

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

Expats in Belgium hate the weather but love the healthcare system.

- 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).
- Belgium comes 41st out of 59 destinations in the Expat Insider 2021 survey. It ranks low in the Cost of Living and Ease of Settling In Indices (41st for both), performing best in the Working Abroad Index (27th).

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.

Belgium comes 41st out of 59 destinations in the *Expat Insider 2021* survey. Expats are particularly unhappy with the cost of living and the ease of settling in, placing Belgium 41st in both indices. The country receives mixed results for the quality of life, with expats being especially happy with the local healthcare, but dissatisfied with the weather and climate. 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.



Belgium in the *Expatriate Insider 2021* Survey

Great Healthcare, but Horrible Weather

Belgium comes in 41st place out of 59 countries in the *Expatriate Insider 2021* survey. It performs worst in the Cost of Living (41st), the Ease of Settling In (41st), and the Quality of Life (40th) Indices. In the latter, the country even lands among the bottom 10 in the Leisure Options subcategory (56th). Only 28% of expats rate the climate and weather in Belgium positively, compared to 66% globally. An expat from Zimbabwe even says that *"the weather is just soul sucking"*. Additionally, 19% of expats are dissatisfied with their socializing and leisure activities (vs. 18% globally). The country also ends up in the bottom 10 for personal happiness (52nd): 16% of expats are generally unhappy with their life abroad (vs. 10% globally). What is more, Belgium is the only European country that lands in the bottom 10 for personal safety (50th): 12% of expats unhappy with this factor (vs. 8% globally), while fewer than three in four (74%) rate it favorably (vs. 84% globally).

On the upside, Belgium places 9th out of 59 in the Health & Well-Being subcategory. The majority of expats rates the quality of medical care positively (83% vs. 71% globally) and is happy with the affordability of healthcare in Belgium (80% vs. 61% globally). Moreover, 91% of expats are satisfied with their travel opportunities (vs. 84% globally). A Croatian expat shares: *"I like the international environment and the geographical position, which makes it easy to travel."* And a British expat says that *"Brussels is international and a hub to travel in Europe"*.

Top Ratings for Job Security in Belgium

Belgium performs best in the Working Abroad Index (27th). On the one hand, 71% of expats are happy with their job security (vs. 61% globally) — 32% even very much so (vs. 24% globally). But while 67% of expats in Belgium are satisfied with their job in general, this is just about the same as the global average (68%). *"The work culture is very outdated,"* says a Finnish expat.

The top 3 fields expats in Belgium work in are IT (15% vs. 11% globally), the public sector (11% vs. 3% globally), and manufacturing and engineering (8% vs. 7% globally). In terms of working hours, Belgium also gets only mediocre results, with 65% of expats rating their working hours positively (vs. 66% globally). On average, expats in Belgium work 40.9 hours a week in a full-time job, which is actually below the global average (43.2 hours). Nevertheless, 18% of expats are dissatisfied with their work-life balance in Belgium (vs. 17% globally).

The Impact of COVID-19 on Expat Life in Belgium

Similar to the global trend, most expats in Belgium (67%) say the COVID-19 pandemic has not affected the period of time they are planning to stay abroad (vs. 63% globally). However, a large share of expats in Belgium (39%) find that the pandemic has strongly affected their social life (vs. 24% globally).

To stay up to date on COVID-19 and related regulations, expats in Belgium mainly follow the local news (57% vs. 47% globally), official government channels (52% vs. 48% globally), and expat news or international media (32% vs. 32% globally). The majority of expats (70%) is generally happy with the official communication regarding COVID-19 (vs. 66% globally). Among them, about half (45%) appreciate that the information is available in several languages (vs. 26% 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 *Expatriate Insider* 2021 Survey

For its annual [Expatriate 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.

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