

PANAMA

Special Report



Pedasí, Panama:
The Tranquil Town On Panama's Azuero...



PANAMA
SPECIAL REPORT

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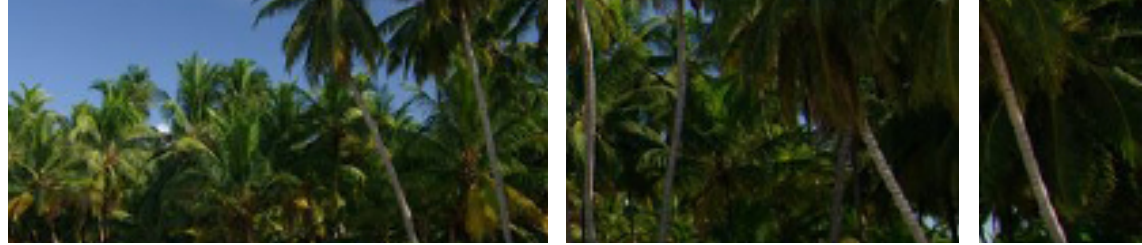
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Pedasi: The Peninsula's Gulf Coast Gem

By Jocelyn Carnegie

In a golden corner of Panama's Azuero Peninsula sits the town of Pedasi. It's a town with a village atmosphere—large enough to feel like you can live there, yet small enough to make you feel like an active stakeholder in a thriving community.

So what exactly is the Azuero Peninsula?

The Azuero Peninsula constitutes Panama's southernmost landmass. Jutting into the Pacific, Azuero is an excellent staging post for forays into the ocean and is home to some of Panama's finest coastline, with idyllic islands

lying offshore surrounded by a deep blue and turquoise ocean abundant with rare mammals and marine life

The peninsula is separated east from west by a north-south spine of highlands at its center. This month, we will concentrate on Azuero's eastern gulf coast and more specifically on the charming traditional coastal town of Pedasi.

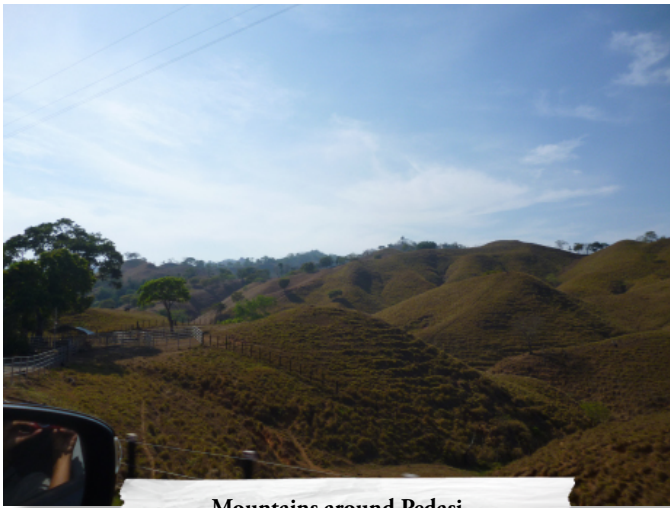
The peninsula is made up of three provinces. Los Santos and Herrera make up the gulf coast, with the southern part of Veraguas

...Continued from page 1

lying to the west. The east coast boasts stunning natural assets of long stretches of beach, rocky headlands with vegetation running down to the sand, and picturesque villages and towns steeped in rural culture, all with a backdrop of lofty mountain landscapes, packed with wildlife, birds, and enchanting rivers.

The Heartland

Considered by many as the heartland of Panama, Azuero is home to more traditional Panamanian culture and folklore than any other area. The east coast of the Peninsula is dotted with quaint Panamanian villages steeped in vernacular history, pastoral folklore, and traditions, all held in the cradle of nature.



Mountains around Pedasi

Azuero offers everything one could ever wish for. A wild spine of rugged, forest-clad mountains divides the provinces of Los Santos and Herrera in the east and Veraguas in the west. Idyllic beaches of golden sand and fascinating rocky outcrops hold rock pools full of tropical life. Dense maritime jungles provide a home to a wealth of flora and fauna. Fresh, life-giving water cascades from the mountains in spectacular waterfalls. Gold bearing rivers meander from the foothills down to the golden shore.

Azuero provides a wide range of options for both the social and antisocial animal: huge areas of untouched maritime forest, deserted coastlines sporting white-sand beaches and primeval mangrove forests, and estuarine river systems. Expansive and diverse national parks play host to rare and endangered species in an area lost between traditional Panama and untamed wildlife.

As you will experience when you arrive in Panama for the first time, the country is all about noise and color. But despite the

fact that there are many cultural and folkloric events throughout the year here, the area can provide a welcome break from the frantic existence that can be Panama. Principally, the area provides sanctuary—a haven of escape and the option of solitary walks along its deserted coastline or a chance to recharge your batteries with some rural relaxation.

Geography

Mountains, desert, tropical forest, tumbling rivers, and luminous waterfalls grace this area of Azuero. Pedasi is known for its drying breezes and long days of sunshine. The eastern shore of Azuero has long been known for the intensity of the sunrise over the Gulf of Panama as well as the dry, tropical maritime climate.

The peninsula is bordered on its 60-mile-long southern coast by the mighty Pacific with nothing to stop the swells which build from the south and west to culminate in some of Panama's finest surf. On Azuero's western fringe is the Gulf of Montijo, whose dense mangrove flank gives rise to rare estuarine life as well. It is also home to the unique island of Coiba, a UNESCO World Heritage Site extending to 38 islands and more than 430,000 acres.



Coast along the peninsula

Azuero's highlands reach their zenith at Mount Canajagua—more than 3,000 feet high and without roads to connect the eastern and western halves of the peninsula across its hills.

Azuero has been cultivated for thousands of years and this has caused some environmental deterioration. Overgrazing by cattle has led to a drought effect in the Sarigua area near Chitre. Sarigua is a desert in the making. Following years of deforestation and desertification, the area is now barren of vegetation and well on its way to becoming a fully fledged sand dune.

Weather

The gulf coast of Azuero offers some of Panama's best weather conditions and is known as the Dry Arc, or Arco Seco. A breeze lowers the humidity of this region and allows a welcome respite from the normal heat and humidity.

Communications

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.



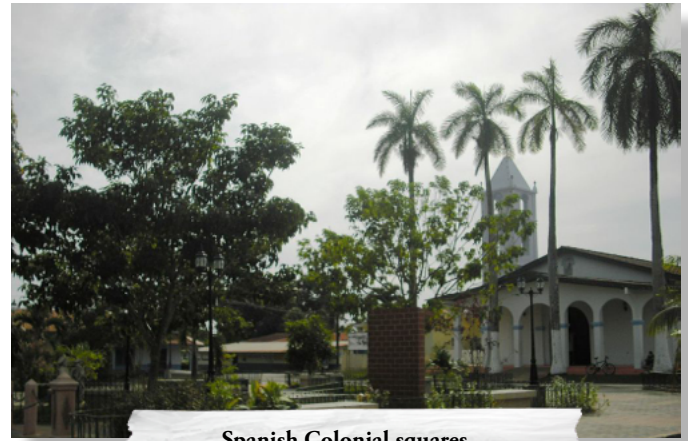
Better roads make the trip to Pedasi a little quicker than before

The area around Pedasi has been opening up as communication links improve. There is now a regular flight from Panama City's domestic Albrook airport on Wednesdays, Fridays, and Sundays. The flight takes 35 minutes and costs fluctuate between US\$100 and US\$120 each way.

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. A comfortable and surprisingly efficient alternative is to take a bus from the terminal in Panama City to Chitré or Las Tablas and then on to Pedasi. A one-way ticket costs about US\$10 and will take about five hours. The 40-minute journey from Chitré to Pedasi costs US\$2. If you have a group of about six people, it can be cost effective to charter a plane privately or through Air Panama, the principal domestic carrier at Albrook airport.

History

Evidence that Azuero was one of the first places in Panama to support settlement comes from about 10,000 years ago. There



Spanish Colonial squares

is further evidence that lands in the north of the peninsula were cultivated thousands of years before the Spanish arrived.

After the Spanish arrived at the beginning of the 16th century, and after the founding of Panama City around 1519, Cordoba was sent to explore northwards. He was probably the first European to look upon Azuero and sail past the southern tip of Panama. The facts are consigned to history, but suffice to say that the main evidence of Spanish activity in Pedasi and the area is to be found in the architecture. There are still some good examples of Spanish colonial architecture to be found in Pedasi and nearby Las Tablas, and some fine 17th and 18th century churches grace traditional Spanish Colonial squares at the center of town.

Azuero was founded around 1850 and named after Vicente Azuero Plata, a Colombian political thinker, lawyer, and journalist, famous for his liberal views.

Culture

The region is known as the heart of Spanish colonial culture, long famous for religious festivals dating back to the earliest settlement of the area by the Spanish. Some 500 religious celebrations are held each year in Azuero, clearly some kind of miracle as there are only 365 days in the year.

The largest festival of the year in the Azuero Peninsula takes place in the town of Las Tablas. It is, of course, Carnival. Four days of hedonistic intemperance-festivities, sometimes wild, sometimes profligate, it is said that Carnival in Rio is the only party to rival that of Panama's (and of course we have to give the nod to Mardi Gras). Meanwhile, the Azuero calendar is enlivened with interesting and engaging events when the streets of towns like Pedasi fill with fun-seekers.

In March or April comes Semana Santa (Holy Week), or Easter, which comes with processions and color. The main events of the season are divided between those of a religious tradition and those of a commercial nature. At the end of April is the International Azuero Fair (Feria Internacional del Azuero), a country fair showcasing products and services from around the peninsula, taking place in La Villa de los Santos. These things are more about the camaraderie of meeting people and feeling engaged in the local community than they are about the cattle and local banking services. Once you've seen one prize bull, you've seen them all, and this is no different anywhere in the world when there are plenty of other attractions such as food stalls and beer tents!

Traditionally, May is a very quiet month in Pedasi. This is when the shopkeepers, hoteliers, and restaurateurs of the town wonder if they chose the right business. These ruminations happen every year and May 2014 has been no different and has actually been worse, according to many residents, as Panama had a general election at the beginning of the month. In addition, the rain arrives after three to four months of dry season when the wind blows and dust pokes its way into everything.

June returns with a vengeance with the Festival of Corpus Christi. The village of La Villa de Los Santos erupts in a fortnight of dancing and merrymaking, featuring the amazing Diablicos—men dressed in red and black striped jumpsuits with intricate and ornate devil masks.

Around a thousand women and girls dressed in the elaborate national dress known as *pollera* gather for the judging of the Festival de la Pollera on July 22 each year. As part of the festival of The Virgin of St. Librada, the Queen of the Pollera is elected.

The Festival de la Mejorana in the town of Guararé has its roots in the reign of Charles V, the king of Spain in the 18th century; however its modern iteration has prevailed since the 1940s when the first festival was arranged to coincide with the festival of the town's patron saint, La Virgen de la Merced. Commemorating 100 years of homage to the virgin in September, the town organized representatives from all provinces of Panama to come to the town, bringing with them their most traditional folkloric dance or music. There is a party involved with some drinks too.

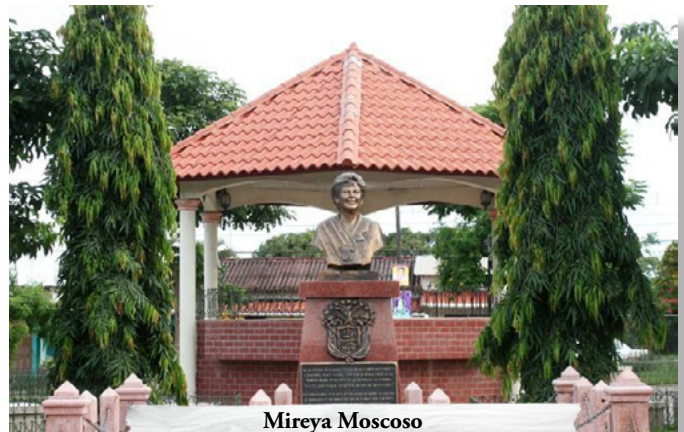
The first vestiges of Panamanian independence arose in the area close to Pedasi, and is now termed the Cry of Independence, a national holiday celebrated every Nov. 10 in Los Santos. Parades,

music, lots of drumming, and marching bands celebrate a day in 1821 when, allegedly, a young woman called Rufina Alfaro shouted “*Viva la libertad*” in a Los Santos street, which culminated in storming the barracks and thus overthrowing the Spanish crown.

Pedasi 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.

Economy

Whilst tourism is a growing component of the local economy, the mainstays are cattle ranching, farming, and fishing. In addition to cattle, rice, corn, sugar cane, and coffee are grown in the area. A significant boost to the economy was that Mireya Moscoso, a Pedasi native, was elected president of Panama in 1999. As well as presiding over the handover of the Panama Canal, President Moscoso set about a big program of investment in infrastructure and services in and around Pedasi. It is in large part thanks to that investment that infrastructure to the town is so good.



Mireya Moscoso
(first female president in Panama)

The population of Pedasi numbers only about 2,000, but Los Santos boasts around 85,000 people and an area of more than 3,000 square kilometers.

Pedasi caters day-to-day needs with small and medium sized supermarkets, two bakeries, a *dulceria* (Dulceria Yely, a well-known sweets/cake shop), several restaurants, bed and breakfasts, and hotels. The region is primarily agricultural, and it is possible to find high-quality fresh produce. In addition, Pedasi has a public health clinic, two banks, a public library, and a small shop selling surf and beach wear.

Pedasi: Typical Cost of Living

Typical lunch	US\$5-\$25
Typical dinner	US\$12-\$29
Car insurance (p.a.)	US\$375
Gallon 91 (low) octane fuel	US\$4
Local cab ride	US\$1-\$2
Local bus ride	US\$0.25-\$2
Chitre-Panama City bus 4 hours	US\$8
Golf & tennis club (/mth)	US\$50
Doctor consultation	US\$25
Dentist	US\$35
Gym membership	US\$25

General

Rent 3-bedroom house	US\$475.00
Haircut	US\$6.00
Cleaning	US\$150.00
Electric	US\$45.00
Gas	US\$5.00
Garbage collection	US\$10.00
Cable/Internet/Phone 3MB	US\$49.00
Cellphone	US\$35.00
Health	US\$65.00
Home insurance	US\$30.00

General

Movies two pcm	US\$12.00
Taxi/Transportation	US\$25.00
Bus	US\$12.00
Car fuel costs \$40/wk	US\$160.00
Water	US\$7.00
Entertainment	US\$250.00
Groceries	US\$410.96
Total month	US\$1,746.96

Pedasi: Grocery Shopping

Eggs	US\$2.19
Milk	US\$1.46
Mice	US\$2.46
Lentils	US\$1.05
Beer	US\$2.70
Bread	US\$2.35
Wine	US\$6.30
Fish	US\$8.00
Chicken	US\$2.69
Chicken thighs	US\$2.25
Ground beef	US\$1.55
Olive oil	US\$7.55
Vegetable oil	US\$5.25
Yogurt	US\$0.69
Vinegar	US\$2.76
Laundry detergent	US\$1.25
Toilet paper	US\$2.96

Pedasi: Grocery Shopping

Corn flakes	US\$3.49
Oats	US\$1.60
Sugar	US\$0.65
Canned tuna	US\$1.79
Butter	US\$5.60
Cheese slices	US\$1.55
Mayonnaise	US\$1.75
Mustard	US\$1.80
Green olives	US\$2.35
Local coffee	US\$3.00
Pasta	US\$2.25
Ketchup	US\$1.45
Basket of fruit	US\$10.00
Basket of vegetables	US\$12.00
Week	US\$102.74
Month	US\$410.96

...Continued from page 4

The capital of the province is Las Tablas, located about 30 minutes north of Pedasi. The name is purported to derive from the fact that boards (*tablas*) from the wreck of a Spanish warship in flight from the sacking of Old Panama by Captain Morgan in 1671 were used to construct some of the first buildings in the town.

Chitré is located a little less than an hour from Pedasi and has all the amenities of a medium-sized city with several good hotels including the newly opened four-star Cubita Boutique Hotel and Resort. A wide range of restaurants serving both local and quality international food as well as most major fast food outlets are represented. All of Panama's largest supermarkets have large outlets in the city, and it is here that you can easily and economically stock up on staples.

Investment in real estate began some years ago with a major investment by renowned French designer Gilles Saint-Gilles. His flagship Villa Camilla broke the boundaries of quality and style, creating a new standard of hospitality in Panama. Since then, the surrounding Azueros project has given rise to a highly exclusive collection of ocean residences, villas, beach studios, and beach lofts. The hotel and development is located a few minutes from Pedasi near Los Destiladeros Beach.



Future hotel development

Initial real estate investments have been made during the last five years, and several celebrity names have been associated with the area. Hotel chains such as Sheraton have bought up land parcels for future development, and big name Panamanians are investing as well. Pedasi seems to be well set to be the next big destination in terms of both tourism and ocean-side community. We will see if the Panama Tourism Authority shares our views on this during the new president's term.

There are three main multiphase development projects under construction in the immediate vicinity of Pedasi and several more in the planning stages. Expats and retirees have been discovering Pedasi and there are now several "lotifications" within a few minutes of the town. Opinions are, however, divided amongst the expat community and some residents wishing to preserve Pedasi as a well-hidden secret that conserves its sleepy rural village feel. My view is that tourism will increase exponentially alongside investment. The growing number of businesses in town need more traffic to become truly sustainable, but it was always so. Those in the trough of the wave can have a hard time avoiding the break whilst those halfway up the face or on the crest of the wave have a smoother ride. I believe that visitor numbers to Pedasi are still on the low side to sustain the businesses in town; however, I think that the would-be investors can still get in at extremely favorable price levels with an excellent risk-to-return ratio.

The Azueros project is rolling out its master plan. The Costa Pedasi development is close to Playa El Toro and offers more than 200 acres of master-planned community. The Israeli group Dekel Developments is in the process of launching several new phases at its flagship Andromeda Ocean Estates, about three minutes from the center of Pedasi. Dekel has been consolidating its position in the area over the last few years and now seems ready to start rolling out its carefully laid plans in earnest. A beautifully conceived Beach Club is coming to life rapidly steps from the Andromeda sand, a judiciously chosen spot as its beach is as close as you can get to private and is protected by rocky headlands on both sides.

Dekel is also a major stakeholder in the town itself with a thriving tour and hospitality business including a bakery, the boutique Pedasito Hotel, a wine bar, and a rentals business. Pedasi Tours is located right in the center of town and offers excellent tour packages for residents and visitors alike.

Panama Equity provides very professional and well-established real estate services in this area. The company has recently scaled-up its operation in Pedasi with a new office and increased staffing. Tedd Tennis is manager of the Pedasi office. He's been in the area for a number of years and knows the local market intimately, having watched its evolution over this critical period of growth. According to him: "The amount of restaurants in the area of Pedasi and Playa Venao has more than quadrupled since I arrived in 2009. The same goes for hotel rooms. Pedasi has a new 18-room hospital opening any day now. The new four-lane highway from Divisa to Las Tablas and the Air Panama flights

from Panama City to Pedasi make getting here that much easier. The pace of both residential and commercial development has been steadily increasing for the last three years. Our office in Pedasi is hiring new agents because we can't keep up with the amount of business being done in the area. We are expanding because we want to continue to be the best option for both buyers and sellers in our market.”

Local Products

Being such a traditional area, there is plenty of choice to find fantastic deals on artisanal products, from hand-built custom furniture for your home to incredible pottery and earthenware which follows ancient designs and production methodology. La Arena is a handicrafts market close to Chitré worth a stop if you are showing visitors around or building up a collection of folkloric art pieces. Panama's best known Carnival-mask producer, Darido Lopez, is located nearby in the village of Parita. This really is worth a visit.



A handicrafts market in La Arena

Food And Beds In The Area

Tourism to Pedasi and the area has been growing steadily over the last few years. The town is already transforming from its sleepy fishing village beginnings into a new destination for visitors, investors, and second-home owners as inward investment helps to open the area and provide quality services and tourism infrastructure.

There are a little less than 300 rooms in the immediate vicinity of Pedasi, including Playa Venao, some 30 minutes from town. There is good, comfortable hostel accommodation available in the whole area. At Playa Venao, you can stay for about US\$10



Comfortable hostel accommodation

per night (for dormitory accommodation at Eco Venao, for example), or US\$15 beds and US\$3 meals (breakfast, lunch, or dinner) at Mama Jita's on Isla Cañas if you want to watch sea turtles hatching. You are almost guaranteed to see a turtle during the season, but if it's a quiet night there are three cantinas on the island serving 75-cent beers. Just down the road in Tonosi I saw a sign offering local beer for 65 cents.

Casita Margarita is one of the best-established small hotels and typical of an area where 18 rooms is the largest in town. Pedasito offers 10 boutique-style rooms and has an excellent chef with good local and international dishes, or you can cook up your own catch of the day. Casa de Campo also offers excellent accommodation and has some very fine locally crafted custom furniture on display to give you some inspiration for your new home.

There is a surprising range of restaurants in Pedasi to suit most tastes and budgets, from basic local *fonda* food and cantina beer to home cooked classics to beautifully prepared international food in pleasant surroundings. Pasta e Vino has a very good Italian inspired menu at reasonable prices from about US\$6, while Bienvenidush serves an excellent homemade hummus with a decent wine list. For a few dollars more, you can try Amareto and El Patio for Latino and Spanish cuisine while Villa Pedasia's specialty is locally prepared fresh seafood dishes. Smiley's offers both U.S. and local menu options in a relaxed, beach bar atmosphere with live music on weekends.

Activities

Pedasi is often considered one of Panama's most authentic and charming small towns. Located right at the southeast corner

of the peninsula, Pedasi is within a few minutes of numerous white-sand beaches and rocky headlands, with numerous sandy coves and hidden coastal delights nearby. Situated on a flat coastal plain in the shadow of the Azuero hills, entering Pedasi is like taking a step back in time. The local population is friendly and hospitable, going out of their way to be helpful. They love baseball, which is taken extremely seriously and competitively at a national level with huge rivalry amongst the three provinces of Azuero.

Pedasi has seen a rise in tourism to the area in recent years due to a gradual discovery of what the town has to offer. Namely, world-class watersports, sport fishing, a number of world-famous surf breaks, and diving and snorkeling in little disturbed and well-preserved coral reefs.

Pedasi's Gulf Coast

Pedasi is a coastal town well known for the quality of its big game fishing. The town is 3 kilometers from the coast where boats can be hired for the short trip to Isla Iguana or out to where the continental shelf drops steeply into the ocean. "Actually, well under an hour from Pedasi, a little round the coast from Playa Venao, the shelf drops off into deep water about a kilometer from shore," commented one enthusiast who runs a sport fishing and diving operation out of Pedasi. "The main problem is we don't run big boats out of here as there is no real harbor. We really need a marina of some sort to cater for the increasing traffic coming to Pedasi," he continued.



That Tuna Coast

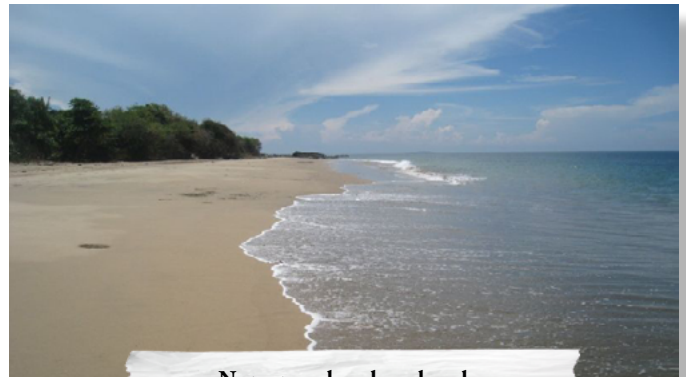
They call it the Tuna Coast because of the large numbers of big yellow-fin tuna to be had relatively close to shore. The waters around Pedasi yield both inshore and offshore fish species within a few minutes of the town. You can catch sailfish, red

and Cubera snapper, marlin, Spanish mackerel, roosterfish, amberjack, mahi-mahi, and grouper, with tuna and wahoo spicing life up in season.

Pedasi sits in an amazing location between two highly favored and world famous fishing spots—close to Hannibal Bank and a half-day's trip away from the renowned Tropic Star Lodge at Piñas Bay in Darien, boasting more than 200 world records. Pedasi is also a great spot for light tackle enthusiasts.

Many Beaches To Choose From...

Alternatively, you can always just choose to seek out one of the numerous beaches close by. A short bicycle ride or a few minutes in a car can have you at any one of the following beaches: El Arenal, Playa El Toro, Playas La Garita, El Lagarto, El Lanchon, El Cascajal, Playa Los Destiladeros, Puerto Escondido, Playa Los Panamaes, Playa La Miel, Punta Chumico, and Playa Venao (located about 30 minutes from Pedasi and renowned as one of the best surf spots in the whole region, drawing surfers from all over the world).

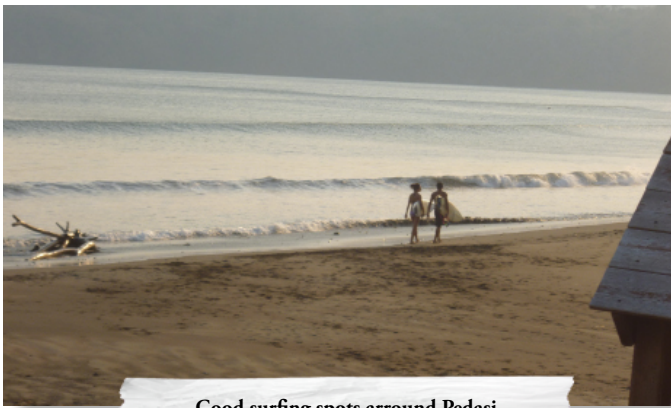


Numerous beaches close by

Pedasi is considered one of the best places from which to see the annual migration of the humpback whale. The main whale-watching season is from June to November, and it is a rare treat to be able to watch these magnificent mammals from your kitchen window. You can spot various types of dolphin most of the year as well as whale sharks, rays, and other extraordinary marine life.

...Of Course, There's A Lot Of Good Surf Nearby

In recent years two world surfing championships have been hosted at Playa Venao. The Venao's famous 5- to 10-foot waves are surfable most of the time, unless the swell is too big when local reef breaks come into their own. Beyond Venao is a great left point break at Playa Ciruelo.



Good surfing spots around Pedasi

Other surf spots surround the town of Pedasi include beach breaks at Playa El Toro, Playa la Miel, Los Panamaes, and Los Destiladeros. Suffice to say that there are plenty of Pedasi residents who will help you out when you get here!

Natural History

Cerro Hoya National Park is located approximately an hour from Pedasi by car. The 80,000-acre mountain and coastal park constitutes one of the last remaining undisturbed areas of forest left in the Azuero Peninsula. The park protects some of the last refuges for more than 30 species of endemic plants including several rare orchids in the Azuero Canyon. The park also harbors about 95 species of bird including the rare Great Green and Red Macaws as well as the locally unique Azuero Parakeet (related to the indigenous Painted Parakeet).

The park is extremely inaccessible but it's worth the trouble, even if there is only a small chance of seeing a jaguar or ocelot, also resident in this wild place.

Isla Iguana

This spectacular 160-acre wildlife refuge is located about 20 minutes (about 5 kilometers) by boat from Pedasi. It is a key nesting site for several types of frigate bird as well as refuge for sea turtle nesting and, of course, iguanas. A healthy and well-preserved coral reef system offers some excellent diving and snorkeling.

Isla Cañas


Isla Cañas, located about 50 minutes from Pedasi, is a wildlife reserve separated from the mainland by a narrow mangrove channel and is reachable by boat taxi. Cañas is Panama's premier turtle spotting site and the top nesting site on the

south Pacific coast. The Olive Ridley, Pacific green, loggerhead, leatherback, and hawksbill sea turtles can be seen at any time during the July to November laying season.

Some 20,000 turtles of all five species arrive along the 14-kilometer beach to lay their eggs in the sand every year. About 15,000 of the nests are protected and 5,000 are donated to the local population of 500 people in a cooperative public-private natural resources management agreement with ANAM, Panama's environment agency.

Summary

You only need to go to Pedasi's central plaza to understand that this is the heart of folkloric Panama. Pedasi is the kind of small town where the locals sit outside their doors on rocking chairs or leave their doors open onto the street. The old men still wear the traditional leather sandals and black and white traditional straw hats. Women of all ages wear *pollera* during festivals and during the annual Carnival celebration. Pedasi is a neat and charming local village with a rural feel and relaxed lifestyle. If you are looking for thumping nightlife and year-round parties, Pedasi is not for you. But as a wholesome place to bring up children, invest, retire, or go as a holiday destination, you won't find a more authentic and genuine place in Panama. For me, Pedasi is right on the money now, but it does depend on your objectives. If you intend to run a small business there, you might want to consider sustainability unless it's a hobby or Internet-based business which does not rely on passing traffic.

Pedasi does offer a rare sense of community and promotes a healthy, peaceful, yet active lifestyle that would be a welcome break from the fanaticism of modern life. 

About The Author

Jocelyn Carnegie has long experience setting up home, family, and business in different countries around the world, from the UK to Ireland, from the United States to France, and from Central Europe to Central America.



He and his current endeavors currently call Panama home, and we welcome Jocelyn to our Panama Letter team.



Pedasi's Comfort Home Cooking

By Jocelyn Carnegie

This month's recipes come from the Provincias Centrales of Los Santos, Herrera, Veraguas, and Coclé. The interior of the country is rich in history and culture and is famous for its wholesome home cooking. Here are two popular dishes designed as comfort food.

Hen Stew (Gallina Guisada)

Ingredients:

- 1 whole chicken/hen (free range)
- Achiote/Annatto (*bixa orellana*) seeds diluted in hot water
- 6 leaves of fresh local coriander
- 1 large chopped and diced onion
- 3 cloves of finely chopped garlic
- 3 chopped and diced plump tomatoes
- 3 chopped and diced green bell peppers
- Vegetable oil
- Water
- Salt

Preparation:

- Heat water to a boil and pour into a bowl with the achiote.
- Clean, wash, and chop the hen.
- In a deep pan, heat the oil and add the chicken pieces already marinated with salt.
- Brown the hen well on all sides.
- Add the achiote, diluted in the hot water, and all the vegetables. If you are using chicken, cook for 10 to 20 minutes.
If you are using hen, cook until soft.





Rice With Chicken

Ingredients:

- 3 pounds washed white rice
- 2 pounds chicken breast (on or off the bone)
- 1 sachet achiote/annatto (*bixa orellana*) seeds diluted in hot water
- 1 large chopped and diced onion
- 4 cloves of crushed garlic
- 1 clove uncrushed garlic
- Some fresh local coriander and/or curly parsley
- *Recado verde**
- Vegetable oil
- Water
- Salt
- Freshly ground black pepper

Preparation:

- Marinate the chicken with salt, black pepper, and the crushed garlic. Place in a pan with water and boil. When it's cooked, bone it and put aside. Reserve the chicken stock.
- In a pan, heat 2 tablespoons of vegetable oil. Add the achiote seeds.
- When the oil has changed color to reddish or yellowish, remove the achiote seeds and add a clove of garlic until it browns, then remove it from the pan and add the chopped *recado verde*. Brown it for a couple of minutes, add the rice, and mix well.
- Add the chicken stock and a pinch of salt and cover the pan. If you need more liquid to cover the rice, add water as necessary.
- When the rice is cooked (approximately 15 minutes) mix with the chicken.



**Recado verde* (sometimes written *recao verde*, or green achiote) is a bunch of leaves, herbs, and vegetables whose basic ingredient is local *culantro* leaf (along with onion, chives, garlic, sometimes young celery leaves, and curly parsley). Used similarly to *bouquet garni* in France, *recado verde* is often used in Azuero to flavor stocks, sauces, and stews.

Fútbol Fiestas In Panama





A Pragmatic *Panadera* In Pedasi

By *Jocelyn Carnegie*

Born in British Guyana (now Guyana), Valerie Longstaff arrived in Panama about two years ago. She chose Panama, having researched several countries in her native Latin America. Having grown up in Guyana as well as Flushing, New York, Valerie then moved with her family and spent most of her life in Toronto. She loves Toronto and has retained a property and many of her possessions back there, but having established a thriving bakery business in Pedasi, Valerie is in no hurry to go back, and, in fact, she is planning to move more of her things to Panama. She may have a considerable amount of *joie de vivre*, but she is also a pragmatist.

Valerie took time to establish her new life in Pedasi as an expat—analysing her options, listening, observing, and not jumping into things on a whim.

Here is a very small part of her story.

What drew you to Panama in the first place?

I was born in the tropics—in Guyana. At that time, it was a British Dependency and we all grew up feeling that Britain was really our home—even so far away in South America. England was the “mother country” and so we all wanted to go there.

But I knew I had to return to the tropics. I’ve spent most of my life cold—New York and Toronto for 35 years. So I needed to feel the sun again as I had as a child. My mother is a descendent from the Portuguese islands of Madeira which lie just off the North African coast, so I grew up dreaming of the heat!

...and you chose Panama?

It wasn’t that easy, I can tell you. I wanted somewhere with white sand and Caribbean water. Actually, I love the Caribbean—those islands are heaven to me.

I was specifically not looking for darker sand beaches (not black), so its funny I have ended up here on the Pacific coast where the sand is glorious but not bright white as in the Caribbean. Guyanese beaches are similar.



I searched long and hard before alighting in Panama. I have been thinking of this for a very long time. I arrived at a point in my life where I could finally make the leap, and here I am!

You did not have any connection to Panama as such. Which other countries did you consider?

I am a traveler born and bred; I take off and go. For example, I’ve been everywhere in Panama except Darien and Colon...and I mean to get there sometime.

I considered Venezuela for a bit, being relatively close to Guyana, but I wasn’t mad about Chavez—it all seemed a little too crazy.

Mexico was out of the question for me. It’s too close the United States, and the drug war seemed to have moved there, so I looked farther afield. I went to Argentina several times...I even considered New Zealand as an English-speaking option, but decided they were both too far.

Did you have any other criteria which contributed to your settling on Panama?

Yes. I wanted to be within a day’s travel—prefereably under six hours—so I could leave in the morning and be back in Toronto

the same afternoon or early evening. Flights to the United States and Canada are reasonable and its within an acceptable radius.

As I said, one of my main criteria was government stability—no coups in recent times anyway. I discovered that Panama uses the U.S. dollar and that it seemed to be much more Second World than I imagined.

I found that Panama ticked most of the boxes. I came here seven times before deciding to give it a try on a more permanent basis.

What about Pedasi? What made you choose Pedasi?

One of my loves is sailing and I figured that Panama, having so much ocean, could be a place I could have a boat in the future. I have done a lot of sailing in this region, including the Florida coast and Margarita Island in Venezuela. Margarita is what made me consider Venezuela as a potential destination.

Pedasi is a fishing and coastal town with nice beaches and a boating culture. My only slight surprise was that there is a lot of sport-fishing boats in Panama, but sailing is actually in its infancy along the Pacific. It's much more popular on the Caribbean side in Colon and Bocas del Toro. There are so many islands and archipelagos that would offer wonderful opportunities for sailing, even on this coast.

Did you come here with the intention of working?

Not specifically, but I am very sociable and active. Can't stand being sedentary. I can fly planes. I had two restaurants in Sarnia and enjoyed that business so I thought about starting a small hotel. Having had experience in the catering and hospitality business, it was a natural first step.

Everything I do is considered, so I looked at what was missing in Pedasi. I came up with a shortlist of businesses: a fresh-food market, a bakery, and a fish-market, to be specific. Pedasi is too far from the main sources for daily deliveries from Cerro Punta, and I am not sure I could do the fish-market smell every day. I found there were quite a lot of small hotels in the town already.

...so what did you do?

I kept looking for holes in the market and thought to myself: I love baking. So I set about looking at the bakery idea. There was nowhere like it in town—healthy breads and US\$5 lunches!

Now, step by step, the bakery is doing well, gradually getting better every day. I have repeat clients all the time. My clientele is 90% expats and 10% local trade, but this side of the business is also growing.

I do what's called the second rising and have a range of very healthy, German-style breads: multigrain, sevel cereals, light, and dark rye. I cook all the pastries, cakes, and *dulces* (sweets) myself.

What was your main barrier to entry?

Really, it was scepticism among fellow expats and suppliers. For example, my supplier of bread mixes is German and his only outlet outside of Panama City is Coronado—getting very populous now. He was very downbeat and unsure of Pedasi and my plans, but I said, "You have to come and see the community down here." He came. He saw. He agreed, and I ordered.

Now, I look forward to every day with too much to do!

So are you a pastry chef?

No. I call myself a cook. I love to cook, but the title chef seems overly formal to me.

I make it all myself. My chocolate cake is popular—I sell three every week, made from 100% cocoa. I also do a mean carrot and orange cake and cinammon bun.

One of the most popular things I do is a US\$5 lunch package. Locals and expats love it as they do my breakfast muffin with pepper jack cheese, bacon, and egg.



Has Pedasi changed since you arrived?

Yes it has. There are many more restaurants and hotel rooms. In fact, I supply a few of them. One of Panama City's most colorful Spanish restaurateurs, Manolo Caracol, has just opened an organic place here and there are a number of others.

Do you miss anything living in Pedasi?

I have a grown-up daughter and two grandchildren. Of course I miss them a lot. I get back about two or three times every year.

As I mentioned, I am a very sociable person, and I miss the parties I would throw back in Toronto. There's no comparison down here, I am afraid. Although one of the reasons I chose Pedasi was for its tranquility—that sleepy coastal-town feel. As it's turned out, the community here is very vibrant, and I have made some great friends.

I am an avid theater-goer, so I do miss that in Pedasi.

How did you settle into the local community?

I rented a place for three months to orientate myself. An opportunity presented itself to buy my home with a three-quarter acre of garden from a Canadian couple I had met, so I took it.

Really the local and expat community has been so kind and welcoming. I like to get involved in things and we do things like organised litter pickups. I am surprised and pleased to see that many more Panamanians are joining in.

So the process of assimilation has been easy for you?

I wouldn't say easy, but it's been a real pleasure for me to get to know people here. Perhaps it helps that I was never trying to compete with hotels and restaurants.

I did not bring too much of my stuff, yet, but I think I will now that I am more settled.

If you had to name a worst part of living in Panama, what would it be?

The terrible discourtesy of driving here. Even if you show them another way, they won't do it. There is no system of priority. "It's all about me" is the only driving code of conduct in Panama!

Bureaucracy is a pain, and it's irritating that it's all geared towards the government being able to squeeze a little more money out of us. Police corruption is also difficult to deal with, but it's a lot less prevalent now. I am involved with a "vigilante" group (neighborhood watch) trying to make a difference to community security. The local police has been nothing but supportive to the community.

There's always the garbage problem. It's endemic everywhere, up and down all the highways. People never seem to learn that their actions are having a direct effect on other people's lives and health. We are trying to educate, and it is finally getting through.

So if there are bad things, there must be good things. What's the best thing?




I love to bake. When I told my staff I was going away, one of them said, "I want to make this the best bakery in the peninsula." Now that's rewarding.

I would not have stayed if it were not for the people here in Pedasi. They have been so helpful to me. The Panamanians have been incredibly welcoming.

What advice would you give to someone thinking of doing what you did?

Plenty of people said, "A bakery in Pedasi? How stupid can you be." Actually, I hadn't asked for their opinions. My attitude was always, "Build it and they will come." I did it and they are coming.

For me there is no gray area. One of my mottos is, "Because I can and I want to." So I suppose my advice would be to follow your passion and do it if you can. There is a very good book called *Feel the Fear and Do it Anyway*. Anyone thinking of doing what I did should read it. 

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

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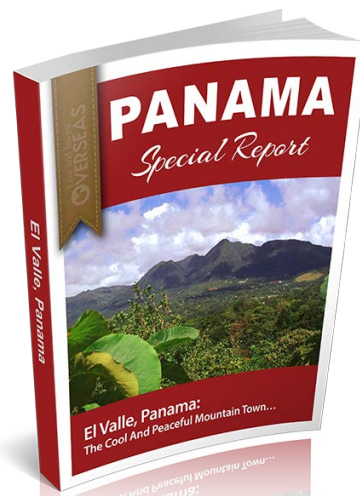
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