



# OVERSEAS

## Haven Report



**El Valle, Panama:**

**A Convenient, But Cozy Mountain Escape...**





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## Haven Report



## Life In This Crater Valley Is Heaven On Earth

*By Lucy Culpepper*

Is the little combi bus reached the edge of the volcanic crater, we were stunned by the most spectacular view...360 degrees of jagged, 1,000-meter-high mountains covered in humid cloud forest, tumbling down to the flat, but equally green and fertile, crater floor. All around us was every shade of green. Craning to see over the tops of hedges, we spotted beautiful gardens blending into the natural landscape. It was hard to figure how so much order and beauty could take place at the center of a volcanic crater.

El Valle de Anton ("El Valle" to the locals) lies at an altitude of approximately 2,000

feet in the Province of Coclé to the west of Panama City. The population of almost 7,000 is made up of natives (descended from the Guaymí tribes), retired and working Panamanians, and retired and inbusiness expats. Over the course of just six weeks, I met with German, Ecuadorian, Peruvian, American, Canadian, and Venezuelan citizens—an impressive international mix for such a small place.

### Why El Valle?

I stayed in El Valle with my family as part of a six-month sabbatical cum "we should travel with the kids before they

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Live and Invest  
**OVERSEAS**



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get too old” trip. How did our family wind up in such a small Panamanian town? After spending a month in the melting heat of Mexico’s Yucatan Peninsula, we craved a cooler, greener place. Panama had been on our minds for almost a year, and El Valle—conveniently positioned not too far from Panama City, yet high enough to be cooler and less humid—kept popping up on our radar. We contacted Rachael Greco of El Valle Real Estate, who found us a six-week rental property.

A volcanic crater may conjure up a picture of cramped (even hazardous) living conditions with mountains towering over you in every direction. Not so El Valle... the crater floor, where the town is situated, is three by five miles wide, and was formed by a volcanic eruption some five million years ago. With vistas that truly take your breath away, the town holds the world record for being the largest continually inhabited volcanic crater.

El Valle has spring-like temperatures year round. The year-round average high is 68° F, and the average night-time minimum is 61° F. There is little variation between summer and winter temperatures, the major difference being the amount of wind and rain from season to season. The dry season runs from mid-December to mid-April and the wet season from May to early December. We were there from July to mid-August, slap bang in the middle of the wet season. When it rained, a vertical river rushed past the windows. But it stops as abruptly as it starts: the water drains away, the sun comes out, everyone jumps on their bicycles, and life goes on as before. The well-constructed drainage channels (all covered with emerald green mosses, lichens, and ferns) that run either side of every road cope remarkably well with the sudden deluge. We experienced just a few days when it was uncomfortably hot for an hour or two. Despite we never had to use them.

### **Friendly And Immaculate**

Apart from its natural beauty, two things are immediately striking about El Valle: its sense of community and the undercurrent of wealth. The town has grown along a straight, not particularly attractive, thoroughfare. But turn off the main road, down any sidestreet, and you’ll enter the other world of El Valle.

Immaculately paved roads lead to homes and gardens that could easily feature on the front cover of any international interior or garden magazine. One such road is Calle Millionario (Millionaire’s Road) which, as the name suggests, is lined by home after beautiful home. Without exception, all blend in and

add to the scene rather than distract from it. The community of El Valle, which includes the locals, the affluent old Panamanian families who visit at weekends, the middle-class business owners, and the expats, are all very welcoming. I was pleased to find that the American-dominated expat community lives closely and happily as part of the community as a whole, with an active but not “separatist” social life. The local people are quiet, polite to a fault, but also friendly and welcoming once their initial shyness has worn off. When a member of the expat community recently passed away, it was almost impossible to get an answer to my e-mails. My friends and contacts in El Valle put the non-essential (me) on hold and focused on supporting each other and the family left behind.

Community is an important factor to consider if you are going to move away from your own family and support network. It’s a factor not often included on a “relocation checklist,” but El Valle certainly has one.

Spanish is the language spoken in El Valle, though you will find a handful of English-speakers in businesses that cater to tourists. When you purchase a language learning program, be sure to get the Latin American version. Having learnt the language in Spain, my Castellano is often remarked upon, in a friendly way, as I use an “old fashioned” word or say “tu” instead of “usted.”

### **The Insider’s Tour**

To get under the skin of this town and see beyond the general tourist attractions, do at least one of the following: hire a guide, a bike, or a horse.

### **The Guaymí**

The Guaymí are an indigenous group mainly found in the Western Panamanian provinces of Panama. Today, the majority of Guaymí people are subsistence farmers supplementing their income by selling crafts at the El Valle weekend market.

The Guaymí women make bags from plant fibers, colorful dresses called *nagua*, and beaded bracelets and necklaces. Guaymí men traditionally weave Panama hats from black and white plant fibers; a slightly rougher version of the classic “Panama hat” made in Ecuador, but just as handsome.



Bikes can be hired from Hotel Don Pepe on Main Street near to the market; horses line up at ‘Kiosko Sammy’ on the road going up to Hotel Campestre, and the best local guides are Carlos Celis and his wife Veronica (both bilingual), who are very involved in the local community. They can be reached at the artisan store opposite El Valle Gourmet Coffee shop. Though the horses appear on the skinny side, they seem to be well-treated. It’s great to clop around town looking over hedges. But hold on tight when you pass a mango tree—your horse is likely to dive for any fallen fruit!

We hiked with our guide, Veronica, up the main River Anton toward the edge of the crater and the source of El Valle’s water. This hike takes you to the beautifully maintained watercress fields that have been farmed by the locals for generations. (If you visit the market in town, you’ll see bunches of these dark green glistening leaves for sale.) The fields are similar in construction to highland rice paddies; water spills over from one leafy terrace to another.

El Valle has a well-established water system, and the next stop on this hike is to admire a perfectly maintained pump, installed, some years back, by an American company. The purity of Panamanian drinking water is a great source of pride; it’s said that you can drink directly from most taps (except on the Caribbean coast). But it’s always wise to ask before you do so.

Unusually for a Latin American town, there’s no plaza (square) here. The main development lies along the Avenida Central or Main Street. The focal point of activity is around the covered market pavilion, where there are fresh fruit and vegetable vendors (daily), a butcher, the post office, and tourist information booth.

Weekends, this is also home to the popular market. (For an uncrowded browse, go on Saturday—tourists and visitors tend to arrive on Sunday.) The town’s large Catholic Church serves as an important meeting point as well as a place of worship.

Friday evenings, this small, peaceful little town welcomes Panama City folk for a weekend of rest and recuperation. They come to spend time at their beautiful weekend homes, ride their horses, buy fresh produce at the market, and eat out. During the school vacation months the numbers step up a notch. This may be a good time to visit family overseas, though you might enjoy the hubbub and temporary party

## Come with your dollars

Technically, Panama’s official currency is the Balboa—despite the fact that the country stopped printing Balboa notes in 1941. The U.S. dollar has been the standard currency since 1903. Yet Panama still mints Balboa coins in the denominations of 1, 5, 10, 25, 50, and 100, which are the same metal, size, and shape of the equivalent American coins. Balboa coins are used interchangeably with U.S. coins.

If you’re not from a greenback country, make sure you buy your dollars before landing in Panama. We came with euros, thinking we could easily exchange them at any bank. Not so: Panamanian banks will only exchange currency in small amounts. We spent a whole morning traveling around Panama City in search of cambios (exchange houses), swapping our euros for dollars at a very bad rate.

Bonus tip: Avoid doing your banking on pay day, which falls the 15th and last day of the month—it’s chaos.

atmosphere the extra crowds bring. On Sunday evenings, a hush spreads over the valley and life returns to normal. (Note: All the local hotels, rentals, and B&Bs fill up in advance of any public holiday.)

## Local Health Care Options

El Valle has a small health clinic (Centro de Salud) located down a bumpy lane just behind the church. It’s staffed 24 hours a day by one or two physicians and a nurse (they don’t speak English).

The staff can deal with minor medical problems (cuts, stitching, injections, stabilizing some emergencies, etc.). The cost for a doctor’s appointment here is about US\$2. Prescriptions can be bought from any one of the numerous pharmacies in town. When I had to have a course of injected antibiotics, I purchased each dose for US\$2.20 from a local pharmacy, and they were administered by the nurse free of charge.

Expats in El Valle say the clinic is also fine for preventative maintenance such as blood pressure and cholesterol checks, but cannot cope with severe medical emergencies. Though it has an ambulance service, government regulations mean it is restricted to taking casualties to the closest hospital, which is



in Penonome. I have only heard bad reports about this hospital (see sidebar on page 10), so steer well clear.

Depending on the severity of the problem, you have two other options. The first is to stay in the public system and go to the Centro de Salud in San Carlos (about 30 minutes away, close to the junction of the main road out of El Valle and the Pan American Highway). Here they have X-ray machines, can stabilize cardiac emergencies, and are generally better equipped than El Valle, yet only charge a slightly higher fee.

### Top-Notch Emergency Care

The second option is to go private. The closest facility (a 45-minute drive from El Valle) is the brand new San Fernando Clinic in Coronado, an affiliate of the San Fernando Hospital in Panama City. The clinic, which opened in October 2008, has an emergency room, a plaster room for broken bones, a dental clinic, an imagery section with X-ray and CAT scan capability, a full laboratory, several medical consultation and examination rooms, a special trauma room in the ER, and a 24-hour pharmacy.

Two expats who visited this week reported, “We were very impressed with the new clinic. Its purpose is to provide emergency care, and, if in-patient hospital care is needed, patients will be referred to an appropriate facility.” The San Fernando Clinic is contracting with an ambulance service to operate in El Valle, as well as providing transport to a hospital in Panama City, or wherever needed.

Generally speaking, Panama’s hospitals are on a par with U.S. and European hospital standards, but offer a saving (usually of at least 50%) on most elective medical and dental procedures. An appointment with a specialist at a private hospital would be about US\$50, while a filling to repair a broken tooth, plus X-rays, cleaning and fluoride treatment runs to US\$89. Many Panamanian doctors are U.S.-trained, and even more are bilingual. According to current legislation covering health matters, Panama offers health care facilities to all nationals and foreign visitors, independent of any reciprocal agreement with a particular country.

Cheaper health care and drugs An expat living in El Valle recently told me, “I’ve had the most pleasant experiences with every health care practitioner I’ve visited in Panama City.

Testing machinery has been higher-tech than I’ve seen in the U.S., including the mammogram/ sonogram examinations (which together cost about US\$140). A full panel blood test runs about US\$155. The cost to visit an internist to stabilize heart medication was US\$45, while my ophthalmologist (the kindest, most gentle man I’ve ever met) charged US\$50. My dentist is a graduate of Johns Hopkins in Maryland, but her pricing is more than reasonable—definitely less than we’d pay back home.”

Prescription drug prices are low (about 35% to 40% of U.S. prices), and many drugs that require a prescription in the States are available over the counter in Panama. If you take regular prescribed drugs at home, bring the full name of the medicine with you—brand names may differ. If you hold a pensionado visa, you are eligible for a further 10% discount on medication.

Health insurance options Since Medicare doesn’t cover you outside the U.S., you’ll have to decide on a health insurance alternative. Basically, you have two options when you go overseas: arrange your insurance with a local provider or buy an international health policy.

While a local policy is usually the cheaper option, you generally have to pay for your care first and be reimbursed later. Also, domestic policies will only cover you for in-country emergency and care. That may not be an issue for you if you plan to spend all or most of your year in Panama. But, for part-time residents, it’s risky.

What happens when you travel back home for a couple months? That’s where the second option comes in. An international health policy, such as those offered by BUPA International ([www.bupaintl.com](http://www.bupaintl.com)), covers you wherever in the world you roam. And, since big companies like BUPA have good relationships with hospitals around the world, they can pay out directly so you aren’t out of pocket for a hospital stay.

There is one other option: go without health insurance. A number of my expatriate friends in Panama find the cost of health care so affordable that it’s cheaper to pay in cash for their health care than take on the cost of an annual premium. Of course, not everybody would be comfortable living without insurance—and much depends on your age and general state of health.



Be sure to research your options carefully and seek personal advice as necessary. One recommended contact is Kevin Bradley, a health insurance broker based in Panama City. You can reach him at: kbradley@cwpanama.net.

## Buying Your Panamanian Home

There are virtually no restrictions for non-residents purchasing in Panama—foreigners have the same rights as Panamanians when buying property. Purchasing a property in Panama is similar to the process in the U.S. or Europe, but with some important differences. For example, most buyers form a Panamanian corporation and then purchase through that corporation to ensure asset protection and to avoid probate.

Below is an outline of the buying procedure. You will need to engage the services of a lawyer and, usually, a real estate agent.

1. Confirm the legal ownership of the property: Ask the owner for the public deed containing the title (escritura) and the Ownership and Encumbrances Certificate (Certificado de Registro Publico) from the Public Registry. If these documents are not available, ask the seller for a property (finca) number. Your lawyer (abogado) can then search for the title.

**Note** that the documents must be originals with the signatures, as well as official stamps, of the registration office.

2. Pass these documents to your lawyer for an updated search.
3. Enter into a “Promise to Buy- Sell Agreement.” You give the seller a down-payment and together agree on a date for the transfer of title. A penalty usually applies if either party backs out. During this time, the seller pays the transfer tax and obtains the certificates needed to transfer the title, while the buyer arranges for payment.

At an agreed-upon time, both parties sign the final contract.

4. Transfer of the title: When you have completed Step 3, your lawyer will draft the final purchase and sale contract.

## Panama City Hospital Beats U.S. Standards

By an expat in El Valle

My partner recently had issues with a kidney stone. The local clinic was “out of stock” of the medication needed to help resolve his problem, but the staff were able to stabilize his condition with IV fluids and pain medication. We drove him to Penonome Hospital ER, where he was placed on an uncovered stretcher in the hallway and neglected for two and a half hours. After pleading with the staff numerous times for some sort of intervention, we decided to take him to Panama City, arriving at the Hospital National (County hospital) at 3.30 a.m.

There he was placed on a clean stretcher and given fluids and pain medication within a few minutes. They even found an Englishspeaking patient representative to help with the necessary paperwork—which wasn’t even mentioned until he was comfortable. My husband was taken to X-ray and ultrasound and told that they were finding a specialist (remember this was 4 a.m!). During all this, his nurse visited numerous times to make sure he was comfortable and stable. A couple of hours later, an English-speaking urologist arrived and explained several medical options. We chose the less invasive route and my husband was started on this medication.

On checking out of the ER, we were given a bill (nominal compared to U.S. ER costs), paid, and returned to El Valle, pain-free and stable. I would highly recommend this facility. The specialist’s office even made several follow-up calls to El Valle to make sure the medication was working and that my partner was okay. U.S. hospitals could learn a lot from this hospital and its staff.

He will make an additional search to check that that no liens or mortgages have been filed since the start of the buying process.

5. The lawyer draws the contract up as a public deed. Both parties go to a public notary to sign the deed. A public notary in Panama is not like a U.S. notary. In Panama (as in Spain and many other Latin American countries), notaries are highranking and highly respected officials. A notary represents neither the buyer nor the seller.
6. Transfer of funds. At this point, you must make payment before you receive the registered deeds. The safest way is to provide a “letter of payment” from a local bank in Panama. This letter, which your lawyer should be able to help you with, is a guarantee to the seller that he will

receive the balance of the sale price upon transfer of the title to you.

An alternative is to pay the balance of the purchase price by bank draft to the seller at the signing of the deed at the Notary's office. This is risky, as you'll be making payment before receiving the registered deed.

7. Your purchase is recorded at the public registry.  
A purchase is not final until this is completed.

This last step normally takes a few weeks. But there are ways to speed it up: your lawyer can file at the main registry office in Panama City and/or you can pay a fee to the Public Registry Office for "Next Day Registration."

When the registration process is complete, you will receive the registered deed from your lawyer.

He will file a copy of the deeds with the tax records department (Oficina del Catastro). The property is officially yours.

## Temporary Digs

El Valle is a unique place to live. You'll either fall 100% in love with it (see Cynthia's story on page 15), or it won't gel with you at all. For your first visit, I'd advise that you stay at one of the town's hotels or B&Bs that are run by well-informed expats, such as Park Eden ([www.parkedden.com](http://www.parkedden.com)), Los Capitanes (<http://www.loscapitanes.com/index.htm>), or Golden Frog (<http://www.goldenfroginn.com>), all just outside the town center, or Anton Valley ([www.antonvalleyhotel.com](http://www.antonvalleyhotel.com)) in the center of town, close to the church. You can also find houses to rent in El Valle from US\$600 to US\$1,800. Again, your best online source for rental property is Rachael Greco at El Valle Real Estate.

## Affordable Day-To-Day Living

Groceries in El Valle are reasonably priced if you stick to non-imported items—with the exception of wine, which we found to be reasonable (you can pick up a good bottle of Chilean Chardonnay or Argentine Malbec for US\$5). The local stores (mostly run by Chinese families) will cover all your basic needs, while the daily fruit and vegetable market is your best source for fresh produce. The best days to buy fruit and vegetables are Saturday and Tuesday. After a few weeks, the local vendors

treated me like a long-term visitor and not a passing tourist, and I noticed a change in the quality of the fruit and veg that went into my basket.

Most mornings, trucks drive around town selling fresh fish. The driver will shout out what he has—generally an incomprehensible stream of unknown names. So I would stop the truck outside the gate to peer into the cooler. I regularly bought four big whole fish for US\$8 and, occasionally, a bag of giant prawns (enough for four adults) for US\$10.

Most of the larger stores in El Valle will accept credit card payment and, in some cases, an American check. There is an ATM machine on the main street next to the MELO store (hardware and pet/garden supplies).

For a wider range of goods and brands from back home, you'll need to make the trip to the El Rey supermarket in Coronado or Super 99 in Penonome (both are about 45 minutes away). I successfully completed a massive grocery shop at El Rey without owning a car; I took the bus to Coronado, and returned by taxi to El Valle (US\$25). The bus into Panama City stops at the Albrook Mall, which has over 37 acres of shopping and a food court with over 35 restaurants. While there are better malls in the city, this is the most convenient if you are arriving by bus.

Energy and communication costs Electricity runs about 0.19 cents per KWH, while gasoline is US \$3.53 per gallon. Basic telephone plans start from US\$10 per month; DirectTV from about US \$30 per month (deposit and installation fee cost around US \$150); and high-speed Internet packages start at US\$20 per month. Internet cafés charge US \$1 an hour. You'll pay around US \$8 a day for a housekeeper and US\$10 for a gardener. There is a MailBoxes Etc. in Coronado (a 45-minute drive toward Panama City), offering all the services you'd expect of MBE.

You can also take advantage of a U.S.-based address, which is useful for making online purchases of items that can't be found in Panama. The office is owned and run by Michael Poirier, a Canadian expat.

## Other Services In El Valle

Most of El Valle's services are located on the valley floor; a few require a short trip by bus, car or taxi to the outskirts of the town or up into the mountains.



## The Barber of El Valle

After two months of travel, my 9-year-old son resembled Shaggy from Scooby Doo. Not wanting to travel the two hours into Panama City, we set off in search of a barber/stylist.

Following much investigation and cycling about, we came to the gate of a rambling property overshadowed by a towering mango tree laden with fruit. We called out “Con permiso?” (which roughly translates as “Hello? Anyone there? Can I come in?”)

A bow-legged gentleman, dressed in gardening clothes, stepped out from a rickety lodge to the side of the main house. Was this the barber? (My son was already backing his bike away.) He beckoned us in and I explained what we had come for.

Yes we were in the right place. Did I want him to do the haircut now? My eyes drifted from his slightly unsteady hands to my son’s hair, and I nodded my consent. And so the gardener stepped into the role of barber, swapping his trowel for scissors.

While Shaggy was being transformed, I collected melonsized mangoes and admired the property’s incredible collection of orchids. Turned out this elderly man was the caretaker/gardener for a Panamanian family who rarely visited; he also happened to be one of the town’s barbers.

He lived in the lodge-cum-leanto during the week and, at weekends, walked two hours up into the hills back to his family home. When he refused to accept payment for the haircut, I picked a bag of mangoes and insisted that he keep the US\$3 for them.

**Pharmacies:** You’ll find several, but the best pharmacy is the one nearest the Centro Commercial Hong Kong.

**Library:** The library has a small collection of English-language books and several computers with Internet access that can be used for a small fee. It occasionally shows movies. Many of the local B&Bs and hotels also have minilibraries. If you stop by for a drink or meal, they are usually happy to let you borrow or exchange books.

**Post office:** Though it looks very basic, everything I sent arrived at its destination (U.S., Europe, and Hong Kong) within three weeks. The staff will help you pack your boxes and parcels.

**Taxis:** A collection of slightly beaten-up vehicles runs around town. You usually only have to wait 10 minutes for

one to come by. A ride from one end of town to the market is US\$1.50.

The pickup style taxis will pile anything in the back from bicycles to dogs and shopping. If you make a note of a driver’s cell phone number, you can sometimes call ahead for one.

**Mini-buses:** Frequent services (every half hour) run between El Valle and Anton, Penonome, Coronado, and Panama City. The best place to get on a bus is at the market or the Texaco gas station (look for the destination on the front windscreen).

Drivers don’t mind you hailing them even if you’re not sure it’s the right one. The mini-buses are airconditioned. Though I have seen them described as “spacious,” my 5’10” husband didn’t agree.

**Coming from Panama City:** Airconditioned mini-buses depart Panama City from the vast bus terminal in Albrook. The trip lasts approximately two to two-and-a half hours, depending on traffic, and the cost is US\$3.50 per person. Most of the trip is along the Pan-American Highway, with the last 45 miles heading up into the mountains and over the edge of the volcanic crater. Depending on the driver, this can be a joyous panoramic journey or a whiteknuckle joyride. The first bus departs Panama City at around 7 a.m., while the last bus departs El Valle (returning to Panama City) at around 4 p.m.

**Town bus:** An old U.S.-style school bus runs a continuous service from about 6:30 a.m. to 9 p.m., winding its way through the village. You can hop on and off anywhere—just call out “para” (stop) when you’re ready to get off. It costs 50 cents a ride.

## Eating Out

Surprisingly, El Valle has a wide range of restaurants and cafés —from basic local fare all the way up the scale to pricey, but extremely good, gourmet at Casa de Lourdes.

Recommended spots include: Casa de Lourdes, Calle El Ciclo. Gourmet restaurant in a fantastic setting. Main dishes from US\$14 to US\$25.

Restaurante Santa Librada, Avenida Central. Simple Panamanian food at good prices. Seafood and grilled meats

are less than US\$10; a hearty bowl of sancocho de gallina (chicken stew) costs US\$2.

Pizzeria Pinocchio, Av. Central in front of the Church. Excellent individual pizzas cost US\$5 to US\$6.50. (My children gave it a worldwide ranking of #3.)

La Brucchetta Av. Central in front of the Church. Next to Pinocchio, this belongs to the same English-speaking family. You'll pay US\$5 and up for a simple, Mediterranean-style, tasty meal.

Restaurante Mar de Plata, Avenida Central next to Hotel Don Pepe. Simple eatery offering some Peruvian food, seafood (excellent grilled white fish), fruit juices, and shakes. Most dishes are US\$5 to US\$10.

Restaurante Don Pepe, Avenida Central below Hotel Don Pepe. Simple but clean. Main dishes of meat, chicken, fish, and seafood cost US\$6 to US\$12.

Bike rental: Our rented house had two bicycles, but we rented two more for the children from Hotel Don Pepe (US\$80 for the two for six weeks). They were invaluable for running down to the store for small groceries or fresh bread on Sunday mornings from the bakery. While you don't need a car to get by in El Valle, you do need to be comfortable with either the bus, taxis or bicycles. Most expats here own cars.

Cable TV and Internet service: There is DirectTV and high speed Internet.

ATM: There is a small booth next to Melo, the hardware and pet food supply store.

Beauty treatments: You can book massages, facial treatments, pedicures, and manicures though some of the more upscale hotels. What you won't find in El Valle: Malls. Typical hair stylists.

## **Drivers Beware**

Driving in El Valle is fairly straightforward; it's a small town and most people seem to respect that and keep their speed down. As in the U.S. and Europe, driving in Panama is on the right hand side. Expats, local buses, weekend visitors, and the occasional truck comprise most of El Valle's traffic.

The roads here are exceptionally good, but, when leaving the main routes, you need to watch for huge potholes. Driving in other parts of Panama —and around Panama City—is another matter. Panamanian drivers are said to be some of the worst in the world and drive vehicles that are far from safe. They often pass on double yellow lines, irrelevant of the oncoming danger, and swerve into oncoming lanes to avoid potholes. Hence, you must always drive defensively.

If you plan to drive in Panama City, I'm told that the quietest day to practice is Sunday.

At all costs, avoid driving during Semana Santa (Holy Week) or any other major fiesta. There are more accidents during Holy Week than at any other time due to drunk driving.

You constantly have to watch out for, and swerve around, bicyclists, pedestrians, and dogs, who think they have right of way (this is the case in El Valle, too).

If you have any type of accident you must, by law, stay near your car leaving it exactly where the accident took place, even if you are holding up the traffic and causing a complete grid lock.

If you stay for more than three months in Panama, you must apply for a "Panama Driving Permit." For shorter stays, the license issued by your home country will suffice.

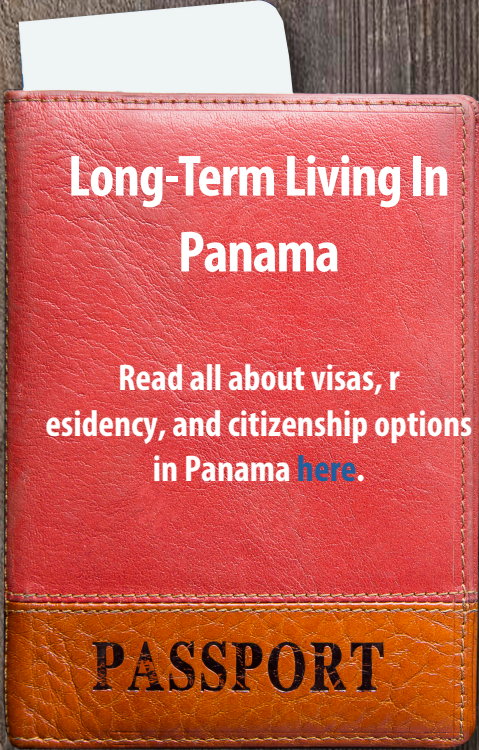
## **The Future Of El Valle**

Surrounded by such beauty and tranquility, El Valle is one of those places where you would love to freeze time. Fortunately, in my inquiries as to future infrastructural developments, I didn't hear of any major plans that would threaten the natural environment here.

A positive change is the formation of a local cooperative, Cooperative Valle Verde, which among other things promotes the protection of the local environment. It holds regular meetings and events. Bottom line, some of Panama's oldest and wealthiest families have, over many years and through generations, built homes here as a haven of rest and relief from the intensity of life in Panama City. I doubt that anything will be able to undo that.

Is El Valle for you? Only you can answer that question, but El Valle could be what you're looking for if you:



A red and orange passport cover is centered on a dark, textured wooden background. The cover has a red upper section and an orange lower section. A white card is tucked into the top. The text on the cover is as follows:

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Panama**

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I hope you enjoyed reading about one of the world's greatest overseas havens.

I'd like to let you in on something: Each one of our ***Overseas Haven Reports*** is but a single element of the greatest resource available today on the world's top overseas retirement havens.

This unique subscription service is called ***Overseas Living Letter***.

Every month, subscribers to ***Overseas Living Letter*** receive an honest, current, and complete introduction to one of the places we've identified as offering tremendous advantages for the would-be retiree abroad...

These are the locations that should be on your radar, either for your immediate retirement or as places to invest today as part of a longer-term plan. Each of these comprehensive reports addresses not only the pros, but also the cons of each destination featured.

This is critical if you want to make a smart, informed choice. ***Overseas Living Letter*** has correspondents all over the world who are living the life you've been dreaming about, right now!



And, over the three decades I've been covering this beat, I've known literally many thousands of people just like you who've taken the leap.

**Retirees who have built the lives of their dreams, and yours, overseas... and who are right now enjoying a retirement lifestyle that goes far beyond what you might believe is possible.**

This extensive network of contributors will provide you with all the tips, tricks, and firsthand insider intelligence you need to follow in their footsteps...

- Where to look to find the kind of life that suits you—at the beach, in the mountains, among the vines, in the big city...
- Insights into what the community is like, who your neighbors would be (locals, expats, or both), and how they live...
- What it would cost you to live there, including detailed monthly budgets...
- Whether it's better to rent or to buy, given the local market right now...
- What to take with you, what to ship, and what to leave behind...
- Which visa options would make most sense for you and how you qualify...
- Who to contact for legal help, health insurance, banking, shipping, residency, taxes...

Read our correspondents' firsthand reports every month. Email them your questions (yes, they'll respond!). Search the archives, available to you free, for more information on the locations that interest you most.

In short, I'm offering you a bridge to the retirement of your dreams... and a chance to try it out for a special discounted price of [less than US\\$2 an issue](#).

Start laying the plans for a retirement that **so far exceeds your expectations... and even your current lifestyle...** that if you hadn't read so many reports from people actually living it today—you wouldn't believe it possible.

All I ask is this: If you like what you read in your Overseas Haven Report... keep reading. Subscribe to ***Overseas Living Letter***, and then, every month, you'll receive in your inbox a new, up-to-the-minute, information-packed Overseas Haven Report providing another from-the-scene guide of the good life in another of the world's premier overseas retirement havens. I predict it will become your favorite read each month.

In each issue you'll read about the world's most affordable places to retire... the friendliest places to live... best weather... lowest tax burdens... the most beautiful, most exciting, most infatuating places to hang your hat...

From Chiang Mai, Thailand, and Cuenca, Ecuador (cheapest)... to Ambergris Caye, Belize, and Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia (foreign resident friendly)... from El Valle, Panama (sweet mountain living in a top tax haven)... to Mendoza, Argentina (wine country on a budget)... from Dumaguete, Philippines (exotic and ultra-cheap)... to Algarve, Portugal, and Languedoc, south of France, (Old World living on a budget)...

What are you waiting for? Take me up on this special subscription price, here now.

## The World's Best Value Destinations For Living and Investing

**Plus, When You Subscribe to Overseas Living Letter—Risk-Free—Today, You'll Receive 3 Special Reports (US\$115 value)**

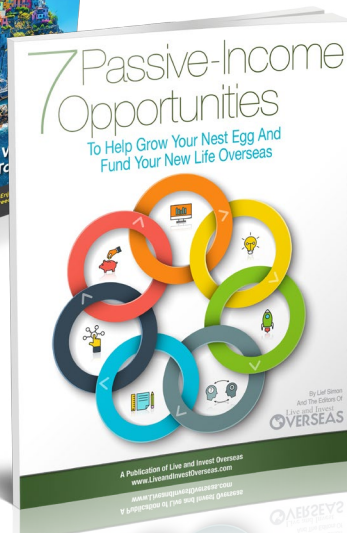
Because right now you can get 12 monthly issues of Overseas Retirement Letter—for just US\$24, only US\$2 an issue (regular rate US\$76). You save US\$52 with this special introductory offer.



- **SPECIAL REPORT # 1:** The Live and Invest Overseas Annual Retire Overseas Index—one bumper report each year... (retail price: US\$49).



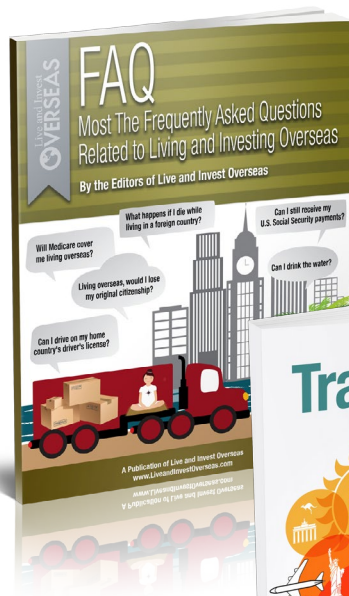
- **SPECIAL REPORT # 2:** Five Fun Ways To Get Paid To Travel (Working As Little As 3 Hours A Week). (retail price: US\$39).



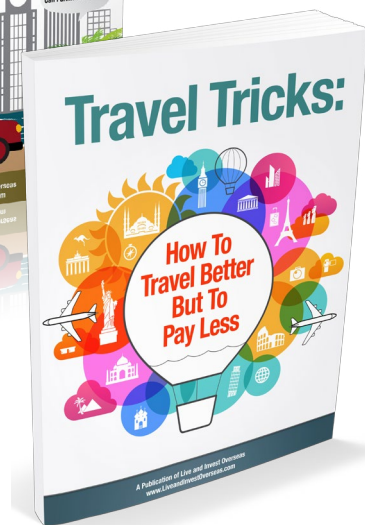
- **SPECIAL REPORT # 3:** 7 Passive Income Opportunities To Help Grow Your Nest Egg And Fund Your New Life Overseas... (retail price: US\$27).



Plus, [sign on today for 24 monthly issues of Overseas Living Letter](#)—for a locked-in rate of US\$42, or only US\$1.75 an issue—and you'll receive two additional special reports—and you'll receive a fourth special report, again with our compliments...



- **SPECIAL REPORT # 4:** FAQ—The Most Frequently Asked Questions Related To Living And Invest Overseas. (retail price: US\$19).



- **SPECIAL REPORT # 5:** Travel Tricks: How To Travel Better But To Pay Less. (retail price: US\$19)

**That's a total value of US\$153.**

What are you waiting for?

I'm putting my entire network of experts and resources at your disposal, in order to help you:

- **At last, figure out the best place in the world for you for part- or full-time living...**
- **Start living the good life from as little as US\$892 a month...**
- **Say goodbye to financial worries (I'm going to arm you with the information you need to fund your new adventure overseas whenever you're ready... you do not have to delay)...**
- **Learn the practical, nuts-and-bolts things you need to help you set yourself up overseas with the least hassle and the greatest success...**

We have no time to lose... let's get started.

[Start now and claim your free reports here.](#)



Kathleen Peddicord  
Publisher, Live and Invest Overseas

## *Kathleen's Personal Guarantee*

**I guarantee that my *Overseas Living Letter*—delivered monthly via email—is the most straight-shooting, tell-it-like-it-is report available about the best-value destinations on the planet for living and investing abroad.**

But if you don't feel *Overseas Living Letter* delivers the kind of make-your-nest-egg-last-forever opportunities you're looking for, you can cancel at any time. If you do, I'll promptly reimburse you for any issues remaining in your subscription, no questions asked.

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