

PANAMA

Special Report



Chitré:

La Ciudad Donde Nadie Es Forastero

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Special Report

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CHITRÉ

—*La Ciudad Donde Nadie Es Forastero*

BY GABRIELLE WELLS



La Ciudad Donde Nadie Es Forastero... The City Where No One Is A Stranger. *La Ciudad Que Crece Sola...* The City That Grows Itself.

There's no better way to describe Chitré than with its endearing nicknames...

They capture the area's appeal for expats and explain why locals are so proud of their *chitreano* heritage.

Two of Chitré's biggest selling points are its rapid development and warm, inviting culture.

Living here, you'd never lack any necessity or convenience; you'd enjoy a laid-back lifestyle in a safe and peaceful community; and the locals would happily adopt you as one of their own.

This is *El Corazón De Panamá...* The Heart Of Panama... and few other towns have preserved their traditions as well as Chitré. There are multiple folkloric festivals throughout the year with *cabalgatas* (horse parades), *bailes típicos* (traditional dances), and women dressed in Panama's traditional attire, *la pollera*.

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

The beach is never far—Playa Monagre and Playa El Rompío are only a few miles outside downtown Chitré—and you can buy beachfront property at shockingly low rates... up to 35% less than the value price.

This is a land of opportunity for investors—take advantage of the limited tourism attractions and accommodations, and you're bound to make a profit.

Here at LIOS, Chitré has become one of our top havens in Panama. If you're looking for a new home with the comforts of a city but a small-town feel, an opportunity to immerse yourself in Panamanian culture and live side-by-side with locals, and if you love the beach but not overpriced beachfront property, your dream life awaits you in Panama's heartland.

Finding Chitré

Chitré is a district in Herrera Province with five *corregimientos* (townships)—San Juan Bautista, Llano Bonito, Monagrillo, La Arena, and Chitré (the main town).

The town of Chitré is the capital of Herrera Province and its largest city, with a population of about 9,100. In total, the district has about 50,700 residents.

You have three options when traveling to Chitré—you can drive, take public transportation, or fly.

Buses to Chitré from Panama City cost US\$9 (about US\$6 for retirees) and leave from the National Transportation Terminal at Albrook. The trip takes five to six hours with a 15-minute stop *en route* for a food and bathroom break. You'll disembark at the Herrera Transportation Terminal in Chitré.

If driving, the trip will be shorter and you'll be behind the wheel for about four hours. Follow the Pan-American Highway (Carretera 1) for about 134 miles (217 kms) until you reach the town of Divisa in Herrera Province, about 25 minutes past Aguadulce. You'll then turn left onto the Carretera 2 ramp which you'll follow straight to Chitré.

If you're in a hurry, Air Panama offers round-trip flights from Albrook's Marcos A. Gelabert Airport to Chitré's Alonso Valderrama Airport.





The Azuero Peninsula—One Of Panama's Oldest Regions

Herrera Province's history began in Pre-Columbian times, when indigenous groups lived in villages throughout the area. They were hunter-gatherer societies who fished, hunted, and grew crops.

The Spanish *conquistador* Gaspa de Espinosa colonized the Azuero Peninsula. Shortly after, the town of Natá de los Caballeros was founded in 1520 in Coclé Province.

Economic prosperity followed, but was short-lived, as its Spanish residents began moving southward into Azuero Peninsula due to disagreements with arbitrary government fines, intentions to re-enslave indigenous peoples—which had previously been abolished—and other factors.

In 1558, Azuero Peninsula's oldest town, Parita, was born about 8 miles (13 kms) from modern-day Chitré. In 1569, La Villa de Los Santos was established and today lies just 10 minutes from Chitré.

Chitré was founded on Oct. 9, 1848, as part of Los Santos Canton and its governor at the time was General Tomas Herrera. In 1855, Azuero Province was created, and Chitré District was added to it. In 1864, after the

elimination of Azuero Province, Chitré became part of the newly-created Los Santos Province. It remained as such until 1915, when Herrera Province was formed and Chitré named its capital.

Leave The Rain Behind (Mostly)

Like all of Panama, Chitré has two seasons: the rainy season (May to December) and the dry season (January to April).

The rainy season is shorter in Chitré, and while it occurs during that seven-month period, it usually only rains for two to three months.

Chitré is found in the *arco seco* (dry arc), a region that receives less rainfall than the rest of the country. The weather here is hot and dry, with less humidity than other parts of Panama.

The temperature varies little throughout the year, and ranges from 88°F to 91°F (31°C to 32°C) during the day.

The heat and sun are intense—stay hydrated and always carry a hat, sunscreen, and sunglasses... heat stroke is a risk and there are several cases each year.

If you dislike rain, there's no better place to be in Panama.

Budget As Low As US\$600 A Month (For A Couple)

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

A couple who owns their house should budget about US\$1,600 a month, and a couple who rents will spend about US\$2,000 monthly. Choose a minimalistic lifestyle and you'll get by on about US\$600 a month.

How to reduce expenses in Chitré? Choose to live in a central part of town and get around on foot or bicycle, using your car only when necessary. Eat out at *fondas* (small, usually open-air restaurants serving traditional Panamanian food at low prices) or food trucks, only occasionally dining at more upscale restaurants.

Buy fresh produce and seafood at the open-air market, with infrequent runs to the supermarket, for a monthly grocery bill of less than US\$100 for a couple. (Bonus tip: if you're looking for a low-cost supermarket, El Machetazo is your friend.)

If you own a car and use it frequently, you'll pay about US\$60 a month for gas and maintenance.

Air conditioning is a must, and you'll spend about US\$125 on electricity monthly.

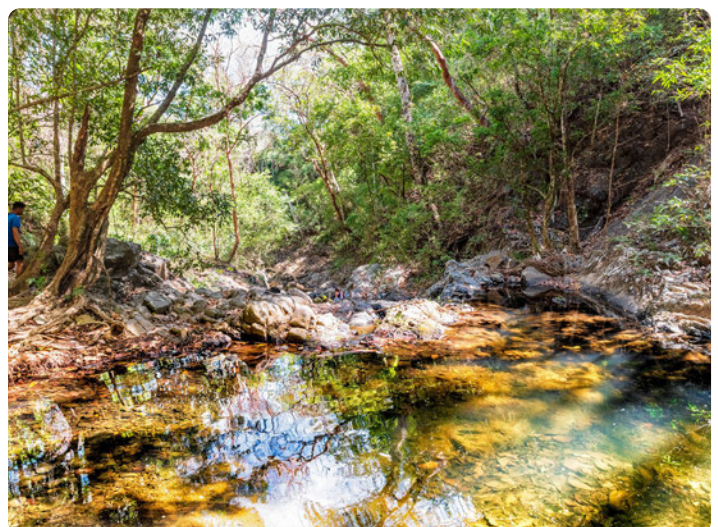
If you shop primarily at supermarkets, your grocery bill will be about US\$425 a month for a couple.

A domestic beer costs US\$1 in Chitré... the cheapest you'll find anywhere in the country.

I found that with US\$10 I could eat well at a Panamanian restaurant (drink included), and for US\$15 I could afford a large meal at an international eatery like Estambul, a restaurant serving Middle Eastern fare. You can enjoy a simple breakfast and coffee for US\$5 or less.

Household cleaners charge US\$15 a day and about US\$300 monthly—remember to tip at least US\$5 each day. Ask for referrals for cleaners from fellow expats or your landlord.

[Click here for a more detailed breakdown of your monthly expenses.](#)



The Hub Of The Azuero Peninsula

Chitré is best described as a town with the services of a city. Living here, you'll know your neighbors, locals will stop and chat with you on the street and at the supermarket, and you'll enjoy friendly and warm service while living a well-appointed lifestyle.

This is the Hub Of The Azuero Peninsula and people come from across the region to shop, bank, access health care, and to seek the services of lawyers, real estate agents, and other experts.

The district offers:

- An excellent and affordable health care system;
- High-quality, free medical attention for all;
- Fresh produce and seafood—you can eat fish that was swimming that same morning;
- World-class bilingual schools;
- All major banks that exist in Panama;
- Mall Paseo Central, a multiple-floor shopping mall with a food court;
- Supermarkets, pharmacies, hardware stores, furniture stores, post offices, car repair shops and car parts stores, hair salons, and other professional services;
- Accountants, lawyers, real estate agents, Ministry of Commerce and Industry (MICI), and other business services;
- A movie theater, diverse dining options, casinos, a baseball stadium, parks, museums, churches, plazas, beaches, and more attractions...

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

Hospital San Fernando, one of Panama City's finest private hospitals, is building a second location in Chitré, which is progressing quickly and should open this year. The company just bought brand-new equipment and will be hiring local doctors.

Hospital Regional de Azuero (Anita Moreno Regional Hospital), in La Villa de Los Santos, will be opening an oncology department within the next couple months. Currently, residents with cancer have to travel to Panama City for treatment, which requires an expensive, multi-day trip. Hospital Regional's oncology department will make cancer treatment more efficient, accessible, and affordable.

The government has announced plans to fix and repave roads across the Azuero Peninsula this year. Many have fallen into disrepair and are uneven and full of potholes, making short drives take much longer. This initiative will make the region more accessible by car, reduce travel times, and hopefully encourage tourism.

President Cortizo recently authorized the reparation of the highway leading to Monagre and Rompío beaches.

The mayor seems dedicated to making the area more environmentally friendly. A local tells me that recently, six solar power plants were created near Parita. There are also increased efforts to pick up trash around town and at the beaches. Of all the small towns I've visited in Panama, Chitré is definitely the cleanest, with no garbage strewn about.

Development is in the works for Playa El Rompío... restaurants, bars, and other amenities will soon bring the area up to speed with nearby Playa Monagre.

The Expat Experience

About 500 expats live in Chitré. During my last visit, I met expats—both retirement age and younger families with children—from the United States, Canada, and other Latin American countries like Colombia, Ecuador, and Venezuela.

The expat lifestyle is in stark contrast to the one on offer in Panama's biggest expat haven, Boquete, where foreigners make up a large percentage of the population and the town caters to English speakers.

Life in Chitré is more authentic. You'll live side-by-side with locals and become immersed in Panamanian culture. Your neighbors and friends will be Panamanian,

you'll celebrate Panamanian festivals, and take part in their traditions.

That's not to say you'll have trouble finding other expats or expat gatherings—in Chitré you can live wholly in both worlds. The expat community holds a meeting every Thursday around lunchtime at Hotel Azuero where you'll have the chance to chat with fellow foreigners, seek advice and recommendations, and learn about clubs and events.

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

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

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

There are weekly expat Spanish classes for free, taught by a Panamanian instructor—inquire about joining at one of the weekly meetings at Hotel Azuero. There are no formal Spanish classes in Chitré, and your best bet is to practice with friends, neighbors, and household cleaners or gardeners if you hire them. Don't be shy—Panamanians are eager to help... and may ask for English practice in return... an excellent way to make new friends.

An Unrivaled Health Care System

Health care is one of Chitré's biggest claims to fame. The two best private clinics are Clínica San Juan Bautista and Clínica Dr. Venancio Villareal.

Two public hospitals offer exceptional care for free (or at a very minimal cost). Hospital General Cecilio A. Castellero is a general hospital providing cost-free care for all patients.

Hospital Gustavo Nelson Collado provides free care to residents and citizens with Panamanian Social Security. Without Social Security, the cost is US\$15 per day and US\$1 for a consult. It also has an ICU.

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

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

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

Nowhere in Panama has better health care than Chitré.



A Top Haven For Families

Safety and access to exceptional schools make Chitré one of Panama's best destinations to raise a family. There is no pretentiousness or classism here, meaning your children can enjoy a wholesome and anxiety-free upbringing.

There are two bilingual *colegios* (high schools) in town... Soyuz Bilingual School is private and Papá Francisco Bilingual School is public.

Colegio Agustiniano is a private Catholic school known for high university acceptance rates.

There are also four bilingual public primary schools in Chitré.

The town is peaceful enough that your children can walk or ride bikes to and from school if you live nearby.

Bargain Real Estate For The Buyer Or Investor

I sat down with Alicia Corro, founder of Alicia Corro Real Estate, to learn more about the market for buyers, renters, and sellers in Chitré. In addition to being a real estate agent, Alicia is also a lawyer and owner of her own bakery, Pan & Cake, with locations in Chitré and La Villa de Los Santos. She is well-versed in the real estate, entrepreneurial, and legal worlds.

Alicia tells me that most homes on the market in Chitré are high-quality, used houses. She explains that many older expats return to the States once they can no longer live independently, and the houses they leave behind sell cheap—for about the original purchase price.

Owner financing is almost always possible, and most plans allow for a promissory contract with monthly payments over the course of three years, after which time the title is transferred to the new owner. Owners generally ask for 50% down and the monthly payments are interest-free.

Alicia says that the real estate market is recovering to its pre-pandemic state and is once again moving upward,

with increased interest from buyers and more expats and tourists visiting Chitré on relocation tours. Most houses on the market are owned by locals, and buyers are predominately foreign... in certain beach neighborhoods, about 90% of residents are expats.

Alicia emphasizes that the time to purchase property in Chitré is now, as prices are a steal. Houses are selling for 35% less than they were before the pandemic. She mentions a two-story, beachfront home with a pool that was listed at US\$600,000 before the pandemic and just sold for US\$300,000.

She recommends the quiet, suburban-style residential communities of Villas del Golf—right beside the golf club, and Paseo Los Guayacanes—which has a community pool—for retirees.

Miramar is the best neighborhood for families with children, as all homes have yards of at least 1,000 square meters.

If you want to grow produce, look to the beach areas—many expats are selling homes with land and gardens near Playa Monagre and Playa El Rompío. There are plenty of vacant lots too, where you can build your dream home.

A project is in the works at Playa Albina Grande, about a 25-minute drive from Playa El Rompío. The owner has sectioned off 2 hectares of land, which will be divided into 14 total lots, with 5 beachfront lots. The lots aren't yet on the market but will sell for around US\$50,000 each.

Alicia suggests that investors look to Las Minas District in Herrera Province, where 3,000-square-meter lots are available for US\$20,000. Coffee, cacao, and root vegetables thrive here. She explains that Cuban immigrants are selling land to expats in Las Minas, throughout Los Santos Province, and on Isla Cañas. She believes these to be lucrative opportunities.

Alicia also recommends investors look to the areas around the Chitré golf club, where land is still available and comes with all infrastructure laid.

Once you've located your ideal property, the purchase process follows these steps:

1. Make a serious offer (your realtor will help you here, but 10% lower than the asking price is a good starting point).
2. The realtor takes the offer to the seller, they negotiate, and an offer is made.
3. A contract to purchase (*contrato de compra-venta*) is drafted and normally includes an inspection of the property and a re-survey if not performed in the last 10 years. Both buyer and seller are represented by attorneys.
4. Once approved by all parties, the contract is signed and the seller must make a 10% non-refundable down payment (if there's a legal problem with the property the deposit is declared null and void).
5. The buyer's attorney researches the property to be sure taxes and other legal matters are up-to-date.
6. If everything is correct, closing normally takes place in 30 to 60 days.

In Panama, no one is required to be present at the signing. If the buyer isn't in-country, the contract can either be e-signed, or a limited POA can be authorized to allow the buyer's attorney to sign in their absence.

Escrow accounts exist in Panama, but due to sanctions placed on the country, many attorneys don't have one. Another option is to send funds from your bank account in the States to your Panamanian account. Your attorney will need to send the contract to the Panamanian bank to justify the transaction.

It's imperative that you hire an attorney—a reputable one. You should gather references for a real estate law attorney who is bilingual and from a creditable real estate agency. If they're not bilingual, you'll need to also hire an interpreter... but this will cost more time and money.

Throughout this process, the bulk of the responsibility falls on the seller who pays 11% of the sale price to the realtor's commission, lawyer fees, and public registry fees. This figure includes the 5% transfer tax. The buyer only pays documentation and lawyer fees.





Unbeatable Rental Rates

Most rentals in Chitré are homes, but you can also find condos and apartments. An unfurnished, two-bedroom house typically rents at about US\$300 per month. Furnished homes are less common but rent for slightly higher, about US\$450 monthly.

Contracts run from six months to a year, and the lessee pays the first and last months and a security deposit upon signing.

Rents are raised no more than 10% annually but normally about 3%. Most landlords don't raise rents here.

Property managers aren't used in Chitré, as landlords provide this service at no charge.

Income taxes are required on rental properties, and you must declare rental income when you file your taxes.

Alicia tells me that rental properties in Chitré don't generate enough income for owners to be liable for the 7% value added tax (VAT)—properties generating less than US\$36,000 annually are exempt from this tax, and most landlords here only gain US\$24,000 a year from rents.

A Land Of Opportunity For Entrepreneurs

I asked Alicia what kinds of businesses are lacking and would be profitable in Chitré, and she explained that

the area has tourism potential, but there aren't many attractions and services catering to tourists.

She recommends tourist accommodations such as hotels, condos, or Airbnbs, and attractions like strip malls and aquatic parks.

Another source expresses the need for more housing options in town, suggesting a sustainable, eco-friendly apartment complex with a social area and pool.

I noticed that there aren't any water sport equipment rentals along the beaches. Tap into Chitré's potential as a beach getaway by setting up a shop and renting kayaks and stand-up paddle boards, and you're sure to receive droves of customers.

Monagre and El Rompío beaches are largely undeveloped and present endless opportunities for the investor or entrepreneur. Open a bar or restaurant, build cabins or beach vacation rentals, and list them on Airbnb, start a tackle shop for fishermen—any creative idea you have could be the area's next big hit.

In town, you could open boutique shops and sell imported clothing, shoes, jewelry, or home goods. Entertainment options are limited, and a bowling alley, laser tag, family fun center, or escape room would be popular.

You could teach freelance classes like Spanish or English, yoga, nutrition and wellness, cooking, gardening, fitness, or any other area you have expertise in.

What's There To Do For Fun?

If you decide to make Chitré your new home, most of your recreation options will be outdoors. If you enjoy being outside and have an adventurous spirit, you won't get bored here.

Here are some ideas to get you started, all within a couple hours' drive of downtown...

- **Explore a national park.** Parque Nacional Sarigua (Panama's only desert), Reserva Forestal El Montuoso (Montuoso Forest Reserve), Reserva Forestal La Tronosa (Tronosa Forest Reserve), and Parque Nacional Cerro Canajagua (Canajagua Hill National Park) are excellent options for a hiking day trip.
- **Kick back on the beach.** Playa Monagre and Playa El Rompío are the two best beaches in Chitré. Playa Monagre is well-developed, with seafood restaurants, bars, and rentable *ranchos* (huts). Head south to Pedasí and Tonosí for the best beaches in Eastern Azuero. Playa Venao, on the route between the two districts, is one of Panama's most-raved-about beaches for surfing. Isla Iguana (Iguana Island) is home to white sand and stunning turquoise waters. It's located just off the coast of Pedasí's Playa Arenal, where fishermen charge a small fee to transport passengers round-trip. Isla Iguana's waters are ideal for snorkeling.



- **Go biking, running, or walking.** A few years ago, a *ciclovía* (bicycle path) was developed, linking the town of Chitré with nearby Playa El Agallito. The *ciclovía* has two smooth, paved lanes, follows the rehabilitated highway Chitré-Playa El Agallito, and makes for a fun morning or late afternoon cycling with a sea view.
- **Play a round of golf.** Club de Golf de Chitré is the local golf club featuring a nine-hole course, a restaurant (with a delicious barbecue every Wednesday evening), a tennis court, golf lessons for children and adults, and tennis classes. You can play 9 holes for US\$20 and 18 holes for US\$25. A local expat tells me that a monthly membership costs US\$80, and there's a group of expats and locals who golf together every Wednesday.
- **Catch a baseball game** at Estadio Rico Cedeño (Rico Cedeño Stadium) or play a game yourself at one of the sandlots across town. If you're feeling competitive, you can even join a league. Baseball is basically a national religion in Panama, and you'll have no trouble finding opportunities to participate.
- **Discover Panama's history and culture.** Attend one of the Azuero Peninsula's many festivals—the most popular ones are *Carnaval*, Corpus Christi, San Juan Bautista, and La Feria Internacional de Azuero.

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

La Villa de Los Santos is where, on Nov. 10, 1821, Panamanians gathered to declare independence from Spain—what is now known as *El Primer Grito de Independencia*. The home where this meeting took place was built in the 1600s and still stands... you can see the meeting room, the independence letter, artifacts from the Azuero Peninsula, and more at Museo de la Nacionalidad (Museum of the Nationality). La Villa boasts centuries-old Spanish-colonial architecture and is Panama's most traditional town.

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



To escape the heat, retreat indoors for activities such as...

- **See a film** at the local movie theater, Cines Moderno.
- **Test your luck** at a casino such as Casino Azuero.
- **Check out the shops** at Mall Paseo Central.
- **Indulge in a delicious meal** at one of several Panamanian and international restaurants. For an unforgettable breakfast, try Alicia Corro's café, **Pan & Cake**... the pancakes, quiche, and cappuccinos are highly recommended. **El Arabe** serves shawarmas, kababs, and other Middle Eastern fare. Head to **Salsa y Carbón** for the best *parrilla* (barbecue) in town. The restaurant at **El Club de Golf** serves deliciously prepared seafood... I tried *pescado a la plancha* and a US\$8 lunch that included prawns in mango sauce, salad, Russian potatoes, and plantains with white cheese, and was very impressed.

Festivals Of The Azuero Peninsula

Carnaval is the biggest party of the year in Panama and businesses shut down for nearly a week. Celebrations take place across the country, but Chitré and Las Tablas (the capital of Los Santos Province) have two of the most famous *Carnavales*. The festival takes place each year during the four days leading up to Ash Wednesday, when the Catholic period of Lent begins.

Expect parties and crowds of thousands; parades day and night complete with floats and queens decked out in feather-laden costumes, women in *polleras*, and men in *montunos*; marching bands; fireworks; and *mojaderos*—trucks that drench the crowds with water.

La Feria Internacional De Azuero is the largest festival in Central America with tens of thousands of attendees and over a thousand exhibitors. It takes place annually in late April through early May in La Villa de Los Santos and includes vendors showcasing their goods and agricultural, craft, commercial, and cultural services.

The event features parades, folkloric dances, amusement park rides, and authentic Panamanian food.

La Fiesta de San Juan Bautista commemorates the arrival of the first image of St. John the Baptist in

Chitré in 1840. Every year on June 22, a procession called *La Traída Del Santo* is held, and hundreds of people walk from Playa El Agallito to the cathedral, with a group of women at the end carrying the painting. Folkloric dances also take place throughout the festival.

Corpus Christi celebrations take place in La Villa de Los Santos and in Parita. They're characterized by *danzas de los diablicos* (dances of the devils).

Corpus Christi falls 60 days after Easter, and the traditions practiced in Panama trace back to Medieval Europe.

Men dressed in *diablico* masks and colorful attire and capes perform more than 10 dances to folkloric music in the streets.

The most famous and oldest dance is *La Danza del Diablo Sucio* (Dance Of The Dirty Devils), which is followed by *La Danza del Diablo Limpio* (The Dance Of The Clean Devils), symbolizing the triumph of good over evil.

In La Villa de Los Santos, flowers and colorful salt paintings of religious figures like the Pope bring the streets and sidewalks to life during Corpus Christi.



“Tranquilo Y Muy Seguro”

Everyone I met describes Chitré as *muy seguro* (very safe) and *tranquilo* (calm). This is a town where neighbors know one another, people smile and greet one another on the street, and residents look out for one another.

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

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

No matter how hot it gets, don't swim in any inland body of water. Rivers, ponds, creeks, and lagoons are filled with crocodiles. While driving by a small lagoon, I saw at least eight crocodiles—three sunning themselves on the shore and five more pairs of eyes in the water. An expat tells me that the crocodiles occasionally—but rarely—swim out into the bay. Be careful if swimming near any estuary.

Accessibility Is Improving

You'll likely want a car for getting around Chitré. Public transportation isn't well-developed yet and is limited to yellow taxis and *chivas* (small buses).

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

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

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

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

the street below without stairs, most buildings aren't wheelchair accessible or equipped with accommodations for disabilities, and, as is a widespread problem in Panama, there's a lack of parking spaces.

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

The good news is that you can design and build your own home for cheap, ensuring your comfort and safety if you have a disability.

LGBTQ Community

In Panama, LGBTQ relationships aren't legally recognized and same-sex marriage isn't legal. Little progress has been made regarding the acceptance of and respect toward the community.

Chitré is not an LGBTQ-friendly destination, and it's less so than Panama City or Bocas del Toro. The Azuero Peninsula is predominantly Catholic, very conservative, and highly traditional.

It's unlikely that a person who identifies as LGBTQ will suffer a hate crime here, but slurs, insults, and derogatory comments aren't uncommon.

A source who identifies as LGBTQ tells me that employment discrimination against members of the community is rampant—they're limited to careers such as nail technician, hair stylist, etc.—and that individuals have left Chitré for these reasons.

If your identity as LGBTQ and are determined to live here, exercise caution and avoid displays of same-sex affection in public for your own safety.

Is Chitré For You?

Here's a checklist to help you out...

- Are you looking for a friendly, small-town environment where you and your neighbors will know each other on a personal level? Do you enjoy meeting new people, chatting with others on the street, and making new friends?

- Are you searching for a relaxed, laid-back destination and a slower pace of life, while at the same time having conveniences, services, and amenities nearby?
- Are you excited by the prospect of learning to speak Spanish?
- Would you enjoy living a local lifestyle, immersing yourself in Panamanian culture, and celebrating local traditions by attending cultural festivals and other events?
- Do you like hot weather with little rain?
- Do you have hobbies like farming or gardening? Is having fresh, local produce, seafood, and meat important to you?
- Do outdoor activities like hiking, fishing, cycling, spending time at the beach, or golfing appeal to you?

If you answered yes to a majority of these questions, Chitré should be at the top of your list.

Here's another checklist. Are you bothered by the following?...

- **Lack of access to hot water.** Your house probably won't be equipped with hot water. Not that you'll need it in a place as hot as Chitré, but it's a matter of personal preference.

- **Lack of anonymity.** Are you a private person, or do you get bothered when other people are in your business? Chitré is said to have a “towny” vibe, which means that news travels fast. After living here for a while, you won't be able to go many places without bumping into someone you know.
- **No large expat community.** Are you happy to integrate into Panamanian culture, or would you feel more comfortable in the presence of a large group of foreigners?
- **Hot weather,** not unlike Arizona in the summer.
- **Few (especially luxury) entertainment options.**

If so, you should visit Chitré to see if these are realities you're prepared to live with full-time...

As always, it's a matter of personality and preferences. What's an inconvenience for one person is an upside for another.

The expats I spoke with love their life in Chitré and wouldn't trade it for a life anywhere else.

As one local put it, “My family and I like to go on vacations and we have fun, but we're always happy to come home to Chitré...” 🌸



About The Author

Gabrielle Wells graduated from university in May 2021 and relocated to Panama in June. She has traveled extensively throughout Mexico, Ecuador, and Panama, and always planned to one day live abroad. Many of her travels have been solo, and this has given her the chance to fully immerse herself in each place she has visited. She visited Panama for the first time in 2018 and fell in love with its natural beauty and local culture. On the weekends she enjoys volunteering, spending time at the beach, exploring Panama's old town, Casco Viejo, and hiking in the breathtaking natural parks outside the city.



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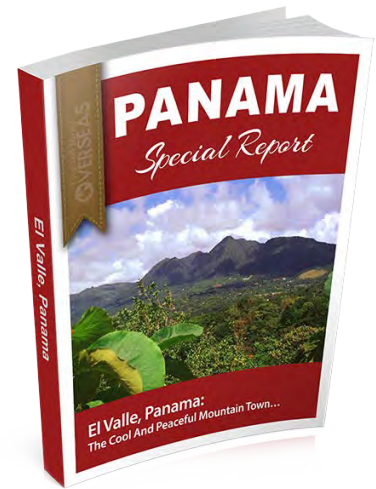
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