

Big City Convenience, Small Town Charm:



Revealing The World's #1 Retirement Haven

By The Editors Of Live And Invest Overseas

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#1 Retirement Haven

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Chitré, a small town in Herrera Province, in the northeastern part of Panama's Azuero Peninsula, took top billing in the 2023 Overseas Retirement Index.

Though Panama is by no means a new retirement haven, Chitré is a new addition to our roster of Index destinations.

How is it that this little-known place has not only been included among our selection of the world's best places to retire but also risen to the number-one spot on the list?

Chitré is a small, safe, and community-minded town. It's four hours from Panama City, located in the "interior" of the country (i.e., anywhere in Panama that isn't Panama City).

Being anywhere other than Panama City in Panama usually means that you don't have easy access to the types of things that expats appreciate—great health facilities, banks, American-style grocery stores, nice cafés and restaurants, entertainment options, and more...

Chitré is an exception to this rule.

All the amenities offered in the metropolitan area of Panama City, not to mention the abundance of casinos, banks, grocery stores, and hardware stores, can be found

in this hidden paradise—a remarkable accomplishment considering its small size.

It's part of the reason some people call Chitré "The Biggest Little City in Panama."

Chitré's other big selling point is its warm, inviting culture. This is *El Corazón De Panamá...* The Heart Of Panama... and few other towns have preserved their traditions as well.

There are multiple folkloric festivals throughout the year with *cabalgatas* (horse parades), *bailes típicos* (traditional dances), and women dressed in Panama's traditional attire, *la pollera*.

The festivals, the Spanish-colonial architecture, and the ranches where ranchers work
Brahman cattle on horseback, give you a sense of what life was like on the Azuero Peninsula decades ago.

About 500 people from the United States, Canada, and other Latin American countries like Colombia, Ecuador, and Venezuela live in Chitré. They're not just retirees... Safety and access to exceptional schools make Chitré one of Panama's best destinations to raise a family.

The expat lifestyle here is in stark contrast to the one on offer in Panama's biggest expat

haven, Boquete, where foreigners make up a large percentage of the population, and the town caters to English speakers.

Life in Chitré is far more authentic. You'll live side-by-side with locals and become immersed in Panamanian culture. Your neighbors and friends will be Panamanian; you'll celebrate Panamanian festivals and take part in their traditions.

That's not to say you'll have trouble finding other expats or expat gatherings—in Chitré you can live fully in both worlds.

Because it's largely undiscovered, Chitré is one of the most affordable places to live in Panama. A couple could get by on about US\$600 per month, though we recommend having more than that available for the most comfortable, well-rounded lifestyle possible.

The low cost of life includes the price of property. You can buy beachfront property at shockingly low prices... up to 35% less than the value price. This is also a land of opportunity for investors.

The beach is never far—Playa Monagre and Playa El Rompío are only a few miles outside downtown Chitré.

And Chitré is growing steadily, especially in the health care sector, making this an ideal destination for senior citizens, individuals with health concerns or disabilities, families with small children, or anyone else needing superior medical care within a few minutes' drive.

Again, Panama's popularity as a retirement haven is long-standing. Panama offers a toptier retirement visa, it uses the U.S. dollar as its currency, it's about as friendly as it gets when it comes to taxes, and it's well-connected to the United States and Canada in terms of flights.

Buoyed by revenue from the Canal among other mega-infrastructure projects, it remains stalwart and stable, even in the face of recession... It's a good place to be during a global economic reset.

These are reasons why Panama is always featured in our overseas retirement indices... But despite how long we've been covering Panama, we're happy to discover that this country still holds surprise. That's what Chitré is to us.

If you're looking for a new home with the comforts of a city but a small-town feel, an opportunity to immerse yourself in Panamanian culture and live side-by-side with locals, and life by the beach without overpriced property, your dream life awaits you in Panama's heartland.





Cost Of Living: B-

Thanks to its limited tourism and small expat community, Chitré is one of Panama's most affordable places to live, and the cost of living is highly controllable.

A couple's basic monthly budget here should come to about US\$2,003, but choose a minimalist lifestyle, and you could get by on about US\$600 a month.

Rent for a furnished, two-bedroom apartment in a desirable part of Chitré is about US\$800 per month. Air conditioning is a must, and you'll spend about US\$125 on electricity monthly.

If you live in a central part of town, you can save on transportation expenses by getting around on foot or bicycle and only using your car when necessary. Driving a car will cost about US\$60 per month.

Eating at fondas (small, usually open-air restaurants serving traditional Panamanian food at low prices) is cheap—about US\$10 per person for a full meal, including a main dish, soup, and a drink. With US\$15 to US\$20 per person, you can eat at an international eatery like Estambul. A simple breakfast and coffee cost US\$5 or less.



If you shop primarily at supermarkets, your grocery bill will be about US\$425 a month for a couple... but you can reduce this by buying fresh produce and seafood at the open-air market.

Don't forget that if you're living in Panama on the Pensionado Visa, you're eligible for certain discounts, which could translate to further savings. You get a 25% discount on your utility bills and airline tickets, a 20% discount on doctor's bills, a 50% discount on hotel stays (Monday to Friday), for instance.



Climate

(we don't give grades for climate)

Chitré is warm to hot year-round.

If you want to do away with your winter coat forever, if you never want to shovel another driveway or see snow again, this could be the place for you.

The temperature varies little throughout the year. The average high is 95°F (35°C) and the average low is 72°F (22°C), and humidity is about 77% throughout the year.

The heat and sun are intense—perfect for sun worshippers, but you'll want air conditioning and to make sure to stay hydrated and carry a hat, sunscreen, and sunglasses... heat stroke is a risk here.

Like all of Panama, Chitré has two seasons: the rainy season (May to December) and the dry season (January to April). If you want heat but dislike rain and humidity, there's no better place to be in Panama...

The rainy season is noticeably shorter in Chitré than in the rest of the country because it's in the country's Dry Arch. It only rains for two or three months instead of the standard seven, for a total of about 99 inches of rainfall per year.

Health Care: A



Panama's health care system is ranked 95th by the WHO... The standard of care in the public system is basic, while the standard of care in the private system is excellent. As an expat, you will almost certainly choose to be cared for in the private system by enrolling in a low-cost insurance plan.

The best private health facilities in the country are generally found in Panama City... Chitré, however, is an exception to this rule.



It offers excellent private and public health care. The two best private clinics are Clínica San Juan Bautista and Clínica Dr. Venancio Villareal. Hospital General Cecilio A. Castillero and Hospital Gustavo Nelson Collado are public hospitals offering exceptional care.

Care is free to residents and citizens with Panamanian Social Security. Without Social Security, the cost is US\$15 per day and US\$1 for a consultation.

Hospital Regional de Azuero, in La Villa de Los Santos (10 minutes from Chitré), is a public hospital that has an agreement with Johns Hopkins. It specializes in heart attacks and heart disease, and all treatment is 100% free, with or without insurance. The doctors are excellent, and some speak English.

Hospital San Fernando, one of Panama City's finest private hospitals (it is JCI-accredited), is building a second location in Chitré, which is progressing quickly. The company just bought brand-new equipment and will hire local doctors.

You have several options for dentistry and orthodontics, including Clínica DentiAzuero, Clínica de Odontologia José Villalaz, and Clínica Dental Cambara Calderon.

Optometrists, physical therapists, and massage therapists are also available.

Chitré is growing steadily, especially in the health sector, making it an ideal destination for senior citizens, individuals with health concerns or disabilities, families with small children, or anyone else needing superior medical care within a few minutes' drive.

Entertainment: B



This is El Corazón De Panamá... The Heart Of Panama... few other Panamanian towns have preserved their traditions as well as Chitré.

There are multiple folkloric festivals throughout the year with cabalgatas (horse parades), bailes típicos (traditional dances), and women dressed in Panama's traditional attire, la pollera.





The festivals, the Spanish-colonial architecture, and the fincas (ranches) where campesinos (ranchers) work Brahman cattle on horseback, give you a sense of what life was like on the Azuero Peninsula decades ago.

For a glimpse into the past, spend an afternoon in the nearby towns of La Villa de Los Santos and La Arena. La Arena is famous for its pan de la arena ("sandy bread") and traditional pottery, which is displayed outside small shops around town.

La Villa de Los Santos is where, on Nov. 10, 1821, Panamanians gathered to declare independence from Spain—what is now known as El Primer Grito de Independencia. The home where this meeting took place was built in the 1600s and still stands... You can see the meeting room, the independence letter, artifacts from the Azuero Peninsula, and more at Museo de la Nacionalidad (Museum of the

Nationality). La Villa boasts centuries-old Spanish-colonial architecture and is Panama's most traditional town.

In downtown Chitré, just off the main plaza, you can visit Catedral de San Juan Bautista (St. John the Baptist Cathedral) and Museo de Herrera (Museum of Herrera).

Other indoor entertainment options in Chitré include seeing a film at the local movie theater, Cines Moderno; testing your luck at Casino Azuero; or checking out the shops at Mall Paseo Central.

You should speak some Spanish or at least be open to learning to enhance your social life.

But that's not to say that there's no expat community in Chitré...

About 500 expats live here. The community holds a meeting every Thursday around lunchtime at Hotel Azuero where you'll have the chance to chat with fellow foreigners, seek advice and recommendations, and learn about clubs and events.

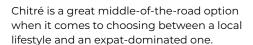
If you're interested in volunteering, the Rotary Club has a branch in Chitré and is dedicated to improving community well-being through social and humanitarian projects. Opportunities to get involved exist here.

Panama Letter Managing Editor Gabrielle Wells says, "During my last visit, I met expats both retirement age and younger families with children—from the United States, Canada, and other Latin American countries like Colombia, Ecuador, and Venezuela."

In other words, you can have a bit of both in Chitré... an authentic experience but also an expat community to tap into.

If you want a fully gringo lifestyle, you'd be better off choosing the City Beaches or Boquete, Panama's biggest expat havens that cater to English-speakers and where foreigners make up a big percentage of the population.

Expat Community: B



Life here, in the cultural heartland of Panama, is authentic. You'll live side-by-side with locals and become immersed in Panamanian culture.

Your neighbors and friends will be Panamanian; you'll celebrate Panamanian festivals and take part in their traditions.

English Spoken: C+



Most Chitreanos speak a little English and will greet you with a "hello," but English isn't as widely spoken here as it is in Panama City. Many doctors speak English, but don't be surprised if workers in the service industry don't... this isn't a tourist town yet.

You'll need to speak Spanish proficiently to live well in Chitré. The locals will do their best to help you, but your quality of life will be better if you go the extra mile to learn Spanish. \rightarrow



There are weekly expat Spanish classes for free, taught by a Panamanian instructor. Inquire about joining at one of the weekly meetings at Hotel Azuero. Your best bet is to practice with friends, neighbors, and household cleaners or gardeners if you hire them.

Don't be shy—Panamanians are eager to help... and may ask for English practice in return... an excellent way to make new friends.



One look at the air travel chart for Tocumen International Airport tells you why Panama City is known as the Hub of the Americas. It's extremely well connected with a ton of direct flights to cities in the States and Canada, not to mention a slew of international destinations.

If we were considering Panama City instead of Chitré as a retirement destination, it would shoot straight to top place for Access To North America... But we're talking about Chitré, which is a four-hour drive from Tocumen International Airport (assuming traffic is light—always a crapshoot in Panama).



It's a smooth drive along the Pan-American Highway, but the hassle of making a long, overland journey to get to Chitré earns it an "A-" for Access To North America instead of an "A+."

Note that Chitré is home to a small regional airport, Alonso Valderrama Airport, which has flights to Panama City's Marcos A. Gelabert Airport... Alonso

Valderrama Airport was not operating during the pandemic. Its current status is unknown.

Tocumen International Airport (PTY) Direct Flights From The United States Atlanta, Boston, Chicago, Denver, Fort Lauderdale, Houston, Las Vegas, Los Angeles, Miami, New York, Newark, Orlando, San Francisco, Tampa, Washington Direct Flights From Canada Direct Flights From Canada Montreal, Toronto Other Direct Flights Argentina, Aruba, Barbados, Belize, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Cuba, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, France, Germany, Guatemala, Guyana, Haiti, Honduras, Jamaica, Mexico, Nicaragua, Paraguay, Peru, Puerto Rico, Saint Martin, Spain, Suriname, The Bahamas, The Netherlands, Trinidad and Tobago, Turkey, Uruguay, Venezuela

Domestic Carriers

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Luxury Mountain Resort Home In Panama's Top Expat Haven

Boquete is Panama's first and most popular expat town...

This is your chance to own in a new private community with the feel of a high-end European, Alpine resort...

- **⊘** Restaurants

- Ø On-site medical facilities

All just 10 minutes from the heart of Boquete town. It's the first luxury country-club resort to be built in the area and will make for easy rental income in a booming eco-tourism, and expat housing market...





Infrastructure: B

Internet \star

- Cost Per Month: US\$85
- Average Download Speed: 127 Mbps (Herrera Province average)

Electricity * * * * *

- Cost Per Month: US\$125
- Average Reliability: Power outages happen occasionally but last only a few minutes at a time.

Domestic Access ★★★★

You'll most likely need a car to get around Chitré. Public transportation isn't welldeveloped yet and is limited to yellow taxis and *chivas* (small buses).

Avoid yellow taxis as they're known to take advantage of foreigners and can drive dangerously, but if you have no other choice, ask someone to give you the phone number of a taxi driver they trust.

There are walking, running, and biking paths around the district... a great way to exercise and save money on gas.

The delivery app Pedidos Ya recently came to the area and allows you to order food from a variety of local restaurants, supermarket items, pet supplies, and more, plus, drivers will pick up packages and run other errands for you for a small fee.

Chitré is a walkable town for those without mobility issues but poses challenges for people with disabilities. Many sidewalks are narrow, uneven, and drop off into the street below without stairs.

The local government is working to make Chitré more accessible by installing wider sidewalks, ramps, pedestrian crosswalks with audio signals, grooved concrete, and handrails in public bathrooms.

Recreation: A-

In Chitré, most of the entertainment options are outdoors. If you enjoy being outside and have an adventurous spirit, you won't get bored here.

Kicking back on the beach is a popular pastime for Chitré expats. Playa Monagre and Playa El Rompío are the two best beaches. Playa Monagre is well-developed, with seafood restaurants, bars, and rentable *ranchos* (huts).

For the best beaches in Eastern Azuero, head south to Pedasí and Tonosí. Playa Venao, on the route between the two districts, is one of Panama's most-raved-about beaches for surfing.

Isla Iguana (Iguana Island) is home to white sand and stunning turquoise waters. It's located just off the coast of Pedasí's Playa Arenal, where fishermen charge a small fee to transport passengers round-trip. Isla Iguana's waters are ideal for snorkeling.

You can also enjoy biking, running, or walking in and around Chitré. A few years ago, a *ciclovía* (bicycle path) was developed, linking the town of Chitré with nearby Playa El Agallito.

It has two smooth, paved lanes, follows the rehabilitated highway Chitré-Playa El Agallito, and makes for a fun morning or late afternoon ride with a sea view.

Club de Golf de Chitré is the local golf club, featuring a nine-hole course, a restaurant (with a Wednesday night barbecue), a tennis court, golf lessons, and tennis classes. A group of expats and locals golf together every Wednesday, and a membership costs US\$80.

Baseball is basically a religion in Panama, and you'll have no trouble finding opportunities to participate. You can catch a game at Rico Cedeño Stadium or play at one of the sandlots across town. If you're feeling competitive, you can even join a league.

There are several national parks in the surrounding area that are ideal for hiking day trips. They include Parque Nacional



Sarigua (Panama's only desert), Montuoso Forest Reserve, Tronosa Forest Reserve, and Canajagua Hill National Park. energy supply from renewable sources by 2050.

Environmental Factors:

It's going electric, too. It launched the National Electric Mobility Strategy to initiate public transportation's switch to electric power. It wants a 35% increase in the number of electric buses on Panama's roads by 2030.

In recent years, the Panama government has turned heads with some lofty conservation commitments.

Panama is still in the process of development, and across the country (including in Panama City), seeing litter on the streets is normal. Within this context, Chitré stands out as surprisingly and refreshingly clean.

The Panama Canal Authority announced plans to have the Canal be carbon neutral by 2030. The government is addressing deforestation by committing to plant 1 million hectares of forest by 2050.

The local mayor is dedicated to making the area more environmentally friendly. <u>Panama Letter</u> Editor Gabrielle Wells says, "Of all the small towns I've visited in Panama, Chitré is definitely the cleanest, with no garbage strewn about.

Panama will also increase its use of renewable energy over coming decades... Currently, less than 10% of the private sector's energy comes from wind and solar and about 70% from hydro. The goal is to get 95% of Panama's

"A local tells me that recently, six solar power plants were created near Parita. There are also increased efforts to pick up trash around town and at the beaches."



Chitré has some environmental issues, like deforestation and desertification. Decades of overgrazing have created a drought effect in the Sarigua area near Chitré. Luckily, Panama is one of the world's most water-rich countries, so this is only an issue on a local level.

Hurricanes are one thing you won't have to worry about if you move to Chitré. Panama lies safely outside the Atlantic Hurricane Belt. Hurricanes rarely make landfall in Panama.

This is an environmentally safe place to live, and in the context of Panama (and Latin America in general), Chitré stands out for its high standards when it comes to keeping things clean.

Crime: A-

Certain types of crime in Panama are standard and part of day-to-day life. Corruption is one example. Bribing police officers to avoid a ticket is commonplace (although, again, we don't recommend it).

Issues with gringo pricing, petty theft, and burglary of homes left unattended for long periods are possible across Panama... But Chitré stands out as an exception to this rule.

It's a place where neighbors know one another, people smile and greet one another on the street, and residents look out for one another. Everyone describes it as safe and calm.

The crime rate is very low and limited mostly to petty theft and low-level street crime. To avoid issues, always lock your house and car, don't leave valuables in sight, and don't carry your wallet or phone in your back pocket...

Exercise the same precautions as you would in your home country, and you'll be fine. People respect one another here.

Panama is ranked the second-safest country in Central America after Costa Rica. It comes in #61 in the 2022 Global Peace Index. (The United States comes in at #129; Canada comes in at #12.)





Restrictions Imposed On Foreign Property Buyers: A-

You can legally own property in Panama as a foreigner whether or not you're a resident, including in your own name or through legal entities like corporations, private foundations, limited liability companies, partnerships, or trusts.

Foreigners have the same legal rights as Panamanians in property ownership, and they're encouraged to invest in property through Panama's Golden Visa. However, they're subject to a few special restrictions...

Foreigners cannot own land within 10 kms of international borders or islands under the jurisdiction of Panama. Panama shares borders with Colombia and Costa Rica; more due diligence is needed when buying property

in border zones as well as waterfront and island property.

Rights of possession land must be owned by a Panamanian for two years before it can be sold to a foreigner. After two years, it can be titled and sold again without restriction.

The law stipulates that properties on the beach must provide a public right of way starting from the highest tide line on the property. Building over water is also tightly controlled; the permits are expensive and difficult to obtain.

Neither Panamanians nor foreigners can purchase property located within *comarcas*, which are sovereign indigenous reserves.

Residency: A+

Panama stands out for the breadth and diversity of residency options it offers, including



unique and interesting investor visas and innovative new programs, like its digital nomad visa.

It offers the Gold Standard of retirement visas... Panama's Pensionado Visa is one of the most accessible and generous in the world.

These are the basic requirements:

- Be 18 or older
- Receive an income of at least US\$1,000 per month
- Have a clean criminal record
- Provide a health certificate issued by a Panamanian doctor
- File your application with a Panamanian lawyer while in Panama

The Pensionado Visa grants permanent residency indefinitely, so long as you spend one day per year in Panama. If you're looking for quick and easy overseas residency with minimal time-in-country requirements, this is the best option in the Index.

The Pensionado Visa comes with special benefits like a 25% discount on your utility bills, a 25% discount on airline tickets, a 20% discount on doctor's bills, a 50% discount on hotel stays (Monday to Friday), and an exemption from import tax for household goods, to name a few.

Considering inflation, the fluctuating costs of gas and energy, and the ever-increasing cost of health care, these benefits are more attractive than ever before.



Panama eclipses most competition when it comes to favorable tax systems...

It has a jurisdictional approach to taxation as well as generous tax exemptions (for things like bank interest and agricultural income) as well as tax incentives for tourism projects and businesses operating in certain areas of targeted development.



Panama is also the Gold Standard when it comes to taxes. It makes it possible for you to organize your life and your business so that you and it pay little or no tax.

You become a tax resident of Panama if you spend more than 183 days per year and generate income in Panama. Panama income tax rates (on locally earned income) are progressive from 0% to 25%.

Capital gains tax is due at a flat rate of 10% on the transfer of securities and real estate (if the sale is not part of your ordinary business activities).

Panama's property taxes are some of the lowest in the region. The system is tiered, allowing for a base exemption on the first US\$30,000 if it's a vacation or second home and the first US\$120,000 if the property is your primary residence. After the exempted amount, the tax rate is 0.5% on the balance up to US\$700,000 and 0.7% for the value above US\$700,000.

There are no net wealth or worth taxes in Panama, nor are there inheritance, estate, or gift taxes.

Panama does not have tax treaties in place with the United States or Canada.

Chitré Score Card

Monthly Budget					
	Rent	US\$800	Furnished, two-bedroom apartment in a desirable area.		
	Transportation	US\$60	Car ownership, including bus trips to Panama City.		
	Gas	US\$10	For cooking.		
	Electricity	US\$125			
	Water	US\$5			
Basics	Cell Phone	US\$35	500 minutes, unlimited data, and flexible contract with Cable & Wireless.		
	Internet	US\$85			
	Entertainment	US\$458	 Monthly cost for eating out twice a week: US\$360 (US\$22.50 per meal). Monthly cost for drinks twice a week: US\$80 (US\$2 to US\$8 per drink). Movie theater trip twice a month: US\$18 (US\$4.50 per ticket). 		
	Groceries	US\$425	Basic items for a couple.		
	Total	US\$2,003			
Extras	Medical Appointment	US\$35	Basic consultation at a private clinic.		
	Household Help	US\$160	Two five-hour cleanings per week at US\$4 per hour.		

Grades				
	Cost Of Living	B-		
	Health Care	А		
	Entertainment	В		
	Recreation	Α-		
cal Criteria	English Spoken	C+		
Local (Expat Community	B+		
	Infrastructure	В		
	Access To North America	Α-		
	Environmental Factors	Α		
	Crime	Α-		
Country Criteria	Real Estate Restrictions	Α-		
	Residency	A+		
	Taxes	A+		

FINAL GRADE



Live And Invest In Panama Home Conference Kit

Our Live And Invest In Panama Home Conference Kit is the most comprehensive Panama resource out there and includes the all-new bundle of expert presentation recordings from our recent Live and Invest in Panama Conference.

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