# LETTER 2021-2022





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# Panama's 14 TOP 14 Refirement Destinations

BY THE EDITORS OF LIVE AND INVEST OVERSEAS<sup>™</sup>

When choosing a place to live, you'll want to thinslice your options... Panama offers a vast diversity of lifestyle options... from First-World city living to absolutely off-grid ruggedness, from rustic country living to upscale beach communities... this country has something to suit just about everyone...

To help you find a place that meets your criteria, we bring you our first-ever Panama Index. Here you'll find 14 destinations which we've graded taking into consideration the major aspects we think make them the best to consider for retirement in 2021-2022.

#### How The Grading Works...

We give report cards for each destination, giving the place a grade in 10 categories that are the most important considerations for potential expats.

Here's how they break down and how we come up with our grades for each...

#### **Cost Of Living**

"How much money do I need to retire?"

This is probably the most frequently asked question.

There are places all over the world where you could live a better life than you do now—and at a very affordable price. But how you manage to do this successfully comes down to your own definition of a good lifestyle—and matching that with the right location.

As you figure this out, you need to be completely honest with yourself. Be prepared to compromise. But don't try to tell yourself that you can do without all the things you love or you'll end up miserable in your own home...

For our basic cost-of-living budgets, we considered the following costs:

- Rent for a midrange, twobedroom apartment;
- Basic groceries for a couple;
- Electricity;
- Water (this is usually included in the rent);
- Gas (for cooking or heating, also sometimes included in the rent);

- Cell phone;
- Cable and internet (these services are most often bundled in a package);
- Entertainment (eating out once a week, two weekly visits to a local watering hole, and a trip to the movies every month);
- Household help (twice a week);
- Health care (private consultation).

If you can live on US\$1,600 or less in one of our destinations, we call that an A grade.

Remember, going overseas can often be a way to live the lifestyle you want at a price you can afford, making your money stretch farther than it might back home—and often for a much more luxurious lifestyle.

#### **Health Care**

Health care is a primary concern for those retiring overseas and one of the topics we receive the most questions about every year. Unfortunately, there is no quick answer to questions about overseas health care. One size does not fit all, and you'll need to take your personal health concerns and preferences into consideration for every destination on the list. Of course, if you've got issues that require ongoing care, mobility issues, or a handicap these special needs should be factored into your decision process, too.

Health care grades in this report are based on proximity to hospitals (that is, those within an hour of the destination) and the quality of care offered. If a hospital closest to you is less than an hour away, this destination receives an A grade. If the hospital is an hour or 1 hour and 30 minutes away, then they receive a B. Lastly, if the hospital is 2 hours or more away, then their grade is a C.

#### Entertainment

How do you picture spending your time in retirement overseas? Do you crave museums and café culture...? Taking dance classes or doing yoga...? Would you feel lost without a weekly trip to the movies now and then?

In most cases, these (and more) are present in cities or other large population centers, which means they are often condensed into a small area.

We grade this section as follows...

If the entertainment of your choice is less than an hour away, then we've graded it as an A. If it about an hour to 1 hour and 30 minutes away, then it receives a B. If your entertainment of choice is 2 hours or more away from you, then it receives a C.

#### Recreation

Is your idea of keeping busy more outdoorsy?

For many, retirement is a longawaited chance to escape the confines of the indoors. Imagine having the time and the freedom to wake up and take a long hike and a fitness class on the beach every morning... spend the afternoon catching some fresh fish and grilling them up for dinner... biking to and from the local market to shop every day...

It sounds idyllic, but it's a perfectly realistic lifestyle for many who have found their perfect overseas haven.

Our grading for this section is the same as the Entertainment section: A if less than an hour away; B if an hour or 1 hour and 30 minutes away; and C is 2 hours or more away.

#### **English Spoken**

One of the biggest challenges of retiring overseas can be overcoming a potential language barrier. Simple jobs such as applying for a driver license or buying groceries become much more difficult, while already stressful tasks, like buying property or negotiating with the bank manager, can be overwhelming.

Another important obstacle is becoming part of the local community. It's possible to live in an English bubble—Netflix and gated communities make this all the easier—but, presumably, you are looking to move overseas to experience something new in life.

Your life will be richer, more rewarding, and more enjoyable (and significantly less stressful) on a practical level if you feel comfortable communicating in the local language. Scheduling and waiting for the plumber or cable person... small talk in the elevator... chit-chat with the baker... These little interactions are opportunities to integrate into your new home, but they can also be the source of unneeded anxiety if you can't communicate.

Here's how we went about grading this section...

A	English is heard almost everywhere you go.		
В	Most inhabitants are bilingual, especially in service and skilled industries.		
С	Outside of hotels and tourist attractions, people won't speak much English.		
D	You'll be lucky to find people who speak English anywhere.		

#### **Expat Community**

There are generally two ways to go when it comes to choosing your lifestyle overseas: gringo or local.

If you choose to go gringo, you're choosing to live where there's a large population of expats like yourself (Anglophiles). You could also wind up in a neighborhood full of foreigners from all over the world.

If you want to go local, though, you've got to be up for complete immersion into your new culture. There are half measures between these two extremes, of course, but make sure you get the real scoop before committing to a place. Know how far you're willing to go to adapt to a new culture and choose a place that you think is within your comfort zone.

The "A" group for Expat Community is reserved for places with expat populations made up of mostly English speakers.

In the "B" destinations, you won't have any trouble meeting foreigners, but the expat community will be smaller and/ or more disbursed with English not necessarily being the mother tongue of most.

"C" locations all have expat populations, but they are either significantly smaller than or not as engaged as the destinations who scored better in this category. A "D" grade indicates that you're almost on your own as an expat living among locals. All of the destinations we cover that have this grade are up-and-coming expat destinations though.

#### Infrastructure

For this overall grade we consider internet speed and cost, electricity cost and reliability, and domestic access—how easy is it to get around within this destination.

- A: You rarely experience outages. Roads are in great condition. And you get almost perfect internet service.
- **B**: You may experience outages during a rain storm or high winds. Roads are neat. And, again, almost perfect internet.
- C: You experience regular outages (maybe once a month or so), and these can last more than an hour. Roads can get somewhat bumpy. And internet and cell service may fail depending on where you go.

#### **Ease Of Access**

Quality of roads, maintenance of roadways, and how far the destination is from airports.

We're talking specifically about getting around for basic needs, but keep in mind you'll probably want to do some exploring in your new home. While you may not need a car in a given destination (and it may make sense not to own one), you may decide to enjoy the freedom of owning a car and the ability to travel around the country at will.

- An **A-level** grade means the destination is easy to get to, it has nearly impeccable roads, and is close to an airport.
- **B-level** grades mean it's a little further away from an airport (somewhere in the country's interior), but has very good roads and is easy to get to.
- A C-level grade indicates the destination is more than three hours away from an airport and the roads aren't nearly as neat.

#### Crime

We'd never recommend upping stakes and moving somewhere that you'd be in danger. But no country is free of crime, no destination in the world completely safe.

Petty crime is unavoidable no matter where you go, so it pays to stay sharp—be you resident or tourist.

Every destination on this list is a safe place to visit and live, as any of their happy expats would gladly tell you. But there is one safety aspect to moving overseas that expats need to keep in mind in many destinations: targeting. In your new home, you are a stranger, an outsider. You may look different or be unable to communicate in the local language, making you even more of a sore thumb.

Moving to Latin America, you'll likely have more money than your local neighbors, perhaps much more, making you wealthy by their standards. Crimes against expats are usually crimes of opportunity—a window left open, a purse left in the shopping cart, or a car left unlocked.

This section is also graded on a curve. Each grade in this category should be considered relative to other grades in this category.

That is, "A" does not mean zero crime, and "C" is not a failing grade. Each grade merely indicates that crime is more or less of a concern in each destination compared with the others.

#### Affordability Of Real Estate

The grades in this section are averages for neighborhoods we've deemed expat-worthy... you could, of course, spend much more in every case, but, if you're a good shopper, you might also find costs to be cheaper.

Without further ado, read on for this year's top picks for retirement overseas...

# The Ranking Of The **Panama Index**

Here is the final ranking of the 2021-2022 Panama Index.

The El Cangrejo neighborhood in Panama City takes top billing in our Index. It's closely followed by Avenida Balboa, also in Panama City, and Boquete, in the Chiriquí Province.

Of all the places in Panama to hang your hat, the following 14 destinations are our top choices... But the nature of a ranking means that some places will come out higher on the list and some places will come out lower, and this year, Mariato ranks last. That doesn't mean that beach town won't work its way up by 2022...

Keep reading for a close-up look and comprehensive breakdown of each destination by category...

Position	Destination	Final Grade
1	El Cangrejo	A+
2	Avenida Balboa	A+
3	Boquete	A+
4	Áreas Revertidas	A+
5	Volcán	A+
6	Casco Viejo	A+
7	El Valle	A
8	Santiago	А
9	Coronado	A-
10	David	A-
11	Pedasí	A-
12	Santa Fe	A-
13	Gorgona	B+
14	Mariato	B+



By the Editors of Live and Invest Overseas™

# **Best City Picks**

For some, being in the middle of it all is exactly what they're looking for. Living in a major city you'll have high-end entertainment, wide-ranging shopping, international dining options, well-maintained roads, public transportation, speedy internet, and easy access to international airports.

However, living in cities also mean a higher cost of living, dealing with traffic and noise pollution, large amounts of people, and, possibly, a higher crime rate.

These are the four neighborhoods we consider to be the best in Panama City, along with two cities in the country's interior that we think can offer you the best quality of life in your retirement...

#### Quick links:

- 🔶 <u>Avenida Balboa</u>
- 🔶 <u>Casco Viejo</u>
- 📌 El Cangrejo
- 🔶 Áreas Revertidas
- 🔶 <u>Santiago</u>
- 🔶 <u>David</u>



### **Panama City**

Panama City varies hugely district to district. Everything from the view outside your window to the languages you hear when walking down the street to the historical quality of the neighborhood can be starkly different.

A major benefit to basing yourself in Panama City is that you'd live within arm's reach of the best health facilities in the country. Nicknamed the Hub of the Americas, you could also take advantage of the capital's well-connected Tocumen Airport, which serves the United States and Canada (as well as a host of other countries) with direct flights daily.

Panama has a three-tier health care system consisting of public hospitals (where the care is basic), socialsecurity institutions (which you gain access to



The famous Panama sign

by being employed), and private facilities. Most expats opt for care in the private facilities: the standard of care is excellent and affordable through Panama's inexpensive insurance policies.

#### PANAMA'S TOP 14 RETIREMENT DESTINATIONS

# Avenida Balboa

★ Best City Picks ♀ Panama City, Panama

Avenida Balboa is an area where you'll find tall skyscrapers and some commercial activity including a select few high-end restaurants, hotels, and cafés.

Parallel to Avenida Balboa you'll find the Cinta Costera, a multimillion-dollar land reclamation project to beautify the city's oceanfront and provide access to outdoor activities to the public. The first phase was completed in 2009, with the third and final phase finished in 2014.

Nearby are all the amenities and attractions of Bella Vista, and in the Puntas—Punta Pacífica and Punta Paitilla—are Multicentro and Multiplaza.

#### **Cost Of Living**

Panama City is no longer a bargain destination, and Avenida Balboa is among the few neighborhoods that offer luxurious apartments. For example, renting a comfortable, two-bedroom apartment will cost about US\$1,500 a month.

Having a car is also expensive; even second-hand cars priced high, and added expenses come from driving on certain roads that charge tolls (Corredor Norte and Corredor Sur).

Groceries can be as much as you pay in the States if you're shopping for the exact same products. You can buy pretty much any generic-brand American product in Panama City for a slightly inflated cost. To lower these expenses, make a few changes and shop for local products.

Hired help, though, is a luxury you will be able to afford in Panama whether you have a cleaner, gardener, or driver. You can have a maid clean your house top to bottom for about US\$20 a day. Public transportation costs next to nothing, with bus tickets as low as 25 cents.



Avenida Balboa and its skyscrapers

Plus, as a retiree living here on the Pensionado Visa, you won't be taxed heavily and will enjoy discounts on things like entertainment (50% off movies, theaters, concerts), transportation (30% off bus, boat, and train fares), hotel stays (25% to 50% off), meals out (25% off sit-down restaurants), prescription medications (10% off), and more.

#### **Health Care**

Private hospitals in Panama City are modern and have state-of-the-art technology and frontline medications. Punta Pacífica Hospital is the best in the country, affiliated and managed by Johns Hopkins Medicine International. It offers a wide range of specialists, English-speaking staff, and almost luxurylevel facilities. It's also one of the most expensive hospitals in the country. Paitilla Hospital is also popular with expats and known for lower prices. It's well-equipped, has Englishspeaking staff, and offers critical care to people of all ages. It also has a specialist cancer treatment ward.

Both hospitals are a few minutes away from Avenida Balboa.

#### Entertainment

The most charming part of town is undoubtedly Casco Viejo, about a 4-minute drive from Avenida Balboa. At only four avenues wide, Casco is a tiny treasure trove of historical structures best explored on foot. Here, old buildings are converted into private homes, condos, restaurants, funky cafés and bars, art galleries, and shops. Vibrant cultural events also take place in Casco Viejo constantly, from impromptu



Casco Viejo

street concerts to pop-up artisan markets. This is where Panama City residents go when they want to go to trendy eateries and bars with carefully curated ambiances and international menus.



The skyline of Avenida Balboa



Cinta Costera

For a casual lunch or dinner, head over to the fish market (Mercado de Marisco) located right at the end of the Cinta Costera. You can choose any freshly caught fish (yellow fin tuna, shrimp, red snapper, octopus, etc.) and have workers cook it for you on the spot or sample some *ceviche*.

Down the other direction you'll find two large malls Multicentro and Multiplaza where you can catch a movie at either one of the mall's movie theater. Multiplaza also has a variety of restaurants to choose from to enjoy a nice lunch or dinner like Paladar, P.F. Changs, Tony Roma's, Crepes & Waffles, and more.

#### Recreation

Parallel to Avenida Balboa is the Cinta Costera. It stretches along the oceanfront from Punta Paitilla



Fish Market (Mercado de Marisco)

to the eastern side of Casco Viejo, ending near the Maracaná Stadium (for soccer). The pathway connects to the exterior road that stretches into the ocean, surrounding Casco Viejo.

#### PANAMA'S TOP 14 RETIREMENT DESTINATIONS

The 7.5 km parkway consists of jogging and biking paths, playground and workout equipment, basketball, tennis, and volleyball courts, a skateboard park, sculptures and art installations, and gazebos for dance and yoga. The area is covered with trees, grass, and other tropical plant life, which stands out compared to the concrete jungle that is the rest of Panama City.

*La Cinta*, as locals call it, is popular during the early hours of the morning and the evenings. You'll see folks walking, jogging, skateboarding, and doing their exercise routines on one of the several bar sets you'll walk past. If you live close to the Cinta, forgo the gym membership and go to there instead.

On Sunday mornings, it's closed off to cars from 6 a.m. until noon. Since Panama is still working toward making the streets more bicycle friendly, this is a great way to enjoy some time on your bike worry-free.

#### **English Spoken**

Panama City has strong connections to the United States and the English language. Many locals in the capital will speak at least some English.

On Avenida Balboa, you'll find most people who work at restaurants and shops can speak at least some basic English. However, electricians, mechanics, gardeners, police, house maids, etc., are unlikely to speak any English.

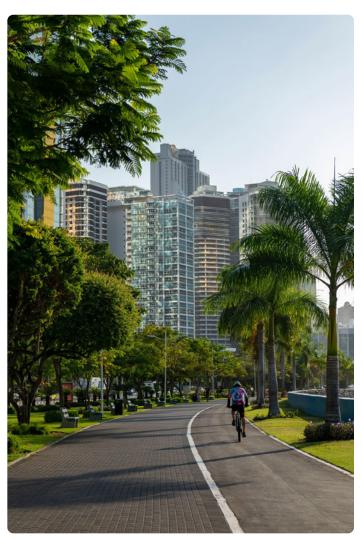
It's always best to learn as much of the local language as you can to enrich your experience. Just because you can get by on English doesn't mean you will be living a full, well-rounded life with it.

#### **Expat Community**

Avenida Balboa does have a fairly large expat population, but the majority of it is made up of working-age expats: employees of multinational corporations, digital nomads, entrepreneurs, etc.



A basketball court in the Cinta Costera



Jogging and biking paths in the Cinta Costera

Though most retired expats choose to relocate in other neighborhoods (and even outside of Panama City), you will find some people from the States, Canada, and other Latin American countries living on Avenida Balboa.

#### Infrastructure

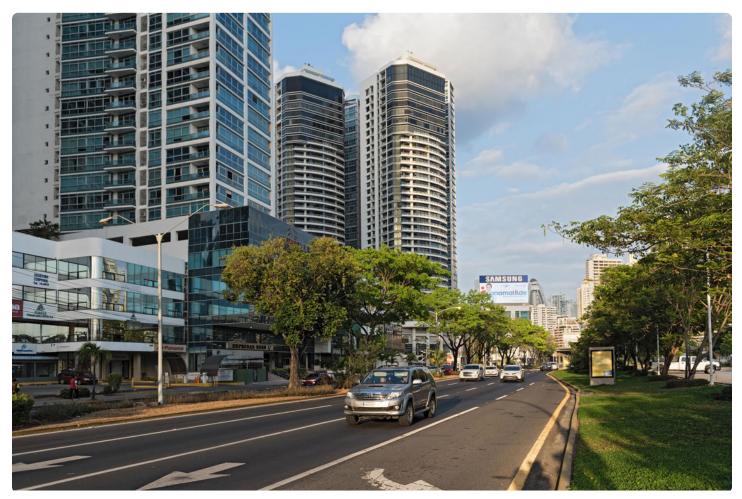
For maximum comfort and convenience, you'll want to own a car. Panama City isn't walkable; sidewalks are either nonexistent or hazardous with uneven surfaces. You'll find many big, busy roads without places for pedestrians to walk or cross safely. Living on Avenida Balboa, though, means you can walk to nearby restaurants and cafés as well as enjoy a stroll on the Cinta Costera.

In the neighboring Punta Pacífica area, you'll find the entrance to the Corredor Sur--one of two major highway lines connecting the city to its outer



Club de Yates y Pesca as seen from Avenida Balboa

metropolitan areas and to the Tocumen International Airport. This is a tolled road, so you'll need to get a Panapass (a sticker in your windshield that corresponds to your account and is read by the electronic toll, automatically charging you) installed in your car.



Avenida Balboca street view

#### PANAMA'S TOP 14 RETIREMENT DESTINATIONS

If you decide against having a car, catching a taxi, bus, or Uber on Avenida Balboa is easy. Because this is a main avenue, taxis pass through here all the time, and there are several bus stops too.

Depending on where you're going, a taxi can charge from US\$1.50 to US\$5. We do advise you get an idea of what the price should be to get you from where you are to where you want to go. Some cab drivers will want to charge you more if they notice you're a foreigner.

As for buses, the fee to ride the MetroBus is 25 cents.

#### Crime

Avenida Balboa is one of a fair few neighborhoods where you can walk around with little concern. However, you won't always know where one neighborhood ends and another begins in Panama City. This is something to keep in mind when wandering around.

If you were to wander up towards Punta Pacífica and Paitilla, you should be fine. But if you were to wander towards Casco Viejo you should be mindful of which street you choose to walk into. You might unexpectedly find yourself in the San Felipe area (next to Casco Viejo). This is one of several areas to avoid.

Here's a tip for identifying a change in neighborhoods: If the look of the houses and streets changes, you may have stumbled upon a rough area. Calmly turn back in the direction you came from.

#### **Affordability Of Real Estate**

Real estate on Avenida Balboa typically costs between US\$2,000 and US\$3,000 per square meter and rents for about US\$2,000 per month.

#### **Ease Of Access**

Avenida Balboa is about a 25-minute drive from Tocumen International Airport via Corredor Sur.



Rainforest sculpture in the Cinta Costera



The modern cityscape of Avenida Balboa

# Avenida Balboa's Report Card

#### **Monthly Budget**

Rent	US\$2,000	Luxurious, two-bedroom apartment with an ocean view.
Transportation	US\$65	If you own your car, and depending on how often you travel to the interior.
Gas	N/A	Included in rent.
Electricity	US\$85	Using air conditioner. This will vary depending on use.
Water	N/A	Included in rent.
Cell Phone	US\$50	Basic plan for two people.
Internet And Cable	US\$65	Including home Wi-Fi, a TV package, and 200 calling minutes.
Household Help	US\$200	Twice a week. Comes out to US\$25 per day.
Entertainment	US\$364	Movies once a week: \$5.50 per ticket; dinner and drinks for two once a week: \$50; drinks for two once a week: \$10 to \$30.
Groceries	US\$400	Basic items for a couple.
Medical Appointment	US\$60	Private consultation.
TOTAL	US\$3,289	

#### Local Criteria

Cost Of Living	C+
Health Care	A+
Entertainment	A+
Recreation	A+
English Spoken	А
Expat Community	В
Infrastructure	A+
Ease Of Access	A+
Crime	A+
Affordability Of Real Estate	B-

**Final Grade** 



#### PANAMA'S TOP 14 RETIREMENT DESTINATIONS

# **Casco Viejo**

★ Best City Picks ♀ Panama City, Panama

Often regarded as the Soho of Latin America, the historic Casco Viejo neighborhood offers a different kind of city life than is found throughout the rest of Panama City. The narrow cobblestone streets, plazas, and centuries-old buildings give this town an Old World impression. The architecture is reminiscent of French-colonial New Orleans or Old Montreal, along with Spanish-colonial, neo-Renaissance, and Art Nouveau influences.

After the destruction of Panama City's original site (Panama Viejo) to pirates in the 1670s, the remaining inhabitants looked west, resettling in the present day location of Casco Viejo. As the city grew during the 20th century, the city grew further out, and the money moved with it. Near the end of the 20th century, the neighborhood's vintage architecture had fallen into a state of decline and decay. Then came UNESCO, designating the area as a World Heritage Site in 1997 and setting the stage for Casco Viejo's revitalization. This has become an exclusive spot for real estate.

Geographically, Casco is distinct from the rest of the city. It sits on a tiny finger of land that juts out into the Bay of Panama. What it lacks in size (it's only four avenues wide) it makes up for in abundance—the place is a treasure trove of historical structures, from its cobblestone streets and centuries-old buildings to its plazas and parks.

Casco Viejo (Spanish for "old quarter") might be the best of what Panama City has to offer... or the worst. It depends on your point of view. If you feel at home surrounded by decaying grandeur and crumbling pastel facades, then this could be the perfect Panama City neighborhood to base yourself in for retirement.

While the hustle-bustle capital city isn't for everyone, I'd bet that the charm of Casco Viejo will appeal to just about anyone...



San Francisco de Asis Church in Casco Viejo

#### **Cost Of Living**

Casco expats pay top dollar for their slice of historical significance. This is Panama's top neighborhood for tourism, so everything from rent to meals at restaurants to goods and services is more expensive here.

Rent in Casco Viejo ranges from about US\$750 to US\$2,000. Be careful when searching for a place, though, as the lower price might signify that the apartment is right above a bar or night club.

There are no grocery stores or movie theaters in the area of Casco. Also, you'll have to head into El Dorado, Albrook, or Punta Pacífica, among other places, for shopping or anything else. If you don't own a car this means you'll have to pay for an Uber or a taxi. Neither is expensive, but it will add up to about US\$36 a month depending on how often you use their services.

What you spend on groceries will depend entirely on how local you decide to go. You can buy almost anything you would back in the States for a bit more. If you buy local products, your monthly groceries expense could be about US\$250.

#### Healthcare

Casco Viejo is about a 10-minute drive from both the Paitilla Hospital and Johns Hopkins affiliate Punta Pacífica Hospital. Both of these have internationally trained doctors and English-speaking staff. You will receive quality care at either one.



National Institute of Culture

#### Entertainment

In Casco Viejo you have many options for entertainment. This is a neighborhood with museums, indigenous vendors, and rooftop bars offering



Casco Viejo as seen from Ancon Hill

happy hours in the afternoons, and beautiful views of the city during the night. There is every type of restaurant you could want here, including traditional Panamanian food. You can also enjoy plays at one of the three theaters in Casco, Teatro Amador, Teatro Anita Villalaz, and the National Theater.

Just around the corner from Casco Viejo is the Amador Causeway, a 6-kilometer (3.7-mile) stretch of road that reaches out into the Pacific and leads to Naos, Perico, and Flamenco islands. On these islands you'll find bars, restaurants, and a harbor. It's also one of the best vantage points for watching large container ships enter and exit the canal.

The Biomuseo, an eye-catchingly colorful building that's dedicated to showcasing Panama's biodiversity, is also at Amador. It has exhibitions dedicated to culture, geology, and natural history and is one of the city's best museums.

#### Recreation

The Amador Causeway is a great place for recreational activities. It has nicely paved roads and manicured sidewalks making it a popular place to go to during the the weekends. You'll almost always find people here walking, jogging, renting pushbikes, roller blading, and so on.

Another great place to spend some time outdoors at is the Cinta Costera. From Casco you can easily access the Cinta Costera III. This is the newest addition to the cinta, and where you can find a skate park as well as an outdoor food court called Sabores del Chorrillo.

#### **English Spoken**

Casco Viejo is a very popular attraction for foreigners. You could get by in casco with little to no Spanish. Every bar, restaurant, shop, museum, and theater will have English-speaking staff.

Still, knowing some Spanish is always a good idea. If you ever were to need an electrician's or a plumber's



Italian restaurant Da Vinci in San Filipe district



Plaza de Francia at Las Bovedas in Casco Viejo



The Amador Causeway and Bio Museo at a distance

assistance, you won't be able to communicate with them in English. Also, if you decide to hire a house maid, you'll need to be able to speak enough Spanish for her to understand what her chores will be.

#### **Expat Community**

With all the trendy nightlife, not many foreigners who move to Panama consider locating themselves in Casco. Locals don't really live in Casco either, mainly because they can't afford it.

However, many expats go to Casco for brunch, lunch, or dinner, or simply to spend some time in the area during the day. It's an excellent neighborhood to meet other foreigners who have decided to move to Panama. Casco-based expats live in the areas of the neighborhood that have been restored, but there are still many pockets of dilapidation here, too. You'd also live alongside Casco's resident locals, many of whom live in poverty-like conditions.



Santé restaurant in Casco Viejo

#### Infrastructure

This area is laid out like a classic European city: It's on a grid with shady plazas complete with churches every couple of blocks. Its narrow streets are meant to be explored on foot... Luckily, walking is the best way to appreciate the colonial architecture, like the buildings with shuttered windows, balconies on every level overlooking the street, ornate iron work and turned wood...

If you decide to not own a car, you can rely on Uber, Taxi, and the MetroBus to get around. All are inexpensive and safe. Word of advice when using a cab, have a rough idea of how much you should pay from where you are to your destination. It's not unusual for taxi drivers to try and charge more than they should when they realize you're a foreigner.



Santo Domingo Church and Arco Chato

#### Crime

Casco Viejo used to be a place people avoided going to before renovations started taking place. Now, though, being only four avenues wide, it's easy to



Casco Viejo street view

stumble upon San Felipe. It's very easy to notice when you've left the Casco area and entered San Felipe. Houses will look rough and deteriorated. Don't panic. The solution is simple... Just turn around in a calm manner and go back the way you came.

#### **Affordability Of Real Estate**

Buying one of the renovated gems in Casco Viejo will generally cost about US\$4,000 per square meter. Rent here can range from US\$750 to US\$2,000, and a purchase could cost about US\$700,000.

Note: Restrictions regulate what can be done to property within the UNESCO boundaries. Property owners are given two years from purchase to begin construction on empty or condemned lots.

#### **Ease Of Access**

To get to Casco Viejo from abroad, you'll need to arrive to Panama City first. Luckily, this is the Hub of the Americas, and Tocumen International Airport is well-connected. It enjoys direct connections to Miami, Toronto, Los Angeles, and several other major North American cities.

Once you get to Panama City, the most comfortable way of getting around is in a private car, whether you own, rent, or take a taxi or uber. The drive from Tocumen to Casco Viejo takes about 40 minutes, give or take depending on traffic.

Once you're settled, and if you own a car, it's best to leave it in the garage (assuming the building has one) when wandering around your newly adopted neighborhood or around the Cinta Costera.

There's also a new underground garage and a parking lot just at the entrance of Casco. If you're planning a meet up with friends, advise they leave their car in one of those two spots and find their way to you by foot.

Within Casco itself, you won't need anything but your own two feet to get around. The neighborhood is compact and walking from one side to the other takes under 15 minutes.



Vintage balcony in Casco Viejo



Old city bank building in Casco Viejo

## **Casco Viejo's Report Card**

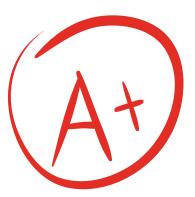
#### **Monthly Budget**

Rent	US\$2,000	2-bedroom, 2-bathroom apartment. With a balcony and water view. Unfurnished.
Transportation	US\$65	If you own your car, and depending on how often you travel to the interior.
Gas	N/A	Included in rent.
Electricity	US\$85	Using air conditioner. This will vary depending on use.
Water	N/A	Included in rent.
Cell Phone	US\$50	Basic plan for two people.
Internet And Cable	US\$65	Including home Wi-Fi, a TV package, and 200 calling minutes.
Household Help	US\$200	Twice a week. Comes out to US\$25 per day.
Entertainment	US\$404	Movies once a week: \$5.50 per ticket; dinner and drinks for two once a week: \$60; drinks for two once a week: \$30 (depending on the drink).
Groceries	US\$400	Basic items for a couple.
Medical Appointment	US\$60	Private consultation.
TOTAL	US\$3,329	

#### Local Criteria

Cost Of Living	С
Health Care	A+
Entertainment	A+
Recreation	A+
English Spoken	А
Expat Community	B+
Infrastructure	A+
Ease Of Access	A+
Crime	B+
Affordability Of Real Estate	D+

**Final Grade** 



#### PANAMA'S TOP 14 RETIREMENT DESTINATIONS

# **El Cangrejo**

★ Best City Picks ♀ Panama City, Panama

The most appealing neighborhood in Panama City for the would-be retiree is in the heart of downtown: El Cangrejo, home to a fast-growing community of expats and foreign retirees who recognize and appreciate the unique quality of life on offer on what is arguably the most comfortable, convenient, and affordable downtown Panama City experience. In El Cangrejo, most everything you need for dayto-day living is within walking distance, including a big U.S.-style grocery store, Pricesmart (Central America's Costco). If you need to move further away from the neighborhood, you can grab the Metro which runs through here.

#### **Cost Of Living**

This is not the most affordable place to base yourself in Panama City. However, El Cangrejo is the best Panama City-lifestyle buy for your retirement dollars. The quality of life you can enjoy here is comparable to the best of "city neighborhood" living anywhere in the States.

Depending on circumstances, such as living arrangements, how often you dine out, and transportation choices, you could expect to live comfortably for about US\$1,500–US\$2,400.

Grocery stores in El Cangrejo are not unlike those in North America-packaged processed goods in the aisles, with baked goods, fresh meat, dairy, fruits, and vegetables along the edges. While some of the brand names are different, many are the same, and finding brand names like Kellogg's or Nutella isn't hard.

While prices for things such as rice and fresh fruit and vegetables are lower than those found in most North American supermarkets, prices for processed goods are usually equal, if not slightly higher. This can be good motivation to buy the cheaper and



El Cangrejo

healthier items like fresh bananas or green peppers instead of less nutritious canned foods.

#### **Health Care**

Health care in Panama is very affordable compared to in the United States. The Clinica Einstein on Via Argentina provides routine medical care with Englishspeaking doctors. Should any emergency care be needed, Hospital Punta Pacifica is a full-service private hospital affiliated with John Hopkins and is about a 10- or 15-minute drive away. More than 350 fully trained and English-speaking specialists are on hand at Hospital Punta Pacífica, and they are well equipped to deal with almost anything that comes through their doors.

#### Entertainment

This neighborhood is home to one of Panama City's best selection of restaurants, cafés, and bars.

For the gastronomic groupies, El Cangrejo has plenty of options to excite your taste buds. With the highest concentration of restaurants in Panama City, the range of cuisine types could keep any palate satisfied. Just as the neighborhood has a multicultural makeup of people, it also has a multicultural makeup of restaurants. Caribbean, Mediterranean, Venezuelan, Italian, Cuban, Peruvian, French, Mexican, Greek, Thai, Swiss, Lebanese, Spanish, Japanese, Chinese, American, and, of course, Panamanian cuisines are all within minutes of your doorstep here.

On Via Argentina, a mix of bars and pubs can be found. La Rana Dorada is a popular brew pub, with their own microbrews on tap offered at half price during weekday happy hour from noon until 6 p.m.



Istmo Brew Pub

Across the street from La Rana is Live, a karaoke bar for experienced and not-so-experienced singers alike. If you'd rather be entertained than be the entertainment, El Pavo Real has live rock-band performances every weekend.



Via Veneto



Apartment buildings and nearby shops

A five minute walk south of El Cangrejo proper, the Calle Uruguay area is scattered with appealing establishments for an evening beverage. The Londoner is a popular pub with free pool tables and Englishstyle fish and chips, and Alta Bar offers a good martini with a view from their rooftop terrace as well as a popular nightclub on the main floor below, for those who like to dance.

The historic Casco Viejo (about a 10-minute cab ride away from El Cangrejo) is probably the only neighborhood that can say it has a better selection of bars.

#### Recreation

Andrés Bello Park is a busy place, often hosting festivals and fairs of all types, including a recent children's festival, complete with food vendors, handcrafts for sale, and dancing performances on stage. The park is perfect for a leisurely stroll or a workout using the park's free outdoor workout equipment. Basketball and soccer games are common and attract some spectators on the evenings and weekends.



Via Argentina

A quick taxi to the nearby Theater Guild of Ancon brings you to one of the best English-based theaters in Panama. There was a showing of "The Importance of Being Earnest" a few years back. The Teatro Nacional in Casco Viejo also has entertaining performances, like "Les Miserables."

After a performance at Teatro Nacional, be sure to check out the rest of Casco Viejo, a UNESCO World Heritage Site with architecture that takes you back to the 17th century, when this area was founded. The neighborhood is sprinkled with bohemian bars and trendy restaurants.

#### **English Spoken**

One advantage for any English-speaking or struggling-withtheir-Spanish expats is that El Cangrejo's expat population as well as its young Panamanian population (thanks as much to American television as to the several universities and other educational facilities located here) speak English more than in other parts of Panama.

Of course, speaking Spanish is still a major help in getting around and dealing with day-to-day situations and other excursions or social interactions.

#### **Expat Community**

El Cangrejo is a mixed residential-commercial area that's popular with young expats and Panamanians. Your neighbor might be a Chilean artist, a Spanish musician, a Serbian entrepreneur, a corporate transplant from Canada, a young Panamanian bucking the tradition of living with his parents through his 20s, or another nice retired couple from the United States.

#### Infrastructure

Getting around El Cangrejo is easy, despite the resilience here not to use designated street addresses. To be sure, the streets do have names—but except for the main routes, these names are not important.



Plaza Concordia, shopping mall



Matsuei Sushi Bar, a popular japanese restaurant



Iglesia del Carmen, church close to El Cangrejo

After a couple of strolls through the neighborhood, landmarks start to pop out at you. Einstein's head and the cathedral serve as useful points of reference when explaining where you are or need to be.

The streets and sidewalks in El Cangrejo have recently been fixed. There are now wider sidewalks and narrow roads which make this neighborhood ideal for walking. If you want to go somewhere but want to avoid driving, you can just hop on the metro.

As for the internet, cable TV, and phone service, these are nearly as reliable as you'd like them to be. There are a few power outages every now and then, and they can vary from a few minutes to a few hours.

#### Crime

When it comes to walking around at night, you should always remain vigilant, as you should in any

major city. But with a homicide rate lower than that of many U.S. cities, you shouldn't feel unsafe in El Cangrejo's streets, even at night.

#### **Affordability Of Real Estate**

Rent at El Cangrejo for a two-bedroom, twobathroom apartment will cost about US\$800.

Depending on where in El Cangrejo you choose to settle, purchasing an apartment can cost about US\$130,000 and can go up to US\$450,000.

#### **Ease Of Access**

Getting to El Cangrejo is not too hard. After flying into Panama City's Tocumen International Airport, a taxi fare to the neighborhood should cost no more

#### PANAMA'S TOP 14 RETIREMENT DESTINATIONS

than US\$30. While taking a bus is also an option— —a much cheaper one, too—it is not advisable. It wouldn't be dangerous, just long. By car, the trip is usually about 30 minutes and double that in bad traffic.

Living in El Cangrejo, a car is not a necessity—most everything you need is a five- or ten-minute walk away. However, if you decide to venture out of the city for a weekend (which is highly recommended) and don't want to take a bus, several car-rental agencies can be found in the area.

El Cangrejo does have a metro stop here called Vía Argentina. This is one of the best ways to get someplace while avoiding traffic. The metro is clean, safe, surprisingly reliable, and shockingly cheap, with a single fare costing only 35 cents.



El Cangrejo as seen from a rooftop



Residential area in El Cangrejo

# El Cangrejo's Report Card

#### **Monthly Budget**

Rent	US\$1,200	Three-bedroom, two-bathroom apartment with a parking space, a small balcony, a social area, and situated next to the park Andrés Bello.
Transportation	US\$65	If you own your car, and depending on how often you travel to the interior.
Gas	N/A	Included in rent.
Electricity	US\$85	Using air conditioner. This will vary depending on use.
Water	N/A	Included in rent.
Cell Phone	US\$50	Basic plan for two people.
Internet And Cable	US\$65	Including home Wi-Fi, a TV package, and 200 calling minutes.
Household Help	US\$200	Twice a week. Comes out to US\$25 per day.
Entertainment	US\$324	Movies once a week: \$5.50 per ticket; dinner and drinks for two once a week: \$50; drinks for two once a week: about \$20.
Groceries	US\$400	Basic items for a couple.
Medical Appointment	US\$60	Private consultation.
TOTAL	US\$2,449	

#### Local Criteria

Cost Of Living	B-
Health Care	A+
Entertainment	A+
Recreation	A-
English Spoken	А
Expat Community	А
Infrastructure	A+
Ease Of Access	A+
Crime	A
Affordability Of Real Estate	B+

**Final Grade** 



#### PANAMA'S TOP 14 RETIREMENT DESTINATIONS

# Áreas Revertidas

★ Best City Picks ♀ Panama City, Panama

The neighborhoods that make up the former Canal Zone, now known as Áreas Revertidas, are Ancón/ Balboa, Albrook, Diablo, Los Rios, Curundu, and Clayton/City of Knowledge.

This was, for all intents and purposes, U.S. sovereign territory. Residents were mainly U.S. military personnel or employed by the Panama Canal Company, which was controlled by the U.S. government. The zone had its own governor, police, schools, hospitals, courts, judges, and even operated under Jim Crow type laws of segregation.

With its old military barracks and facilities, these neighborhoods are tropical residential areas with unique architectural designs, popular with expats and those wanting to get away from the city and closer to nature. Panama City is the only metropolis in the world that has tropical rain forest within its city limits.

The more common neighborhoods where most expats decide to settle in are Albrook and Clayton (Ciudad del Saber/City of Knowledge).

#### Albrook

Albrook is filled with prior military barracks and officer quarters. One of the great things about Albrook, is how calm and quiet the area is. You can sit outside and listen to the breeze and kids playing in playgrounds nearby.

Albrook offers jungle-side living in an archetypal tropical setting. Former Officers housing sits side-byside with well-proportioned apartment buildings and sleek modern homes.

One of Panama's largest and best-established private schools, St. Mary's, is located in Albrook with more than 1,500 pupils taught in English only classes.



Ancón Hill

#### Clayton/City Of Knowledge

This neighborhood is spread over quite a large area separated by green areas and forest. There are a number of separate communities as well as some large private schools such as Colegio Javier, Las Esclavas, and Kings College, the British school of Panama.

Clayton is where you'll find the U.S. Embassy compound.

The homes here are a mixture of fine old officers housing with the less grand, four- to six-unit apartment buildings and single-family home communities interspersed with the occasional new apartment tower—thankfully rare in this area due to permitting restrictions. The scenery around Clayton is typical old-school military. Everything is very boxy.

#### **Cost Of Living**

The Áreas Revertidas aren't a bargain per se. Houses here for rent cost about US\$2,200 with three bedrooms, three bathrooms, and one studio (that can be turned into an additional bedroom).

Your cost of living in this area will go up a bit seeing as you'll have to commute almost every day depending on where you decide to go buy groceries from and where you decide to dine.

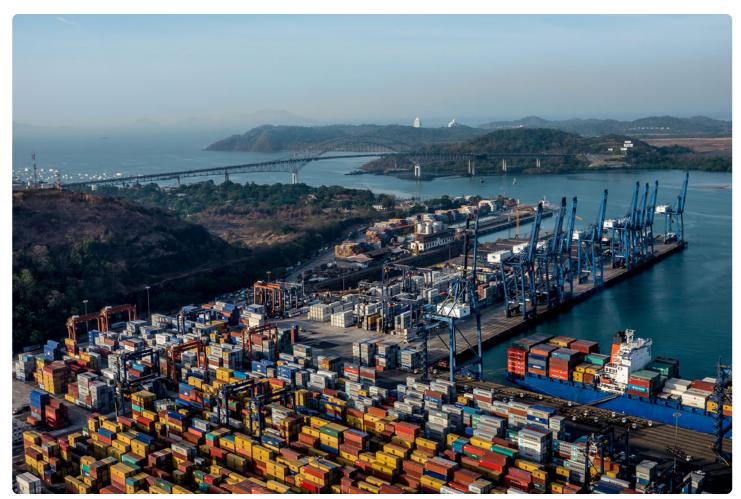
#### **Health Care**

For health care, like everywhere else in Panama City, the best quality you'll receive will be at Punta



A view out over the port of Balboa and the entrance of the Panama Canal from the top of Ancon Hill

Pacífica Hospital or Paitilla Hospital. Both are about 20 minutes away from the Áreas Revertidas neighborhood (depending on traffic).



Port of Balboa



Albrook mall is the biggest shopping mall in Panama City

#### **Entertainment**

There's plenty of entertainment around the Áreas Revertidas neighborhoods. You've got a bowling alley and movie theater right at Albrook Mall––the largest of Panama's malls––and the Panama Canal is close by. You can also go for a walk at Cerro Ancón. It's usually open to visitors from about 7 a.m. until 5 p.m.

Plus, you're practically in Panama City, so you're only minutes from everything else the city has to offer.

#### Recreation

Both Albrook and Clayton are fantastic place to enjoy a stroll. You won't feel nearly as much heat as in the city center because of the neighborhoods' intact forests. Many people ride bikes, skateboards,

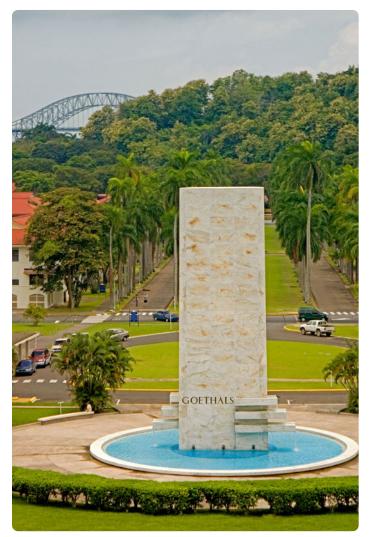


Balboa Theather, constructed in 1946

roller blades, etc. Clayton has an area called Kiwanis with an open green field where youngsters go to play football and baseball. In this same area, there are also several other green areas where you see parents with



The Balboa Union Church



George Washington Goethals Memorial fountain at the administration building of the Panama Canal

their children as well as retired couples either walking around or sitting on benches people watching.

Additionally, both Albrook and Clayton have swimming pools that you can use for a minimum entrance fee.

#### **English Spoken**

Because of the popularity among expats, you'll find that many who live in Albrook and Clayton speak English. Many bars and restaurants will also have an English-speaking staff.

As we always say, though, learning a little Spanish will help you avoid headaches when trying to communicate with a local who doesn't speak or understand English.

#### **Expat Community**

There is a fairly large expat community in Albrook and Clayton. However, you'll find that most are coupled with school aged children or people who've been relocated to the country for work. That's not to say you won't find any retirees in the area.

#### Infrastructure

The infrastructure, as it is in most of Panama City, is fantastic. You can get Wi-Fi almost everywhere. The roads are well maintained, water is drinkable from the tap, electricity is reliable, and you've got your choice of cable television or satellite TV.

#### Crime

Crime in Albrook and Clayton isn't common. However, these neighborhoods get very quiet, dark, and deserted at night. Just like everywhere else, it's good to practice some caution when wandering around in the evenings.

#### **Affordability Of Real Estate**

Houses here for rent cost about US\$2,200 with three bedrooms, three bathrooms, and one studio (that can be turned into an additional bedroom).

If you're looking to buy a home here, prices can vary from US\$375,000 and US\$700,000 (and more).

#### **Ease Of Access**

You'd definitely need a car to get around comfortably. You could call them walking towns, as there are sidewalks everywhere, and the scenery is beautiful, but you're not going to get from one destination to another easily. Everything is very spread out. Plus, buses are scarce in much of the area, and taxis expensive, so having a private vehicle makes transportation a lot easier.

Amenities and services in Clayton include a few shops and restaurants, but no supermarket. For most necessities, trips to the nearby Albrook area or downtown are required. There's a Farmacia Arrocha (a pharmacy) both in Albrook and in Clayton so getting medication isn't a problem. You'll also find a Felipe Motta and Banco General in Clayton.

The Marcos A. Gelabert Airport, the local airport, is located at Albrook. It's a jumble of hangars housing private aircraft and helicopters. Air Panama operates domestic flights from here using turbo prop aircraft or mid-sized jets. Flights from here are usually no more than US\$250 or so to get to the furthest corners of Panama.

Across the runway you will see Albrook Mall and the National Transport Terminal (mainly provincial coach services and a metro station for Line 1 of the Panama City Metro).



# Áreas Revertidas' Report Card

#### **Monthly Budget**

Rent	US\$2,000	Two-bedroom, two-bathroom two story house with a balcony and two parking spaces. Furnished.
Transportation	US\$65	If you own your car, and depending on how often you travel to the interior.
Gas	N/A	Included in rent.
Electricity	US\$85	Using air conditioner. This will vary depending on use.
Water	N/A	Included in rent.
Cell Phone	US\$50	Basic plan for two people.
Internet And Cable	US\$65	Including home Wi-Fi, a TV package, and 200 calling minutes.
Household Help	US\$200	Twice a week. Comes out to US\$25 per day.
Entertainment	US\$364	Movies once a week: \$5.50 per ticket; dinner and drinks for two once a week: \$50; drinks for two once a week: \$10 to \$30.
Groceries	US\$400	Basic items for a couple.
Medical Appointment	US\$60	Private consultation.
TOTAL	US\$3,289	

#### **Local Criteria**

Cost Of Living	C+
Health Care	A+
Entertainment	A+
Recreation	A-
English Spoken	A-
Expat Community	A-
Infrastructure	A+
Ease Of Access	A-
Crime	B+
Affordability Of Real Estate	C+

**Final Grade** 



# Santiago

★ Best City Picks ♥ Veraguas, Panama

Santiago is the bustling capital and the commercial and political center of the Veraguas province, as well as the transportation hub for Central Panama. It is also a university town renowned for training the future teachers of Panama.

Santiago has been growing for several years now, but no one was paying attention as the creeping path of progress wound its way through this sleepy city.

These days, Santiago is no longer an outpost in the middle of nowhere, it's become a true regional hub in its own right.

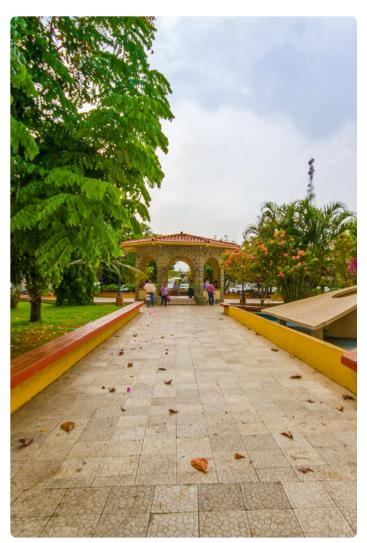
In the past you may have had to sacrifice a few amenities living here, traveling to the city for a fast-food fix, or to go on a shopping spree... But with a myriad of shops, restaurants, and service providers, you won't lack for almost anything living in Santiago nowadays.

## **Cost Of Living**

Santiago remains a bargain, but that will soon change. Up until recently, this city was overlooked because it lacked access to many amenities. Now, with a mall, hotels, restaurants, and improved infrastructure, Santiago is attracting the attention of many.

Renting an apartment or house here can cost about US\$500 a month (considerably cheaper than in Panama City).

How much you spend on food will depend on the products you purchase (imported items are more expensive, of course), the types of food (shrimp or jumbo shrimp, beef or pork, certified organic or just off the farm), and the quantity or package size, of



Santiago city center

the item you are buying. If you decide to go the local way, your grocery monthly budget could be as little as US\$300 (for you and your spouse).

Santiago is full of people willing to work around your home. Name the type of worker you want... maid, cook, housecleaner, gardener, handyman, painter, woodworker, etc. In Santiago you'll find them all. Determine how often you want them to come work at your place. Do you want a full-time housekeeper or just four hours a day, three times a week? A landscaper once a month or more frequently? Know what you want before you discuss payment, and expect to pay US\$20 to US\$25 per day for a full day's work.

#### **Health Care**

The Hospital Regional de Veraguas Dr. Luis "Chicho" Fábrega is considered a First-World hospital and one of the best in Panama. Residents of the Veraguas province no longer have to search for better care in other parts of the country. The Fábrega Hospital is also associated with the University of Panama and together they have committed to graduating 100 doctors annually.

The University of Texas School of Medicine has established a medical program and academic exchange with the hospital.

# 

**Museo Regional** 

## Entertainment

For entertainment, you can head to the mall to catch a movie. The movie theater has seven screens, including

a VIP theater showing 3D films, and a birthday room for private parties.

Shopping options in the Santiago Mall include Mr. Jones, Ximi Vogue, Bellini, and Columbia.



Santiago is one of the largest towns in Panama and a major transportation hub for the region



A view from elevated point over beach in Coiba National Park

#### Recreation

In Santiago, you can easily spend the days just kicking back and relaxing if that's what you want.

For those who are more adventure-driven, there are all kinds of outdoor activities in the area to take advantage of, too—hiking, fishing, surfing, diving, snorkeling, horseback riding, boating, swimming, and photography... to name a few.

Veraguas is also home to 40 islands, the largest of which, Coiba, is home to Coiba National Park, a UNESCO Heritage Site, which has the largest coral reef along the Pacific coast of the Americas. Coiba Island is the largest of these islands and one of Panama natural treasures. A visit here is perfect for



Golden hour light bathing the mountains of Calobre

the nature lover and those who enjoy an adventurous eco-tour. The island has natural primary forests, beaches, and mangroves. The mountain areas of the province boast four national parks: Santa Fe National Park, Reserva Forestal El Montuoso, Parque Nacional Cerro Hoya, and La Yeguada Reserva Forestal. (La Yeguada is home to a large man-made lake used for producing electricity.) Parque Nacional Cerro Hoya covers the southwestern part of the Azuero Peninsula and includes the ocean region that surrounds the area.

The beaches of Playa Santa Catalina, Playa Mariato, Malena, and Torio are great for surfing and fishing.

Those who have any sort of religious interest, be it for historical or personal reasons, La Iglesia de San Francisco de la Montaña (mountain church of San Francisco) is a must-see. Built back in 1727, it may not look like much from the outside, but the interior has some beautiful examples of baroque embellishment. It was declared a National Historical Monument on Jan. 27, 1939.

Although not as spectacular, La Catedral de Santiago Apóstol is certainly worth seeing, as well.

#### **English Spoken**

It really is a funny thing in Panama... one day almost everyone you meet speaks English, but then for the next three days you can't find a single person who does.

In Santiago you'll find some hotel staff and staff at car rental offices will speak decent English. You might even run into a few employees at the mall that speak basic English. This isn't something that'll happen frequently though. Some basic Spanish is necessary if you choose to settle in Santiago.

## **Expat Community**

Ask anyone in the area about the expat population and you'll be told quite a few live in and around Santiago... which includes Santa Fe, Santa Catalina, Mariato, and along the coast.

The city of Santiago itself is not an expat haven... yet. But it is becoming more and more popular. We



A horse eating its everyday lunch at the beach in Santa Catalina



La Iglesia de San Francisco de la Montaña in Veraguas

wouldn't be surprised if Santiago becomes one of Panama's most popular expat havens in the coming years.

#### Infrastructure

Cable and cell service in Santiago is almost the same as Panama City. However, the farther out you go from the city, the more sporadic your service will be... the terrain here is the natural enemy of good signal strength. Radio waves travel by line of sight—hills, trees, buildings, and vegetation all work to impede good reception.

Outside of Santiago most homes use a satellite dish for their cable service. Unless the local developer is willing to install a cable system, it's just not practical for a service provider to spend money trying to string cables all over the countryside.



The market in Santiago draws people from across the country

#### Crime

Take the time to explore neighborhoods and to get to know the city.



City Center of Santiago, Veraguas



School Normal J D Arrosemena in the city of Santiago

Like everywhere else, Santiago has areas where you'll likely want to avoid. That's not to say that they're necessarily dangerous but you being a foreigner (and you probably will stand out), you may want to be a bit more careful with where you venture into. Just take the same precautions you would anywhere else in the world, don't wear extremely flashy jewelry, lock your house door and make sure all your windows are closed, lock your car, and don't leave valuables laying around.

#### **Affordability Of Real Estate**

Santiago has a very active market with many properties for sale, if you know how to find them.

The best method when shopping for property is to personally visit the area you want to focus on, spend time canvasing the area, look for *se vende* (for sale) or *se alquila* (for rent) signs propped up in windows or pegged in the ground, and talk to neighbors and local businesses. Selling property by word-of-mouth is common in all of Panama, so don't underestimate this last method. Even new developments are not easy to learn about via the web... A boots-on-the-ground method will most often yield the best results.

You can purchase a three-bedroom house in Santiago for about US\$170,000.

#### **Ease Of Access**

As it is, the only way to get to Santiago from the city is by private plane or helicopter... or by car (or bus).

Driving time from Panama City varies depending on traffic... Friday afternoons are generally a nightmare when leaving Panama City, as are holiday weekends when everyone heads to the interior of the country.

In perfect conditions, the drive should take about three hours. It's located halfway between Panama City and the Costa Rica border.

# Santiago's Report Card

#### Monthly Budget

Rent	US\$500	Two-bedroom house.
Transportation	US\$65	If you own your car, and depending on how often you travel to the interior.
Gas	N/A	Included in rent.
Electricity	US\$85	Using air conditioner. This will vary depending on use.
Water	N/A	Included in rent.
Cell Phone	US\$50	Basic plan for two people.
Internet And Cable	US\$65	Including home Wi-Fi, a TV package, and 200 calling minutes.
Household Help	US\$200	Twice a week. Comes out to US\$25 per day.
Entertainment	US\$264	Movies once a week: \$5.50 per ticket; dinner and drinks for two once a week: \$40; drinks for two once a week: about \$15.
Groceries	US\$300	Basic items for a couple.
Medical Appointment	US\$60	Private consultation.
TOTAL	US\$1,589	

#### Local Criteria

Cost Of Living	A-
Health Care	A+
Entertainment	A+
Recreation	A+
English Spoken	С
Expat Community	C-
Infrastructure	В
Ease Of Access	B+
Crime	B-
Affordability Of Real Estate	А

**Final Grade** 



# David

★ Best City Picks ♀ Chiriquí, Panama

David is the capital city of the Province of Chiriquí.

The province is famous for its agricultural production, particularly its cattle. David, a middle-class town built on farming, feels like a down to earth, straightforward kind of a place. If your interest includes any investment agenda, this part of the country should have your attention.

What's the downside to David? The biggest is the climate. David is the hottest city in Panama. Unless you love humid heat, you will find air conditioning essential in this part of the country.

The low housing prices might make the additional cost of cooling easier to bare though.

## **Cost Of Living**

In David, you can live on about US\$1,500 a month.

Rent will vary on location and quality, but you can find options starting at US\$300 to US\$1,000. Buses, like everywhere else in Panama, are very inexpensive. What you pay for electricity will depend on use, but bills will generally be US\$30 a month or less. As for household help, you can hire a maid for about US\$20 a day.

David remains a very affordable place to live.

## **Health Care**

David is where people living in surrounding provinces come for quality medical care or surgery.

Panama has two parallel health care systems. The one for the working population is the Social Security system, and David hosts the regional and children's hospitals for the Panamanian population.



Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra Park in David

The very same doctors also work in a high-quality, reasonably priced private system.

David has two quality private hospitals, Centro Médico Mae Lewis located on the Pan-American Highway and Hospital Chiriquí. Both are very popular with the expat population, and the costs are reasonable.

## Entertainment

Each year, Club David hosts many events for the local community and many events for various charities. Most are open to the public.

The Feria International de David (International David Fair) takes place in March. This is something you can't miss. More than 500 agricultural, artisanal, industrial, commercial, educational, folkloric, cultural, and technological exhibitors participate every year.

Make sure to check out the exhibits, eat the food, and don't miss the Horse Parade.

#### Recreation

David has easy access to the mountains and beaches.

Boquete and Volcán are both about 45 minutes away. You can head up in the morning for a hike or to wander around both charming mountain town and head back home in the evening.

Also about an hour away you'll find several beaches like La Barqueta and Las Lajas.



Couple dancing in the Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra Park

## **English Spoken**

David is a Spanish-speaking city. Unlike other popular expat havens, the expat population is a small percentage of the total population of the city.



Typical fruits and vegetables street stall in David

If you decide to live in David, learning Spanish should be a priority.

#### **Expat Community**

David is only just starting to attract people's attention. Like Santiago, it isn't until recently that amenities such as malls and a PriceSmart (Panama's version of Costco) were brought to the city.

However, more and more expats (and locals) are turning to David as a place to relocate to. Residential developments like Altos de Coquito are drawing them in.

#### Infrastructure

Infrastructure in David is equal to Panama City. Electricity, telephone, water, trash pickup are all here. In addition, you can still buy subsidized propane at US\$8 for 25 pounds, and you have a choice of internet providers such as Cable and Wireless and Cable Onda.

There are also several areas with free government provided Wi-Fi.

The road in David are pretty decent, and unlike about a decade ago where almost everyone here had pick-up trucks, it's common to see small cars like the Suzuki Swift around the city.

#### Crime

Like any other country/city, David has places where you do not want to live or walk, particularly after dark. If you consider David as a place to live, you'll want to get to know the city well before choosing a neighborhood.

It is part of the culture in urban and even rural Panama to have a dog, to have bars on your windows, gates, and to keep doors closed and locked. However, these are not, in itself, any indication that an area or a neighborhood is unsafe.



Horses and riders parade through the streets of David during the annual equestrian festival



History and Art Museum José de Obaldía

## Affordability Of Real Estate

You can purchase a three-bedroom, three-bathroom home for about US\$240,000. The property will likely include a large garden spacious enough for a barbecue area and benches.

Depending on the neighborhood you choose, the price could lower.

## **Ease Of Access**

David is located about six hours from Panama City by car or bus. The Pan-American Highway was fixed a few years ago making the trip a smooth one. There are also daily flights from the Marcos A. Gelabert Airport in Panama City to Enrique Malek Airport in David.



The Pan-American Highway near David



Iglesia de la Sagrada Familia

# **David's Report Card**

#### **Monthly Budget**

Rent	US\$600	Two-bedroom, two-bathroom comfortable house.
Transportation	US\$65	If you own your car, and depending on how often you travel.
Gas	US\$8	Per tank.
Electricity	US\$40	Average.
Water	N/A	Included in rent.
Cell Phone	US\$35	Using pre-paid minutes.
Internet And Cable	US\$55	Including home Wi-Fi, a TV package, and 200 calling minutes.
Household Help	US\$200	Twice a week. Comes out to US\$25 per day.
Entertainment	US\$102	Movies once a week: \$5.50 per ticket; dinner and drinks for two once a week: \$35; drinks for two once a week: \$14.
Groceries	US\$400	Basic items for a couple.
Medical Appointment	US\$60	Private consultation.
TOTAL	US\$1,565	

#### Local Criteria

Cost Of Living	A-
Health Care	A+
Entertainment	A
Recreation	A-
English Spoken	D
Expat Community	D
Infrastructure	A+
Ease Of Access	B+
Crime	B+
Affordability Of Real Estate	B+

**Final Grade** 





BY THE EDITORS OF LIVE AND INVEST OVERSEAS™

## **Best Beach Picks**

Panama's

For some, nothing says retirement more than the sound of waves, the smell of salty water, and the feeling of warm sand between your toes... and let's not forget that margarita.

Panama offers several beach destinations to choose from. However, living by the beach has its downsides. For one, it's hot and humid all the time. Plus, things will rust and humidity will creep into your house walls and closet easily. Salty sea air is damaging to property of all kinds.

Read on for our top four beach town picks for 2021...

#### **Quick links:**

- 🕇 Gorgona
- 🔶 Coronado
- 📌 Pedasí
- 📌 Mariato

# Gorgona

★ Best Beach Picks
♥ Western Panama

Gorgona and Coronado (below), are very similar and yet very different... both are growing rapidly... both have a separate beach... both have an international mixture of residences. Gorgona has more Panamanians than expats... Coronado more expats than Panamanians.

Presently, all of the shopping stores are in Coronado. But with a nominal travel time of 5 minutes, it doesn't really matter.

Real estate is less expensive in Gorgona... as is the general cost of living.

## **Cost Of Living**

Because Gorgona has yet to become as popular as neighboring Coronado, you'll find rentals and properties for sale at a bargain price compared to Coronado.

For example, a two-bedroom, two-bathroom house in a condominium at walking distance from the beach could cost about US\$400 a month to rent.

To buy groceries, you'll have to drive to Coronado. However, your gas expense shouldn't increase by much seeing as it's about 5 minutes away. As discussed before, you monthly budget for groceries will either increase or decrease depending on what you choose to buy.

You could live very comfortably in Gorgona with a budget of about US\$1,400.

#### **Health Care**

Coronado is where most people from surrounding areas come seeking health care if the drive all the way back to Panama City proves to be too much. In the area you'll find two major health care providers:



Gorgona is located on the south coast of Panama

Consultorios Medicos Coronado and Clinica Hospital San Fernando Coronado.

Quality of health care is equivalent to, and in some cases better than, the States. Additionally, many clinicians speak English.

Again, thank goodness Coronado is barely a 5-minute drive away.

#### Entertainment

The Feria International de David (International David Fair) takes place in March. This is something you can't miss. More than 500 agricultural, artisanal,There isn't much in terms of entertainment in Gorgona but just a few minutes away in Coronado, you can meet up with fellow expats for happy hours, church groups, trivia nights, and more.

You can check out what your fellow expats are up to in the Facebook group Expats in Coronado, Panama, <u>here</u>.

#### Recreation

You're at the beach! This is a wonderful place to be. Take your pick from surrounding beaches to spend the day—Punta Chame, Coronado, San Carlos, etc. Book a surf or kitesurfing lesson, or simply enjoy sunbathing and taking a dip in the cooling water afterward.

Or, if feel you'd like a change, you can drive to the mountains in El Valle about an hour away. It's close enough to spend the day and return home in the



**Beach scene from Punta Chame** 

evening, and I'm sure it'll be a welcome change of scenery. You can enjoy a hike, going to the thermal waters, the zoo, or simply wandering around town enjoying the cooler weather.



Waves roll into shore on the Pacific coast of Panama in Gorgona

## **English Spoken**

Gorgona is not yet popular enough among expats to make this a place where you could get by with little to no Spanish. If you decide to move to Gorgona, you must learn a bit of the local language.

## **Expat Community**

Most expats choose Coronado over Gorgona. It might be because of all the amenities you can find here without having to drive on the Pan-American Highway to reach them, or it might be because you won't have much trouble running into fellow expats.

However, you can still enjoy all this (minus the 5-minute drive on the highway), plus the low cost of living if you decide to give Gorgona a chance.

This isn't to say you won't find expats in Gorgona. You will undoubtedly run into at least one North American couple while strolling on the beach.

## Infrastructure

Not all areas have quality internet and cable service, so do your homework if you need high speed internet. Electricity can range from US\$50 to US\$150 monthly for a two-bedroom house depending on your usage and location.

The road into town after getting off the Pan-American Highway is good. No big crater-like holes and, depending on where you've decided to relocate, no rock roads.

Gorgona's main roads are quite smooth. There are quite a few speed bumps, though, and not all are painted so keep an eye out.

## Crime

Car break-ins and petty theft aren't a huge problem but they do happen every now and then. Take all your



Kiteboarders take advantage of a windy day at Punta Chame



Kitesurfing in Punta Chame

regular precautions—lock your doors, lock your car, roll your windows up when leaving the car, don't leave valuables lying around, etc.—and you'll be fine.

Gorgona's inhabitants are mainly very humble Panamanians. Though crime isn't common and people are usually friendly, it may be a good idea to refrain from wandering around on foot at night.

#### **Affordability Of Real Estate**

You can purchase a fairly large house with three-bedrooms, three-bathrooms, and a garden for about US\$180,000. If you prefer apartments, you also have that option here. A two-bedroom, two-bathroom apartment within walking distance from the beach can cost about US\$214,900.



**Beach scene from Gorgona** 

#### **Ease Of Access**

Nowhere else in Panama would the living be as easy or as convenient. You're an hour-and-a-half (give or take) from Panama City, meaning you can return to the big city for supplies, shopping, and nightlife whenever you want.



Kitesurfing around fishing boats during sunset at Punta Chame

# Gorgona's Report Card

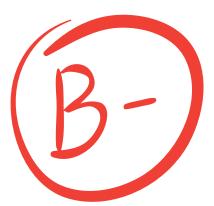
#### Monthly Budget

Rent	US\$400	Comfortable two-bedroom, two-bathroom house.
Transportation	US\$65	If you own your car, and depending on how often you travel to the interior.
Gas	US\$8	Per tank.
Electricity	US\$80	Using air conditioner. This will vary depending on use.
Water	N/A	Included in rent.
Cell Phone	US\$50	Basic plan for two people.
Internet And Cable	US\$65	Including home Wi-Fi, a TV package, and 200 calling minutes.
Household Help	US\$200	Twice a week. Comes out to US\$25 per day.
Entertainment	US\$91	Movies once a week: \$5.50 per ticket; dinner and drinks for two once a week: \$40; drinks for two once a week: \$10.
Groceries	US\$400	Basic items for a couple.
Medical Appointment	US\$60	Private consultation.
TOTAL	US\$1,419	

#### Local Criteria

Cost Of Living	A
Health Care	A
Entertainment	A-
Recreation	A-
English Spoken	D
Expat Community	C-
Infrastructure	C+
Ease Of Access	B-
Crime	C+
Affordability Of Real Estate	А

**Final Grade** 



# Coronado

★ Best Beach Picks
♥ Western Panama

Coronado is at the center of the area that spans Punta Chame and Rio Hato. It was among Panama's first resort developments and remains an area of high interest for expats, tourism, and vacationers.

The modern area known as Coronado was founded in 1941, but its real estate registry dates back to the late 1600s. The cultural mix includes Panamanians and expats from the Americas, Canada, Europe, and elsewhere.

Almost everything you need for life by the beach is here. You may on occasion need something that can only be obtained in Panama City, though, which is about 90-minutes by car from Coronado.

In Coronado you can rest assured you'll find likeminded foreigners, all living out their dream retirement on the beach, ready to mingle and discover new neighbors.

## **Cost Of Living**

This isn't the cheapest spot in Panama for services and health care, but it is competitive. The areas in and around Coronado provide lots of retail, health clinic, veterinarian, restaurant, pharmacy, and professional service options.

You can rent a house or apartment for about U\$800. Your monthly rent along with entertainment, groceries, and all that fun stuff will amount to about U\$\$1,800.

#### **Health Care**

This is where neighbors come for health care. People in Gorgona, El Valle, San Carlos, Chame, etc. book medical appointments at Hospital San Fernando Coronado and Consultorios Medicos Coronado.



Landscape view at the coastline beaches and houses in Coronado

Both have English-speaking staff and offer quality care.

#### Entertainment

Entertainment in Coronado mostly has to do with time spent at the beach. Whether it's the beach in Coronado or nearby beaches in Punta Chame, Chame, Gorgona, or even El Palmar beach, water sports and fishing are a major pastime.

When not at the beach, most residents in Coronado also enjoy hanging out with their new friends. It's common to see barbecues and other get togethers. Social life here includes expat happy hours, church groups, volunteer groups, trivia nights, workout groups, movie nights, hiking, and more.

#### Recreation

If you don't own them yourself, wave runners, jet skis, boats, diving and snorkeling gear, surf boards, and probably any other water related equipment can be rented. One place in town advertises four wheeler expeditions, parasailing, and even rides on the inflatable water banana. They can even set you up with canopy tours, bicycle tours, river rafting, and many other activities. <u>Xtreme Panama offers</u> <u>this and more</u>.

#### **English Spoken**

English is more commonly spoken in Coronado because of its popularity with expats. However, some Spanish is required if you're looking to integrate into the already existing Coronado community (locals) as a whole. It'll also avoid any misunderstandings with your house maid, the electrician, the plumber, etc.



Young boy and his mom horseback riding on Coronado beach

#### **Expat Community**

Coronado has a large expat group. Most who decide they want to relocate outside the city but still want to be close enough focus on Coronado.



Overview of Coronado Beach near Panama City, Panama



Shopping mall in Coronado



Sunrise on Coronado Beach

Check out the Expats in Coronado, Panama <u>here</u> to connect.

#### Infrastructure

The Pan-American Highway is smooth which means you'll have a fast and uncomplicated drive. You don't need a 4x4 to get to Coronado or around the area.

As for Wi-Fi, cable TV, and such, some areas are better than other, but overall you will have quality service.

#### Crime

Like in Gorgona, petty theft and car break-ins aren't common but precaution is always a good idea. Lock your car, lock your home, and don't leave valuables lying around.

#### **Affordability Of Real Estate**

Homes in Coronado range from small, cozy singlefamily homes to million dollar luxurious mansions to high-rise condos. One of the great things about Coronado is the fact that there are also smaller homes, so it's possible to find something in the US\$250,000 range.

As far as rentals, you can find a one-bedroom apartment on the beach going for about US\$750.

Still, as this beach town is becoming more and more popular, prices also increase.

#### **Ease Of Access**

Coronado is a Little over an hour away from Panama City. The road to get to Coronado is in almost perfect conditions. Once you get off the highway the roads start to deteriorate a little, but not so much to make the drive a pain.

# Coronado's Report Card

#### **Monthly Budget**

Rent	US\$800	Two-bedroom, two-bathroom, spacious house.
Transportation	US\$65	If you own your car, and depending on how often you use it.
Gas	US\$8	Per tank.
Electricity	US\$80	Will vary depending on how often you use the air conditioning.
Water	N/A	Included in rent.
Cell Phone	US\$50	Basic plan for two people.
Internet And Cable	US\$65	Including home Wi-Fi, a TV package, and 200 calling minutes.
Household Help	US\$200	Twice a week. Comes out to US\$25 per day.
Entertainment	US\$141	Dinner and drinks for two twice a week: \$30; drinks for two once a week: \$14.
Groceries	US\$400	Basic items for a couple.
Medical Appointment	US\$60	Private consultation.
TOTAL	US\$1,869	

#### Local Criteria

Cost Of Living	В
Health Care	A
Entertainment	A-
Recreation	A
English Spoken	B-
Expat Community	А
Infrastructure	B+
Ease Of Access	B-
Crime	C+
Affordability Of Real Estate	В

**Final Grade** 



# **Pedasí**

★ Best Beach Picks ♀Los Santos, Panama

Pedasí is a charming beach town of about 2,500 people situated in the province of Los Santos, on the south-eastern tip of the Azuero Peninsula.

Considered by many as the heartland of Panama, Azuero is home to more traditional Panamanian culture and folklore than any other area. Its economic mainstays are still cattle ranching, farming, and fishing, and local artisans still handmake their products the same way their grandparents and great grandparents did.

Like almost all Spanish colonial towns, Pedasí has a central plaza with structures like Iglesia de Santa Catalina dating back to 1785. Old men still linger in the plaza wearing the traditional straw hats and sandals... Women, during festivals, still don *polleras* (colorful, multi-layered dresses)... And at dusk, people all over town still take to their porches to welcome the cool air of the evening.

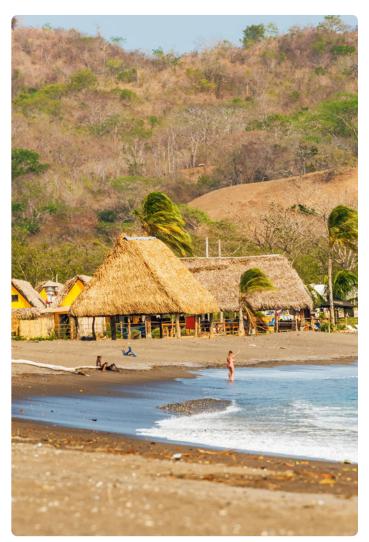
Pedasí's carefree, tranquil life seems to be what most people love about living here. So many famous and influential people coming to visit Pedasí, and some even have homes here because of the peace and safety that characterizes this town.

The beaches surrounding Pedasí have become a lure to capital from around the world. People are buying tracts of land and lots, and are building and relocating to the equivalent of their vision of pristine paradise.

## **Cost Of Living**

Pedasí is increasing its popularity among expats.

Purchasing real estate is still affordable, though, and if you choose to live as locals--not buying imported



Playa Venao

goods all the time or going out to breakfast, lunch, and dinner every day—your cost of living could be on the low side.

For example, getting around town is pretty easy. Bicycles are an important part of the transportation system. You see them everywhere. Here you could easily get by without a car. If you plan to head out of town often or want to shoot into the big city from time to time to pick up supplies, a car would be useful, but getting around the village can be done easily on foot or by bicycle. This will contribute to bringing down your monthly fuel expense.

You could be looking at a monthly budget of about US\$1,400 or less.

#### **Health Care**

There is a small regional public hospital, but for major care you need to return to Chitré, or, better, to the private hospitals in Panama City (or Coronado).

#### Entertainment

Traditionally, May is a quiet time for Pedasí, but the rest of the year brings many festivals to this and surrounding towns.

Additionally, Pedasí has several small but interesting local museums of mainly local, social, and cultural interests, such as the Museum Belisario Porras and Manuel F. Zarate and an archaeological site at Cerro Juan Diaz, an indigenous burial site from about 2,200 years ago.



Man on the horse in Playa Venao

#### Recreation

There are at least 12 beaches in close proximity to the town. You can take your pick and enjoy a day basking



Colorful facade of the old colonial building in the town of Pedasí in Panama



Beautiful beach landscape of Playa Venao

in the sun, playing beach volleyball or soccer with friends and family, or going for a swim.

Playa Venao is the most well-known among the surrounding beaches. It attracts surfers from around the world and is famous for hosting big international surf competitions.

#### **English Spoken**

Yes, the expat community here is growing, and English is being heard in the streets more and more every day. However, expat influence not big enough to say that you could get by using only English... yet.

#### **Expat Community**

Steadily growing.



Playa Venao is situated on the Pacific ocean near town of Pedasí

So many famous and influential people coming to visit Pedasí, and some even have homes here because of the peace and safety that characterizes this town.

#### Infrastructure

Good roads connect the Pan-American Highway to the principal towns of the gulf coast (Chitre, Las Tablas, and Pedasi), and the infrastructure around Pedasi has improved remarkably in recent years.

Recent improvements to the Pan-American Highway mean the journey to Pedasi by car can be done in a little more than four hours from Panama City.

#### Crime

Pedasí is a calm and safe town. No place is immune to petty theft, but there are no major crimes being reported.

## **Affordability Of Real Estate**

You can purchase a two-bedroom, two-bathroom



Catholic church called Iglesia de Santa Catalina in Pedasí

house for about US\$160,000, or a luxurious home for about US\$215,000.

If you're looking to rent, you could find a comfortable place for about US\$450 or US\$500 a month.



Main road in the town of Pedasí



Landscape view at the beach at Iguana Island located on Pacific Ocean of the Azuero Peninsula coast near Pedasí

#### **Ease Of Access**

Pedasí is situated on the southeastern most tip of the Azuero Peninsula, and you can access it from Panama City by bus or car.

In a car you can drive into the interior on the Pan-American Highway, and when you reach Divisa you take the overpass to the road to Chitré. You will pass through Chitré, Los Santos, Las Tablas, and then finally enter Pedasí.

If you choose to drive, be prepared for a time-warp after passing through Chitré. Pedasí is a town just entering the 1960s. When driving, look along the road for unfamiliar sights. You may also find yourself



Souvenir store in the town of Pedasí

dodging some cattle being herded, or just taking a stroll down the highway.

# Pedasi's Report Card

#### **Monthly Budget**

Rent	US\$475	Two-bedroom, two-bathroom, spacious house.
Transportation	US\$50	If you own your car, and depending on how often you use it.
Gas	US\$8	Per tank.
Electricity	US\$50	Will vary depending on how often you use the air conditioning.
Water	N/A	Included in rent.
Cell Phone	US\$50	Basic plan for two people.
Internet And Cable	US\$65	Including home Wi-Fi, a TV package, and 200 calling minutes.
Household Help	US\$200	Twice a week. Comes out to US\$25 per day.
Entertainment	US\$148	Dinner and drinks for two twice a week: \$30; drinks for two once a week: \$14.
Groceries	US\$300	Basic items for a couple.
Medical Appointment	US\$60	Private consultation.
TOTAL	US\$1,406	

#### Local Criteria

Cost Of Living	A
Health Care	C-
Entertainment	A
Recreation	A+
English Spoken	С
Expat Community	В
Infrastructure	B-
Ease Of Access	C+
Crime	В
Affordability Of Real Estate	A+

**Final Grade** 



# Mariato

★ Best Beach Picks ♥ Veraguas, Panama

The western side of Azuero was previously only known to cattle ranchers and wealthy farmers... Then surfers came. They managed to keep the great waves a secret, but word eventually got out. Now, international surfing championships are held here.

The better-known areas in this region are all related to surfing, and Mariato is one of them.

It is a largely rural district, with a small population spread out throughout the region. The district, 1,409 square kms in size, makes up roughly two-thirds of Veraguas Province's Azuero area. It comprises all the west-facing coastline on the Gulf of Montijo.

## **Cost Of Living**

Mariato is barely getting its name out there. Therefore, your cost of living here will be undoubtedly lower than in any other destination on this list.

This lack of popularity does mean certain amenities have yet to find their way here. Having to drive out to purchase certain goods might mean your fuel expenses will go up. You can balance things out, though. Just be smart about what you buy and see which things you and your spouse can compromise on.

#### **Health Care**

You will want to go to Santiago to receive health care. They have the Hospital Regional de Veraguas Dr. Luis "Chicho" Fábrega which is considered a First-World hospital and one of the best in Panama.

It is a bit of a drive though, about two hours.

#### Entertainment

International surfing competitions take place here. If you decide to relocate here, you'd have a front row seat.



Mariato

#### Recreation

Mariato has miles and miles of unspoiled, and largely empty beaches, ideal for surfing, swimming, and exploring the array of marine wildlife that calls this secluded stretch of Panama home.

From August to September four different species of turtle arrive to lay their eggs. During October and November the eggs hatch and the tiny turtles make their way into the ocean.

As if the turtles wasn't enough, the region also boasts the chance to see Humpback Whales. Every year, the whales arrive in Panama's tropical waters to mate and nurse their newborn calves.



Sandbank at the mouth of the Mariato River in the Pacific Ocean in the province of Veraguas

Mariato is also a great place for birdwatching. Many of Panama's rarest, and most colorful species are here, including various hummingbirds, warblers, and of course the Keel-billed Toucan.

**English Spoken** 

It's best to learn conversational Spanish if you decide Mariato is the place you'd like to retire to. You will find a few people that speak English, but it's not something you should rely on.

#### **Expat Community**

Mariato is starting to appear on the radar as a tourist and expat destination. It's easy to see why. Here you'll find miles and miles of unspoiled, and largely empty beaches, ideal for surfing, swimming, and exploring the array of marine wildlife that calls this secluded stretch of Panama home.

#### Infrastructure

This area is much less developed than Coronado and Gorgona.

Development is accelerating in the area of Mariato and its neighbors. Electricity is more reliable, cell

service and the internet are more available, a bank and more grocery shopping options have opened in Mariato, and the government allocated funds to repave the road.

#### Crime

There aren't many reports about crime happening in Mariato. If you take the normal precautions then you should have nothing to worry about.

#### **Affordability Of Real Estate**

You can buy a one-bedroom house in Mariato for about US\$169,000.

Prices will go up as the area increases in popularity.

#### **Ease Of Access**

Mariato is over five hours, and the road traveling around this area is pitted and rutted. Cell and internet service can be quite patchy too.

To get to Mariato, you first have to find your way to Veraguas Province and then get off the Pan-American Highway and head down the Azuero Peninsula until you reach the town.

# Mariato's Report Card

## Monthly Budget

Rent	US\$450	Two-bedroom house with an ocean view.
Transportation	US\$65	If you own your car, and depending on how often you use it.
Gas	US\$8	Per tank.
Electricity	US\$50	Using air conditioner. This will vary depending on use.
Water	N/A	Included in rent.
Cell Phone	US\$50	Basic plan for two people.
Internet And Cable	US\$65	Including home Wi-Fi, a TV package, and 200 calling minutes.
Household Help	US\$200	Twice a week. Comes out to US\$25 per day.
Entertainment	US\$116	Dinner and drinks for two twice a week: \$30; drinks for two once a week: \$14.
Groceries	US\$300	Basic items for a couple.
Medical Appointment	US\$60	Private consultation.
TOTAL	US\$1,364	

#### Local Criteria

Cost Of Living	A+
Health Care	С
Entertainment	В
Recreation	A+
English Spoken	D
Expat Community	C+
Infrastructure	С
Ease Of Access	С
Crime	C+
Affordability Of Real Estate	A+

**Final Grade** 





BY THE EDITORS OF LIVE AND INVEST OVERSEAS™

Panama's

# **Best Mountain Picks**

If you're someone who enjoys cooler climates, being surrounded by lush green forests, and waking up to the sounds of birds and tropics, these mountain towns might just be what you're looking for.

In many cases, mountain living can offer a chance to get off-grid, to get closer to nature, and to enjoy some peace and solitude, while still being in close proximity to major cities.

On the flip side, accessibility can be a problem in some cases, with limited, sub-par roads that may become more dangerous or even inaccessible at certain times of year (due to flooding, landslide, or mudslide). Because of the likelihood of these issues, most mountain destinations aren't good choices for those with ongoing or potential health risks; emergency care could be unreliable.

Here are our four picks for mountain havens for 2021...

#### **Quick links:**

- 📌 El Valle
- 📌 <u>Santa Fe</u>
- **<u>Boquete</u>** 🕇 Volcán

# **El Valle**

★ Best Mountain Picks ♀ Coclé, Panama

El Valle de Antón is situated in a 3.7-miles-wide caldera of an inactive volcano. It's without a doubt one of Panama's biggest tourist and vacation destinations. Urban dwellers come here to relax, expats come here for the vida mas tranquila (quieter life), and tourists come for its many natural attractions.

Because of its elevation (600 m above sea level), it has a year-round mild and mostly cool climate. Arguably best of all is that this is a great walking town. Bike lanes, paved pedestrian paths, and decorative street lighting run through the center of town via Calle Central, making El Valle an even better place for cycling, walking, and running. You don't really need a car, although you may find yourself wishing for one in the rainy season.

## **Cost Of Living**

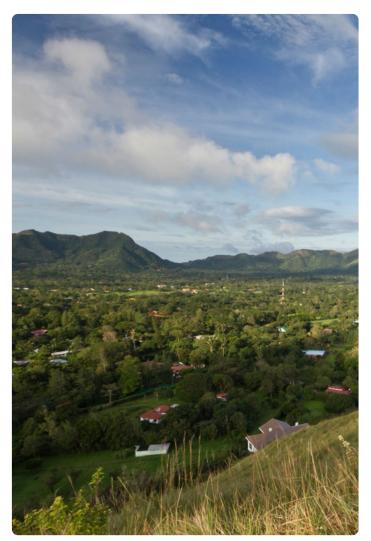
There are few dramatic differences in the cost of living in El Valle compared to other areas of Panama. Goods and services are somewhat limited here, but ever improving.

Food prices have gone up, but are still comparable to those of the States. As is the case throughout Panama, local brands and produce can often save you money. Local restaurants serving comida típica, traditional Panamanian cuisine, offer the most affordable dining in El Valle (i.e. cheap eats). Most other restaurants offer mid-range to fine dining prices.

Your monthly budget to live comfortably in El Valle could amount to about US\$1,600.

#### **Health Care**

There are no specialists in El Valle. To get this attention, you'll have to go to Coronado, Penonomé,



El Valle de Antón

or Panama City. El Valle doesn't have an ambulance service, either. Emergencies require a trip by car to Clínica Hospital San Fernando in Coronado, Hospital Aquilino Tejeira in Penonomé, or one of the Panama City based hospitals. Pharmacies in El Valle are reasonably well stocked.

#### Entertainment

This is a town that revels in the celebrations of the holiday season. The country's holiday season spans early November to early January, and El Valle commemorates the season with lots of parades filled with loud music and fireworks. El Valle also has a vibrant restaurant scene, offering traditional Panamanian, Italian, Peruvian, Chinese, Spanish, and fusion cuisine. Most of the restaurants are casual, but there are upscale options.

#### Recreation

This is a great place for hiking and bird-watching.

The area's most well-known hiking trail is La India Dormida. This hike is a relatively short hike for the experienced hiker. The trail is narrow and steep, and can be treacherous during rainy season.

Cerro Gaital is another one for experienced hikers. Like La India Dormida, it's recommended you start this hike in the morning hours, on a nice day. Cerro Gaital is one of El Valle's highest points at 1,185 meters (3,888 feet).



La India Dormida

Cerro Cara Iguana is known for great sunsets. It's recommended you start the hike 90 minutes before sunset. Even on a cloudy day, this hike offers stunning views. Access to Cerro Cara Iguana is free.



Hiker walking on top of India Dormida

## **English Spoken**

El Valle is a Spanish speaking community. Few locals speak English. If living in or visiting a Spanish speaking country isn't enough motivation for you to learn a little Spanish, there are local Spanish classes offered by community volunteers.

## **Expat Community**

El Valle is a popular expat destination among retirees. Is it a great place to raise a family? In some respects, perhaps it is. However, local schools do not cater to international students, and the closest international school is about an hour away in Gorgona.

Getting to know your neighbors in El Valle is easy. Locals and expats are very friendly. Social activity is driven by church groups, volunteer activities, expat happy hours, community fairs, and more.

Connect with fellow expats on the El Valle de Anton Panama Community Facebook group.

## Infrastructure

Over the years, electricity and water have become reasonably stable in El Valle. Internet service is good throughout much of El Valle, although it is advisable to verify service availability. Not all areas are within current reach of the local cable internet provider Cable Onda.

A good generator and water reserve will ensure yearround comfort and convenience.

#### Crime

Like most countries, there are places to avoid in Panama. El Valle does have crime, mostly petty theft.

Is it a safe place for travel, vacationing, and living? Absolutely.



El Nispero



Tourists hiking in the rainforest at the El Chorro Macho Trails



Main street of El Valle de Anton

Are some areas safer than others? Sure.

It's helpful to understand that El Valle has a good amount of poverty among locals, many unemployed youths, and a poor school system.

Most of El Valle is safe, and there is strong public awareness concerning problem areas and individuals. There is also a strong police presence.

#### **Affordability Of Real Estate**

Rentals go for about US\$400 per month (for a very basic Panamanian style house), to US\$2,000 per month (for a high-end North American style home).

You can buy a three-bedroom, three-bathroom house for about US\$348,000.



Sale of straw hats in El Valle

As with any real estate market in Panama, variables affecting rates include location, size, age, and type of construction.

#### **Ease Of Access**

El Valle is about 90 miles from Panama's Tocumen International Airport.

The primary road leading to El Valle is a winding twolane road, just off the Pan-American Highway. The scenery along this road is breathtaking in places, but it is a typical mountain road. The road is good, but there are perils to be aware of, including pedestrians, stray dogs, and commercial vehicle traffic. It can also be an unpleasant drive in heavy rain or fog. Drive carefully here, no matter how good the conditions.



Mountains in El Valle



Panoramic view of the crater of El Valle de Anton

## El Valle's Report Card

#### **Monthly Budget**

Rent	US\$600	Cozy two-bedroom apartment.
Transportation	US\$65	If you own your car, and depending on how often you use it.
Gas	US\$8	Per tank.
Electricity	US\$55	On average. Without air conditioning.
Water	N/A	Included in rent.
Cell Phone	US\$50	Basic plan for two people.
Internet And Cable	US\$65	Including home Wi-Fi, a TV package, and 200 calling minutes.
Household Help	US\$200	Twice a week. Comes out to US\$25 per day.
Entertainment	US\$210	Dinner and drinks for two once a week: \$50; drinks for two once a week: \$40.
Groceries	US\$300	Basic items for a couple. Buying local good.
Medical Appointment	US\$60	Private consultation.
TOTAL	US\$1,613	

#### Local Criteria

Cost Of Living	B+
Health Care	B+
Entertainment	A-
Recreation	A+
English Spoken	C+
Expat Community	B+
Infrastructure	B+
Ease Of Access	А
Crime	В
Affordability Of Real Estate	В



#### PANAMA'S TOP 14 RETIREMENT DESTINATIONS

### Santa Fe

★ Best Mountain Picks ♥ Veraguas, Panama

Santa Fe is an unassuming, unsung town of about 3,000 people. It's comparable to popular Boquete but at a fraction of the price.

Located in Veraguas, this is the only Panamanian province that reaches both the Caribbean and the Pacific Coast.

Santa Fe is set at 430 meters above sea level, not quite qualifying it as a cloud forest, but has that same mountainous, orchid, mossy terrain. The average annual temperature in Santa Fe is nearly 76°F (24.4°C). Its cooler climate makes for a garden enthusiast's dream and gives way to an economy which is primarily built on agriculture.

#### **Cost Of Living**

This is one of the most affordable parts of the country. You could live comfortably here on a little over US\$1,200.

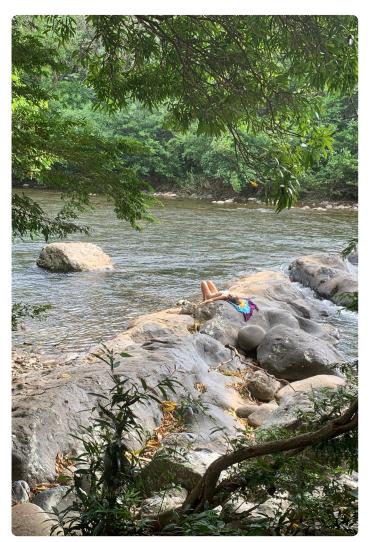
The groceries (depending on what you decide to purchase) can amount to as little as US\$300 a month for two people. Rent can be as little as US\$400 for a small, cozy, two-bedroom house. The cooler weather means you'll most likely be able to get by with no air conditioning lowering your electrical bill considerably.

#### **Health Care**

Head to Santiago (about an hour away) to the Hospital Regional de Veraguas Dr. Luis "Chicho" Fábrega for quality health care.

#### Entertainment

People get together for regular dinner parties and an annual American Thanksgiving feast.



Tourist sunbathing on a river in Santa Fe

As far as restaurants go, aside from Anachoreo with its delicious Cambodian menu, dining selection is limited to very basic Panamanian fare.

#### Recreation

Hiking, biking, riverwading, tubing, horse-back riding, and fishing are just a few of the ways you could spend your free time.

#### **English Spoken**

Your neighbors would be Panamanian, not expat, meaning you'd need to learn Spanish. That's not to say you need to become basic. Though there are not many local residents who speak English, there are plenty of expats getting by on very basic Spanish.

#### **Expat Community**

Santa Fe's international community is growing. There's an estimated population of up to 30+ yearround expats.

Gardeners and wildlife lovers have begun to immigrate, and there seems to be a group of alternative health care providers; massage therapists, reiki practitioners, and osteopaths (yes plural).

The foreign community is diverse. North Americans, Europeans, South Americans, and South Africans, among other nationalities, have chosen to reside here.



Shoppers at the Santa Fe International Folk Art Market

#### Infrastructure

Santa Fe's infrastructure has seen some improvements over the last decade, most notably in the condition of the roads... A few years ago, the rainy season would



Santa Fe highlands

wash them out completely, making a temporary island of the town (despite it being in the center of the country). Continued improvements could mean big opportunity for speculators and investors...

There is still no gas station here (supposedly this is soon to come) but the local cooperative store sells diesel, groceries, and agricultural supplies.

The telecommunications company Cable Onda recently installed a fiber optic internet system which is a game changer for Santa Fe. Coverage begins at the Hotel Santa Fe and continues up to "city center". For about US\$33 they provide up to 20 Megabits at 4 Mbps.

#### Crime

It's uncommon to hear of reported crimes in Santa Fe. Life here is very mellow and serene. Expats and locals are friendly. Taking the normal precautions, chances of you being a victim of petty theft or any crime is slim.

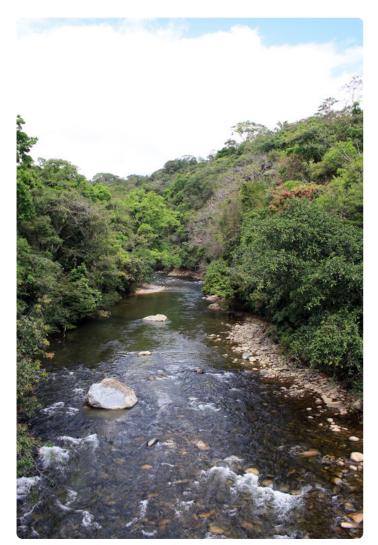
#### **Affordability Of Real Estate**

Due to most of the recent growth in Santa Fe coming from the national population, there really hasn't been a whole lot of movement in the real estate market the last few years. Prices have stayed steady for more than a decade (about US\$10 per meter in town and US\$20 to US\$25 riverfront), making it a buyer's market.

Of course, these prices don't apply when dealing with larger parcels (hectares) which describes much of the real estate in this area.

#### **Ease Of Access**

Santa Fe is about four hours (driving by car) from Panama City—including one hour up a winding mountain road from Santiago. The road is narrow; lacking any yellow or white division lines as well as a shoulder or guardrails.



Rio Bulava



Small house in Santa Fe

One of the first and larger towns you pass after leaving Santiago is San Francisco, home to a beautiful church, the Iglesia de San Francisco de la Montaña. This is the location of the nearest bank and ATM which serves the Santa Fe area.

As you continue your ascension, the road begins to parallel and cross the wide Santa Maria River.

The main road eventually leads you to the center of town. There you'll find a large church, a few general stores, and a small community market.



Colorful and fresh village in Santa Fe



Road bridge through the jungle in Santa Fe

## Santa Fe's Report Card

#### **Monthly Budget**

Rent	US\$400	Small, two-bedroom house in a desirable part of town.
Transportation	US\$65	If you own your car, and depending on how often you travel.
Gas	US\$8	Per tank.
Electricity	US\$50	Using air conditioner. This will vary depending on use.
Water	N/A	Included in rent.
Cell Phone	US\$50	Basic plan for two people.
Internet And Cable	US\$65	Including home Wi-Fi, a TV package, and landline.
Household Help	US\$200	Twice a week. Comes out to US\$25 per day.
Entertainment	US\$85	Movies once a week: \$5.50 per ticket; dinner and drinks for two once a week: \$34; drinks for two once a week: \$10.
Groceries	US\$300	Basic items for a couple.
Medical Appointment	US\$60	Private consultation.
TOTAL	US\$1,283	

#### Local Criteria

Cost Of Living	A+
Health Care	B-
Entertainment	B-
Recreation	A
English Spoken	C-
Expat Community	B-
Infrastructure	В
Ease Of Access	B-
Crime	В
Affordability Of Real Estate	А



#### PANAMA'S TOP 14 RETIREMENT DESTINATIONS

## Boquete

★ Best Mountain Picks ♥ Chiriquí, Panama

Boquete is part of the Chiriquí Province, about 37 miles from the Costa Rican border. The city of David is about 30 miles from here. Most conversations about retirement in Panama begin and end with Boquete the mountain village that's had a foreign presence since its inception.

Snuggled into the side of a volcanic crater, surrounded by lush forest, and home to profusions of multi-hued blossoms, this region is nothing if not picturesque...

The climate here is springlike year-round with temperatures hovering between 65°F and 75°F. Nights, especially during the rainy season, can be chilly enough for a sweater or light jacket. The tropical heat that Panama is famous for is much less intense in Boquete, and thanks to all the rain, it's less dry than lower-altitude areas.

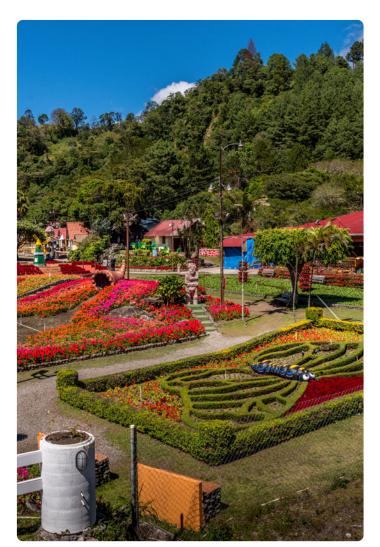
Life in Boquete is familiar... a natural choice for someone contemplating overseas retirement but not willing or ready to fully immerse themselves in the foreign.

#### **Cost Of Living**

Not including Panama City and Coronado, the cost of living in Boquete is higher than in other areas of Panama. Boquete is, after all, considered to be one of Panama's most popular expat havens.

Renting a two-bedroom house with a garden and relatively close to town can cost about US\$1,000. Groceries for a couple will cost about US\$400.

Boquete's monthly budget will be about US\$1,800 or US\$2,000.



Boquete coffee and flower fair

#### **Health Care**

Boquete doesn't have its own hospital yet, but David, where hospitals are available, is close by.

That said, there is no shortage of health care options available in Boquete... Several clinics and doctors' offices offer general practice and specialist services.

Boquete Health and Hospice is a volunteer organization mostly made up of medical caregivers. They aid the elderly and the infirm and provide services to the dying and their families as well as those suffering from dementia and other debilitating illnesses.

#### Entertainment

Boquete boasts the most lively music and arts scene in the entire country. The Boquete Jazz and Blues Festival and the Coffee and Flower Festival are just a few of the internationally recognized and attended events that take place here.

#### Recreation

Boquete expats embrace their adopted country wholeheartedly and constantly strive to make it a better place, not only for themselves but also for the locals. This is an easy place to become involved with the resident community.

Boquete is a nature lovers' playground. Head into the mountains and take your pick of the trail you wish to hike. The more common ones are Sendero El Pianista,



**CEFATI, Boquete Tourist Center** 

Sendero Los Quetzales, Las Cascadas Perdidas, and the Pipeline Trail.

You can also go ziplining at Finca El Oasis or Boquete Tree Trek, white water rafting, or take part in a coffee plantation tour.



Town and main street of Bajo Boquete

#### **English Spoken**

This is probably the only place in Panama where you can retire to and not have to learn a single word of Spanish. You'll hear English often when you walk Boquete's streets...

We still always advise you learn at least the basics of the local language. Even a rudimentary knowledge of Spanish will make living here easier and further endear you to the locals.

#### **Expat Community**

Boquete has the highest density of expats in Panama, and it's fascinating and heartwarming to watch them intermingle seamlessly with third-generation *boqueteños*, indigenous people, and everyone in between. One particularly forward-thinking individual saw the opportunity in Boquete's natural appeal and set up a private expat community, restaurants, hotels, and a golf course...

You won't struggle to integrate into your new community.

#### Infrastructure

The government of Panama invested over US\$110 million dollars widening and improving the highway from David to Boquete in anticipation of the impending growth in this region. This improvement decreased the travel time from a little over an hour to about 45 minutes.

You have reliable internet and cell service near the town center (called Bajo Boquete). However, the further out you go (to areas like Palmira, Quiel, Bajo Mono, Jaramillo, etc.) cell service as well as internet begin to fail.

Power outages don't happen on a regular basis, but they aren't uncommon.

There are several supermarkets, clothing, shoe, and dry goods stores, hardware and agricultural supply



The Lost Waterfalls in Bajo Mono, Boquete



Catarata trail

establishments, hairdressers, computer and cell phone outlets, real estate offices, a butcher shop, and several banks, including Banco Nacional, Banco General, and more.

#### Crime

Petty theft and violent crime aren't common in Boquete. This is considered to be a generally safe place. However, keeping your doors locked and leaving valuables at easy reach is advisable.

#### **Affordability Of Real Estate**

Property is readily available in Boquete and surrounding areas, both to rent and to purchase. Houses, condos, and apartments range from modest, Panamanian-style to more elaborate American builds.



Souvenir shops and residences in Plaza Central

Prices are a bit higher in Boquete than in David and outlying areas because this is such a desirable expat haven. They're still in reach, however, and much less expensive than comparable North American homes.



The Rio Caldera, which flows through the mountain town



View of downtown Boquete

Purchase a two-bedroom, three-bathroom home in Boquete for about US\$375,000.

#### **Ease Of Access**

Petty theft and violent crime aren't common in Boquete. This is considered to be a generally safe place. However, keeping your doors locked and leaving valuables at easy reach is advisable.

Panama City is about 340 miles east of Boquete. To get here by car or bus, simply follow the Pan-American Highway from Panama City to David and then divert north towards Boquete. Busses are inexpensive, air conditioned, and make the trip daily.

If you want to avoid a seven-hour road trip, though, there are daily flights from Panama City that



40km four-lane highway from Boquete to David

take about an hour. They fly into Enrique Malek International Airport in David where rental cars, buses, and taxis can take you from there on to Boquete.

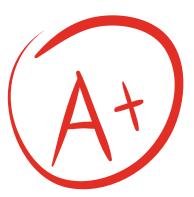
## **Boquete's Report Card**

#### **Monthly Budget**

Rent	US\$1,000	Two-bedroom house close to town.
Transportation	US\$65	If you own your car, and depending on how often you travel.
Gas	US\$8	Per tank.
Electricity	US\$30	No air conditioning needed.
Water	N/A	Included in rent.
Cell Phone	US\$50	Basic plan for two people.
Internet And Cable	US\$65	Including home Wi-Fi, a TV package, and 200 calling minutes.
Household Help	US\$200	Twice a week. Comes out to US\$25 per day.
Entertainment	US\$444	Movies once a week: \$5.50 per ticket; dinner and drinks for two once a week: \$50; drinks for two twice a week: \$50.
Groceries	US\$400	Basic items for a couple.
Medical Appointment	US\$60	Private consultation.
TOTAL	US\$2,322	

#### Local Criteria

Cost Of Living	B-
Health Care	A-
Entertainment	B-
Recreation	A+
English Spoken	A+
Expat Community	A+
Infrastructure	А
Ease Of Access	А
Crime	A
Affordability Of Real Estate	C+



#### PANAMA'S TOP 14 RETIREMENT DESTINATIONS

## Volcán

★ Best Mountain Picks ♥ Chiriquí, Panama

Volcán is a quiet and peaceful town, largely free of the tourists and expats that you find in Boquete. The area is very remote and sparsely populated.

Entering this town, certain adjectives come to mind: unassuming, peaceful, cool (as in "not hot"), welcoming... At this point you'll have climbed 1,400 meters above sea level.

Today, Volcán is a farming community and boasts some of the most fertile farmland in the country. Known as the breadbasket of Panama, this area provides at least 75% of the fruits, vegetables, meat, and milk. Crops include potatoes, carrots, onions, cabbage, lettuce, corn, bananas, tomatoes, cauliflower, and broccoli. Row upon row of greenhouses and acre upon acre of terraced produce farms punctuate the mountainside.

Large dairy farms, horse ranches, and small chicken and pig farms are found everywhere here. If seeing a herd of cattle lumbering down the road at any time would upset you, you should reconsider moving to Volcán.

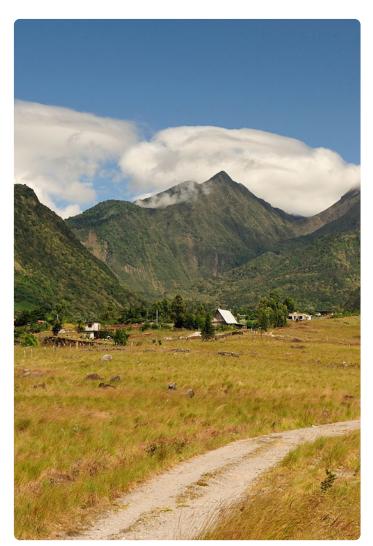
#### **Cost Of Living**

You can rent a two-bedroom, two-bathroom house for about US\$500. Your utility bill will be negligible, as air conditioning isn't necessary here. Your groceries can amount to about US\$300 if you choose to buy local produce (being in Volcán, this is something you might want to take advantage of).

Overall, your monthly budget could be about US\$1,500.

#### **Health Care**

You will want to make the hour or so drive to David for quality medical care and surgery.



Volcán landscape

Take your pick of one of the two quality private hospitals, Centro Médico Mae Lewis located on the Pan-American Highway and Hospital Chiriquí. Both are very popular with the expat population, and the costs are reasonable.

#### Entertainment

For a small town, Volcán is blessed with many restaurants.

One of these restaurants in The Wandering Sloth at Paso Ancho (on the road between Volcán and Cerro Punto) is unique and fun. Eric and Nancy are expats who've made it their mission to serve great food, create a nice atmosphere, and get Panamanians and expats to mingle and have fun together.

Nightlife includes bars, a disco, and a pool hall. The Wandering Sloth offers live music on Saturdays and the place is often hopping.

#### **Recreation**

For hikers there are two virtually untamed parks: Volcán Barú National Park and La Amistad Park, both with trails through the jungle. Or hike to the top of Volcán Barú on a clear day and gaze at both the Pacific Ocean and the Caribbean Sea.

This area is also great for fishing. Local streams are alive with trout, and there are two fish-filled lakes nearby.



Bird watching at the La Amistad Park

Just a few kilometers outside of town is the site of a rare and important archaeological dig.

Some 1,000 to 3,000 years ago, Sitio Barriles was a thriving preColumbian village. It was a sedentary town,



Farm fields near Volcan in northwestern Panama

where inhabitants grew corn and made handicrafts and were exceptional sculptors and goldsmiths. It may've been the biggest permanent settlement in the area prior to Volcán itself. It's possible to visit the site, which is owned by a Panamanian family who has preserved it and offer tours.

#### **English Spoken**

English is not yet widely spoken in the area. For now, at least a smattering of Spanish is necessary to get by here.

#### **Expat Community**

More and more retirees, families, and entrepreneurs are moving to Volcán and surrounding areas. It has become the third-largest condensed area of expats in Chiriquí. The expat community is friendly and supportive of each other and are welcomed by the locals.

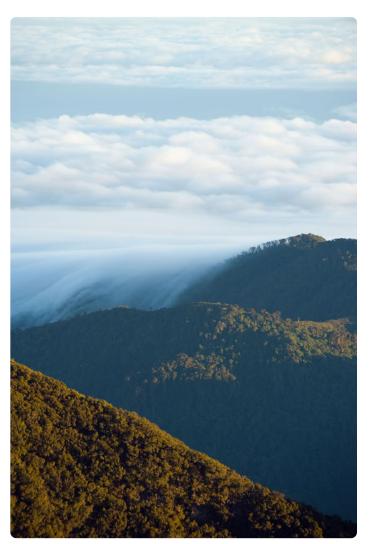
#### Infrastructure

All the necessary suppliers are found here, like hardware stores, four large supermarkets, bakeries, banks, boutique hotels, and pharmacies, as well as feed stores, saddleries, and auto- and tire-repair shops. David is just 40 minutes away, so whatever is not available in Volcán can be purchased there.

The infrastructure is close to excellent: uninterrupted electricity, potable tap water, and internet and cable (Cable & Wireless, Cable Onda, Claro, and Sky Satellite) are all readily available and reasonably priced. Plus, the public transport system is reliable.

#### Crime

Volcán has historically experienced low rates of crimes of any sort (petty theft, violent crimes, etc.). That's not to say petty theft never occurs. Just make sure to take all the necessary precautions to ensure you don't become a victim (store away all valuables, roll your car windows up and lock everything, lock your house's front and back door, etc.



Volcan Baru National Park



Volcan street view

#### **Affordability Of Real Estate**

Rental homes are readily available. Costs vary depending on whether you want a Panamanian-style home (US\$300 to US\$500 per month) or an Americastyle home (US\$800 to US\$1,200).

Buy your own three-bedroom, two-bathroom house for about US\$160,000.

Volcán's real estate business isn't as developed as Boquete's... Land prices are approximately 40% lower. These will most likely increase in the future.

#### **Ease Of Access**

To get to Volcán, you have two options...

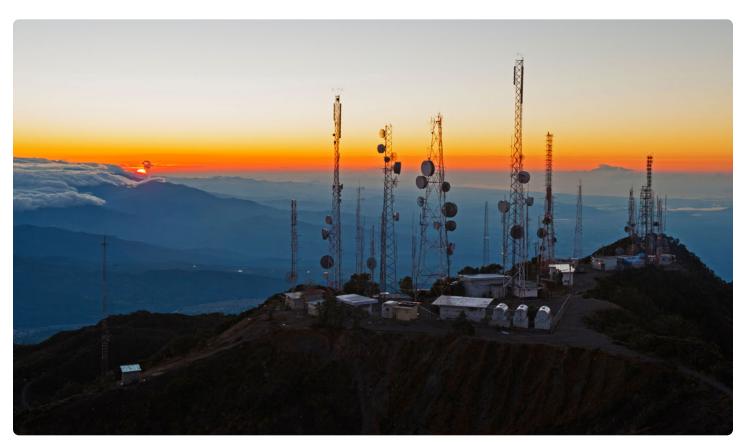
One begins at the Boquete/David highway, veers left toward Potrerillos, then goes up a winding, twolane paved highway that seems never-ending. This route offers some of the most stunning views in all of



Parada de las Flores, annual flower parade

Panama. After a little over an hour of jaw-dropping, neck-craning scenery, you arrive in Volcán.

The other, less vertical route follows the Pan-American Highway from David to La Concepción where you turn right. This is an excellent road and travel is much faster—a mere 40 minutes from David.



View from the summit of Volcan Baru

## Volcan's Report Card

#### Monthly Budget

Rent	US\$500	Two-bedroom house.
Transportation	US\$65	If you own your car, and depending on how often you travel.
Gas	US\$8	Per tank.
Electricity	US\$35	No air conditioning needed.
Water	N/A	Included in rent.
Cell Phone	US\$50	Basic plan for two people.
Internet And Cable	US\$65	Including home Wi-Fi, a TV package, and 200 calling minutes.
Household Help	US\$200	Twice a week. Comes out to US\$25 per day.
Entertainment	US\$284	Movies once a week: \$5.50 per ticket; dinner and drinks for two once a week: \$40; drinks for two once a week: \$20.
Groceries	US\$300	Basic items for a couple.
Medical Appointment	US\$60	Private consultation.
TOTAL	US\$1,567	

#### Local Criteria

Cost Of Living	A-
Health Care	B-
Entertainment	B-
Recreation	А
English Spoken	B-
Expat Community	B+
Infrastructure	А
Ease Of Access	А
Crime	А
Affordability Of Real Estate	A+



# — Finding — The Right Fit FOR YOU

For anyone looking to move overseas, it's hard enough choosing a country, and then choosing a city or town. Then to layer on choosing a neighborhood on top of that makes for what could seem like a daunting task. But don't overthink it.

Take it one step at a time. Come to Panama, explore the city, get a feel for the countryside and coastal areas. If you decide that the city is where you want to be, rent a place where you're comfortable and explore from there. And remember that if you like somewhere else more than where you're at, you can always move.

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