

PANAMA

Special Report



**Panama City, Panama:
A Thriving Metropolitan City...**

The logo features the letters 'PSR' in a large, bold, black font with a white horizontal bar across the top. Below this, the word 'PANAMA' is written in a large, bold, red font, and 'SPECIAL REPORT' is written in a smaller, bold, grey font underneath.

Staff

Kathleen Peddicord

Founding Publisher

Kat Kalashian

Editor in Chief

Charles Conn

Managing Editor

Sophia Titley

Editorial Assistant

Hélène Kletochkina

Design Director

If you have queries relating to your subscription, get in touch at: CustomerService@PanamaLetter.com.

For editorial comments and contributions, reach us at: Editorial@PanamaLetter.com.

©Copyright 2018 by Live and Invest Overseas. All Rights Reserved.

Protected by copyright laws of the United States and international treaties. This newsletter may be used only pursuant to the subscription agreement and any reproduction, copying, or redistribution (electronic or otherwise, including on the World Wide Web), in whole or in part, is strictly prohibited without the express written permission of the publisher, Live and Invest Overseas, Calle Dr. Alberto Navarro, Casa No. 45, El Cangrejo, Panama, Republic of Panama.

Any investments recommended in this letter should be made only after consulting with your investment advisor and only after reviewing the prospectus or financial statements of the company.



PANAMA

LETTER

Volume 7, Issue 12

INSIDE

From The Desk Of Kathleen Peddicord: Feliz Navidad From Panama City... p. 2

Reader Questions Answered: "Where In Panama Isn't It Humid?"; Can You Recommend A Reputable, Bilingual Attorney?; What Are The In-Country Requirements For A Pensionado Visa Holder?; How Investing In Panama Can Protect Against A U.S. Dollar Collapse; Post-Expatriation Tax Obligations Explained; El Valle Versus Santa Fe; And More Of Your Letters Answered... p. 3

Recipes Of The Month: Ron Ponche De La Abuela And Panamanian-Style Christmas Turkey... p. 16

Photospread: Where The World Converges—Panama City's Russian Bazaar... p. 20

Panama 101: Celebrating The Holidays The Panama Way... p. 27

¿Cómo Se Dice?: Your Holiday-Season Language Survival Guide... p. 33

Expat Interview: Return Of The Zonian... p. 34



Panama City—One City, Many Options

By Matt Chilliak

Often referred to as the Dubai of Latin America, Panama City experienced growth at a breakneck pace over the past 15 years and transformed itself into the business capital of Latin America. Today, the city's iconic skyscraper skyline would be almost unrecognizable from photos from even just a decade or two ago.

Another transformation has been Panama City's nightlife. Pubs and clubs, pop music concerts, food and beer festivals, flashy casinos, red-light districts, punk-rock shows, tattoo expos—the city's late-night lights are brighter than ever.

That's the side of Panama City that you read about and see in tourist travel blogs and guides. But there's more to this city than nightclubs, skyscrapers, and shady gentlemen's clubs. This city is diverse, and for most of its residents, that fast-lane lifestyle is out of reach or out of mind or both.

Living in a penthouse suite, bar-hopping three nights a week to the most exclusive clubs, dining at five-star restaurants, letting it ride at the casinos, and keeping an entourage of beautiful women around isn't on the agenda for most people who live in the city (nor is it for most who are looking at relocating

...Continued from page 1

there). Most people work or study, have families, assume responsibilities, don't have a trust fund, and want to save money. A trip to the theater that goes past midnight is late-night enough, or maybe a salsa class or a night out for drinks once in a blue moon.

The neighborhoods of Panama City are varied and offer all sorts of different surroundings and lifestyle options. You could live in a bohemian student hub or a run-of-the-mill, working-class neighborhood... on a hillside surrounded by lush jungle or an upper-floor condo surrounded by ocean views... in a new, planned suburban neighborhood full of modern conveniences... or a 17th-century historical site full of romantic charm...

For those setting their sights on Panama, the good news is that these options exist. Of course, figuring it all out on your own can be a daunting task, so we've compiled a list of noteworthy neighborhoods and highlighted a few of the key selling points, disadvantages, hidden spots, and other must-know tidbits for each.

Of course, you won't want to stop here. Research is your friend when moving anywhere, be it to a new country, a new city, or even just a new neighborhood. You can never read too much about what will be one of the biggest decisions you'll make in life: where to live.

This is a starting point, though. A comparison guide to give you a good idea about where you might want to base yourself, be it permanently or just for a little while. Note that some of the neighborhoods encompass smaller areas within them, while others are amalgamated with adjacent, similar areas. With dozens of subdivisions and even more neighborhoods within those subdivisions, we've arranged them in ways that make it easier to analyze and compare.

These are your top options for living in Panama City.

Bella Vista



The subdivision of Bella Vista was developed in the 1930s and 40s and includes the neighborhoods of Bella Vista, El Cangrejo, Obarrio, Marbella, Campo Alegre, La Cresta, and El Carmen.

The heart of Panama City, Bella Vista has it all, be it to live, work, or play. Modern condos, flashy casinos, late-night dance clubs, tourist traps, the banking district, the red light district, and much, much more—you name it, you'll find it in Bella Vista.

There's a youthfulness about Bella Vista that gives the neighborhood a distinct vibe, especially so in El Cangrejo. Students pour out onto the streets from the many secondary schools in the area, including the Canadian International School, La Salle Academy, Lincoln Academy, and Oxford International School. As well, the University of Panama's main campus is located here, known for its abundance of street cats who've made it their home, drawing the ire of old curmudgeons hell-bent on banishing them.

Another group in Bella Vista that has resisted the grumbles of generations past has been the LGBT community, which has as open a community as

there is in Panama in Bella Vista. The city's Pride Parade usually takes place around the university and through the El Cangrejo area.

Bella Vista attracts residents from around the world, making it a multicultural mosaic of cultures and backgrounds. There are no gated-off communities or cultural enclaves here, but instead, daily social interactions among the diverse backgrounds. Panamanian, American, Canadian, Colombian, Venezuelan, Jamaican, Chinese, Indian, German, Romanian, Lebanese, Mexican, Cuban, French, and dozens, if not hundreds of others come to this neighborhood as entrepreneurs, employees, educators, students, tourists, travelers, and, perhaps most importantly, restaurateurs. Travel the world via your taste buds and introduce yourself to flavors in this neighborhood that might otherwise be thousands of miles away.

Looking for a spot to eat here? Be sure to try some of the local fare from El Trapiche or Las Tinajas where guests are treated to a show of traditional Panamanian song and dance with their meal. Another local favorite is Churrería Manolo's, a chain with several locations in the city and around Latin America—think of it as a Latin diner.

Or, for something a little different, try Beirut, where the Lebanese dishes are accompanied by sensuous belly dancers. You can also find Thai curries from Sukhi, butter chicken at Sabor de la India, excellent tikka masala at Avatar, or traditional fish and chips at La Rana Dorada. For regular "American" pub plates and cheap buckets of beer, check out La Brasserie. One popular spot—especially among young students, immigrants, and travelers—is New York Bagels, one of the only places in the city with all-you-can-drink coffee. For late night eats after the bars close, the 24-hour diner Del Prado makes a mean milkshake, or coffee if you need to sober up before work in the morning. Another late-night staple is Niko's, specializing in Greek food and open 24 hours.

For a night out on the town, Bella Vista has several options, though the hipster trendsetters are moving more and more toward the newly emerging nightlife in the colonial sector of Casco Viejo. Still, Bella Vista has plenty of options for late nights and red lights. Calle Uruguay is jam-packed with dance clubs that stay open late and attract a younger crowd. Head on over to the Veneto Hotel and Casino or Habanos Cigar Bar for a glance into Panama City's red-light tourism.

The Veneto and the nearby Hotel El Panama also host several conventions and expos, from wedding showcases to tattoo and piercing exhibitions. On Vía Argentina, a selection of pubs and cafés makes for a slower pace, although regular live music at Pavo Real gets the crowd rocking on the weekend. For more live music, check out El Apartamento.

Entertainment options in Bella Vista don't have to include alcohol. Theater performances at Teatro La Quadra in El Cangrejo get great reviews, and movie theaters are nearby in the three nearby shopping malls.

Shopaholics find solace in Bella Vista, with the luxury Soho Mall located in Obarrio, along with the nearby Multicentro and Multiplaza shopping malls. Outdoor shopping hotspots are found along Vía España, Vía Veneto, Vía Argentina, and Calle 50.

One of the most appealing aspects of living in Bella Vista is its connectivity. Most anything you might need is a short walk away. Groceries, shops, clinics, pharmacies, veterinarians, schools, hotels, restaurants, pubs, clubs, cafés, gyms, parks, salons, tailors, banks, are all nearby. Public transportation is also easy, with several bus routes passing through, as well as two metro stations.

For leisurely strolls and outdoor workouts, the oceanfront Cinta Costera pathway borders the southern limits of Bella Vista, and public parks include Urracá, Harry Strunz, Andrés Bello, and Benito Juárez.

Real estate varies from affordable old apartments in El Cangrejo to modern luxury condos in Obarrio to classically designed mansions in La Cresta. A room to rent can cost as low as US\$400 a month, while a spacious two-bed, two-bath suite would start around US\$1,200 and go up from there. If you're purchasing, expect to pay somewhere in the range of US\$1,500 to US\$3,000 per square meter.

The drawback to living in such a bustling neighborhood is noise. Be it from traffic, construction, or nightclubs, the cacophony of this part of the city can be a bit much, especially if you're living in an apartment at or close to street level. But, despite this, Bella Vista remains a top choice for living in Panama City.

The Cinta Costera

Panama City's Cinta Costera was 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.

The Cinta stretches along the oceanfront from Punta Paitilla to the eastern side of Casco Viejo, ending near the newly built Maracaná Stadium (for soccer). The pathway connects to the exterior road that stretches into the ocean, surrounding Casco Viejo.

The 7.5 km parkway consists of jogging and biking paths, playground and workout equipment, basketball, tennis, and volleyball courts, ping-pong tables, soccer fields, a skateboard park, sculptures and art installations, a koi pond, and gazebos for dance and yoga. The area is bucolic—completely covered with trees, grass, and other tropical plant life, which stands out compared to the concrete jungle that is nearby downtown Panama City.

During the weekends, the Cinta is swarming—folks out for a leisurely stroll, workout junkies flexing their stuff, pick-up soccer, volleyball, and basketball games with players young and old, and many others making use of the city's best public attraction. If you live close to the Cinta, forgo the gym membership and go to the Cinta instead.

On Sunday evenings, the Cinta becomes somewhat of an outdoor bazaar, with vendors selling everything from food and drink, remote control toy cars, handmade jewelry, shoes (new or used), tours, and various other goods. You might even be able to buy a dog or cat.

San Francisco



Away from Panama City's hectic center, San Francisco provides all the upsides to urban living, without all the noise. Developed during the 1920s as an area for escaping the city, the neighborhood focused on rest, relaxation, and recreation. Today, San Francisco still carries the same appeal.

Living in San Francisco isn't the same as moving to the suburbs. This is still the inner-city and close enough to the city center as to enjoy proximity

to all the needs and desires of daily living. Supermarkets, hardware stores, dentists, department store, shopping malls, veterinarians, hospitals, pharmacies, gyms, salons, schools, restaurants, cafés, pubs, and many other services and shops are found here. What isn't found here—at least not as much as the central Bella Vista area—are tourists, ladies of the night, blaring nightclub music, and swindling taxi drivers.

The Atlapa Convention Center in San Francisco is the city's premier event and exhibition space. Performances from the likes of Ricky Martin, Yanni, and the Blue Man Group, as well as Miss Universe contests, book fairs, and the Summit of the Americas have taken place here. The surrounding restaurants and bars make for a nice pre- or post-event meal and drinks, but they tend to get busy when events are taking place.

San Francisco's food and drink options have emerged as a foodie focal point in the city. While the massive five-star restaurants and clubs remain at bay, plenty of small mom-and-pop shops, restaurants, cafés, and pubs are scattered throughout the neighborhood. Take note of Dainer16 (Southern-influenced soul food), Local (which isn't restricted to locally sourced food, as the name might suggest), Roadster's (a 1950s-style diner where the wall memorabilia may be more memorable than the meal), and Restaurante Vietnamita (you must try the pho soup). Another popular spot is Athanasiou, a Greek café, chocolatier, sandwich shop, and bakery.

Panama City is not normally known as an artistic hub, but San Francisco challenges that notion with a number of art galleries featuring works from both domestic and international artists. Among them are Dgriss Art Gallery, Allegro Galería, Galería Arteconsult, Mateo Sariel Gallery, Imagen Galería.

San Francisco's centerpiece is its 140-acre greenspace, Parque Omar. The park occupies a former golf course and features miles of jogging paths, playground equipment, baseball and soccer fields, basketball courts, a swimming pool, fruit and food stands, art displays, the National Library, yoga and dance classes, film screenings, concerts, and festivals.

Getting around San Francisco is made easy by its grid street layout, use of street signs, and numbered streets—both of which are uncommon in much of the rest of the city. And although there isn't a Metro station located directly in the neighborhood (nor is there one planned to be), public transit via bus is readily available.

Real estate in San Francisco isn't cheap. It used to be that building-height restrictions kept condo skyscrapers from popping up like dandelions as they were in the rest of the city center. This means that today, while there are several condo skyscrapers built or being built now that the restriction has been lifted, there remain quite a few single-family houses. And since this area was intentionally developed for the elite, many of these houses are large and grand compared to some in other areas of the city.

These homes come at a premium price, though (at least US\$3,000 per square meter). Basic, newer condos generally start around US\$2,000 per square meter. In Coco del Mar, the exclusive oceanfront neighborhood just to the east of San Francisco, prices tend to be higher, with fewer homes and more skyscraper condos.

The Metro

After Panama City's economic boom, a major problem soon reared its ugly head: traffic.

This city was (and still is) notorious for its gridlocked rush hours. Instead of short, 15-minute commutes, drivers were stuck in traffic jams for an hour—sometimes more. The government knew it had to act. Every hour lost to traffic is a loss to the country's GDP.

The first line of the Panama Metro system opened in 2014, linking the city's downtown to the northeastern district of San Miguelito, where many Panamanian workers live, as well as to the Albrook bus depot, where many workers arrive daily when commuting by bus from out of town. The line covers 15.8 kms, with 15 stations, and cost close to US\$2 billion.

The metro is clean, safe, surprisingly reliable, and shockingly cheap, with a single fare costing only 35 cents. During its first year of operations, it carried an average of 200,000 people per day.

Further metro lines are planned, with Line 2 already under construction. The line will run 29 kms from the downtown Parque Urracá to Felipillo, on the easternmost edge of the city, past Tocumen International Airport. It is expected to be finished in time for Panama City's hosting of World Youth Day in January 2019.

Line 3 will run some 27 kms from the Albrook bus depot to the western commuter towns of Arraiján and La Chorrera. In April 2016, the government announced that the line would have financing and technological help from the Japanese government. Construction is slated to begin in 2017, with the line planned to begin operating by 2022.

Several other metro and tramway lines are planned to cover even more areas of the city and surrounding areas, with the masterplan extended until 2040.

Costa del Este

In Panama City, sometimes it's easy to forget you're in a Spanish-speaking, Latin American country. Sometimes, with all the brand-name shops, fast-food outlets, and U.S. vehicles, it takes reminding that this isn't the United States. This is especially so in the master-planned suburban neighborhood of Costa del Este.



What makes Costa del Este so "Americanized"? In true American fashion, it's the roads. They're wide, smooth, clean, and without the canopy of electrical wires that hangs over many other roads in Panama City. Costa del Este's wires were buried underground during development. The suburban community has its own street sweeping, trash collection, and wastewater treatment, separate from the rest of the city. And the wide roads and abundance of parking lots means getting around isn't a gridlocked nightmare.

The neighborhood was conceived in the mid-1990s as a city within a city, planned around a large park. It features condo skyscrapers, single-family homes, and gated communities located about 10 to 15 minutes (without traffic) from both downtown Panama City and the Tocumen International Airport. While living here without a personal vehicle would be a hassle, there is some intermittent bus service to the area.

Initially, the development had many skeptics. The 310-hectare development was partially built on a landfill, which didn't lend itself to the imagery of modern refinement that the developer was pitching. The success of the Costa del Este development silenced those critics, and the neighborhood is now one of the most valuable and exclusive in the city.

Plenty of multinational corporations have moved headquarters or operations here, and many of their executives live in Costa del Este. Most everything that one would need can be found here, including banks, supermarkets, salons, gyms, day care, medical clinics, dentists, hotels,

Panama City—One City, Many Options

parks, restaurants, and pubs. Situated directly beside Costa del Este is the Jack Nicklaus-designed, resort-style Santa María golf course.

The lack of a hip and happening nightlife doesn't seem to worry the older, more family-orientated residents. They're more interested in the schooling options, which include the Catholic Colegio San Agustín and the bilingual Academia Interamericana de Panamá.

Real estate in Costa del Este isn't cheap. Typically, prices are around US\$3,000 per square meter and rents around US\$2,500 per month.

Punta Paitilla, Punta Pacífica, Avenida Balboa



Put together, Punta Paitilla, Punto Pacífica, and Avenida Balboa represent central Panama City's most sought-after, skyscraping real estate.

Like much of this city, these three areas transformed themselves over the past two decades. Paitilla was an airport until 1999, much of Punta Pacífica was bare until the development of the Corredor Sur bypass linking Panama City to Tocumen International Airport, and Avenida Balboa was nothing but a stretch of road along the ocean with only a few adjacent buildings in the

1980s.

These neighborhoods are less mixed than others in Panama City, both in terms of income-class and zoning types. In these areas, you'll mostly find tall skyscrapers full of rich people, with little commercial activity save for a select few high-end restaurants, hotels, and casinos. That's not to say these areas aren't connected or livable, though. Nearby are all the amenities and attractions of Bella Vista, and in the Puntas, nearby are Multicentro, Multiplaza, and the John Hopkins-affiliated Punta Pacífica Hospital and Punta Paitilla Hospital. Parallel to Avenida Balboa is the Cinta Costera, and transit along the oceanfront is frequent.

Real estate in these skyscraper condos typically costs between US\$2,000 and US\$3,000 per square meter and rents for around US\$2,000 per month.

While the sky-high condos can command sky-high rents, the real big bucks come at sea level, where private developers are building two islands out into the ocean from Punta Pacífica. The Ocean Reef islands will cover almost 20 hectares combined and will easily be Panama's most exclusive community. The islands will include a marina, tennis courts, and likely many more amenities of the well-to-do. Reportedly, the oceanfront lots initially cost US\$1 million and sold out quickly, and resales are already looking at least double that amount. The second island is now being developed, and it's sure to be just as popular as the first.



Casco Viejo

Walking over the cobblestone streets of Casco Viejo, you can literally feel the history under your feet.

After the destruction of Panama City's original site (founded circa 1519) to pirates in the 1670s, the remaining inhabitants looked west, resettling in the present day location of Casco Viejo. In the case of Iglesia La Merced, the church's entire facade was rebuilt with the same old stones from its destroyed predecessor.

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.

As of late, Casco has turned into a trendy spot for nightlife, buzzing with activity from the hotels, hostels, and bars. Gone are the days when this neighborhood was seen as strictly off limits after dark. In fact, many of the neighborhood's former gang members are themselves leading the charge to bring safety to the streets. One such group is Esperanza Social Venture Club. They provide guided tours through former gang territory in Casco Viejo and provide opportunities for former gang members to turn their lives around.

For a guided tour a little more mainstream, Casco Viejo's official office gives tours on Fridays and Saturdays at 10 a.m., 10:30 a.m., and 11 a.m. from Plaza Independencia.

History buffs should be sure to visit the Panama Canal Museum, open Tuesday through Sunday from 9:30 a.m. to 5 p.m. Admission is US\$2, plus another US\$1 for headphones to listen to English narration of the Spanish presentations. The museum's three-story building was built in 1874 and served as headquarters for the French Canal Company and then the U.S. Isthmian Canal Commission before being used as a post office and now a museum. The museum is one of Panama's best, not just for canal history but for general Panamanian history, too, with an impressive presentation of the 1977 Carter-Torrijos Treaties that returned control of the canal from the United States to Panama.

Another interesting historical visit can be made at the Museum of Colonial Religious Art, open Tuesday through Saturday from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m., with admission for US\$1. As well, centuries-old churches such as La Catedral Metropolitana, Iglesia de Santo Domingo, Iglesia de la Merced, Iglesia de San José, Iglesia de la Compañía de Jesús, and Iglesia de San Francisco are located here.

If history isn't your thing, you could visit one of the outdoor plazas like Herrera Plaza, Plaza Francia, Plaza Independencia, or Plaza Bolívar and sip on a coffee, dine to the melodies of a Spanish guitarist, or bargain hunt at one of the weekend pop-up flea markets.

While other areas are scattered with run-of-the-mill diners and pubs, Casco's restaurants are almost all a cut above. Casa Sucre is a cozy café and breakfast spot with high ceilings, French doors, and antique décor. Dodo Bon Pan Café is a chic option for brunch, lunch, or tea. The French bistro is tucked away in a corner off Plaza Francia. The Fish Market, not to be confused with the seafood market nearby on Avenida Balboa, is an open area in an abandoned building and is one of the city's most popular restaurants, with a variety of fresh fish and seafood dishes as well as craft beer. For something on the more expensive side, check out Capital Bistro, right near the entrance to Casco. The views from their patio of the city skyline and ocean justify the premium prices on the menu. For late night drinks or dances, check out Mojitos Sin Mojitos, Relic, Tántalo, and Villa Augustina.

Casco has become an exclusive spot for real estate, with the UNESCO designation bringing a premium for what was previously viewed as nothing but a bunch of old rubble. Today, Casco Viejo's history is something to be celebrated and preserved. Restrictions regulate what can be done to property within the UNESCO boundaries. The penalties for destroying heritage assets can be harsh, even resulting in jail time. Property owners are given two years from purchase to begin construction on empty or condemned lots. Buying one of the renovated gems in Casco Viejo will generally cost around US\$4,000 per square meter.

Panama Viejo

Casco Viejo, founded during the 1670s, is not the original location of Panama City.

Founded in 1519, Panama City's original location survived several pirate attacks over some 150 years before falling to an attack from the legendary privateer Henry Morgan.

With a population of about 10,000 in 1671, the city was attacked, looted, and burned to the ground (though many now believe the fire wasn't started by Morgan and his gang, but by the inhabitants, in an attempt to prevent the invaders from looting further and reaching the gunpowder and munitions).

The surviving residents of Panama City decided to move the city a few miles west, to where Casco Viejo is located. It was from here that the modern-day city grew, eventually encapsulating the old ruins, known as Panama Viejo. Today, the remaining skeletons of the old buildings are designated as a UNESCO World Heritage Site and are undergoing efforts at further preservation.

Visitors can see the ruins up close at Panama Viejo, which are located to the east of Coco del Mar and to the west of Costa del Este.

Calidonia



Not much remains in central Panama City for affordable real estate. From Casco Viejo to Costa del Este, prices have shot up since the turn of the century. The national economy boomed, and the path of progress completely transformed the cityscape.

While bargain hunters have little luck finding much left in Panama City, one neighborhood is still affordable and ripe with potential for growth and development: Calidonia.

Originally, the Calidonia area served as housing for canal workers. It was further developed as a proper neighborhood for the 1915 National Expo, attracting attention (along with the newly constructed Panama Canal) from

around the world. Today, the neighborhood is mostly middle- and working-class, but is falling into disrepair.

The government, seeing the growth of the middle class in Panama and not ignoring it, decided to invest millions of dollars in rehabilitating the neighborhood. The plan includes regulating street vendors, billboards, and waste disposal; investing millions into urban renewal projects that promote green, pedestrian-friendly spaces and transportation options; improving lighting and security at night; and developing cultural projects and attractions, such as the Afro-Antillean Museum.

Aside from these improvements, Calidonia already has the framework to be a sought-after neighborhood. It's close to the Cinta Costera, has three metro stations, and features the busy Avenida Central shopping destination. Before the city's boom and the arrival of megamalls, Avenida Central was the top destination for shopping. It's still popular, with a wide variety of hardware, grocery, appliance, clothing stores, and rundown hotels, though snooty expats often regard it as nothing but a dangerous slum. In reality, the street is busy with regular folk and enterprising entrepreneurs. A visit during daylight hours is safe and nothing to worry about.

The dormant value in Calidonia is evident. It has location, accessibility, and historical charm—at a fraction of the prices commanded in neighboring areas like Casco or Bella Vista. While some of the oceanfront is being built up with skyscrapers where condos could cost US\$2,500 per square meter, the rest of the neighborhood is much cheaper. Plenty of properties can be found for around or under US\$1,000 per square meter, though don't expect to be living a life of luxury. These will be your everyday, average apartments and homes—no glitz or glamour here.

Panamá Pacífico

Forbes called it "The Most Audacious Real Estate Project In The World," and that's no overstatement. Panamá Pacífico is shaping up to be one of Panama's biggest developments in real estate, which, given the competition, is no small feat.

The massive project is expected to draw a total of US\$4 billion in investments and be worth US\$10 billion upon completion. The plans are for an entire master-planned community to be built on the west bank of the Panama Canal entrance at the location of the former U.S. Howard Airforce Base. The area of the project is about 3,500 acres.

The project aims to incorporate the tropical environment into its design and utilize the latest in sustainable-design standards. Almost 50% of the land will be preserved as greenspace, and a 37-acre central park will be a main feature.



While the project is still being developed, one of the biggest pieces of infrastructure is already a go. The Panamá Pacífico International Airport is serviced by budget airline VivaColombia with routes to Bogotá, Cali, and Medellín. Airline Wingo has announced that beginning Dec. 1, 2016, they'll be flying to Bogotá, Cali, Medellín, Guatemala City, and San José.

One of the major infrastructure developments on the horizon for Panamá Pacífico will be an eventual metro station, though that is still a few years away. The station is planned for the metro's third line, and construction has barely just begun on the second. Nonetheless, once there, the station will bring a crucial connection to the rest of the city, alleviating the traffic stress that anyone making the commute will have to put up with until then.

Other services and amenities will include several restaurants, shops, a leisure center, Olympic-sized pool, Power Club gym, baseball field, basketball courts, tennis courts, Citibank, Mailboxes Etc., hardware store, medical center, dentist, pharmacy, schools, and, last but not least, a golf course.

Panamá Pacífico is as family-orientated as a community can be in Panama, especially one so close to the city. Schooling options include the Magen David Academy for Jewish children, Howard Kids Academy, Knightsbridge International School, French school Lycée Français Paul

Gauguin de Panamá, and Panamá Pacífico Academy, the first virtual high school in Panama. Post-secondary education opportunities include Universidad del Caribe and the Technical University of Panama.

The Panamá Pacífico Special Economic Area offers one of the most attractive set of benefits for businesses and corporations in Panama. The aim of the area is to attract foreign direct investment, bring industry to the area, and provide high-paying jobs for the Panamanian people along with the incoming foreign labor. The benefits include an array of tax exemptions as well as looser labor regulations regarding hiring, firing, and paying for holidays and overtime.

Panamá Pacífico has already attracted over 200 businesses, including 3M, Dell, VF, BASF, Samtec, and Caterpillar. It's expected that the community will eventually employ more than 40,000 people.

In March 2016, the project was estimated to have about 1,000 completed homes with about 85% of development left to go, meaning there will be plenty of opportunities to get in while the getting is good. Real estate prices usually cost around US\$2,500 per square meter, which isn't bad when considering these are all brand new homes and condos.

The Former Panama Canal Zone

The former Panama Canal Zone was a territory of the United States during their occupation of the Panama Canal from 1903 to 1979. The zone consisted of a 5-mile buffer from the canal, though was shorter around the cities of Colón and Panama City.

The Canal Zone, for all intents and purposes, was 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. "Gold" and "silver" designations were used to distinguish payroll, with the white employees mostly getting paid in wages determined by gold, and the black employees mostly paid in wages determined by silver.

As a result of the Torrijos-Carter Treaties that relinquished control of the canal to Panama, the zone was placed under joint U.S.-Panamanian control from 1979 until 1999, when Panama gained full control over the canal and surrounding area.

Today, the communities of the former Canal Zone, with its old military barracks and facilities, are tropical residential areas with unique architectural designs, popular with immigrants 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. In the former Canal Zone, you can see sloths,

monkeys, anteaters, ocelots, and many different tropical bird species. But the zone isn't far from downtown, and without traffic the drive is only 10 to 20 minutes, depending on where in the zone you live. Buses are scarce in much of the area, and taxis expensive, so having a private vehicle makes transportation a lot easier.

Clayton is one of the communities in the zone furthest from downtown. The Embassy Club is located here, an affluent gated community that features a central social area where residents enjoy the use of a large swimming pool, gym, spa, and small café. Nearby is the actual U.S. Embassy. For a gated community that's a little less expensive, check out Clayton Village. 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.

At Albrook you'll find the city's bus depot for trips out of the city, the end of the line for the Metro line, a domestic airport, and an expansive shopping mall with various shops, hardware and department stores, groceries, banks, a movie theater, bowling alley, casino, and much more.

Schools in and around Clayton and the zone include Colegio Javier, Colegio Las Esclavas, Kings College, St. Mary's Catholic School, Boston International School, and Balboa Academy.

Close to Clayton is the City of Knowledge, a 300-acre innovation, research, development, and education campus sponsored and founded by the government during the 1990s. Generous tax exemptions and lax immigration regulations have attracted more than 300 organizations, academic institutions, and companies, with more than 5,000 people living or working on the campus. International education programs with McGill University, University of Pennsylvania, Florida State University, Saint Louis University, Iowa State University are established here, along operations for the United Nations, UNICEF, and the Red Cross. Other facilities on campus include a health clinic, shops, restaurants, a hotel, gym, and sports and conference facilities. The annual Panama Jazz Festival usually takes place here.

Also in the former Canal Zone are the neighborhoods of Balboa, La Boca, Diablo, and Ancón.

The former administration area for the Canal Zone, Balboa is slightly more rugged than other areas in the zone, but the houses are large. La Boca has fewer amenities than other parts of the zone and is home to the International Maritime University. In Diablo (a name that religious puritans at one point unsuccessfully tried to change to Altos de Jesús), there's a boat launch.

Located in Balboa is the Panama City passenger station for the Panama Canal Railway. The train departs the Panama City station at 7:15 a.m. toward Colón and leaves Colón to return to Panama City at 5:15 p.m.

on weekdays only. The one-way fare is US\$25 for adults and US\$15 for children. Retired travelers who are Panamanian residents pay US\$17.50 each way. They also have a monthly pass for around US\$700.

Atop the 654-foot summit of Cerro Ancón (Ancon Hill) flies the Panamanian flag, an emotional and symbolic achievement for Panamanians old enough to remember seeing the U.S. flag here for decades. The trek to the top (by foot or car) is open to all now, and is a popular vista for tourists and locals alike. Houses line the winding road up to the summit. The Theatre Guild of Ancon has their stage in the area, performing English-language productions for several decades now.

The Amador Causeway stretches out into the ocean near the opening of the canal and links four small islands. Built with removed soil from the canal, it was initially meant as a breakwater for the canal. U.S. military fortifications were built on the islands during World War II to protect the canal, and some of those old fortifications remain. Today, the islands of Naos and Culebra are home to Smithsonian Institute research facilities, and Isla Flamenco has boat docks, restaurants, and other cruise-ship attractions.

Amador is one of the city's top nightlife destinations. Next to the Figali Convention Center is the Zona Vida, with nightclubs, lounges, and bars that attract a young, festive crowd. A less rowdy spot for a drink, popular with older crowds, is the Balboa Yacht Club (and no, you don't need to have a yacht). For daytime activities, there are many options. Rent a tandem side-by-side bike for a cruise along the causeway, catch a ferry to Isla Taboga (about 30 minutes and US\$10 each way), or visit the Biomuseo, designed by world-renowned architect Frank Gehry.

The colorful and jagged edges of the Biomuseo make it distinguishable from miles away, and is the only example of the famous architect's work in Latin America, designed to represent the Panamanian Isthmus rising out of the ocean and bridging the two continents, infusing their biodiversity forever. The entry fee is US\$22 for foreigners and US\$12 for residents. The 4,000-square-meter museum has eight galleries, a shop, café, public atrium, and outdoor biodiversity park. The neighboring Smithsonian Tropical Research Institute participates in the exhibitions.

The government is currently undergoing renovation efforts on Amador. Road widening, additional bike and walking paths, a new convention center, and cruise-ship facilities on Isla Perico are all part of the plan. Work is expected to finish sometime in 2018.

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.

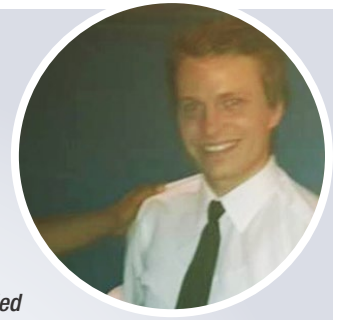
Panama City—One City, Many Options

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 there.

Panama City is a booming metropolis like none other in Latin America. But lost in the stories of skyscrapers and scandalous papers is the fact that Panama City offers a variety of diverse communities. For arriving immigrants, it's just a matter of finding the one that suits your lifestyle and desires. **PL**

About The Author

Matt Chilliak is a political consultant from Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, with an honors degree in political studies from the University of Saskatchewan and minors in economics and Spanish. He has traveled throughout Canada, the United States, and Latin America, including Mexico, the Dominican Republic, Cuba, Colombia, and Panama. He also holds certification from Fine Art Bartending School and mixes a mean Old Fashioned.



Enjoy Annualized Returns Of 16% From A Fruit That's In Huge Demand

- A turnkey opportunity to invest in agriculture without having to plant, manage, or harvest crops yourself...
- Capitalize on a fruit that has high global demand with a fast-growing market...
- Partner with an established farm operator that has a proven track record...
- Enjoy annualized returns of 16% over 25 years with a minimum investment of only US\$45,000...



[CLICK HERE TO FIND OUT MORE](#)

RON PONCHE DE LA ABUELA (GRANDMA'S EGG NOG)



Ingredients:

- 1 bottle of rum (Ron Abuelo is a great choice. A liter size is good to start with. If you like it stronger, add more.)
- 1 spoonful of ground nutmeg (anywhere from a teaspoon to a tablespoon will do)
- 12 egg yolks, lightly beaten
- 2 ½ cups water
- 3 ½ 12-oz. cans evaporated milk (avoid fat free or light versions; higher milkfat content prevents clotting)
- 3 14-oz. cans sweetened, condensed milk
- 1 cup cornstarch

Christmas and New Year's in Panama are festive occasions for celebrating with family and friends. Wherever the party takes you, typical dishes are the star of the show. Hosts receive their guests with generous portions of turkey and ham, as well as *arroz con pollo* (or *arroz con guandú*), potato salad, *plátanos en tentación*, and tamales—all piled high on a plate that brims over.

One of the tastes of the season that can't be missed is the traditional spiked egg nog, known locally as *ron ponche*. Around this time of year, supermarkets stock up on an inexpensive, alcohol-free version of the dessert-like beverage called *ponche de huevo*, by brands such as Estrella Azul, Bonlac, and Borden. Premium bottled brands of spiked egg nog also start to appear, such as Minita, relatively easy to find, and the elusive and exclusive Gourmet, available at Felipe Motta Wine Stores & Deli.

As good as each of these brands are, none hold a candle to the delectable version that follows. This homemade *ron ponche* recipe is handed down from my cousin's grandmother, one of the rare breed of Panamanians who've lived their entire lives in the *intramuro* portion of Casco Antiguo. *Intramuro* literally means "within the walls," and refers to the fortifications built around Casco Antiguo to protect the new settlement after the original city, today known as Panamá La Vieja, was burned down in 1671. A treasured part of my cousin's family's book of heirloom recipes, *ron ponche de la abuela* is hands down the best spiked egg nog I have ever tried.



Directions:

1. Steep the rum with the ground nutmeg the night before. Vanilla extract or fresh vanilla bean can be added to taste, as well.
2. Beat egg yolks for 10 minutes or until they change color, then reserve.
3. In a separate pan, combine the evaporated and condensed milk with the cornstarch over low heat, stirring constantly until the mixture thickens.
4. Remove from heat and, using an electric blender, slowly incorporate the beaten egg yolks, mixing vigorously to prevent the egg from curdling.
5. Allow to cool then add the rum to taste.
6. Strain before refrigerating.
7. Serve cold, garnishing with a dash or a stick of cinnamon.

*Food safety tip: Don't count on the alcohol to kill unwanted bacteria. To avoid spreading salmonella, get the egg mixture to a temperature of 160°F. To accomplish this, heat the cornstarch and milk to above this mark, then incorporate the egg yolks as indicated, checking that the temperature doesn't fall below 160°F until the egg nog is fully emulsified. More information at FoodSafety.gov.



PANAMANIAN-STYLE CHRISTMAS TURKEY



Ingredients:

- 1 turkey (we used a 23-pound bird)
- 5 packets *caldo de pollo* (chicken stock packets; try Sazón packets made with *culantro* and *achiote* by Goya if you're in the United States)
- 1 tsp. salt
- 1 tbsp. fresh peppercorn (crushed)
- ½ cup cilantro (finely chopped)
- ½ cup green pepper (minced)
- ¼ cup red pepper (minced)
- 1 large yellow onion (minced)
- 5 bulbs of garlic (minced)
- 1½ cup salsa *condimentada* (similar to Worcestershire sauce, but not the same)
- ½ cup water

Turkey is a holiday staple in Panama. Unlike the Stateside version, it's usually made without stuffing or gravy, and is doctored up with a plenty of Latin spice.

The use of a food processor makes this recipe much easier since most of the vegetables need to be very finely chopped or minced.

Directions:

1. Pre-heat oven to 325° F.
2. Mix water, green and red peppers, onion, and cilantro. Reserve mixture.
3. In a large roasting pan, rub turkey down with salt, pepper, and *caldo de pollo*.
4. Pour the salsa *condimentada* over turkey and massage in.
5. Rub turkey with the minced garlic and pepper/onion/cilantro mixture.
6. Cover the turkey with foil and bake for two hours.
7. Turn turkey over, re-cover with foil, and continue baking for another two hours.
8. Remove foil, turn turkey over again, and bake one more hour without foil.
9. Pour all of the juice/vegetables from the pan into a pot and bring to a boil. Let it simmer until thickened. This sauce will be poured over the turkey once it's sliced.
10. Enjoy!

Panama's Gold Standard Private Beach Community

**Los Islotes on the Azuero Sunset Coast:
A fully master-planned paradise
with elite amenities and
postcard picture
views...**

[CLICK HERE TO FIND OUT MORE](#)





El Bazar Ruso



(Russian Bazaar)

By Charles Conn





Panama is an international tapestry of a city, a true melting pot where world cultures have been converging for centuries. Such diversity is reflected in myriad international events held throughout the year. Organized by resident civic organizations, business leaders, and cultural groups, these events provide émigrés with a sense of community and nostalgia for their homelands, while offering locals a chance to learn about their multifaceted neighbors from around the world.

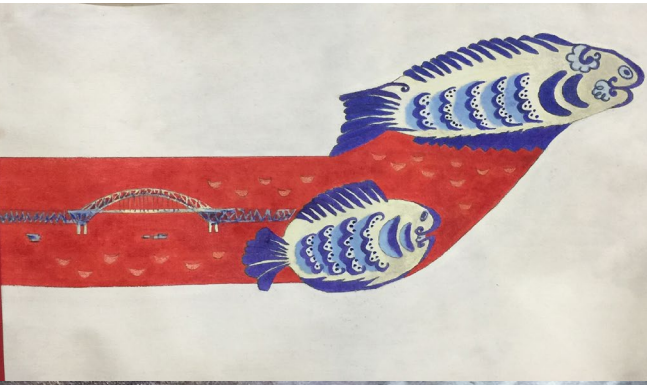
In the middle of November, the city's Russian community presented their second annual Festival Internacional de la Cultura Rusa (International Russian Culture Festival) at Hotel El Panamá, bringing the sights, sounds, and flavors of the world's largest country—from the Caucasus to the high steppes—all the way to the tiny, tropical Isthmus of Panama.

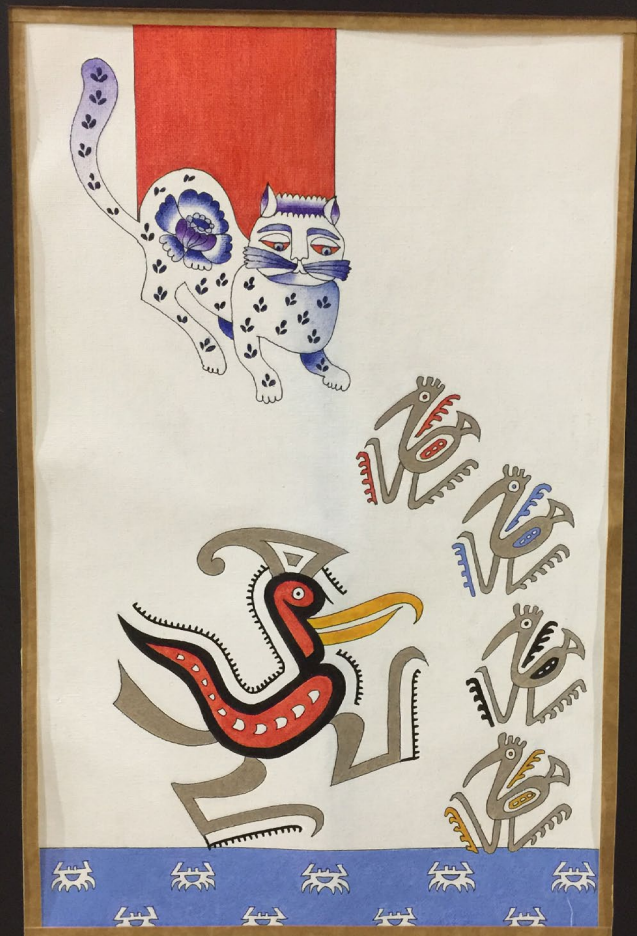
Attendees were delighted with traditional, Russian folk performances, theatrical and musical presentations, art and fashion, and gastronomical delights from across the continent. Highlights included an array of visually stunning vestments representing the varied cultures of Russia, as well as an evening filled with songs both ancient and contemporary, interspersed with mesmerizing dance choreographies in a convivial and friendly atmosphere.

Enjoy a glance into this visually rich event in this month's photospread... and here's looking forward to next year's Bazar Ruso.

In the words of Boris Y. Marchuk, the Russian ambassador to Panama who presided over the festivities, "¡Viva Panamá y viva Rusia!"











Photos courtesy of Bazar Ruso.
More information at BazarRuso.com.



MEET US IN PANAMA

This beautiful little country with two long coastlines qualifies more than ever as one of the world's top retirement, investment, business, tax, and offshore havens...

[Click Here To Learn More](#)

Early Bird
DISCOUNT
Available!

Celebrating The Holidays, Tropical Style

How To Navigate The Season Like A Local

By Charles Conn

The holidays in Panama are a tropical affair, indeed. Though the country will be marking Christmas and New Year's like the rest of the world, here, the celebrations take on decidedly local flavor, influenced as much by centuries-old Latin customs as they are by long-established American influence.

For starters, there's the way things kick off towards the end of November, a month-long celebration of the nation's independence from Spain, separation from Colombia, and subsequent founding as a republic. The month before December is filled with solemn, civic observations, patriotic displays, high school marching bands, and folkloric presentations. Once the last *acto protocolar* (ceremonial act) has concluded on Nov. 28, the country is officially ready to tackle Christmas tinsel and New Year garlands.



Panamanian President Juan Carlos Varela presides over one of last year's independence day parades

But First, Black Friday

The lack of an official Thanksgiving provides carte blanche for Christmas to sneak in a little earlier than it should, and for this we have Black Friday to thank. What began as one mall's publicity stunt in 2012 has snowballed into a government-endorsed endeavor promoted by the country's Tourism Authority which, early on, saw huge potential for capitalizing on the tens of thousands of visitors who arrive from across the region just to take

advantage of the discounts and deals. This year, the event morphed into an entire Black (three-day) Weekend sale that extended into Monday, a national holiday commemorating Panama's independence from Spain.



Shoppers wait in line all night to be the first to get to the deals (Photo: Eric Batista/La Prensa)

This is the official, if frenzied, start of the shopping season, just in time for the decorum surrounding Dec. 8, the Day of the Immaculate Conception, better known as Mother's Day. This is when the spirit of the holidays takes on more gravitas. (Maybe it's because Mother's Day is second only to Christmas as far as driving Black Friday sales.)

Going into December, Mother's Day certainly sets the tone for Christmas, a family-oriented holiday in a family-oriented culture. With no Thanksgiving stealing the show, it's also a food-focused (and party-focused) time all the way through the New Year.

The Panamanian Holiday Table

Panamanians don't need much of an excuse to party, and Christmas isn't just as good a reason as any, it's one of the best!

From quiet, family-focused dinners to all-out block parties with the neighbors (or even at the trendy discotheque *du jour*), everyone finds time to get decked

out to celebrate with loved ones. Wherever the party takes you, it's best to not show up empty-handed. Your host will appreciate your thoughtfulness for bringing an extra bottle of bubbly, wine, or (for the fearless) Seco Herrerano, the made-in-Panama, sugar-cane-based, 70-proof spirit.



Made by Varela Hermanos, the president's family's company, Seco Herrerano is a popular spirit at national celebrations

Pavo (turkey) and *jamón* (ham) are holiday standards, but are often overshadowed by local delicacies such as tamales and *arroz con guandú*. The appearance of *guandú* (a local variety of pigeon peas) in rice recipes is a quintessential sign of the season because the first crops mature and are harvested around this time of the year. Until larger quantities are harvested later towards January, the high demand and scarcity of the grain in December can cause prices to soar above US\$4 a pound, and two pounds are the minimum needed for a rice dish to turn out decently. So if your dinner host presents you with a plateful of this typical dish at this year's Christmas shindig, be sure to voice your appreciation.

Sancocho, the traditional chicken soup made with *ñame* (a starchy tuber) and flavored with *culantro* (cilantro's pungent cousin), is often served around this time of year. It's famous as a hangover cure, which is why bowlfuls of the soup make the rounds at New Year's parties after the midnight hour.

Getting Into The Spirit Of Navidad

Nowhere is the Panamanian blending of traditions—both local and imported—more evident than in December.

For a touch of the traditional, try visiting the interior of the country where folks create large-scale Nativity scenes that become roadside attractions in their own right. The most famous one is erected each year by a family in the neighborhood of Las Palmeras in David, Chiriquí. Comprising over 5,000 pieces and measuring around 130 meters, the pesebre has attracted crowds from miles around for over 19 years to the family's garage in Casa 58 of Urbanización La Perla.



The annual, oversized nativity scene in David, Chiriquí, has drawn crowds for over 19 years (Photo: Mi Diario)

The people of David, Chiriquí, love their *pesebres* so much so that one of the town's residents, Yajaira Morales Gómez, confects edible ones using traditional Panamanian fruit cake as the base, topped with painstakingly crafted manger scenes made with sugary fondant. Each edible figurine takes Yajaira about two hours to make, and the finished cake about six hours. These are special-ordered by her customers weeks in advance, along with other mouth-watering specialties such as rum cake, at Adelina's Café & Pastelería in Urbanización El Carmen.



Carols by Candlelight has become a perennial favorite for locals and expats alike (Photo: U.S. Embassy)

Across the country, holiday concerts, too, are all the rage, mostly organized by local charitable groups, filling area churches and theaters with the unmistakable sounds of the season. One such event, *Carols by Candlelight*, has become a perennial expat favorite put together by the CanadaPLUS Club (clubcanadaplus@gmail.com). In its 6th iteration, the concert includes participation of various schools, singing groups, and special guest performers, with the money raised benefitting the Santo Tomás Hospital and Vision of Hope.

Decking The Halls

You don't have to travel far to get into the holiday spirit. Every major mall features an enormous Christmas tree as a centerpiece attraction, with lighting ceremonies taking place the first weeks of December. The Christmas tree in Metro Mall presides over an indoor skating rink—open through Jan. 15—that will have you thinking you've been transported to Rockefeller Center in the heart of Manhattan.

For those who prefer ice-skating as a spectator sport, Disney On Ice is scheduled for Dec. 13–18 at the Roberto Durán Arena, leaving fans of Disney characters to collectively breathe a huge sigh of relief. When it was announced that the Disney-themed Christmas parade that took place the last two years running in Panama City was cancelled for 2016, many were concerned they would have to do without their Mickey Mouse fix. It's just as well things got moved off the humid streets and into the frosty confines of an ice-skating rink, what with the thickly cushioned outfits the characters wear.



In lieu of a Disney parade, Mickey and friends are opting for a cooler sort of holiday spectacle this year (Photo: Hubert Yu)

At the ready to fill the void left by Disney, Panama City's mayor's office put together a parade that they felt would better reflect local customs without skimping on pomp or fireworks. Scheduled for Sunday, Dec. 11, it takes place along the Cinta Costera, with plenty of floats, marching bands, and regional folklore presentations—all after 5 p.m.

Speaking recently about the parade on a local TV news show, mayor José Blandón proudly announced this year's grand Christmas "innovation": a US\$1.1 million lighting scheme that will bring festive illumination to 10 city locations, including *Vía Argentina* (nearby the LIOS offices) and *Mi Pueblito* on Ancon Hill, where a live Nativity scene is scheduled for Dec. 18. The city's official Christmas concert, which, like the parade, takes place on the Cinta Costera, is scheduled for Christmas day.



Eschewing a sleigh for a 4x4, Santa Claus rides high in Panama City's Christmas Day parade (Photo: La Estrella)

Closing Out The Year

Be sure to enjoy that last blast of yuletide cheer before it all goes the way of Christmas past, for just as soon as Santa's yearly visit ends do holiday revelers turn their focus to New Year's.

If you find yourself overindulging with food and drink this season, no need to wait for January to enact your get-healthy resolutions. Don ye now your gay apparel and head out to the 5th annual Santa's Race, a 5k taking place Dec. 18 in the City of Knowledge (see this issue's "Out And About" section for more details).

Then, a few days after opening gifts, check out the Atlapa Convention Center for a day of dance and culture when the Asociación Pro Danza De Panamá presents the timeless, classic ballet, "The Nutcracker," Dec. 28–29 (visit Panatickets.com for pricing and tickets).

By this time, you may have noticed the countryside (and some parts of the city) has gotten populated by creepy effigies symbolizing the Old Year, but done up to represent prominent political and cultural figures. Known as *muñecos de año viejo* (old year dolls) or *muñecos judas* (Judas dolls), these artfully crafted, life-sized dolls are made with old clothing and shoes, a wig perhaps, and stuffed with dried leaves and sometimes firecrackers.

Judas dolls represent all the good and bad of the year gone by, all of which is released in cathartic ritual when they're burned at midnight while folks ring in the New Year. The dolls are best appreciated along the Pan-American Highway, especially near San Carlos, where a cottage industry has built up around their confection, with people charging upwards of US\$100 per effigy. In Chame, they can run up to US\$500.

Local politicians are by far the most requested muñecos. Last year, ex-president Ricardo Martinelli was a prominently featured figure, as well as other Panamanian officials embroiled in heady, front-page scandals. But there's another side to the coin, for popular public personalities, too, are fair fodder for the doll-makers. Other personalities that have gone up in smoke in year's past include U.S. president Barack Obama, Homer Simpson, and Chespirito, the well-loved Mexican comedian who died in 2014.



After bungling the 2015 Miss Universe pageant, U.S. comedian Steve Harvey became a popular New Year muñeco in Panama (Photo: Pablo Castillo Miranda/Panamá América)

Those Quaint And Crazy Customs

Panamanians tend to harbor a fair amount of superstitious beliefs, and at no other time is this more evident than in the days leading up to the stroke of midnight marking the arrival of the New Year. Incense are burned, special baths are prepared, and dwellings are cleaned and blessed, all to ensure the year ahead will be filled with abundance and positivity. There are many such good luck rituals in which you can take part, including:

- Eating 12 grapes: Make a wish with each bite, then save and count the seeds... that'll be your good luck number for the year ahead...
- Holding money, assuring 2017 will be a wealthy one... even your last coins will do...
- Wheeling around your suitcase... It doesn't have to be packed, but walking it around the house—or around the block—will fill your year with travel and adventure...
- Wearing yellow underwear: Only good luck and happiness is ahead of you now, officially. Nothing to worry about in the year ahead...
- Donning red attire... and you might just begin a year of romance, ensuring a great start to your New Year... maybe even sparking an unexpected New Year's kiss.

The holidays don't properly end until the Day of the Magi on Jan. 6, a traditional celebration that's an institution in places like Mexico, Spain, Peru, and

Puerto Rico, where children expectantly await for gifts brought to them by the three wise men. Because of this, shoes (or shoeboxes) are left out the night before to be filled, like Christmas stockings on the 25th, with little baubles and often money.

Rosca de reyes (king cake) is eaten at this time, similar in style to the ones made famous in New Orleans, minus the plastic baby Jesus. While Panama City dwellers don't mark the occasion with much fanfare, the tradition survives in the town of Macaracas, Los Santos province, where Día de los Reyes Mago has been observed for nearly 200 years.

The town folks customarily put on a play that reenacts the fabled visit of Balthasar, Melchior, and Gaspar to the infant Nazarene in the manger, in addition to an ox-drawn cart parade and various folkloric presentations.



The town of Macaracas in Los Santos has marked the Day of the Magi for nearly 200 years

Of the authentic village activities visitors may come to witness is the building of a casa de *quincha*, an event in which the community comes together to construct a house for a family in need. Made of *quincha* (an adobe-like mud) and bamboo, this typical-style construction requires the mixing of dirt and water on a grand scale. To accomplish this, shoes (or *cutarra* sandals) are removed, pant legs are rolled up to mid-calf, and arm-in-arm all in a row, groups of people take turns stomping back and forth over a suitable patch of ground until the claylike mixture of mud has turned out just right. It's sweat-inducing, back-breaking work, but coming together—and taking a few shots of Seco Herrerrano—helps to lighten the load.

Jan. 6 is also the day Panamanians burn their Christmas trees, though in recent years prohibitions have been issued against this activity taking place in the city metro area due to fire safety concerns.

By this day, global warming notwithstanding, the end of the rainy season has gradually set in, the torrential rains replaced by lower humidity levels and the trade winds that mark the dry season months.



The Bridge of the Americas alights as the country celebrates (Photo: Panama Canal Country)

If you've survived the holidays intact, you now have “summer” to look forward to, and the Bacchanalia that finds an entire country at play—*carnaval*. **PL**





SIMON LETTER

Taxes are a complicated and confusing thing for many... as is understanding banking overseas, residency and second citizenship, currency fluctuation, foreign property purchase, and many other aspects of administration overseas.

But none of this is confusing to resident offshore guru Lief Simon. Lief's namesake publication, *Simon Letter*, clarifies all of these important issues and more, each month.

Put your investments on autopilot, virtually eliminate risk, minimize or even eliminate your tax burden (legally), grow your wealth and sleep like a baby...

"I'll give you the intelligence and the judgment you need to make your own determinations. My aim is to help you take control of your life and your future as I've taken control of mine... to give you options..." --Lief Simon

SIMON LETTER 



CLICK HERE
TO LEARN MORE

¿Cómo Se Dice? (How Do You Say?)

By Charles Conn

Christmas is one of Panama's biggest celebrations and is a festive affair, despite the heat. Light displays and festive décor are common, with the city pulling out all stops for the annual holiday parade.

'Tis the season for traditional Panamanian food, which you're sure to encounter at any local Christmas-themed event. With all the staying up, feasting, drinking, and partying—and the requisite fireworks at midnight—Christmas across the isthmus serves as practice for ringing in New Year's. Indeed, the holiday celebrations don't properly conclude until Jan. 6, the Day of the Magi, when Panamanians burn their trees... and begin to look forward to carnival.

To help you successfully navigate your busy social schedule this season, dress to impress... and arm yourself with this handy, holiday-themed lexicon.

- Christmas = *Navidad*
- Christmas Eve = *Nochebuena (also Víspera De Navidad)*
- Christmas Day = *Día de Navidad*
- Carols = *Villancicos*
- Santa Claus = *Papá Noel (also Santa Claus)*
- The North Pole = *El Polo Norte*
- Elves = *Duendes*
- Sleigh = *Trineo*
- Reindeer = *Renos*
- Christmas Tree = *Árbol de Navidad*
- Christmas Lights = *Luces de Navidad*
- Christ Child = *Niño Dios*
- Nativity Scene = *Nacimiento (also Pesebre)*
- Manger = *Pesebre*
- The Three Wise Men = *Los Tres Reyes Magos*
- Gifts = *Regalos*
- Christmas Card = *Tarjeta de Navidad*
- Decorations = *Decoraciones*
- Christmas Stockings = *Medias de Navidad*
- Christmas Dinner = *Cena de Navidad*
- Christmas Party = *Fiesta de Navidad*
- Egg Nog = *Ponche de Huevo*
- Spiked Egg Nog = *Ron ponche*
- Cookies = *Galletas*
- Candies = *Golosinas (also Pastillas)*
- Fruit Cake = *Dulce de fruta*
- Turkey = *Pavo*
- Ham = *Jamón*
- Toast = *Brindis*
- Wine = *Vino*
- Champagne = *Champán*
- Fireworks = *Fuegos Artificiales*
- Firecrackers = *Bombitas*
- New Year's = *Año Nuevo*
- New Year's Eve = *Víspera de Año Nuevo (also Nochevieja)*

Phrases:

Open the gifts. = *Abrir los regalos.*

Merry Christmas! = *¡Feliz Navidad! (also ¡Felices Pascuas!)*

Happy New Year! = *¡Feliz Año Nuevo! (also ¡Próspero Año Nuevo!)*

Season's Greetings! (or Happy Holidays!) = *¡Felices Fiestas!*

Make a toast. = *Hacer un brindis.*



Return Of The Zonian

By Katharine Cavanaugh

Meet Charles Conn, a 41-year-old American expat living in Panama City. Charles' expat status is a bit more intricate than most... his mother is Panamanian, he was born in Panama, and he also grew up in Panama in the early 90s. He moved to the United States when he was 17 to attend college and after some time in the States he decided to move back to Panama.

Panama Letter: So let's start at the beginning... Where did you first live in Panama?

Well, my father was a U.S. civilian employee on Fort Amador and this afforded my family housing there. I was born in the Canal Zone at Gorgas Army Hospital and lived on Fort Amador until I was about 13. When my father retired from service we lost our base privileges and in 1988—a year before the U.S. invasion—we moved into the city.

PL: Which Panama City neighborhood do you call home now?

Charles Conn: I currently live in my childhood home in a neighborhood called Pedregal. It has more recently been branded under the moniker Panama Norte... A lot of money is currently being funneled into infrastructure projects there to slowly build up the area in much the same way that Panama Oeste was established.

My house is located on what is known as Corredor de Los Pobres (Highway of the Poor), the highway that connects Ricardo de Alfaro road to Colón. It serves as a way for drivers to bypass the tolls associated with taking the Panama Expressway, hence the nickname.

Before its new name and the new developments within, this neighborhood had a bit of a reputation. I once told a friend where I lived and I remember their reaction was something like,

"Oh my God! But that's where they dispose of the bodies." And, you know, at that time he wasn't wrong. It was a tough little neighborhood.

PL: Did your neighborhood have that reputation when you first arrived there in 1988?

CC: No, when I first moved to Pedregal it was more rural and there was not as much crime as there was in the mid to late 90s. It was an isolated rural community that people associated with grassy fields. When my father first purchased the lot there was no electrical service and there wasn't any water. He built the house himself and installed the electrical meter and water pump.

I think the city's growth has finally caught up to the neighborhood, though, and has begun encroaching. I'd say that in the next five years it's going to be unrecognizable.

A gas station just opened in the last two weeks and it's a big deal. They built the station but for a while it sat vacant. They finally pumped in the gas and now cars are filling up. It has been a little crazy to witness progress like this over the last several years in that part of town. Although I did miss out on some of the development when I was in the States.

PL: Let's talk about that... Why did you leave Panama?

CC: In 1993 I left Panama to attend college. It's funny, I told myself that if I didn't get in I just wouldn't go to college, and then I got in



to the University of Southern California's film school. It was only many years later that I learned that at the time of my application the odds for acceptance were more stringent than, say, Harvard Law School. Knowing that now, I feel even luckier to have had that opportunity. I graduated in four years but stayed in Los Angeles for three more years.

PL: So you left Panama to attend USC... What elements in Panama inspired you to go to film school?

CC: I would say that the U.S. invasion was a big source of inspiration to me. I couldn't really shake that. It was very impactful. I was 12 years old, going on 13, and I literally thought I was going to die. It was the morning of Dec. 20, 1989. It was right before Christmas and I remember waking up to my brother saying, "We're going to die! We're going to die!"

By that time we had moved to that rural area in Pedregal, so I didn't feel as protected as I think I would have had my family and I been on the base. I felt we were out on our own.

The experience really informed me as an artist and as someone interested in telling stories. In fact, I wrote about the invasion as part of my application for college. I think it was a big reason I was accepted.

PL: What are the American-Panamanian dynamics of your family like considering the history between the two countries?

CC: What really marks my childhood was the feeling of growing up in a divided country where we were on the American side and the Panamanian side was... over there. Yet, my father was from Virginia and my mother was from Panama, so we were living on both sides, and it was odd knowing that my aunts couldn't just come over to visit.

In fact, one of my uncles was in the Panamanian military, residing just on the other side of the fence in Amador as a member of Batallón 2000, and he came very close to losing his life.

Even given his perspective of living that side of history, today he and my Panamanian family don't really harbor any animosity toward my American family nor any bad feelings about that era, so, oddly enough, I feel like that divisiveness is no longer in play.

PL: What brought you back to Panama?

CC: About three years ago I attended my grandfather's funeral in Panama. I was here for the last of his illness to support my mother, primarily. While here for the funeral I was able to witness just how much Panama had changed in the time I was away, and I wanted to experience this new version of the country, now, as an adult. It seemed to be the right time and place to build roots and settle down. So without much of a plan at all, I packed all of my belongings and moved to Panama.

PL: How do you find working in Panama?

CC: When I first arrived, I hoped to pursue a writing career as an independent author or freelance journalist, anything really to allow me the chance to get paid to write. I got my first opportunity with a job at El Visitante—a weekly bilingual publication based in tourism that's very well known here in the expat community.

After three years I started looking for a better work-life balance. I found that I wasn't able to enjoy many of the critical elements of Panama that had drawn me back: beach and sun. I took a year-long sabbatical to write a book which is currently being edited. It's a meditation guide book called "3-Minute Meditations for Busy Bodies." I then started a new position as a copywriter and I'm really enjoying the mobility of the profession that allows me to live and work in Panama.

PL: What's your dream Panama neighborhood and why?

CC: For city living, I'd love to live in a duplex in Fort Clayton where I can rent out one half of the duplex for some residual income. For country living, somewhere like Volcán would be wonderful. I can envision myself enjoying a calm and serene life in the highlands eating organic food and enjoying the cool weather.

PL: When you returned to Panama after several years away what's one thing you found to be quite different?

CC: Oh boy, *el tranquilo!* Traffic is so unpredictable in the city. My commute varies from 45 minutes to two-and-a-half hours. At times it has seemed it would be faster for me to fly to Miami than drive to work. It really has forced me to get really centered in my zen. You have to remain calm, otherwise it'll get you down.

PL: What are your number one at-home neighborhood hot spots?

CC: Mall culture is big here and Metro Mall is my go-to spot. I love it. It's relatively easy for me to get to, it has all the name-brand stores and decent enough restaurants. Everyone who lives nearby just flocks there, which is great for the area... that area really needed something to raise the standards of living a little. My mother always comments when I take her that people behave a little differently there—it's such a nice place that people feel

the need to step up their behavior to match the environment.

PL: What's your favorite food and where do you typically go to enjoy it in the city?

CC: I love Korean food and I know almost all the Korean restaurants in the city. My favorite restaurant is Chinni Chinni on via Porras. It's very authentic and they even have a piece of the barbed wired that once separated North and South Korean. It's not particularly American-friendly... but it's very original and it's very famous among Koreans. I had dinner there once with a Samsung executive who was visiting from Korea and he specifically asked that we go out to this restaurant for a particular dish. When he tried it he said it was the best version of that soup that he had ever tasted, including Korea. It's truly great.

PL: What are the most over- and underrated things to do in Panama?

CC: I think the most overrated thing to do in Panama is the Coronado beach circuit. The weekend commute to Coronado is not ideal, making your time spent there a bit bittersweet. The most underrated thing to do is hike Volcán. The view is amazing! Whether you consider yourself a hiker or not, you must plan a day where you hike this old lava flow from Volcán Barú—Panama's highest point.

PL: What's the number-one outstanding item on your Panama bucket list?

CC: Isla Coiba. I've actually been there twice but I want to go back. The last time I was there I was able to swim with sharks. I freaked out the first time but the second time I was cooler about it and I really got to appreciate the experience. There really just isn't anything like being able to have an up-close experience and interaction with wildlife. Coiba is a great place for this and one of my favorite places in Panama. **PL**

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

**Long-Term Living In
Panama**

Read all about visas, residency,
and citizenship options in
Panama [here](#).

PASSPORT

Read all about visas, residency,
and citizenship options in
Panama [here](#).

PASSPORT



The World's Top Retirement Haven

Dear *Panama Special Report* Buyer,

I hope you enjoyed reading about one of the top destinations in the world's greatest overseas haven.

I'd like to let you in on something: Each one of our Special Panama Reports is but a single element of the greatest resource available today on insights into life in Panama. This unique service is called the ***Panama Letter***.

Every month, subscribers to the ***Panama Letter*** receive an honest, current, and complete introduction to one of the places we've identified as offering tremendous advantages for the would-be retiree, investor, or part-timer in Panama. These are the locations that should be on your radar, either for your immediate retirement or as places to invest today as part of a longer-term plan in Panama.

Each of these comprehensive reports addresses not only the pros, but also the cons of each destination featured. This is critical if you want to make a smart, informed choice. You'd be hard-pressed to find this information anywhere else in the world.

This is Panama without the sugar coating. From a team of expats, investors, and businesspeople with, together, many decades of experience spending time and making money in the Hub of the Americas. Let us show you why, after considering the whole world, we've chosen to be here.

Our network of contributors will provide you with all the tips, tricks, and firsthand insider intelligence you need to follow in their footsteps, including these popular features in every issue:

- Broad **budget comparisons**, to help you thin-slice the cost of living in this Little country with big upside. Whether it's the cost of bread and milk, furniture and maid service, or rent and utilities, we'll have you covered...
- **“What's On In Panama This Month”**...a guide to events and activities in the country this month. Where to go to watch the playoffs...how to plan your Carnaval adventure...who's appearing live in concert this month... and what's playing at Panama City's English-language theater...

Plus much, much more, including:

- Where to look to find the kind of **life that suits you** — at the beach, in the mountains, in the big city...
- **Insights** into what the community is like, who your neighbors would be (locals, expats, or both), and how they live...

All I ask is this: If you like what you read in your Special Panama Report... keep reading. Subscribe to the ***Panama Letter***, and then, every month, you'll receive in your in-box a new, up-to-the-minute, information-packed Special Panama Report providing another from-the-scene guide of life in another destination in Panama.

I predict it will become your favorite read each month.

Better yet, as a Preferred Panama Reader, you can save an extra US\$79 off this comprehensive Panama service.

[Learn more here.](#)

Subscribe To The Panama Letter Today... And Receive 9 Free Reports Worth US\$192.78!

To get you up-to-speed with Panama as quickly as possible, I'd like to offer you a number of special bonus reports, simply for giving my new ***Panama Letter*** a try.

First, I'd like to send you a **complete library of 7 Panama resources**. This is the world's most comprehensive package of Panama resources, worth a total of US\$147.88. However, it's yours free when you take advantage of this special Preferred Panama Reader offer for the ***Panama Letter***.

Limited-time Bonus: The Panama Starter Kit

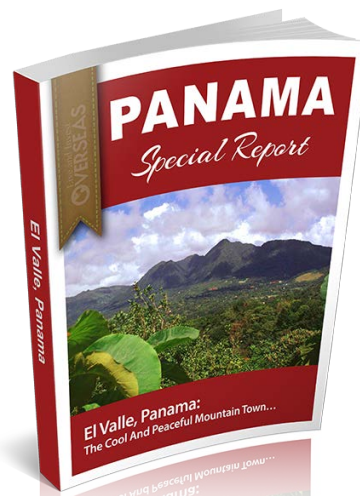
Yours free when you try the ***Panama Letter***:

- **“Live and Invest in Panama,”** the complete, 221-page guide (a US\$79 value)--This complete and current guide to Panama introduces you to the country's top seven choices for expat living and helps you to compare them, one to the other, with a clear look at the pluses and the minuses in each case...
- **“Panama 101: 101 Things You'll Wish Someone Had Told You About Panama”** (a US\$9.99 value)--This is the guide I'd love to have had when I first came to Panama some 15 years ago. It would certainly have saved me embarrassment, hassle, delay, and headaches...not to mention a whole lot of cash. In these pages, you'll learn vital lessons, including the absolute maximum you should ever pay for a taxi ride across Panama City...what not to wear if you want to be taken seriously by your new compatriots... where to go to shop for books in English...a guide to festivals and seasons...and helpful Panamanian-isms...



- **“Panama Residency Visas Supplement,”** containing fully up-to-date information on all 14 of this country’s top foreign residency options (a US\$9.99 value)--This is your step-by-step guide with answers to all your residency- and visa-related questions...• **“Little Black Book for Panama,”** our private Rolodex, not available for sale anywhere--This is a guide to our best in-country contacts, which is supplemented every month with the new contacts we’ll introduce you to in your issues of the *Panama Letter*...

- The Special Retirement Report **“El Valle de Anton, the World’s Top Retirement Haven”** (a US\$9.95 value)--To get you started on your Grand Tour of Panama, this special report features the little mountain town of El Valle de Anton, conveniently located 30 to 45 minutes from the beach and about two hours outside Panama City...so you can regularly enjoy the best of the city, without its heat and humidity...



- The Special Retirement Report on **El Cangrejo, Panama City** (a US\$9.95 value) To continue your Grand Tour of Panama, this special report features the metropolitan neighborhood of El Cangrejo. Central, eclectic, welcoming, and affordable, El Cangrejo is a popular relocation choice among young entrepreneurial expats and retirees who want a neighborhood with character and countless amenities—banks, hospitals, restaurants, casinos, and nightclubs—all within walking distance. This report provides all the essential information for establishing yourself in this trendy and very expat-friendly neighborhood, one of our favorite in all Panama City...

- The special report, **“44 Things You Must Know Before You Relocate, Retire, or Invest Offshore,”** the nuts-and-bolts support you need to plan your adventures in Panama with confidence (a US\$29 value)...

But wait, as they say, there’s more.

For this special offer, we’re bundling together every resource we can imagine you might need as you consider and prepare for a new life in this beautiful little country. In addition, therefore, to the complete Panama Starter Kit, when you take advantage of this limited-time launch invitation and subscribe to the *Panama Letter* for two years, we’ll also send you two other important bonus reports:

Additional Two-Year Bonus Report #1: Top 5 Medical Insurance Options for the Expat in Panama (a US\$19.95 value) introduces you to Panama's health care systems, both public and private. This country boasts some of the best health care facilities in region. In fact, Panama is increasingly recognized as a leading medical tourism destination. And the top-notch medical facilities aren't limited to the capital city.

Certainly, you'll find the best services in Panama City, but some smaller towns also offer good public and private hospital and clinic options. This report shows you where, beyond the capital, you can find them...plus it also details your top in-country health insurance options (including policies that could provide all the coverage you need for as little as US\$50 per month...

Additional Two-Year Bonus Report #2: **Sunsets, Surfing, And Serenity--Early In On The Azuero Sunset Coast** (a US\$24.95 value) is your guide to where the smart money is headed in this country...the "other" Azuero, the only western-facing coast in the country, sitting smack dab in Panama's path of progress (the new president hails from this province and already has is pushing ahead for serious infrastructure improvements in his home region)...

In all, that's nine special reports with a total value of US\$192.78.

They're yours free when you become a subscribe to the ***Panama Letter***.

Now here's the crazy part. These nine special Panama reports that we're standing by to send to you with our compliments together are worth more than the cost of your ***Panama Letter*** Subscription.

The ***Panama Letter*** is valued at US\$189 for one year, US\$289 for two years.

However, as a ***Live and Invest Overseas Preferred Panama Reader***, you can become a subscriber to my the ***Panama Letter*** for one year for only **US\$66**. That's far less than the cost of the special free reports if you were to purchase them on their own...and a discount of **65% off** the regular one-year subscription price!

But here's an even better deal...

Nine Special Panama Reports With A Total Value Of US\$192.78--Yours Free!

Subscribe today for **two years** of the support, insider information, judgment, experience, and real-life know-how you'll gain with the help of the ***Panama Letter***, and you'll pay only **US\$100**. That's less than the regular one-year subscription rate...a savings of **65% off** the regular two-year subscription rate!

My new ***Panama Letter*** is your real-life, real-time, real-deal guide to the real Panama. The subscription cost, considered within the context of the resources and the research that will be brought to bear to fulfil this service, is, I fear we will discover, not enough.

However, right now, for a limited time, it's the price on the table.

[Go here now to claim your deep discount and free Special Reports.](#)

Sign Me Up NOW!

Subscribe Now--100% Risk Free

The ***Panama Letter*** is the most complete and current resource to living, investing, retiring, and doing business in Panama available anywhere. I guarantee it. If you are disappointed in any way with the information, insights, recommendations, and discoveries shared in your ***Panama Letter*** subscription, simply say so. If you do, we'll promptly reimburse you for any issues remaining in your subscription. No questions asked. The Special Reports are yours to keep, no matter what.

Sincerely,



Kathleen Peddicord
Publisher, Live and Invest Overseas
Publisher, ***Panama Letter***

P.S. This offer is only available for Live and Invest Overseas Preferred Panama readers. Thanks to a past purchase of a Panama publication, you can now upgrade that purchase to become a one-year Panama Letter subscriber for only US\$66 or a two-year subscriber for only US\$100.

Simply click the button below to subscribe to the ***Panama Letter*** at the exclusive discounted rate.

Sign Me Up NOW!

PANAMA

SPECIAL REPORT