

Living Full-Time In Southeast Asia

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Southeast Asia is a remarkably diverse land that over the past decades has become much more welcoming to Westerners. In several countries in this region, you no longer need to make visa runs in order to stay long-term. Nor is it necessary to invest great sums of cash in order to buy residency through investment visas. Today, even while living on a modest pension or savings, you have the opportunity to live full-time in several welcoming, tropical paradises.

Although there are many advantages to living in this part of the world, the low cost of living is the one factor that probably attracts the most people. With the exception of Singapore, your money goes much farther in Southeast Asia than it would in the United States or any other western country. This doesn't mean that the standard of living is less; it only means that things cost less here.

In the U.S., you're probably paying at least \$50 per month for reasonably fast Internet. In the Philippines, which actively recruits foreign retirees, your monthly Internet costs are about \$12 per month, and most likely, you'll have faster speeds than you have now. In Thailand and Malaysia, fast internet will cost about \$18 per month.

Similar savings can be seen in the prices of phone services, cooking gas, electric bills, and groceries. If you rent, you'll likely enjoy nicer quarters in Southeast Asia for less money than you're paying now. If you decide to purchase real estate, you'll find that in most areas, you're getting much more value for your money.

You will also get a better value for health care. Doctor visits cost less than \$20 throughout most of Southeast Asia, and the care that you receive will likely exceed your expectations. Highly skilled, English-speaking doctors are the norm here. They work in hygienic offices with modern equipment, and may be affiliated with state-of-the-art, internationally accredited hospitals. Both Thailand and Malaysia are considered among the top five countries in the world for medical tourism.

There are practical financial reasons for living in Southeast Asia. Several countries will gladly waive any minimum monthly income requirements for long-term or permanent residency if you invest in a fixed deposit account at a local bank. In countries where a monthly

pension is required, the qualifying amount is often surprisingly low.

English is widely understood throughout this region. It is an official language of the Philippines, Singapore, and parts of Malaysia. The majority of people who you come into contact with in these three countries will be fluent in English. Additionally, English is a required subject at schools in every country in Southeast Asia. Any urban area and many small towns will have enough English speakers so that communication will rarely present a significant barrier. You'll find more English spoken and understood in most urban areas of Southeast Asia than you're likely to find anywhere in Latin America with the exception of Belize.

Several countries in Southeast Asia have opened their doors to foreigners looking for legal, long-term residency. Although requirements differ from one country to another, you'll have your choice of residency options.

Living Long-Term In Thailand: The Land Of Smiles

For many years, Thailand has been a popular destination for retirees and expats. Thailand has some of the best beaches in the world, lush mountains and jungles, a laid back, welcoming culture, and a foreigner-friendly infrastructure. Thailand also has one of the lower costs of living that you will find anywhere. Tens of thousands of foreigners have settled down throughout the country: in world-renowned resorts such as Koh Samui, Koh Lanta, and Phuket; cities including Bangkok, Pattaya, Chiang Mai, and Chiang Rai; and the smaller towns of Hua Hin, Cha-am, and Pai. It's rare to find any town in Thailand that doesn't have at least a few foreign residents.

Thailand's visa laws have changed over the years. It used to be possible to stay indefinitely in the country with a tourist visa, making visa runs to a neighboring country every month or so. However, the government felt that too many people were abusing the system, and changed the laws a few years ago. Now, foreigners who want to live long-term in the country are only permitted to do so with the proper visa. Fortunately, the requirements for Thai residency are quite attainable.

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Most foreigners can have visa-free entry into Thailand for a period of 30 days. Getting a pre-arranged tourist visa allows for a stay of 60 days. Extensions are possible, however foreigners with single-entry tourist visas will not be able to stay for more than 90 days in any 6-month period, and those with 60-day multiple entry visas are only allowed one extension, allowing for a total stay of 120 days.

The Non-Immigrant “O-A” Visa

Most people planning to stay long-term in Thailand who do not intend to hold employment obtain a *Non-Immigrant Visa “O-A” (Long-stay)*. This visa grants the applicant a stay of one year and is often referred to as a “retirement visa.” The application process is relatively straightforward.

The qualifications for the Non-Immigrant Visa “O-A” are as follows:

- You must be age 50 or older at the time of application.
- You must have completed a satisfactory police records check.
- You must have obtained a medical examination and be able to present a certificate of health.
- You must have 800,000 baht (about \$24,800) deposited in a Thai bank for at least two months prior to applying for the “O-A” visa, or be able to prove that you receive a pension of at least 65,000 baht (about \$2,000) per month, or a deposit account plus a monthly income totaling not less than 800,000 baht. When it is time to extend your visa, you will need to show your last three month’s bank statements or pay stubs to the Immigration Department, proving that you still meet the same financial requirements. If you are submitting bank statements, you must show an original letter of guarantee from the bank.
- If your spouse is applying, they will also need to meet the financial requirements. However, if your spouse is under the age of 50, they will be considered a dependent and will not qualify for the Non-Immigrant Type “O-A” visa. In this case, you will need to provide a marriage certificate that has been notarized by your embassy so that your spouse can apply for a Type “O” multiple entry visa (see below). Your children may also apply for a Type “O” visa if they will be accompanying you.

The application for the Non-Immigrant Visa “O-A” visa may be submitted to the Thai Consulate or Thai Embassy in your home country or directly to the Immigration Bureau in Thailand.

There is a requirement that the Non-Immigrant “O-A” visa-holder check in with Thai Immigration every 90 days to report their location. If there is no Thai Immigration office where you live, you may report to the police department. At the end of the first year, you may apply for a one-year extension. The one-year Non-Immigrant Visa “O-A” costs 5,000 baht (\$155).

Once you have this visa, you are permitted to leave and re-enter the country, although you’ll need to apply at the Immigration office for a re-entry permit before your departure. Without first obtaining this permit, your Non-Immigrant “O-A” visa will be void upon departure.

As long as you continue to meet the requirements, your retirement visa can be extended indefinitely. Having any sort of employment is strictly prohibited.

Other Visa Types

You can get a *Multiple Entry Type “O” Visa*, regardless of your age. This visa is valid for 12 months, and requires that the holder exit and enter Thailand at least every 90 days in order to get a new entry stamp. The stamp allows you to stay for another 90 days. If you exit Thailand right before your 12-month visa expires, you will be granted an additional 90 days. In effect, this gives you a total of nearly 15 months in Thailand. The Multiple Entry Type “O” Visa cannot be issued from within Thailand. It is best to apply through the Thai Embassy or consulate in your home country or your country of residence. The Type “O” visa is the one that is most commonly used when a spouse is not yet 50 years old and does not qualify for a retirement visa.

There are other ways to legally live long-term in Thailand. Employment visas, student visas and investor visas are available to applicants who meet the necessary requirements.

Used household belongings can be imported duty-free as long as you have a visa that is valid for one year and they arrive in Thailand within six months of your initial entry. Otherwise, a 20% duty and 7% VAT will be assessed.

Thailand Investment Visa

You can get a Thai long-term investment visa regardless of your age or income. The minimum investment amount is 10 million Thai baht (about \$310,000). Investment visas are valid for one year and can be extended.

The requirements for a one-year investment visa are as follows:

- Invest 10 million baht into a Term Savings account with an approved government bank; or
- Invest 10 million baht into government bonds; or
- Invest 10 million baht into the purchase or lease of a condominium for not less than three years; or
- Invest 10 million baht into a combination of a savings, bonds, or property.
- The investment must be for a period of not less than three years.
- The money must have originated from overseas.

If you want to purchase a condo for the purpose of securing an investment visa, you will need to provide the title deed of the property, the sales contract, the tax receipt, and your passport.

The easiest way to get an investment visa is to first enter Thailand with a single entry tourist visa. Then, open a bank account at a government bank (either Krung Thai or Government Savings Bank). Next, transfer 10 million baht into the account from overseas. Be sure to get an official letter from the bank that confirms your account balance and verifies that the money originated from overseas.

Next, go to immigration and apply for a change of visa status based upon your proposed investment. You will be issued a 90-day, non-immigrant “O” visa that can be extended to one year after you have been in the country for 60 days. At this point, you can shop for a condo. If the total lease or purchase price is less than 10 million baht, you can put the remainder into a fixed term account or government bonds. After one year, when it is time for your visa to be extended, you’ll have no difficulties once evidence of your investment is supplied.

Permanent Residency

The Non-Immigrant Visa “O-A” does not give permanent residency. Only 100 people each year of each nationality are granted permanent residency, and having held a valid work permit for three years prior to the application is one of the requirements. If you have lived in Thailand with a non-immigrant “O-A” retirement visa, you are not eligible to apply for permanent residency.

Additionally, you are required to have had three consecutive one-year visa extensions, earn 30,000 baht (about \$930) per month if you have been married to a Thai national for five years, or 80,000 baht (about US \$2,480) per month if you are single. You must provide three years of income tax statements when you submit your application.

If you want to become a Thai citizen, you’ll first need to be a permanent resident. Citizenship is possible after you have been a permanent resident for 10 consecutive years.

The fee for the permanent residency visa is 7,600 baht (\$235).

Permanent Residency In The Philippines: The Pearl Of The Orient Seas

Of all the Southeast Asian countries that offer long-term visas, the Philippines has the lowest overall cost of living. You’ll find that you can enjoy a quality lifestyle on a very small budget. Cable television costs just \$10 per month, Internet is about \$12 per month, and a visit to a health care specialist costs less than US \$15. You can expect to spend less than \$15 for an elegant dinner for two, including drinks. English is spoken by practically everyone—it’s an official language here. The scenery is stunning and the people are exceptionally friendly.

Compared to any other country in Southeast Asia, the Philippines offers the easiest path to permanent residency (PR). Its PR program comes with more benefits than any other country in this part of the

world, as well. Unlike Thailand's retirement program, the Philippines allows foreign permanent residents to work or start a business. Once you have been granted permanent residency, you can stay in the country for as long as you want, and your visa will never expire.

Try It First

Citizens from almost every country can travel to the Philippines without a pre-arranged visa. Travelers entering the Philippines are required to have proof of onward travel and a passport that has at least six-month's validity beyond the intended period of stay. A visitor visa is issued upon arrival that is valid for 21 days. The 21 days actually begins the day following your date of arrival, effectively giving you permission to remain in the country for 22 days.

If you expect to stay for longer than 21 days, you can apply for a 59-day visa at any Philippine embassy or consulate prior to your departure or get a 38-day extension on an existing visitor's visa from the Bureau of Immigration offices once you are in the Philippines. Subsequent monthly extensions can be granted for at least 18 months. You can see the fees for extensions [here](#). Those without a long-term visa who want to remain in the country for longer than 18 months will eventually need to leave the country, even if for a day, before returning.

Commit To The SRRV Program

The retirement program the Philippines offers foreigners comes with a host of incentives. These include:

- The duty-free importation of up to \$7,000 worth of household belongings.
- The ability to work, to own a business, or go to school.
- The ability to have a driver's license and bank account.
- An exemption from paying any airport travel taxes.
- Numerous other discounts and incentives.

You can leave the country and return any time you like without needing to re-apply for residency.

There are four types of Special Resident Retiree Visas (SRRV) which all include the benefit of permanent Living Full-Time In Southeast Asia

residency. The most basic is the SRRV Smile, which allows you to remain in the Philippines for as long as you want, provided you deposit \$20,000 in a Philippine bank and keep it there for the duration of your stay. This visa is available to anyone who is 35 years old or older. Your deposit is fixed and may not be converted into an investment for a long-term lease or condominium purchase. There is no minimum income requirement.

The SRRV Classic differs from the SRRV Smile; you can use your funds to purchase a condominium or a long-term property lease. If you are between the ages of 35-49, you will need to deposit \$50,000 in a Philippine bank or purchase a ready-to-occupy condominium costing \$50,000 or more. If you are age 50 or above, you only need to invest \$10,000, provided you have an individual pension of at least \$800 per month. A couple would need a pension income of at least \$1,000 per month. Applicants who are at least 50 years old who cannot meet the pension requirements can still qualify for the SRRV Classic by maintaining a deposit of at least \$20,000 in a local bank.

The SRRV Human Touch offers the benefits of permanent Philippine residency to any retiree with a preexisting, non-contagious medical condition who is in need of ongoing medical care or services. The minimum investment amount is just \$10,000 if you are age 35 or older, and the conditions are the same as for those in the SRRV Smile program. Human Touch applicants must be able to show a pension of at least \$1,500 per month and proof of health insurance. This makes residency the Philippines a great option if you have a disability or chronic medical condition.

The *SRRV Courtesy* visa is for individuals 50 years old or older who are either former citizens of the Philippines or ambassadors or diplomats who have served in the Philippines. The terms and conditions for the courtesy visa are the same as for the SRRV Classic program.

SRRV applicants must pay a one-time administration fee of \$1,400. The application process is quite simple and can be completed online. There is no need to hire an agent for assistance.

The Philippines is so eager to offer permanent residency that Philippines Retirement Authority representatives will even pick you up at the airport and provide you with free assistance in getting a driver's license, employment permits, bank accounts, and whatever else you may need to get settled.

If you have lived in the Philippines for a continuous period of at least ten years, you may apply for citizenship. Unless you are of Filipino ancestry, you must renounce your previous citizenship once you become a citizen of the Philippines.

Special Visas For Investors, Too

Anyone who meets the qualifications and is at least 21 years of age is invited to apply for a *Special Investor's Resident Visa* (SIRV). This visa allows you, your spouse, and your unmarried children to live in the Philippines for as long as you want, providing the required qualifications and investments are maintained. Your initial visa will be valid for a period of six months, and can be extended indefinitely.

You will need to obtain a certificate from the Department of Health, a hospital, or medical facility in the Philippines or from your home country stating that you are physically and mentally fit. Additionally, you must present a criminal background check to prove that you don't have any criminal convictions involving moral turpitude (crimes that would be considered to be contrary to the rules of morality, such as murder, incest, rape, or spouse/child abuse.) You must also be able to show that you have at least \$75,000 to invest in the Philippines.

Your investment can be held as a fixed deposit in any accredited depository bank in the Philippines. You'll need to provide a certified copy of your certificate of deposit and the certificate must have a maturity date of at least 30 days and not more than 180 days from the initial date of deposit.

The other requirements for the SIRV are:

- You must complete and notarize the application form.
- You must provide recent photographs.
- You need to provide your birth certificate as well as birth certificates for your spouse and dependent children.

- If applicable, you must provide a legal copy of your marriage license.
- You must provide your original passport.
- You'll need to pay the processing fee of \$300 plus 10,110 pesos (about \$225) to the Board of Investments (BOI).

You will then be issued a probationary SIRV visa.

Once you have your probationary visa, you'll have 180 days to convert your fixed deposit into an eligible enterprise and report it to the BOI. You'll need to invest in a publicly listed company engaged in either manufacturing or services that are listed in the [Investment Priorities Plan of the BOI](#) (PDF). After you convert your fixed deposit to an investment, you'll need to pay a final 1,000 peso (about \$25) processing fee to the BOI.

As long as you maintain your qualifying investment in the Philippines, you can stay in the country as long as you want. You can also import your household goods and personal effects duty-free.

Your overseas pension or social security income is exempt from Philippine taxes, and the interest earned on bank deposits may be withdrawn at any time. If you ever decide to relinquish your Philippine residency status, your entire qualifying deposit is returned to you.

Malaysia's Open Door To Immigration

Malaysia is a friendly, welcoming country, and in no way is this more apparent than in their immigration laws. Foreigners from Europe, North America, Australia, and New Zealand can enter Malaysia through any immigration checkpoint and receive a 90-day Social Visit Stamp. Making visa runs every three months can extend your stay indefinitely. This is one of the few countries in Southeast Asia that allows foreigners to live in the country for an extended period of time without requiring that they attain residency status.

Malaysia has a very reasonable cost of living. Most things cost between a half and a third of what they would cost in the west. Utilities, food, entertainment, and health care are all inexpensive, and you can live very well on a low to moderate budget. Prices in Kuala

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Lumpur and Johor Bahru are roughly equivalent to those in Bangkok, while prices elsewhere in the country average much less than that. It is the only country in Southeast Asia that allows foreigners to own full titles to landed property.

Permanent Residency Made Easy

If you move to Malaysia, there are good reasons to obtain permanent residency. You'll need it to open a checking or savings account or obtain a driver's license and insurance, among other things. Malaysia invites foreigners to apply for permanent residency through their *Malaysia My Second Home Programme*, or as it is popularly known, the MM2H. If you want to purchase any real estate in Malaysia, the MM2H comes with significant incentives.

You only need to be 35 years old and meet the mandated requirements to obtain permanent residency in Malaysia. Successful applicants will receive a residency pass that is valid for up to 10 years which covers the immigration of spouses, children, parents, and even a housekeeper under the same visa.

MM2H Benefits

Here are the primary incentives the Malaysian government offers prospective MM2H participants:

- Foreigners, regardless of whether they are permanent residents or not, can purchase up to two properties in Malaysia. This includes condominiums, houses, or land. The minimum purchase price for a non-resident foreigner to buy property is 1 million Malaysian ringgit (RM), and may be more depending on where the property is located. That's about \$300,000 at the current exchange rate. If you have a MM2H visa, though, you can purchase property valued at much less than this. As an example, if you have a MM2H visa, you could buy a home in the state of Sarawak for RM300,000 (\$65,000) or in the state of Perak for RM350,000 (\$76,000). The minimum purchase price varies from state to state—you can see the full list [here](#).
 - If you sell real estate, you are responsible for paying Real Property Gains Taxes (RPGT). The amount varies according to the length of time that you have owned the property. MM2H holders qualify for a reduced rate, and are exempt from paying the RPGT
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at all if their property has been held for at least five years.

- You can apply for a home loan through a Malaysian bank for up to 80% of the value of a qualifying residential property.
- You can import your household and personal belongings duty-free.
- You can import one automobile duty-free, or buy a locally assembled automobile free of import duty, excise duty, or sales tax.
- You may obtain a Malaysian driver's license and bank account.
- You can bring one maid into Malaysia, as long as that person meets the basic immigration requirements.
- You may bring your family with you. That includes your spouse, any unmarried children under the age of 21, and your parents. Only the applicant needs to meet the financial eligibility requirements.
- Your unmarried children may attend private schools.
- All income from foreign sources such as pensions, interest and dividend income, and foreign earned income is exempt from Malaysian taxes. However, income received from employment or business within Malaysia is taxable.
- You may start a public or private business in Malaysia. The minimum investment capital is RM250,000 (\$55,000).
- If you are over the age of 50, you may work up to 20 hours per week in a position that the government deems is filling a critical sector—one that would be difficult or impossible to fill by a Malaysian.
- You are issued a Malaysian ID card, so you no longer need to carry a passport.
- You and your family can reside in Malaysia for up to 10 years with the option of indefinite visa renewals. You can enter and leave the country as often as you wish. The length of the visa is determined according to the validity of the passport – it will not extend beyond the passport's expiration date.

MM2H Requirements

Applicants must meet certain requirements when immigrating to any foreign country. Malaysia's MM2H Program requirements are as follows:

- If you are at least 35 years old, but under the age of 50, you must be able to show that you have liquid assets of at least RM500,000 (\$108,170)

- and an offshore (non Malaysian) income of at least RM10,000 (\$2,164) per month. Additionally, you will need to open a fixed deposit account of at least RM300,000 (\$65,000) at a Malaysian bank. This deposit will earn interest, which is exempt from Malaysian taxes. After living in Malaysia for one year, you can withdraw half of your deposit and use it for a home purchase, your children's education expenses, or for medical expenses. The remainder of the fixed deposit must remain in a Malaysian bank for the duration of your participation in the MM2H program.
- If you are over the age of 50, you must show financial proof of at least RM350,000 (\$76,000) in assets and an offshore income of at least RM10,000 a month. If you are retired, you must show proof of receiving a monthly pension. You have your choice of opening either a fixed deposit account of at least RM150,000 (\$32,500) or providing proof of a monthly government pension of RM10,000 (\$2,164). If you have made a fixed deposit, RM50,000 (\$11,000) may be withdrawn for approved expenses after one year (as above). The remainder—at least RM100,000 (\$22,000)—must be maintained in your fixed deposit account for the duration of your participation in the program.
 - Regardless of age, you'll need to submit a medical report, which can be obtained from any Malaysian hospital or registered clinic. Additionally, you must have health insurance. This requirement can be waived if you are unable to get insured due to your age or a pre-existing condition.
 - You must be bonded, which will cost anywhere from RM200 to RM2,000, depending on your nationality.
 - You'll need to submit certified copies of your passport and marriage license (if immigrating with your spouse),
 - You'll need to submit copies of your last three months' bank statements, pay slips, and pension or income statements.
 - Finally, you will need to purchase a MM2H Social Visit Stamp, which costs RM90 annually.

For a complete list of what documentation is required, the MM2H website has information [here](#). You can apply for the MM2H visa yourself, or enlist the assistance of an agent who can navigate the red tape for you. Most agents will charge applicants between RM4,000 (\$865) and RM10,000 (\$2,164) for their services.

Permanent Residency For Investors

High net worth individuals are also invited to apply for permanent residency. You must be willing to invest at least \$2 million in a fixed deposit account at any Malaysian bank and keep it there for at least five years. At the end of that time, you, your spouse, and your unmarried children under the age of 18 will be eligible to receive permanent residency status.

Indonesia: Living In The Emerald Of The Equator

Although Indonesia doesn't offer the best long stay visa in the world, there are still good reasons to consider living here. You'll have your choice of living on one of 17,000 tropical islands – some cosmopolitan, some with perfect beaches, excellent snorkeling and top-end resorts, and some that are so remote that you could practically have one all to yourself. The cost of living is roughly half of what it is in the United States, which makes Indonesia a very inexpensive country. As a whole, Indonesia is not as developed as some of the other Southeast Asian countries, although luxury is still available for a price. Even in Jakarta—one of the largest cities in the world—it isn't unusual to see cattle or goats sharing the crowded streets with a haphazard mix of motorcycles, cars, carts, and pedestrians.

Despite the drawbacks, there is something magical about this country. Bali, the "Island of Gods," is a stunningly beautiful island ringed with beaches that lie under the shadows of towering Mount Agung, at 3,031 meters (9,944 feet). Many other islands in the archipelago compete with Bali for scenic beauty. Living here could be full of adventure and exploration. The people are very good-natured and the food is delicious. English is understood by many people, so language wouldn't be a major hurdle in any city or popular tourist area. Bali, Jakarta and many other parts of Indonesia have sizable expat populations.

Make It A Holiday

The majority of people coming to Indonesia get a tourist visa, which is issued upon arrival at most international airports and seaports. This visa allows you to visit the country for up to 30 days and costs \$25,

which is customarily paid in U.S. dollars. If needed, the visa can be extended once for an additional 30 days.

Try It Out Long-Term

If you are at least 55 years old and want to stay in Indonesia long-term, you can apply for a Retirement Visa, which is locally known as a *KITAS*. To qualify, you'll need to meet the following requirements:

- Your passport must have more than 18 month's validity.
- You will need to show your original passport, along with a copy of all your passport pages.
- You will need four passport photos, which must be taken in front of a red background.
- You will need to provide a copy of your curriculum vitae (resume).
- If you are married, you will need a copy of your marriage license.
- You will need a statement from your pension fund or bank showing that you have funds available to provide living expenses during your stay in Indonesia. A minimum of \$1,500 per month or a total \$18,000 per year is required.
- You will need to show proof of health insurance, life insurance, and personal liability insurance.
- You must provide a personal letter of guarantee regarding your living arrangements in Indonesia. If you decide to purchase a condominium, the unit must cost at least \$35,000. If you are renting, you will need to present a letter with the name of the owner of the property, the address of the house, and the amount of monthly rent. Your rent must be least US \$500 a month in Jakarta, Bandung, and Bali; \$300 a month for other cities in Java, Batam, and Medan; or at least \$200 a month in any other Indonesian city. Your residence must be located in an authorized tourist area.
- You will need to provide an affidavit that you will employ at least one Indonesian maid, driver, or other domestic worker while living in Indonesia.
- You will need to provide a sponsorship letter from an approved travel agency or agent.
- You must make a written statement that you agree not to engage in any business activities or work while living in Indonesia.
- You will need to pay 700,000 Indonesian Rupiahs (IDR) to immigration (about \$43).

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Although the above requirements appear to be quite straightforward, do not underestimate Indonesian bureaucracy. You should seriously consider using the services of an agent, who can navigate the significant administrative hurdles involved. The usual combined fee for the *KITAS* visa and the agent's service charge is between 5 and 7 million IDR (\$306 to \$430).

The *KITAS* visa takes about two months to process. It is valid for one year and can be extended for up to a total of five years. Your spouse and any unmarried children under the age of 18 can accompany you.

Once you have a *KITAS* visa, you can import your household goods and personal effects duty-free. Duties will be waived for a total of one air shipment and one sea shipment. Your personal effects must arrive within three months of your date of arrival in Indonesia in order to qualify for the exemption. The importation of cars and motorcycles is prohibited.

You will also be permitted to open a bank account, obtain a driver's license and, theoretically, be eligible to receive certain discounts, although what these are is not made clear on any Indonesian government website. Some locals have said that they have had discounts on golf course fees using their *KITAS* visas.

The Next Step Is Permanent Residency

After you have had your *KITAS* visa for five years, you can apply for a *KITAP* permanent stay visa through the Senior Foreign Tourist Travel Bureau. Paperwork will need to be submitted again, including most of the items that were required for the *KITAS* visa. You'll need to prove that your income meets the minimum guidelines, present your curriculum vitae, your original passport along with copies of every page, four photographs, a statement that you have hired a maid or domestic helper, and proof of where you are living, along with the amount of your monthly rent, if applicable. You will also need to show an application letter and guarantee from the tourist travel bureau that has agreed to sponsor you, along with their appointment letter, license, and tax number. Although there are no laws prohibiting you from doing this on your own, it is much easier to enlist an agent who is experienced in obtaining visas to assist you in getting a *KITAP*.

Once you have obtained permanent residency with the *KITAP*, you may apply for Indonesian citizenship. The process takes about one year.

No Investment Visa Offered

Indonesia doesn't offer investment visas. If you want to start a company, you will need to apply for a work permit, which is also called a *KITAS*. The requirements are similar as to those required for a retirement visa. You may be able to open a business as long as you have partnered with a local resident before you register the company in Indonesia. To help you qualify, there are professional immigration service providers who will provide you with a silent partner for your business. You will need to provide the immigration authorities with complete details regarding your background as well as the activities of your Indonesian company. Extensions of the *KITAS* work permit are granted depending on how well your company is performing. It is not legal to start a company purely for immigration purposes.

In Singapore: Residency By Investment

The little city-state of Singapore has one of the highest standards of living of any country in the world. For those who have the desired skills or can afford to make a sizable investment in Singapore's economy, permanent residency—and even citizenship—are relatively easy to obtain. Its highly developed infrastructure and international ambience makes Singapore a prime destination for wealthy individuals who can afford to live in the most expensive country in Southeast Asia.

Citizens of all western countries are eligible to enter Singapore without a visa. An entry stamp valid for 90 days is granted upon arrival for residents of most western countries with the exception of citizens from the U.K. and Ireland, who are granted visa-free stays of one month.

With Singapore's proximity to Malaysia, it may be possible to make a visa run in order to stay a bit longer. Unlike Malaysia, however, Singapore Immigration will not permit people to stay indefinitely on a tourist entry stamp. If you want to live long-term in Singapore, you'll need a resident visa.

Singapore does not have a retirement visa, per se, although attaining permanent residency is possible by either opening a business or making an investment in Singapore's economy through the *Global Investor Programme (GIP)*.

Participants in the GIP have two options. Option A requires an investment of at least S\$2.5 million (about \$2 million) in a new business or in an equivalent expansion of an existing business operation. Option B requires an investment of at least S\$2.5 million into a GIP fund that invests in Singapore-based companies.

To be eligible to participate in the GIP, you must meet certain criteria:

- Applicants must submit a detailed three-year business or investment plan with annual financial and employment projections. You must also meet those projections for three years following the date of your initial investment.
- You must possess a track record of at least three years of entrepreneurial business operations, and be able to provide audited financial statements of your company for the last three years.
- If your company is in the real estate or construction industry, the company's turnover must be at least S\$200 million in the most recent year and per annum, on average, for the last three years. If the company is in a non-construction or real estate sector, its turnover must be at least S\$50 million in the most recent year and at least S\$50 million per annum, on average, for the last three years. You may consolidate your businesses to meet the minimum turnover criteria.
- If your company is privately-owned, you must have at least 30% shareholding in the company. The growth and profitability of the company, as well as your role in the company, are taken into consideration at the time of application.
- Option A applicants must also submit a detailed three-year business or investment plan with employment and annual financial projections.

Once your GIP application is approved, you have six months in which to make your Singapore investment.

Permanent residency is a part of the GIP and is obtained by submitting a non-refundable application

Living Full-Time In Southeast Asia

fee of S\$5,650 and fulfilling all of the program's criteria. Once permanent residency is established, you will receive a five-year Re-Entry Permit (REP). This permit allows you to travel freely in and out of Singapore while retaining your PR status. The REP is renewable in either three or five year increments. The renewal permits cost an additional S\$110 (\$87).

The other way to obtain PR status in Singapore is by opening a business. Your business must meet the Ministry of Manpower (MOM) [Entrepass guidelines](#), but the initial investment is much lower than it is with the GIP—as low as S\$50,000 (\$37,000). You must own at least 30% of the company's shares and fulfill other criteria. Many businesses are excluded from the Entrepass program, and final approval is up to the MOM. If your business is approved, you will initially be issued a one-year visa. After the first renewal, your dependents may come to live with you in Singapore. [Paul Hype Page & Co.](#) has a helpful table outlining the requirements and benefits of the *Entrepass* program.

Having PR status is a path to Singaporean citizenship. If you have been a permanent resident for at least two years, you can apply for citizenship. Singapore does not recognize dual citizenship.

Long-term Living In Vietnam

Vietnam is Southeast Asia's rising star. The country is a rapidly developing middle-income state with a growing middle class population. It also has one of the lowest costs of living in the world, which makes it an attractive place if you have a limited budget. Even in Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City, it is quite possible to live very well on a monthly budget of around \$1,000. Vietnam's 3,260 kilometers (2,025 miles) of coastline, 30 national parks, 8 UNESCO World Heritage Sites, and 54 ethnic groups provide more than a few good reasons to live in Vietnam.

Vietnam does not offer retirement visas, though it is fairly straightforward to live here long-term without needing to make frequent trips abroad. Visas must be arranged before entering the country and can be for one or three month's duration. When the visa nears expiration, an agent can get you one or two extensions. Each extension is valid for the same length of time as your original visa, so if you entered Vietnam with [Living Full-Time In Southeast Asia](#)

a one-month visa, you could stay in the country for a total of three months; if you entered with a three-month visa, you could stay in Vietnam for a total of nine months. After the visa has been extended twice, a visa run is necessary.

To stay longer in Vietnam requires working, having a Vietnamese spouse, or owning and operating a business in the country. If you have a work permit, business visas are typically issued for one year and they can be extended. On occasion, it may be possible to get a two or even a three year business visa. At this time, if you do not have a work permit, the maximum duration of a standard business visa is three months.

Vietnamese visa laws are in a constant state of flux. Although the rules for qualifying remain roughly the same, the length of stay that is granted changes frequently. If the laws change during the tenure of your visa the original terms are still honored. It is occasionally possible to get a 6 or even 12-month business visa even if you don't have a work permit—you just have to keep checking.

Living Long-term In Laos And Cambodia

Many westerners who live in Laos and Cambodia seem quite happy with their choice. Both countries are rapidly developing, but lack the infrastructure and amenities found elsewhere in Southeast Asia. Although both countries have relatively cosmopolitan capital cities, once you're past the suburbs, living can often require going back to the basics. Medical care does not meet international standards, but it's a short flight to Thailand, Malaysia or Singapore. The low cost of living makes the occasional trip out of the country seem much more affordable.

Citizens of most western countries will receive a 30-day tourist visa when entering Laos or Cambodia. A Laotian tourist visa can be extended two times, and a Cambodian tourist visa can be extended once. Making a visa run every month to get a fresh 30 days is common, and many foreigners have been living in Laos and Cambodia in this manner for years.

Cambodia and Laos do not offer retirement visas, though it is relatively easy to live long-term in either

country with a business visa. A business visa will grant you one year in the country, and it is renewable indefinitely. There are no defined conditions that must be met in either country, other than paying the required fees and getting a sponsor. Sponsorship is easily accomplished through almost any travel agency that advertises visas. The agent will act as your sponsor or find someone who will.

Both countries formally require an investment, but any agency familiar with the local laws can easily obtain a business visa for you, generally at a very reasonable cost. As long as you have a passport with at least six months validity and the necessary fees, you will qualify for a business visa. An advantage to having a business visa is that you can work if you want, and many foreigners do work or volunteer part or full-time. Showing immigration a letterhead from your company and paying the fee is all that is needed for a Cambodian business visa.

Myanmar: The Final Frontier

Myanmar (formerly Burma) is the last country in this region to open its doors to foreigners, and it's been a slow process. If you lived here, you could enjoy amazing scenery, interesting food, kindhearted people, and fantastic culture. On the other hand, many of the "western conveniences" are hard to come by, due to a general lack of infrastructure. This is Southeast Asia's poorest country, full of opportunity and rich in resources but impoverished, nonetheless.

A 28-day tourist visa is issued for citizens of most western countries. Although this visa can technically be issued upon arrival in the country, the U.S. State Department recommends that you apply for your visa beforehand. The visa cannot be extended at this time.

Myanmar does not offer retirement visas, but it is possible to stay long-term by applying for a business visa, which allows you to stay in the country for up to 70 days. This can be extended for a total stay of up to one year. It is also possible to apply for a multiple-entry business visa, which is valid for 6 to 12 months.

Unlike business visas in Cambodia and Laos, people with Myanmar business visas are expected to be working or be engaged in business. You'll need to present an original invitation letter addressed to you

from a company registered in Myanmar in order to apply for a business visa. Approvals are granted on a case by case basis. Other requirements can be found on the Embassy of the Republic of Myanmar's [website](#).

If you have a local sponsor, you can apply for a "permit to stay." This allows you to work for three months to one year in Myanmar.

The work permit is a relatively new concept in Myanmar. It is available to foreigners who work for companies that have been set up under the Myanmar Foreign Investment Law.

Something For Everybody In Southeast Asia

Some countries in Southeast Asia, such as the Philippines and Malaysia, actively recruit foreigners for permanent residency, offering incentives for people to live, play, and invest in their country. Indonesia's program doesn't come with many incentives, but it is possible to live there long-term and gain PR status. Thailand's program lacks many incentives and PR status, but allows you to commit to long-term living with easy minimum financial requirements. Singapore welcomes wealthy foreigners who can purchase permanent residency by investing in the economy.

Though formal residency schemes do not yet exist, Cambodia and Laos allow foreigners to live in the country through business visas without imposing the need for them to actually conduct any business. Vietnam allows non-working foreigners to remain in the country for nine or more months without needing to make a visa run, and working foreigners can get long-term visas issued with a minimum of hassle. Only Myanmar has yet to truly open its doors for foreigners, but with the introduction of work permits, even this is in the process of changing.

This rapidly developing part of the world is practically bursting with opportunity. Whether you're interested in exploring, retiring, or investing in this region, you'll have your pick of places to consider. With unspoiled tropical islands and beaches, thoroughly cosmopolitan cities, lush jungles and mountains, sunny weather, friendly locals, and welcoming immigration laws, there is something for everybody in Southeast Asia.

Relevant Contacts

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Website (Permanent residency): www.thaiembassy.com/thailand/thai-permanent-residency.php

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