats worldwide are unhappy with their access, 40% of expats in the UAE are not satisfied. An expat from Germany cites *"social media blockages"* as one of the things he does not like about life in Dubai.

46. Oman

Oman comes in a below-average 46th place for digital life in the *Expat Insider 2018* survey, which contributes to its general decline in the Quality of Life Index (26th out of 65 in 2017 vs. 37th out of 68 in 2018). The country ranks 49th worldwide for high-speed internet at home, with 21% finding it hard to get access (vs. 16% globally). When it comes to unrestricted access to online services, Oman manages to outperform neighboring states like Qatar, the UAE, and Saudi Arabia, but it still ranks a low 62nd out of 68 worldwide. More than one in five expats (21%) are unhappy with their access, which is more than twice the global average (10%). However, Oman matches the global average for the availability of administrative or government services online, with 55% of expats expressing their satisfaction both locally and globally. With Oman ranking 26th out of 68, this is the country's best feature when it comes to digital life.

56. Kuwait

Kuwait is the worst-rated country for expats in the *Expatriate Insider 2018* survey, and its poor results for digital life (56th out of 68) are no exception. In contrast to other GCC States, such as Bahrain, the UAE and Qatar, Kuwait does not shine regarding the availability of administrative or government services. Just over one-quarter (26%) of expats are satisfied with their availability (vs. 55% globally). Expats in Kuwait also appear to struggle with getting high-speed internet at home: close to three in ten (28%) are unhappy with this factor, compared to 16% globally. What is more, Kuwait joins the other GCC States in offering poor access to online services such as social media, ranking 63rd worldwide. Only half the expats (50%) in Kuwait are satisfied with their online access, which is 30 percentage points below the global average (80%).

63. Saudi Arabia

Having always ranked in the bottom 10 of the Quality of Life Index, the addition of the Digital Life subcategory is one of the reasons for Saudi Arabia dropping another eight places (59th out of 65 in 2017 vs. 67th out of 68 in 2018). The country comes in second-to-last place worldwide in terms of unrestricted access to online services such as social media, only ahead of China. In fact, close to half the expats in Saudi Arabia (46%) are unhappy with this factor, compared to 10% globally, or as an Indian expat states: *"There is no freedom and too much restriction."* Close to one in five expats (16%) even say it could not be any worse, which is more than five times the global average (3%). Only administrative or government services seem to be easily available online (27th out of 68), with 55% of respondents stating that they are satisfied, exactly the same share as the global average. Lastly, expats in Saudi Arabia seem to struggle to get a local mobile phone number (21% negative ratings vs. 7% globally) as well as access to high-speed internet at home (25% negative ratings vs. 16% globally).

Top 10 Countries for Digital Life Abroad

1. Estonia

Being featured in the *Expatriate Insider* survey for the first time, Estonia comes in 1st place out of 68 countries in terms of digital life. The country is rated best in the world for both unrestricted access to online services (e.g. social media) and the availability of administrative or government services online. In fact, 96% of expats judge the access to online services favorably (vs. 80% globally), with 86% saying it could not be any better (vs. 58% globally). Another 94% are impressed with the availability of administrative or government services online (vs. 55% globally), with 70% giving it the best possible rating (vs. 23% globally). These excellent results help the country compensate its low rankings in terms of available leisure options (51st) and travel opportunities (65th): all in all, Estonia comes in a good 21st place out of 68 countries for its general quality of life.

2. Finland

Paying without cash seems to be no issue at all in Finland, which comes first in the world for this factor. Nearly all expats in the country (96%) are satisfied with the ease of cashless payments (vs. 78% globally). They are also happy with the ease of getting high-speed internet at home (96% vs. 75% globally), the availability of administrative or government services online (88% vs. 55% globally), and the unrestricted access to online services such as social media (94% vs. 80% globally). Interestingly, it does not seem to be that easy to get a local mobile phone number in Finland (9% negative ratings vs. 7% globally), with the country ranking 44th out of 68 destinations for this factor.

3. Norway

Similarly to Finland, Norway ranks among the top 10 countries for most rating factors regarding digital life, but it drops drastically to 50th place for the ease of getting a local mobile number. In fact, just 84%

of expats find this easy (vs. 86% globally), making Norway the worst-ranking among the top 10 countries for this factor. On the other end of the scale, nearly all expats (97%) are happy with the level of unrestricted access to online services in Norway, compared to 80% globally. The same is true for high speed internet access at home (95% positive ratings vs. 75% globally) and paying without cash. The latter is considered easy by 97% of expats, which is 19 percentage points more than the global average (78%).

4. Denmark

An excellent 4th place in terms of digital life helps Denmark to make up for its bottom 10 positions for leisure options (64th out of 68 countries) and personal happiness (66th): it comes in 24th place for quality of life overall. The Nordic country ranks 2nd worldwide for the ease of cashless payments (97% satisfied vs. 78% globally), only beaten by Finland. Additionally, nine in ten expats living in Denmark (90%) rate the availability of administrative or government online services positively (vs. 55% globally), while over half (57%) even claim that it is *very good* (vs. just 23% globally). Only getting a local mobile phone number does not seem to be all that easy in Denmark (46th out of 68 countries), with 6% stating to be unhappy with this factor (about the same as the global average of 7%).

5. New Zealand

New Zealand's generally high ratings for the local quality of life (11th worldwide) are further consolidated by the Digital Life subcategory: Nearly all expats (98%) say that it is easy to get a local mobile number (vs. 86% globally), which is the highest share in the world. What is more, 99% of expats are happy with the ease of cashless payments (vs. 78% globally), with 77% even saying it could not be any better (vs. 48% globally). When it comes to the availability of government services online, another 91% agree that the access is good (vs. 55% globally). However, New Zealand just ranks a mediocre 35th out of 68 countries in terms of getting access to high-speed internet at home: about four in five (79%) agree that getting high speed internet access at home is easy, which is only slightly above the global average (75%).

6. Israel

Israel makes it into the top 10 countries in terms of quality of life for the first time, thanks to the new Digital Life subcategory, which has helped it to climb up the ranks. The country receives its best ratings for the unrestricted access to online services such as social media and the ease of getting a local mobile phone number (3rd worldwide for both). In fact, nearly all expats (95%) rate their access to online services positively (vs. 80% globally), and 84% say it could not be any better (vs. 58% globally). Similarly, 94% find it easy to get a mobile number (vs. 86% globally), and 80% think this could not be any easier (vs. 58% globally). Expats in Israel are not nearly as satisfied with the availability of administrative or government services online; however, the country still ranks a good 21st out of 68, with 67% positive ratings for this factor (vs. 55% globally).

7. Canada

With regard to digital life, Canada receives its best ratings for the availability of administrative or government services online (ranking 8th out of 68 destinations) and the ease of cashless payments (10th). More than nine in ten expats (94%) find the latter easy, compared to 78% globally. Moreover, expats in Canada are happy with the unrestricted access to online services such as social media (11th) and the ease of getting high-speed internet at home (12th). Close to nine in ten respondents (89%) are happy with the latter (vs. 75% globally), but the *"very high costs of internet"* are mentioned as a downside of life in Canada by a German expat. Only getting a local mobile phone number does not seem to be all that easy in Canada (38th); however, the share of expats who are satisfied with this factor is still slightly above the global average (89% vs. 86% globally).

8. Singapore

Singapore shows an interesting mix of excellent and rather average rankings in terms of digital life. The country ranks 21st out of 68 countries for cashless payments, 29th for the ease of getting a local mobile

phone number, and 45th for unrestricted access to online services. Although the latter result places Singapore in the bottom half worldwide, 83% of expats still rate this factor positively, three percentage points above the global average (80%). On the other hand, Singapore receives great ratings for the ease of getting high-speed internet at home (8th) and the availability of administration or government services online. For the latter, Singapore even ranks 2nd worldwide, beaten only by Estonia. More than nine in ten expats (93%) are happy with this factor (vs. 94% in Estonia and 55% globally), and 60% say it could not be any better (vs. 23% globally).

9. Netherlands

Expats in the Netherlands can expect to be pleased with digital life if they are looking for unrestricted access to online services such as social media (8th out of 68) and a good availability of administrative or government services online (10th). *"Everything can be done online,"* an expat from Germany comments. In fact, 83% of respondents are happy with the availability of administrative or government services online, compared to 55% globally. The Netherlands receive its worst — though still above-average — ratings for the ease of getting a local mobile phone number (24th out of 68) and paying without cash (20th). While 90% of respondents do agree that it is easy to pay with something other than cash in the Netherlands (vs. 78% globally), this is the second-worst ranking among the top 10 countries for digital life, after Singapore (21st).

10. United States of America

Coming in a low 47th place out of 68 countries regarding the general quality of life, the USA receives its best ratings within this index for its digital life. Expats in the USA are most satisfied with the ease of cashless payments (8th), as nearly all respondents (95%) rate this favorably (vs. 78% globally). Close to three-quarters (74%) even agree that paying without cash could not be any easier in the USA (vs. 48% globally). Expats are also very satisfied with the ease of getting high-speed internet access at home (90% happy vs. 75% globally). However, this is not the case when it comes to getting a local mobile phone number (31st): This factor has the lowest ranking within the Digital Life subcategory. Nonetheless, 91% of expats still say that it is easy to get a local number (vs. 86% globally), with one expat from Sweden highlighting *"how easy it is to get a local phone number anywhere"* in the USA.

Bottom 10 Countries for Digital Life Abroad

68. Myanmar

Ranking last worldwide in terms of digital life, it seems like Myanmar is still a long way from becoming a digital society. The country is the world's worst-rated destination to pay without cash and to get access to high-speed internet at home. In fact, 74% of expats find making cashless payments in Myanmar difficult, which is 61 percentage points more than the global average (13%) and double the share in Argentina (37%), the second-worst destination for this factor. Similarly, 58% of expats in Myanmar are unhappy with their access to high-speed internet at home, which is the highest share worldwide and close to four times the global average (16%). However, Myanmar also holds a surprise: The country ranks first worldwide for the ease of getting a local mobile phone number. Nearly all expats (96%) find this easy, compared to 86% globally, and 80% even say it is *very easy* (vs. 58% globally).

67. China

Coming in 57th place in the Quality of Life Index overall, China performs worst when it comes to digital life. The poor performance is one of the reasons for its further drop in the rankings: China is by far the worst country for unrestricted access to social media, with 83% being unsatisfied, which is over eight times the global average (10%) and 37 percentage points higher than the share in Saudi Arabia (46%), the destination with the second-worst ranking. Over half the expats in China (52%) even say that it could not

be any worse (vs. 3% globally), and a US American respondent names the *“government control of media and internet”* as one of the worst things about life in China. While expats are also extremely unsatisfied with the access to high-speed internet at home (38% negative ratings vs. 16% globally), the ease of getting a local mobile phone number (14% vs. 7% globally), and the availability of administrative or government services online (52% vs. 26% globally), China ranks a good 17th out of 68 for cashless payments: 89% say paying without cash is no problem (vs. 78% globally), and 72% even think it could not be any easier in China (vs. 48% globally).

66. Egypt

Almost seven in ten expats in Egypt (69%) are unsatisfied with the availability of administrative or government services online (vs. 26% globally), which is the highest share worldwide (together with Myanmar). Digital life in Egypt is made even harder due to the slow internet speed, with close to half the expats (47%) finding it hard to get access to high-speed internet at home (vs. 16% globally). A US American expat lists the *“internet at home”* as one of the worst things about living in Egypt. What is more, expats are unhappy with the ease of paying without cash (35% negative ratings vs. 13% globally) and the access to online services such as social media (19% negative ratings vs. 10% globally). Only getting a local mobile phone number seems to be fairly easy in Egypt (39th out of 68 countries; 89% positive ratings vs. 86% globally).

65. India

When it comes to getting a local mobile phone number, India is the world’s most difficult *country* to live in. Almost two in five expats (37%) find this hard, which is more than five times the global average (7%) and 13 percentage points more than in Japan (24%), the country with the second-worst ranking. *“Administration is terrible,”* an expat from Sweden complains. *“You have to fill in hundreds of forms for getting a local prepaid cellphone number.”* Administrative procedures do not get any easier with a lack of government services online (64th out of 68). Almost three in five expats living in India (59%) say they are unsatisfied with the services on offer, which is more than double the global average (26%). Expats in India also struggle with a lack of high-speed internet at home: almost three in ten (28%) are unsatisfied with their internet speed, which is twelve percentage points above the worldwide average (16%).

64. Philippines

Expats not having access to high-speed internet at home is one of the biggest reasons for the Philippines’ ranking among the bottom 10 destinations for digital life. Close to half the expats (49%) state that they are unsatisfied with their internet speed (vs. 16% globally), with only Myanmar (58%) ranking worse. *“The internet speed is slow”*, bemoans an expat from Indonesia. What is more, almost half the respondents (48%) are unhappy with the availability of government services online, which is 22 percentage points above the global average (26%). Expats also seem to struggle to pay without cash as over a third (34%) say it is difficult, compared to just 13% worldwide. Only getting a local mobile phone number does not seem to be an issue: Ranking the country 27th out of 68 in this respect, 90% say that this is easy (vs. 86% globally). More than seven in ten (72%) even say that it could not be any easier (vs. 58% globally).

63. Saudi Arabia

62. Indonesia

Indonesia is another country among the bottom 10 which appears to be lacking in online administrative or government services. Over three in five expats (61%) are unhappy with the services available, ranking the country 66th in the world for this factor (vs. 26% globally), only ahead of Myanmar and Egypt (69% negative ratings). Indonesia also comes in a low 61st place for both the access to high-speed internet at home (30% negative ratings vs. 16% globally) and the unrestricted access to online services such as social media (20% negative ratings vs. 10% globally). Lastly, the country appears to be a long way from

becoming a cashless society, as one-fifth of expats (20%) say it is difficult to pay without cash, seven percentage points more than the global average (13%).

61. Peru

Expats in Peru seem to struggle with the lack of administrative or government services online: Close to half (49%) are unsatisfied with the services provided, which is 23 percentage points more than the global average (26%). A US American expat specifically mentions that *"dealing with the government"* can be difficult in Peru. Paying without cash (26% negative ratings vs. 13% globally) and getting access to high-speed internet at home (29% negative ratings vs. 16% globally) also appear to be tricky in the South American country. In fact, Peru ranks among the bottom 10 countries for all three factors mentioned so far. On the other hand, 86% of expats are satisfied with the unrestricted access to online services such as social media (vs. 80% globally). Among the bottom 10 countries, this is the best performance, but worldwide Peru still ranks just 46th out of 68 destinations.

60. Turkey

Turkey has lost 14 ranks in the Quality of Life Index within one year (from 39th out of 65 countries in 2017 to 53rd out of 68 in 2018). This is partly due to the addition of the Digital Life subcategory, where it ranks among the world's worst countries. Expats seem to be particularly unsatisfied with their unrestricted access to online services such as social media: Close to half (45%) rate this negatively, which is over four times the global average (10%). A French expat even names *"media control"* as one of the things he dislikes most about life in Turkey. Receiving a local mobile phone number appears to be difficult, too, as one in five expats (20%) struggles to get one. This is almost three times the global average (7%). The country receives its best ratings for the ease of paying without cash, coming in an average 34th place out of 68 destinations.

59. Uganda

Ranking among the worst countries in the world for digital life, Uganda receives its lowest ratings for getting access to high-speed internet at home (65th out of 68 countries) and paying without cash (61st): close to two in five expats in the country (39%) are unsatisfied with the first factor (vs. 16% globally), while a third (33%) rate cashless payment opportunities negatively (vs. 13% globally). In fact, twelve percent even say it is *very difficult* to pay without cash in Uganda; only five other countries worldwide have higher percentages in this regard (Germany, Argentina, Egypt, Japan, and Myanmar). On the bright side, Uganda ranks among the top 10 countries regarding how easy it is to get a local mobile phone number (8th) — nearly all expats (97%) say that this is not an issue.

About the Digital Life Abroad Report

The [Digital Life Abroad Report](#) is an addition to the annually published [Expatriate Insider survey](#) by InterNations. The topical report is based on the Digital Life subcategory, which was added to the *Expatriate Insider* survey for the first time in 2018. The subcategory is part of the Quality of Life Index, which covers five other subcategories, including Leisure Options, Health & Well-Being, and Travel & Transportation.

To identify the best and worst countries for digital life, survey respondents were asked to rate their satisfaction with the following factors on a scale from one to seven: the unrestricted access to online services such as social media, the availability of government/administrative services online, the ease of getting a local mobile phone number, the ease of paying without cash, and the ease of getting access to high-speed internet at home.

For a country to be featured in the *Expatriate Insider 2018* survey and subsequently in the Digital Life Abroad Report, a sample size of at least 75 survey participants per destination was necessary. In 2018, 68 met

this requirement, with a total of 18,135 expatriates taking part in the survey, representing 178 nationalities and living in 187 countries or territories.

About InterNations

With 3.5 million members in 420 cities around the world, InterNations (www.internations.org) is the largest global community and information site for people who live and work abroad. InterNations offers global and local networking both online and face-to-face. At around 6,000 official events and activities per month, expatriates have the opportunity to meet other global minds. Online services include country and city guides created by a team of professional writers, guest contributions about life abroad, and discussion forums to help members with topics such as the local job or housing search. InterNations membership is by approval only to ensure we remain a community of trust.

The InterNations app is available for Android and iOS and can be downloaded for free on [Google Play](#) and the [App Store](#).

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