

PANAMA

Special Report



Pedasí:
A Perfect Coastal Getaway

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PEDASÍ:

A Perfect Coastal Getaway

BY THE EDITORS OF LIVE AND INVEST OVERSEAS



Pedasí is situated in the province of Los Santos, on the south-eastern tip of the Azuero Peninsula. The capital of the province is Las Tablas. 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 Panama Viejo by Captain Morgan in 1671 were used to construct some of the first buildings in the town.

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

When you enter Pedasí, the highway becomes the main street. It's lined with row houses not typically found in Panama making for a tranquil, beautiful and rather unique town.



History

Evidence that Azuero was one of the first places in Panama to support settlement comes from about 10,000 years ago. There is further evidence that lands in the north of the peninsula were cultivated thousands of years before the Spanish arrived.

The facts are consigned to history, but suffice it to say that the main evidence of Spanish activity in Pedasí and the area is to be found in the architecture. There are still some good examples of Spanish colonial architecture to be found in Pedasí and nearby Las Tablas, and some fine 17th and 18th century churches grace traditional Spanish Colonial squares at the center of town.

The first vestiges of Panamanian independence arose in the area close to Pedasí, 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.



Culture

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.

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. 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).

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.

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.

You'll find 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.

By Bus Or By Car... Pedasí Isn't As Remote As You Might Think

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

Buses leave from the Albrook bus terminal in Panama City and go as far as Las Tablas, then you

need to shift to a small vansized bus for the final 40 kilometers to Pedasí.

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

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

You may also find yourself dodging some cattle being herded, or just taking a stroll down the highway. Los Santos Province raises a lot of beef for export and internal consumption. The cattle and the pasture they require have been both the income and partial destruction of what is a rare tropical dry forest in the Azuero Peninsula.

Life In Pedasí

Getting around town is pretty easy. Bicycles are an important part of the transportation system. You see them everywhere.

In Pedasí you could easily get by without a car. Sure, if you plan to head out of town often or want to shoot into the big city from time to time to pick up supplies, a car would be useful, but getting around the village can be done easily on foot or by bicycle. In fact, some locals still travel by horseback.

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

There's no place where peace and tranquility is more evident than in the town center, where at noon some of the older residents gather in the central park gazebo to gossip and talk about the good ol' days. Oftentimes they're seen engaged in dominoes. Slow days turn into cool, fun nights. The town center transforms into the meeting place for young lovers, often seen passing flirtatious glances and quick kisses back and forth beneath the stars. Around them, young kids play and ride bikes, while vendors sell hot dogs and other items from pushcarts. Everyone knows everyone, but no one bothers the other.

Around the central park, and all over the main part of town, are small cafés, lovely places for sitting and chatting with friends, or relaxing with a book. Unlike other towns, this one is always comfortably quiet. Other towns have the hustle and bustle of noontime energy all about, with people rushing back to work, cars honking at friends passing by, and street side vendors calling out to passing customers.

Pedasí is different. It's calm. Restauranters are willing to wait for customers to stop by. They're not out noisily peddling their goods. If you do hear yelling it's usually someone shouting hello to a friend passing by.

For being such a tiny town, Pedasí has a large variety of dining options. Chinese, Spanish, Italian, and of course, typical Panamanian cuisine can be found in



town. Seafood is easy to come by, too. Fish caught fresh from the many fishermen in town is sold to the local restaurants, making seafood a common treat. Expats currently living here are in no rush to see major corporations in town. They don't want to see a Domino's Pizza or a Subway pop up like in so many other places in Panama. They'd rather see the mom-and-pop stores thrive.

To find the more commercial establishments you wouldn't have to travel far, though. If you absolutely have to get away and eat fast food and shop in larger department stores from time to time, you can find most of that in nearby Chitré. You also won't find a major supermarket in Pedasí. It just wouldn't fit in.

The Super Centro El Pueblo is one of the largest "mini-supers". It's a comfortable place to shop, unlike many mini-supers in other areas. The lighting is good, the aisles are spacious, and they have a little bit of

everything from pantry items to fruits and vegetables and even a variety of meats at the butcher counter. Anything else can be picked up at the other mini-supers in town or even from local vendors.

It seems that nothing is missing from Pedasí. The town has a large *fútbol*/baseball field, a cemetery, beauty salons, an internet café, several bakeries, a couple of places offering surf lessons, a souvenir shop, and beachwear stores.

In the town itself, homes come in all shapes and sizes, but all stay true to the original look and feel of the city. Down side streets you can find everything from large Spanish-colonial homes to small, concrete structures. In some of the more local parts of town, the streets become slightly rougher than in the main town center. There you'll find small homes with clothes hanging out on the line.

Farms, or *fincas*, make up a large part of the area around Pedasí. The road leading into and away from town is lined with farmland.

Pedasí is home to a milk factory, and grows fruits and vegetable such as mangoes, rice, and corn. If you have an interest in farming your land, this is a great place to do it.

Getting Around With A Disability

Panama has made some progress in this area...

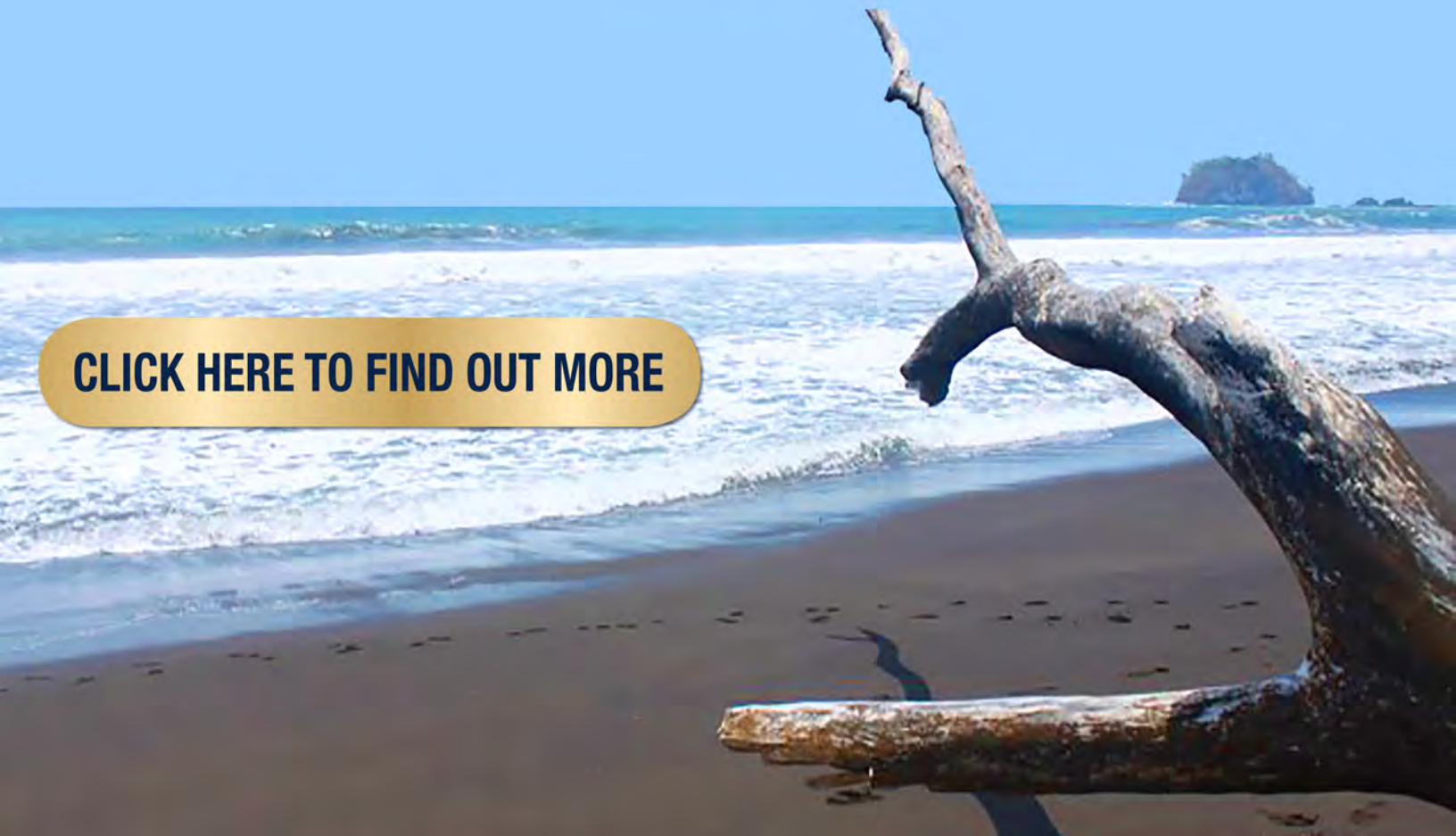
As new construction and major renovation projects take place, handicapped parking and access ramps are being incorporated into infrastructure. When people make an exploratory visit to the interior, they are usually pleasantly surprised to find ramps almost



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everywhere. The ramps are usually very short and steep, but they're manageable.

The low cost of home ownership provides a unique solution to those with disabilities. You can design your home to meet your personal requirements without breaking the bank.

Nevertheless, as always, the only way to know if you'll be comfortable and accommodated in a new place is to test it out for yourself.

What's manageable for one may be untenable for another...

Speaking Of Weather And Tropical Forests...

The climate in Pedasí is dramatic. During the winter, from December to January, Pedasí is dry; much



of Panama is dry, but in Pedasí the green becomes brown, and you experience a dry tropical forest, something unique and endangered worldwide.

Four months of heat and sunshine can be enticing to people from the northlands.

LGBTQ In Panama

Vocal opposition to the LGBTQ community in Panama comes predominantly from the Catholic Church, which has argued that Panama shouldn't accept the recommendations of the Latin American Human Rights Organization. That's the official standpoint.

On the day-to-day level, though, Panama is quite tolerant, and Panama City is something of a mecca for the LGBTQ community within highly conservative Central America. In 2005 Panama held its first ever gay pride parade, which has continued annually ever since, and many gayfriendly accommodations are available.

That said, discrimination still exists. Many Panamanians don't want to see public displays of affection between the same sex. Name calling is still more prevalent here than it is in many more progressive countries these days.

As a rule of thumb, if you accept and respect Panamanians for who they are, they will show you the same courtesy. There are many gay, lesbian, and transgender folks—expats and locals—living very happily in various parts of Panama.

From Fishing And Snorkeling To Whale-Watching—In Pedasí, It's All About The Sea

Recreation around Pedasí is related to the sea: a trip to Isla Iguana, deep-sea fishing from a *panga* (a small, open fishing boat), diving, snorkeling and, of course, surfing.

If you like fishing for tuna, or other long-lived fish, Pedasí is perfect because the deep waters are a very short distance off the coast. It is deep enough to be a seasonal home to humpback whales which can often be spotted just off the shore.

Pedasí is a treasure in the raw for those who have fantasies of living on a tropical beach and can deal with the lack of infrastructure. The price you pay for seclusion and perfection is that it has not yet been dragged into the 21st century.



Pedasí 101

The reality is that Pedasí is still primitive; this provides opportunities for entrepreneurs, but can make current living a bit of a challenge, and therefore it is not for everyone.

Schools: The Oxford School has a branch in Pedasí.

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

Real estate: Investment in real estate began 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.



[For a sample of properties available for purchase in Pedasí, click here.](#)

Recreation: Fishing, surfing, diving, riding horses, chasing cattle from the road all work during the day. There are several discos partying into the night on Saturdays.

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

Cost of living: Like most places in the interior of Panama, Pedasí offers a good quality of life for a low budget—especially if you decide to cut back on imported goods and decide to try living the “local way”.

[For information on the cost of living in Pedasí, click here.](#)

Little by little people are discovering what’s missing, and they’re bringing those things into town. At some point, like most other places, Pedasí will run out of space and available businesses. Now’s the time to move to Pedasí, while it’s still young, and there’s so much opportunity.

On The Abuelo Rum Trail—A Story Of Distilled Flavor And Tradition

Rum is distilled in the small pueblo of Pesé, 18 kilometers from Chitré. For more than 100 years the Varela family has made Pesé their home, and their distillery produces an excellent rum, as well as the national drink of Panama, seco.

Varela distilleries has 90% of the market in Panama with their products. Amazingly, rum is not their main product; it's their seco that is the national drink of Panama. Few people outside of Panama have heard of seco. Seco is the raw essence of sugarcane after fermentation and distillation.

Hacienda San Isidro, home of the rum distillery for the famous Ron Abuelo, is just outside of Pesé and has 1,000 hectares of sugarcane, the raw flesh of good rum and seco. The soul of good rum comes from the pressing of the cane, the fermenting, the distilling over oak fires, and the process of aging.

Hacienda San Isidro has 15 huge bodegas aging tomorrow's elixir. The rums of Varela are aged in barrels from the Jack Daniel Distillery. The barrels are used once, and in the past they were sold after use; now they are burned to distill the fermented mash of sugar cane.

To master the technique that makes today's Ron Abuelo, the founder of the distillery imported a master rum maker from Cuba, bourbon barrels from the United States, but insisted on growing his own sugar cane. The family prides itself not only on its secret formula, but on the quality of sugarcane they grow and ferment.

Even now, more than 100 years after the founding of the distillery, the Varela family still grows most of its sugarcane. Each year they hire 300 local men



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to hand cut the cane with machetes, so that it will grow again the next year. The cane is then mashed and distilled. From the distillery, the ethanol is moved into large tanks. The distillate designated for rum is then casked for aging. That which is to be seco goes to town to be mixed in a secret recipe and bottled immediately. Seco ages in the bottle, in the delivery truck, and in the market.

Both rum and seco are bottled in this facility in the town of Pesé and also in Panama City. The Varela brothers export the *sabor* (flavor) of Panama worldwide.

You owe it to yourselves to pay them a visit next time you are on the road to Pedasí—just follow the smell of curing, maturing rum Abuelo. 🌸

Launch Your New Life In Charming Pedasí

ADRIANA VALDEZ E.

Beautiful House For Sale

Price: US\$160,000
2 bedrooms, 2 bathrooms
Construction: 180 square meters

This beautiful, spacious house is located three minutes from El Arenal Beach, and three minutes from town.

The house has a blend of rustic and modern architecture. With two bedrooms, two bathrooms, a dining room, a living room, air conditioning in each bedroom and the living room, a spacious kitchen, hot water, and a *bohio* (shack), this house makes for a perfect place to launch your new life.



Luxury Home For Sale

Price: US\$215,000
2 bedrooms, 2 bathrooms
Construction: 144 square meters

This luxurious house is located in a quiet neighborhood 1 kilometer from El Arenal Beach and 1 kilometer from town.

It's offered either fully furnished or partly furnished, and has upgrades like wooden cabinets in the kitchen, wooden closets and shelves in both bedrooms, and wooden bookshelves in the living room. The property also has a covered outdoor dining area with a wooden pergola and seating area.





Cozy House In Town For Sale

Price: US\$89,000

2 bedrooms, 2 bathrooms

Construction: 90 square meters

This remodeled house is located in town, close to shops and restaurants.

It has a terrace, a garden, a small shack with seats, a small living room, a spacious kitchen, and air conditioning.



Spanish-Style House For Sale

Price: US\$299,000

2 bedrooms, 1 bathroom

Construction: 195 square meters

This beautiful house is located in the Costa Pedasí oceanfront gated community.

It has natural clay floor tiles both inside and outside the house. It has an open concept kitchen with custom made cabinets and granite counter tops, a living room area, and a veranda overlooking the garden, swimming pool, and the ocean. The master bedroom has a walk-in closet, en-suite bathroom with his and her sinks, and double sliding patio doors opening to the veranda.

The house also has air conditioning, a roofed parking space, and a washer and dryer.

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