

# 6 Residency Havens That Roll Out The Welcome Mat

By the Editors of Live and Invest Overseas™



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# 6 Residency Havens That Roll Out The Welcome Mat

By the Editors of Live and Invest Overseas™

Dear Reader,

We here at Live and Invest Overseas™ know firsthand the potential challenges and hurdles that come with transitioning to a new country. We've been not only covering the live-retire- invest overseas beat but living it ourselves for decades. As we've learned, sometimes the hard way, one of the most frustrating and confusing aspects of setting up a new life overseas can be establishing residency in the country where you decide you'd like to relaunch your life.

Most governments put the welcome mat out for tourists. They'd love for you to spend some time in their countries, indulging in the local cuisine, strolling their parks and museums, and taking in their unique brand of culture...all the while stimulating the local economy, of course. Invest in some hotel nights, restaurant meals, and maybe a commemorative mug and t-shirt, then move on.

The truth is, however, not every country welcomes foreigners full time. You aren't going to get a visa to reside full time, legally, in India, for example. Ireland made their requirements so onerous that most people wanting to live there as retirees won't qualify..

A few countries, however, keep the welcome mat out for foreigners wanting more than a few weeks of vacation. These countries not only welcome you to stay full-time, but they compete for your attention, offering tax incentives, in-country discounts, duty-free imports, among other perks. More importantly, these "welcome-mat residency havens" have put in place a number of programs that make establishing residency, easy.

Having legal residency in a country other than the country of your citizenship is a valuable asset and an important aspect of international diversification. And since legal residents have many of the same rights as citizens (suffrage is usually the only difference),

residency can make your life overseas immeasurably less complicated.

Unfortunately, many governments, if they offer residency options in the first place, can make the process so maddeningly complicated and prolonged that you may decide it's not worth the bother... hopefully not after you've landed, though.

You shouldn't pick your new home overseas solely because of the ease of the residency options it offers, but it is an important issue to factor into your thinking early on. You'll be welcome almost anywhere in the world for 30 to 90 days (the typical stay permitted by a tourist visa in most countries, though some, like Mexico offer 180 days for tourists). If you'd like to stay longer—say, indefinitely—where could that be organized easily and efficiently and even to some considerable personal advantage?

In the pages that follow, we detail your options for establishing full-time residency in six countries that qualify as the world's most user- friendly in this regard—namely, Belize, Colombia, Ecuador, Nicaragua, Panama, and Peru.

What's more, these six countries are also appealing and affordable places to live... places where residents enjoy pristine beaches and cool mountain air... peaceful off-the-grid retreats, historic colonial towns, and booming cosmopolitan cities... places that value freedom and promote peace of mind and where quality medical care is available at a fair or downright bargain price.

These are playgrounds for the adventurous retiree, expat, investor, and entrepreneur, places where you might well want to stick around.

Here's how to organize just that.

Sincerely,

The Editors of Live and Invest Overseas™

# **Belize:**

## **Retire At 45 In Tropical, Tax-Free Tranquility**

About two decades ago, the government of Belize, a tiny nation at the intersection of Central America and the Caribbean, enacted legislation to allow Qualified Retired Persons (QRPs) to obtain permanent residency in their country. In many ways, this program is the most efficient route to foreign residency anywhere in the Americas.

Furthermore, you can enjoy the benefits of being a QRP even if you spend as little as one month a year in Belize. Or, if you want, you could become a full-time resident. Right now, with the world economy in turmoil, running away to a new life in the Caribbean doesn't seem like such a bad idea, does it?

Belize's Qualified Retired Persons residency program isn't, strictly speaking, for "retirees" only. It is available to anyone 45 years of age or older, and it grants a host of incentives designed to encourage foreigners to come and bring their money.

These incentives include a permanent exemption from any Belizean taxes, including income tax, capital gains tax, estate tax, and import tax on household goods, automobiles, boats, even airplanes.

### **Easy To Qualify**

The only requirements to qualify for Belize's QRP program are that you or your spouse be 45 years of age or older, that you consider yourself to be retired (more on this in a minute), and that you show that you have at least US\$2,000 a month in income to support yourself in Belize. While pension income can be shown to meet the last requirement, the easiest way to prove financial means is simply to deposit a minimum of US\$24,000 per year into a Belizean bank account.

In practical terms, the "consider yourself to be retired" requirement means that, as a QRP, you can't apply for a work visa or earn any income in Belize. (This is not to say that you can't do international or internet work.)

Even if you are not contemplating retiring for one, three, or even, say, five years, this is the time to apply and to lock in the benefits of the current QRP law. Once you've qualified, a one-month holiday in Belize each year will maintain your QRP residency status while you work toward your ultimate retirement plan.

### **Remember, If You Are 45, You Qualify As A Retiree In This Safe Haven**

In fact, as we've said, in Belize, you could "retire" as young as 45. And you don't have to live in this country full-time (unless you want to). You can come and go as you please. You need only spend a few weeks here each year. That's the beauty of its special Qualified Retirement Program (QRP).

Just come for a relaxing vacation and start the process.

Once you visit, you may never want to go back home. Belize is a peaceful eco-tourism retreat with more than 540 species of birds, 4,000 species of flowering plants, and 700 species of trees. Nearly 40% of Belize is protected as parkland or nature preserves. Belize is also home to the second-largest barrier reef in the world, teeming with colorful fish, coral, and unusual marine life. It is a fisherman's and diver's paradise.

You'll also find the modern conveniences you need to live comfortably. Easy internet access allows you to continue working remotely, if you like, and makes it easy to stay in touch with friends and family.

For many, though, one of the most appealing parts of Belize's QRP program is that it doesn't require you to reside physically in Belize. You might call it a "Virtual Residency Program," allowing you to take advantage of the benefits of Belize residency while spending your time anywhere in the world you choose.

Once you obtain your QRP residency status, you'll need to demonstrate that you're spending just a few weeks a year in Belize and that you have a legal address here.

### **Applying For The QRP Residency Status**

You can apply on your own (be warned that this takes a fair amount of legwork) or through an attorney specialized in QRP residency applications.

The QRP application process is handled by the Belize Tourism Board in collaboration with the Ministry of National Security and the Department of Immigration and Nationality.

Contact the Belize Tourism Board at P.O. Box 325, 64 Regent Street, Belize City, or by phone at (501) 227-2420 (in Belize) or 1-800-624-0686 (U.S. toll-free number).

To apply for the QRP Residency Program, you will be required to present the following documents:

1. Copy of the Birth Certificate for each applicant and dependent;
2. Copy of the Marriage Certificate (if married, and spouse is a dependent);
3. Authentic Police Record/Criminal History Report from applicant's (and dependents') last place of residency, issued within one month prior to the application;
4. Notarized color copies of all pages of Passport (including blank pages) for the applicant and all dependents;
5. Proof of Income:
  - a. An official statement from a bank or financial institution certifying that the applicant is receiving an income of US\$2,000 per month, or
  - b. An official statement from a financial institution or building society in
6. Belize certifying that the applicant's investment or deposit will generate a minimum of US\$2,000 per month or any equivalent of US\$24,000 per year;
7. Certified results of a complete Medical Examination including an HIV/AIDS test;
8. Eight color passport size photos: four of front, two of left, and two of right sides.

The dependents you can include in your application are your spouse and children under age of 18 through the age of 23 if they are enrolled in a university. The fees you'll have to pay are the following:

- A non-refundable application fee in the sum of US\$150 payable to the Belize Tourism Board, submitted with the application.
- A program fee in the sum of US\$1,000 payable to the Belize Tourism Board, submitted upon acceptance into the program.
- Upon acceptance into the program, you'll pay a fee of US\$200 to the Belize Tourism Board for the issuance of the Qualified Retired Person Residency Card.

- Each dependent is required to pay a Program Fee of US\$750 to enter the program.

All payments must be made payable to the Belize Tourism Board and be in the form of cash, U.S. bank draft, or U.S. cashier's check.

It can be easier to engage help with the paperwork involved with applying and qualifying for QRP status in Belize.

For more details on the application process, [check the Belize chapter in our "Passport to Freedom: The World's Top Havens for Residency, Citizenship, and a Second Passport."](#)

For help applying, [get in touch with our recommended expert in Belize here.](#)

## Permanent Residency In Belize

Unlike QRP, permanent residency in Belize is handled in the more traditional way through the Immigration and Nationality Department. You can apply with the department for residency after residing in Belize for a year with only spending 14 days outside of the country, although some officials have been known to interpret the stipulation as 14 consecutive days at a time in multiple instances.

The required documents submitted with the application are similar to that of the QRP program, with the exception of proof of US\$2,000 monthly deposit, and including the additional:

- Passport confirming presence in Belize for one year;
- Alien registration for resident and each dependent, if present in Belize continuously for six months or longer;
- Recent local bank statement if means of financial support is not otherwise demonstrated;
- Proof of property ownership in Belize if resident is claiming real estate (but owning property is not required). Application fees vary depending on nationality; Americans are charged US\$1,000 per person.

The wait time for residency varies according to how many applications the department is dealing with... at

times it's said to be about a month... and at others up to a year.

Upon approval, an additional US\$150 is due to stamp the passport as official permanent resident. You have up to a year from that date to bring in a one-time import of household goods duty-free. You are a resident of Belize and entitled to all subsequent rights except to vote in national elections. You are also able to take advantage of the same benefit of paying no Belize tax on income generated outside of the country.

After five years of legal residency, you may apply for citizenship.

For more information, or to obtain an application contact:

[Belize Immigration and Nationality Department](#)

New Administration Building, Belmopan, Cayo District  
Phone: +501-822-2423 or +501-822-0265

For help with an application, [get in touch with our recommended residency expert in Belize here.](#)

## Why Belize?

Belize is not only perhaps the easiest place in the world to establish foreign residency, it's also a very appealing place to spend time. This little country, frankly, has a lot going for it.

Belize...

...Is a stable country that welcomes expatriates. Once a British colony (it gained its independence in 1981), the political, economic, and legal systems are based upon familiar British models...

...Is home to a secure and conservative international banking system. The international banking laws are very strict. Bank failures are unheard-of. The Central Bank's liquidity requirement is 24% for every dollar deposited. A far cry from the liquidity of U.S. banks, which average less than 4% liquidity. You can open an account here with peace of mind and diversify your funds in other currencies...

...Offers QRP resident retirees special government incentives, including little to no duty on personal goods moved here and no taxes on any income or receipts that accrue from outside the country...

...A very affordable place to live. A couple could live comfortably on US\$24,000 a year in Belize, including on Ambergris Caye, where the cost of living is higher than anywhere else in the country. On the mainland, especially in the interior, you could live on considerably less...

...Is safe. Compared with nearby countries and U.S. cities, the crime rates are very low. And the government and local towns are working together to keep it that way...

...Is English-speaking! This sure makes life easier...

...Boasts a diverse and appealing geography, with Caribbean cays and a lush interior region rich with diverse ecology and rich archaeological history. This country is an ecotourist's delight...

...Is a small, friendly place to live. The population of the entire country is just over 350,000. You'll never be lost in the crowd here...

...Boasts a moderate subtropical climate. The weather is balmy and comfortable. Temperatures and rainfall vary according to location. Just pick your preferred climate. You'll be greeted by the sun most days, and you'll never need more than a light jacket or sweater...

...Is highly accessible, just a two-hour flight from Miami, 2 1/2 hours from Houston...

...Is a great place for outdoor recreational activities, from snorkeling and scuba diving to fishing, bird watching, and trekking through ruins...In addition, there are festivals and concerts, cultural events, and volunteer opportunities. It's easy to make friends and to keep busy...

We all care about our quality of life, and we all want to maintain a comfortable standard of living in retirement. Most important, we all want to be able to retire... before age 80!

Many of us have lost a good amount of our retirement funds recently. In Belize, your dollars stretch further, meaning you're able to retire earlier and to live comfortably on less.

# Colombia:

## A Top Choice For Internationalizing Your Life

With recent strides toward peace happening as investment and development booms across the country, Colombia has come a long way in distancing itself from its checkered past. The Colombia of today ticks many boxes on the wish list of anyone shopping for options for internationalizing his life.

It continues to stand out among the competition whenever backup residency alternatives are discussed and belongs squarely at the top of the list of easy backup residency options. One friend and colleague in Colombia was able to obtain Colombian residency quickly, efficiently, and without the help (or expense) of an attorney.

Colombia offers a handful, ranging from a pensionado visa to investor visas. Most of these start out providing temporary residency that can lead to permanent residency. However, if you invest enough up front, you can gain permanent residency straightaway, which is a nice option and means more flexibility in general.

Colombia has a transparent process with easy documentation requirements, including no need for a background check from your current country of residence. All requirements are clearly spelled out on [their excellent immigration website](#), and the requirements don't change when you get to the individual agents.

The process can even be begun [online here](#), and all requirements can be sent digitally via the same application page.

All residency permits in Colombia are issued out of the immigration office in Bogotá. Once all documents are submitted, the embassy might deliver your temporary resident's visa in a matter of days. When you go to convert it into a permanent visa, you might be out with a new card within the same hour.

In Colombia more than most places, it's possible and feasible to undergo the process yourself, without the help of an attorney. To be a do-it-yourselfer, though, you need to speak Spanish well enough to get through the process. However, if you don't speak Spanish and end up using an attorney, the process is still very easy.

In addition, that list of requirements doesn't include a police background check (at least not yet; our contacts say that this point is being actively discussed by

the powers that be). This eliminates the need for an American to get an FBI report, which can be one of the biggest delays for an American trying to establish residency in any country other than Colombia.

For more information about residency and citizenship requirements or to begin your application, [get in touch with our preferred attorney in Colombia](#).

### Easy To Qualify And Apply

There are two other easily accessible temporary visas—the *pensionado* and the *rentista*.

The pensionado is for someone receiving a pension either from a company or the government. The minimum amount to qualify is three times the minimum wage in Colombia. The minimum wage in Colombia 877,803 pesos (for 2020); three of those would be 2,633,409 pesos. Again, though, this number goes up and down with the exchange rate as well as increasing each January as the minimum wage increases.

The rentista option is for people with non-pension income. This could be covered using interest or dividend payments from investment or a salary from your own company. The minimum amount required for the rentista visa is 10 times the minimum wage, which comes to 8,778,030 pesos. Go [here](#) to convert these at today's rate.

With either of these two "retirement" visas (though, again, you can qualify for the rentista visa using salary income in some cases), you would be on a three-year temporary visa, after five years as a temporary resident, you are eligible to apply for permanent residency.

While the thresholds for Colombia's retirement and investment visa options aren't the lowest on offer anywhere, the amounts are competitive. The actual numbers are in Colombian pesos and so, to state the obvious, the U.S. dollar values change with the exchange rate. Note as well that the income thresholds are based on the country's monthly minimum wage (you must earn three or ten times the minimum wage), which increases each year.

This means two things. First, if the idea of residency in Colombia interests you, you should act now, as the cost is only going to increase. Second, ideally you should have a bit more in pension income or invest a bit more than the minimums to make sure you continue to meet the peso thresholds at renewal.

Along with competitive thresholds for qualifying, Colombia's time-in-country requirements for maintaining your residency status are user-friendly. Under the temporary residency options (which the two figures above represent), you need to spend but one day every six months in the country.

Easy bureaucracy, easy qualification thresholds, and easy requirements for maintaining the status... Colombia makes for a great option under any circumstances, whether you're looking for a primary plan or a Plan B.

## Making The Right Investment For Permanent Residency

The diversity of investment options that qualify you for residency is another benefit in Colombia. You have choices that qualify you for residency while also positioning you for good return.

If you take the real estate track, you must make a minimum investment of 350 times the minimum wage, coming to 307,231,050 pesos (for 2020). Ordinarily, the municipal value on the deed is considerably less than the purchase price; this is a nuance your attorney can help you to understand and manage.

Or you can qualify by owning or investing in a Colombian corporation for a minimum investment that amounts to 100 times the minimum wage, which comes to 87,780,300 pesos (in 2020). Go [here](#) to convert Colombian pesos at today's exchange rate.

This multiple-entry visa will allow you to stay in Colombia for three years. After this period, the visa must be renewed. Renewal is contingent upon maintenance of the investment.

A Resident Investor visa is a unique option, as it allows you to bypass the temporary status and go straight to permanent residency. For this, you'd need to make an investment in a Colombian corporation investment vehicle (i.e. trust) of 650 times the minimum wage, 570,571,950 pesos (in 2020). Go [here](#) to convert Colombian pesos at today's exchange rate.

Agriculture is one of our preferred asset classes these days. In Colombia, one of the agricultural plays we like is timber, and by investing in timber here you can qualify for residency.

If you have a temporary visa and are out of Colombia for more than six consecutive months, you lose your residency status. However, with a permanent residency, you can be out of the country for up to two years. Again, obviously, the permanent residency visa means better flexibility, especially if you're establishing options rather than making a full-time move right now.

Keep in mind that resident visa holders with a *cédula de extranjero* (ID card) should not be absent from Colombia for more than two consecutive years or risk losing their status.

The investor visa that starts at the permanent level requires an investment of at least US\$150,000 in Colombia. Typically this would be in a private company that is already operating in the country, but you could start your own business.

Buying shares of public companies in Colombia does not qualify you for the investor visas, but you can qualify by investing US\$200,000 in real estate (an apartment for example).

If you have or want to invest less to gain residency, you'll start with temporary status. The downside is that this must be renewed each year; the good news is that the required minimum amounts to qualify are extremely attractive.

Note that the following options are based on changeable peso values, as with the pensionado thresholds, and the minimum wage changes annually, the exchange rate daily...

As an aside here, we recommend that you work with your attorney to minimize the gap between the registered value and the purchase price, not only so you can qualify for residency without buying a more expensive piece of property, but also because you don't want to have a capital gains tax issue when you go to sell.

It's quite possible, and we've seen it happen a number of times in other markets, to get stuck in the middle of a country transitioning from the tradition of recording lower values on purchase deeds to the government cracking down and forcing everyone to record the actual purchase price. If you're the last man holding in this scenario, you're stuck for the capital gains on the gap amount.

For more details on the options and application process, [check the Colombia chapter in our "Passport to Freedom: The World's Top Havens for Residency, Citizenship, and a Second Passport."](#)

For more information about residency and citizenship requirements or to begin your application, [get in touch with our preferred attorney in Colombia.](#)

## Why Colombia?

Twenty years ago if you told anyone inside or outside of Colombia that their civil-war-torn country would be cleaned up and considered high-tech and sought-after just two decades later, no one would have believed you.

But that is exactly what has happened...

For us and Colombia, it was love at first sight. Over the near decade since we first laid eyes on this beautiful country, we've become only more enchanted.

Shortly after Colombia first came onto our radar, we made a bold prediction... Colombia, specifically Medellín, we reported, would soon take its place on the short list of world's best places to live.

Back when we first made it, that prognostication created a stir.

How could we be recommending that expats and retirees think about taking up residence in the land of Pablo Escobar?

We weren't bothered by the naysayers or their confusion. Big new ideas are often met with resistance.

Today we're no longer alone in referencing Colombia as a world's best destination. The New York Times, Travel + Leisure, Forbes, and others have made similar declarations.

As a result, Colombia as a top-tier choice for anyone considering launching a new life overseas isn't news. Colombia is enjoying the attention she deserves in this context.

Why is Colombia garnering so much attention? Here are just a few of the top reasons...

...Just about any city in Colombia is affordable. In the modern, culture-rich city of Medellín, you could get away with a budget of US\$1,295 monthly, for a couple.

...According to the World Health Organization, Colombia has one of the world's best health care systems, and Medellín specifically is home to 8 of the best hospitals in Latin America (and 22 of the top 43 in Latin America).

In fact, it surpasses many developed countries, such as the United States, Canada, Switzerland, and Germany. Medellín also boasts some of the continent's best and most highly skilled doctors. Long-known as a destination for cosmetic surgery, Medellín is now established as a destination for complex procedures and advanced technology, including transplant surgery. Medical insurance and out-of-pocket medical expenses are less than one-third the cost of those of the United States. Doctors in Colombia provide their personal cell phone numbers to patients and even make house calls if requested.

...The U.S. dollar's historic strength against the Colombian peso is creating remarkable bargains. And, more than ever before, Colombia, specifically Medellín, qualifies as one of the best places on Earth today to establish your foothold overseas.

...This country has a strong, stable economy with a rapidly growing middle class.

...Colombia is culture rich—Bogotá has more than 50 museums, 60 art galleries, 30 libraries, 40 theaters, and 150 national monuments. Colombia's cultural capital, Medellín, is competitive with its better known peers, offering a wide range of entertainment options. With modern movie theaters, shopping, orchestra, theater, and countless events and shows (including an annual symphony season), vibrant nightlife, impressive galleries, museums, venues for theater and music, plus soccer stadiums.

...Colombians support an upbeat gay social scene. Medellín, especially, is very LGBT-friendly; Parque Lleras in Medellín is famous for hosting one of the most entertaining and energetic gay scenes in South America.

...Purchasing real estate is affordable and property sees steady appreciation. We've been recommending Colombia, specifically Medellín, for investment for 10 years. The Medellín market has seen good appreciation over the last decade (as much as 10% per year). Expect this to continue.

...Developed, reliable infrastructure—good, fast internet, minimal power shortages, pure drinking water, and large cities with good domestic access. In certain cities, Medellín, for example, the public transportation system is highly developed (with metro and Metrocable, a funicular service that runs up and down mountains; bus routes are extensive, and vehicles run on natural gas; taxis here are metered and easy to hail), so you can get by without a car. Roads in and around the city are good, and most of the city is built on a grid system, making it relatively easy to navigate.

...Colombia offers excellent, easy, and quick foreign residency options, including one for pensioners (with an income requirement under US\$1000 a month) and another for investors. Colombia also offers residency with the least amount of red tape. Expats report that it's possible to apply and get the permanent residency visa issued in just one hour. You qualify instantly for permanent residency as a property owner, shaving five years off the time required for permanent residency and citizenship.

...It's not too far. Medellín, for example, is only a three-hour flight from Miami and just over five hours to New York.

# Ecuador:

## South America's Retirement and Residency Haven

Ecuador has long ranked among the top spots on the list of desirable retirement destinations...

Boasting a mild climate, vibrant culture, stunning coastline, and charming city centers, it's no wonder this South American gem has caught the attention of retirees worldwide. From the coast to the mountainous regions, Ecuador is bursting with natural beauty, tranquility, and adventure to be had.

For those looking to retire abroad, Ecuador is not only aesthetically appealing, but also a practical decision. If you want to talk about an affordable retirement lifestyle, you want to talk about Ecuador. Life may be simpler here than, say, the fast pace of the United States, but that does not mean you must give up certain comforts and amenities of home... quite the contrary. In Ecuador, your retirement wouldn't be spent penny pinching.

Residency in Ecuador affords one all the same rights as a citizen. One big additional advantage is that you can import your household effects duty-free. Your attorney will guide you through this process, where timing is critical and strict adherence to the rules is required. Additionally, the health care system here is not only affordable for foreigners, but it also offers top-tier services with coverage options for all ages—even if you don't opt into this public program, health costs are super low.

Ecuador also offers a great package of senior benefits:

- 50% off all public transportation
- 50% off national and international airfare
- 50% off all cultural, sports, artistic, and recreational events
- 50% off electricity, water, and telephone service
- Special discount on property tax
- Relief from Ecuadorian income tax
- Discount on vehicle tax
- Discount on judicial fees
- Refund of Value Added Tax (sales tax)
- And best of all, you never have to stand in line; seniors (65+ years) always go to the front.

### Becoming A Resident

Ecuador offers a number of attractive residency options, with low thresholds of qualification.

To check out Ecuador initially, a 90-day tourist entry will do the trick; you'll get this automatically when you enter the country. You can extend your this initial 90-day stay one time, for an additional 90 days. To stay longer than 180 days, you'll need to apply for a one-year visa before leaving home.

To become a resident, you'll generally need to first hold a temporary resident visa, allowing you to stay in the country for up to two years (and renewable once), followed by a permanent residency visa. On a Temporary Resident Visa, you may be absent from Ecuador no more than a cumulative total of 90 days per year.

There are 13 types of Temporary Resident Visas; the most commonly used by expats are these:

- *Trabajador* (workers)
- *Rentista* (those with income from abroad or from Ecuadorian sources)
- *Jubilados* (retirees with a pension)
- *Investionistas* (investors)
- *Amparado* (for dependents of other visa-holders)

If you're qualifying using a financial instrument, remember that bonds, CDs, and other financial instruments have maturity dates, and you'll need to record the new instrument with immigration when the old one expires to maintain residency.

For more details on the application process, [check the Ecuador chapter in our "Passport to Freedom: The World's Top Havens for Residency, Citizenship, and a Second Passport."](#)

### How To Begin The Application For A Residency Visa

You apply for Ecuadorian residency at a local immigration office in Ecuador.

Ecuador charges a non-refundable, US\$50 application fee for each applicant. In addition, a visa fee of US\$400 is

due when the visa is granted. The only exception to the US\$400 fee is the dependent visa (amparado) which is US\$200.

The general requirements for temporary resident visas (regardless of which kind you're asking for) include:

- **Passport:** You must have a passport from your home country that won't expire for at least six months.
- **Movimiento Migratorio:** This is a record of your movements in and out of Ecuador (movimiento migratorio), available from the immigration office.
- **Background Check:** Ecuador requires a background check from your country of origin, or the country where you have lived for the past five years.

In addition to the three general requirements above, there will be requirements specific to each type of visa.

All submitted documents must be originals or authenticated, as well as translated if not already in Spanish. All obtained documentation must stem from the proper department in the country of origin and must be certified by the Ecuadorian Consul.

Dependents can be included on any visa type. A dependent must prove their relationship to the primary visa-holder. The primary visa-holder's required income must be sufficient to add the number of dependents who also want to come in under that same visa. For example, if the primary visa holder may be required to have an income of US\$800 per month plus an additional US\$100 for each dependent.

For more details on the application process, [check the Ecuador chapter in our "Passport to Freedom: The World's Top Havens for Residency, Citizenship, and a Second Passport."](#)

[Our recommended attorney on matters of immigration and importation in Ecuador can be reached here.](#)

## **Permanent Residency (Residencia Permanente)**

To be eligible for permanent residency, most people will need to have been temporary residents... but not everyone.

To qualify, you need to meet only one of the following four requirements:

- You can be the holder of a Temporary Resident Visa for at least 21 months;
- You can be married or have a civil union with an Ecuadorian citizen;
- You can be a disabled person who is dependent on an Ecuadorian citizen or permanent resident;
- You can be related to an Ecuadorian citizen or permanent resident, by at least the second degree (i.e., you share a grandparent).

To apply for permanent residency, you'll need to provide:

- **Passport:** You must have a passport from your home country that won't expire for at least six months.
- **Movimiento Migratorio:** You'll also need a record of your movements in and out of Ecuador (*movimiento migratorio*), from the immigration office.
- **Background Check:** Ecuador requires a background check. If you've been in Ecuador on a temporary visa, you can get this from the local police station in Ecuador. For others, you'll need a background check from your country of origin, or the country where you have lived for the past five years.
- **Income certification:** You must show that you have continued means to support yourself and any dependents.

Residency visa applications are made at an immigration office within Ecuador rather than at a consulate. There are offices all over the country.

You may not be absent from Ecuador for more than 180 days per year, for each of the first two years. They will forgive one violation of this rule, provided you pay a fine set at four times the Ecuadorian minimum wage. For 2020—at a minimum wage of US\$400 per month—the fine would be US\$1,600.

After the first two years, you may be absent for up to five years without losing your residency.

Again, all documents which are issued outside of Ecuador must be authenticated by the country of origin. Depending on the country of origin, you'll use either the apostille process or consular legalization. Any document that is not in Spanish must be translated into Spanish. The translator must certify the translation as correct, and their signature must be verified by a notary.

Permanent residents must have private health insurance, or they must opt in to Ecuador's social security system (ISSS) within 30 days after granting of their visa. They will not issue the order for your cédula (national ID card) until you've presented evidence of health insurance.

As with the temporary visas, you'll pay a non-refundable, US\$50 application fee for each applicant. In addition, a visa fee is US\$500 for holders of temporary visas. Those who qualified based on marriage, civil union, or parentage will pay US\$200. Special deals also exist for citizens of Venezuela and Mercosur countries. And those over 65 get a 50% discount on the government fees.

[Our recommended attorney on matters of immigration and importation in Ecuador can be reached here.](#)

## Why Ecuador?

Ecuador is home to great weather and jaw-dropping low prices. This country offers a perennial spring-like climate in the mountains (meaning no heating or air conditioning is required), an easy path to a retirement visa, and several well-established expat communities. Plus, local handicrafts make for great import-export business opportunities for those looking to start a business overseas.

Ecuador is not known for its beaches, and its coast remains relatively undeveloped. Current talk of a new beach road, though, is bringing investor attention to one particular stretch of coast, giving our editors reason to return Ecuador to our active radar screen.

Once you've relocated to Ecuador, you'll have one of the world's most beautiful and dramatic countries at your doorstep...

Explore the Amazon Rainforest, the Galapagos Islands, and Vilcabamba in the Valley of Longevity (where you'll also find a sizable community of English-speaking expats). And there are also hundreds of miles of beautiful coast to explore, along with the central valleys of Ecuador's Andean Sierra, the lush province of Esmeraldas, or the Incan ruins at Ingapirca.

Ecuador offers multiple noteworthy locales for your new life, Cuenca, Quito, Cotacachi, Loja, Salinas, and Playas, are but some of the country's most popular expat havens.

But don't forget that underneath the Spanish Colonial charm and breathtaking surroundings, Ecuador is a poor, developing country. The standards of maintenance for

the roads, buildings, and sidewalks won't always be what you'd like... and the inefficiency of administrative processes may drive you crazy sometimes. Yet these minor annoyances also indicate one of Ecuador's best traits: a simpler, more wholesome lifestyle.

Ecuador has a great, low-cost (US\$.25) public transportation system, with excellent bus coverage and loads of taxis. Buses are most convenient if you pay by using a rechargeable bus card. If you don't, be sure to have the exact change—and join the multitudes that are hoarding quarters for this purpose. The interprovincial bus system is efficient, inexpensive, and a great way to get to cities like Loja or Guayaquil for a few bucks. For a little more, you'll find the seven-passenger shuttle vans to such destinations as Loja and Guayaquil to be faster and more comfortable.

Plus, Ecuador is almost a tax haven... Everyone pays sales tax, of course (known throughout Latin America as IVA; pronounced EE-vah), but the rate in Ecuador is 12%, which is the second lowest in South America where rates range from 10% (Paraguay) to 22% (Uruguay). You'll also be subject to a "capital outflow" tax of 5% on outbound international wire transfers of US\$1,000 or more. You can legally avoid this when you sell your home, however, by taking payment outside of Ecuador. There is a capital gains tax on the sale of property, but it's calculated as 0.5% on the change in municipal value (rather than the actual gain) and it's usually negligible.

Ecuador has a graduated income tax on Ecuadorian-source income, ranging from 0% to 35%. The current tax law actually says it applies to "all income" but there's no implementing regulation to collect tax on personal income generated from outside Ecuador, so expats generally don't pay it.

Property taxes are among the lowest in the world, and even on a large house, it's unusual to see an annual tax bill higher than US\$200 per year.

No matter where you choose to settle in Ecuador, you will be surrounded by fascinating culture, adventure, and entertainment... go for a hike in the Andes Mountains... check out the folkloric ballet... visit street art exhibitions... shop indigenous handicrafts... dine out and enjoy the refreshing evening air at a good restaurant... peruse a colorful open-air market... or simply relax and listen to the sound of the waves crashing on the sand.

However you choose to spend your time, you surely won't be disappointed by this delightful country.

# Nicaragua:

## Central American Haven Where Expats Fit Right In

Nicaragua has emerged as a top retirement and vacation hotspot. Why? Offering the world's cheapest retirement residency program, the cheapest living in the Americas, and rain forests, mountains, and coastlines, Nicaragua has something for everyone—especially those on a tight budget.

The mainstream press has even caught on. MSN, Lonely Planet, U.S. News & World Reports, and other global press have been giving a lot of ink lately to this, the largest country in Central America.

Nicaragua's residency program is one of the most benefit-laden in the region. In the simplest of terms, the costs to qualify are the lowest around and the physical presence requirement is minimal.

### Benefit-Rich Residency

As a resident of Nicaragua, you'll be able to avail of a host of benefits associated with the status— regardless of the specific visa you choose in most cases.

Here's a summary:

- Pay no taxes on any out-of-country earnings;
- Bring up to US\$20,000 worth of household goods from your own home, duty-free;
- Exemption from import taxes on vehicles valued at less than US\$25,000, and you are allowed to import a car from the U.S. once every four years (cannot be more than seven years old);
- Import an additional vehicle every five years under the same tax exemptions;
- Pay no sales tax on purchase of US\$50,000 worth of products used to build your business;
- An IVA (sales) tax exemption for car rentals when used for tourism purposes (must have a valid Nicaraguan driver's license);
- Tax exemption on importation of up to US\$200,000 worth of scientific or professional items, if the residents will use them for the benefit of Nicaragua;
- Legally register a vehicle;

- Apply for firearms license;
- The minimum age for eligibility is 45, but this may be waived if the applicant shows proof of stable income;
- Applicants can present a naturalization certificate instead of a birth certificate;
- No requirement for a guaranty bond for residency.

And once a person qualifies as a resident, the same legal status will be conferred on his or her parents, spouse, minor children, and anyone within four degrees of blood that are dependent on the resident for support. (For each of these relatives, the resident must demonstrate an additional pension or income of US\$150 per month per person.)

Residents must be present in Nicaragua for at least six months each year unless the Resident receives permission to be absent because of health conditions or impossibility of travel. The six months do not have to be contiguous.

Each year the Resident must present to INTUR documents showing that the pension or income monies were transmitted to Nicaragua.

Pay for a residency card (*cédula*) every five years.

And, be warned... in case you ever do anything to make authorities revoke our residency, you'll be subject to repay all exonerated taxes that were exempted within the two-year period prior to the revocation—perhaps an extra incentive to stay on the good side of the government here.

### The Options To Qualify

The processing time for all of the visas below is typically three to six months, but could be quicker or slower depending on a variety of factors (the quickest is said to be a month, the longest a year).

While some applicants previously had issued a one-year temporary card, the majority now receive an immediate five-year Permanent Resident Card.

## **Pensionado:**

To apply for a pensioner visa, you must be at least 45 years of age (though there's some flexibility with this requirement if you can prove a stable income) and receive a monthly income of at least US\$600 (plus US\$100 for each dependent) from a government or private company pension, or Social Security benefits.

In addition to the general documents required for all visas, pensioners will also be asked to show proof of the stable income that will support them. Under this visa, you are not permitted to work in Nicaragua. However, under certain circumstances and with approval from the Ministry of Economy and Industry, there is a possibility of opening a business that would benefit the community, such as a hotel or restaurant that attracts tourists and creates jobs for locals.

## **Rentista:**

The rentista visa is available to anyone of any age who earns a stable and permanent monthly income of at least US\$750 (plus US\$150 for each dependent). Income can be sourced from investments, stocks, certificates of deposit, or similar sources; salary does not apply.

Rentista visa holders are offered all the same benefits as pensionados. Under this visa, you are not permitted to work in Nicaragua. However, under certain circumstances and with approval from the Ministry of Economy and Industry, there is a possibility of opening a business that would benefit the community, such as a hotel or restaurant that attracts tourists and creates jobs for locals.

## **Investment Tracks:**

There are few different ways to qualify for Nicaragua's investment visa. These visas allow you to bypass the temporary visa holding time and immediately acquire a permanent residency visa valid for five years. They also permit you to apply for citizenship by naturalization in just two years as opposed to the usual four years of permanent residency under the other visa options.

## **Investment In Business:**

The investor visa requires an investment into any Nicaraguan business of at least US\$30,000; the money cannot be invested in real estate (there's an exception to this rule, more below). You will also be subject to government inspection under this visa, in order to prove the legitimacy of your investment. In addition to the general documents required for all visas, investors will also be asked to show:

- An investment business plan approved by the Ministry of Commerce and Industry;
- Incorporation of a company properly registered in the Public Registry;
- A letter from financial institutions certified by the Nicaraguan Central Bank proving the existence of the capital necessary for the investment;
- A document certifying the source of the funds.

Dependents can be included in the application for this visa at no additional cost.

The investor visa processing time is generally longer than the *pensionado* or *rentista* visa times, largely due to the additional administration time that opening a business takes, but is six months on average.

## **Reforestation Investment:**

Investment of US\$35,000 in teak is a popular route for investment visas. In this case, you'll receive a plot of teak trees, title to the land they are grown on, and a nice return on your long-term investment.

Dependents can be included in the application for this visa at no additional cost.

[If you're interested in learning more about this opportunity to invest in hardwood for residency, you can get in touch with one outfit offering teak parcels here.](#)

## **Investment In Real Estate:**

There is an option to invest in real estate with a value of US\$100,000 or more, and under this option you can work in the country and still receive all the benefits offered to retirees. In order to be eligible, you must be deemed by the Ministry of Economics and Industry to be making profitable investments in Nicaragua.

Dependents can be included in the application for this visa at no additional cost.

## **Applying For Residency In Nicaragua**

Applying for any of the visa options, you'll need the following documentation:

- A letter to the president of INTUR indicating your intention of acquiring permanent residency and domicile under this Law. The letter must state the address where you will live in Nicaragua and your contact information.

- A certificate of income from your bank or pension plan affirming that you will have enough money to meet the minimum requirement of US\$750 a month with an additional US\$150 to US\$200 for each dependent family member for at least five years
- A copy of your birth certificate (or naturalization certificate) for you and each dependent. A birth certificate showing a minimum age of 45. The age requirement can be exempted if the person can show an investment in Nicaragua of at least US\$75,000, they are legally disabled, or can show a stable income.
- A copy of your passport.
- Two passport photos (per person).
- Marriage certificate.
- A certificate from your doctor stating that you are in good physical health, are free from communicable diseases and are mentally sound.
- A letter from your local police department stating that you have never been convicted of any crime plus a set of fingerprints from a government-approved agency.
- A list of the household items that you will be importing with stated values.

All documents must be authenticated and translated and submitted in triplicate to the Nicaraguan Institute of Tourism (INTUR) or the Nicaraguan consulate.

If you are receiving Social Security benefits, be aware that the original letters from the office where you signed up might not be good enough proof for income, because the later documents will usually be sent from Kansas City, Missouri, or some other regional center. As some countries are confused by this and with the electronic signatures on the forms, proof becomes a matter of perception.

With all of your documentation, be prepared for questioning: the wiser course is to have everything notarized, stamped, and to appear to be as official as possible.

If you have your Social Security benefits deposited directly into a U.S. bank you will avoid the automatic 30% withholding by the IRS.

For more details on the application process, [check the Nicaragua chapter in our "Passport to Freedom: The World's Top Havens for Residency, Citizenship, and a Second Passport."](#)

## Why Nicaragua?

Nicaragua is a land of contrasts at an interesting time in its development. The civil war is history, and Nicaraguans today want nothing more than peace and prosperity.

Geographically, Nicaragua is blessed, with two long coastlines and two big lakes, plus volcanoes, highlands, rain forest, and rivers. In this regard, it's got everything Costa Rica's got, all less discovered, less developed, and available for the adventurer, eco-traveler, and budget-minded retiree at bargain rates compared with costs both in the United States and in Costa Rica or anywhere else in Central America.

Architecturally, too, Nicaragua is notable. Its two sister colonial cities, Granada and Leon, vie for the title of Oldest City in the Americas. Whichever story you believe (that the Spanish conquistadores settled first on the shores of Lake Nicaragua at Granada or, perhaps, a few months earlier in Old Leon), Nicaragua is the big winner, with impressive colonial-era churches, public buildings, and parks to her credit. Colonial Granada is, in our opinion, the most romantic city in the Americas.

Nicaragua appeals to the romantic. It is a land of pirates and martyrs, heroes, warriors, and poets, fighting each in his way for what he believes. Nicaragua is a colorful land, from its red clay-tiled roofs to its powder blue church steeples... from the yellow, green, red, and blue facades of its centuries-old haciendas to the pink and purple bougainvillea that cascades down its inland hillsides.

And the local people know how to relax. On the happy meter they rate much higher than North Americans do. A recently published report from the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) names Nicaragua the safest country in Central America and Interpol has previously ranked Nicaragua as the country with the lowest crime rate in Latin America.

The cost of enjoying all this diverse and beautiful country has to offer is, again, about as bargain-basement as it gets. Nicaragua is one of the most affordable places in the world to enjoy a comfortable, full, and rich retirement.

Because it has been so long misunderstood, ignored, and, frankly, feared, Nicaragua remains a frontier, a land for pioneers in search of opportunity and a new way of life. It is also, however (and herein lies the real opportunity), one of the most affordable places in the world for the would-be retiree.

The country has opened its heart to those bold enough to overlook its past, ignore its headline-grabbing president, and embrace all that this country has to offer.

The door is open, and the welcome mat is out... try Nicaragua on for size!

# Panama: The World's Top Residency Option—Even If You're Not a Retiree

We've been making the case for Panama for nearly 20 years now, and we're more bullish on the opportunities and upsides on offer in the Hub of the Americas than ever before.

Panama could arguably be called the world's best "do-anything haven." Panama has been recognized as the world's top retirement haven for a couple decades now...

Today's Panama, though, is also a top option for the investor, the entrepreneur, the millennial in search of opportunity, the digital nomad... really, anyone of any age seeking adventure, a new life, and opportunity for both fun and profit. This country wants a place on the world stage and has been working aggressively over the last decade or so toward achieving developed-world status.

For all these aims one might have in Panama, there's a visa to suit. From the Gold Standard pensionado program to the most recently introduced programs to attract skilled labor to the country, Panama's has some of the most diversely useful and user-friendly residency visas in the world.

If you are in the market right now for a place to live, retire, invest, or do business overseas, you're doing yourself a big disservice if you aren't looking closely at this little country.

## **Spoiled For Choice**

The Hub of the Americas offers perhaps more good options than any other country we cover, and attaining residency has even become significantly easier over the last few years as new options have been initiated.

The challenge in Panama isn't qualifying for residency... it's choosing which residency option best suits your financial status and other circumstances.

Panama's retiree (*pensionado*) visa is by far the most popular option. The program has drawn thousands of retirees to Panama to take advantage of the tax status, the discounts, and the other benefits that come along with it.

The *pensionado* visa option is certainly easy and appealing, but what if you don't earn a pension? Having

a lump sum in the bank will do just as well. Or perhaps you have some private income that's sufficient to support yourself on.

Or maybe an investment is more suitable for your situation... There are several ways to invest in the country for residency. One option here allows you to invest in agriculture or timber to qualify. You own the crops or trees and the land they're planted on. You reap the profits when the trees are harvested for timber. Someone else manages the entire operation for you. And, meantime, you get your full-time residency visa for Panama.

Want to open a business in Panama? All it takes is five Panamanian employees and a minimum investment.

## ***Pensionado Visa*** **(Pensioner/Retiree's Visa)**

The pensionado program is by far the most popular visa option Panama offers. Panama's pensionado visa has become the Gold Standard, providing one of the most generous retiree packages in the world. To reap these benefits, you don't need to invest a cent up front. You need only receive a pension or an annuity that meets the requirements.

The government of Panama is fairly relaxed with regards to the minimum age to apply for this visa. Typically if you are over the age of 18 and if you receive a guaranteed pension from any government entity, Social Security, Armed Forces, or private company, you can apply.

Your pension must be at least US\$1,000 per month, plus US\$250 per month for each dependent, including children under 18, or open a bank account in Panama with at least US\$2,000 deposited per dependent.

To prove the regular income you earn, you must present a letter or form from your government pension plan (and/or pension administrator if you are retiring before you receive a government pension), which shows that you will be receiving at least US\$1,000 a month for you and an additional US\$250 for each dependent. This form/letter will need to be authenticated along with all the other documents you submit.

If you are receiving your pension from a nongovernmental agency or business, then you will also need to provide a check stub or a statement of account showing the pension being deposited, and a good-standing certificate from the company issuing the pension. This must be authenticated, as well.

With the pensionado visa, you are also entitled to a one-time tax exemption on the importation of household goods (up to US\$10,000) and a tax rebate on every two years of import duties for the importation of a car (sales tax and luxury tax still apply).

The pensionado visa comes with not only financial advantages, but social ones, as well. In Panama retired people, pensioners, and people of “tercer edad” (seniors) enjoy special benefits under the law (regardless of nationality or residency status; Ley 6). For instance, banks and other businesses have lines for retirees only, which can shorten an otherwise sometimes very long wait for service.

Nationwide discounts for seniors (including pensioners, retired folks, and those of senior age) include:

- 50% off entertainment anywhere in the country (movies, theaters, concerts, etc.);
- 30% off bus, boat, train fares;
- 25% off airline tickets;
- 50% off hotels stays Monday through Thursday;
- 30% off hotels stays Friday through Sunday;
- 25% off at sit-down restaurants;
- 15% off at fast food restaurants;
- 15% off hospital bills (if no insurance applies);
- 20% off prescription medications;
- 20% off medical consultations;
- 15% off dental and eye exams;
- 20% off professional and technical services;
- 50% off closing costs for home loans;
- 1% off mortgages;
- 25% off utility bills, including electricity, telephone, and water;
- 20% off funereal costs.

If all goes well, you should receive your pensionado visa card, or carnet, in about a month.

## **Rentista Visa (Private Income Retiree)**

You can apply for a Private Income Retiree visa if you have received a lump sum of retirement money or inheritance, as opposed to a pension.

To qualify for this visa, you must deposit enough money in a Panamanian national bank (Banco Nacional de Panama or Caja de Ahorros) to yield at least US\$850 per month. The deposit must be a five-year CD, and your visa status is reviewed at the end of the term. There is no age requirement to apply for this visa.

## **Solvencia Economica Propia (Person Of Means)**

If you are able to support yourself financially in Panama, with no need to work or start a business, the Person of Means Visa may suit your needs.

To obtain a Person of Means visa, you must deposit a minimum of US\$300,000 in any local bank in Panama. You can also use that US\$300,000 to invest in real estate. You must pay for the property in full and the title must be in your name, or under a private interest foundation, of which you are named as the founder and the beneficiaries are you and/or the dependents.

You can also combine the two options, investing, for example, US\$125,000 in real estate and then deposit US\$175,000 in a bank account in Panama.

Once you have been approved for the visa, you will receive a provisional two-year visa. After two years, the government will verify the requirements are still being met, and then you receive a national identity card (*cédula*).

There are many very specific requirements to show how your capital entered the country for this path. [Check the Panama chapter in our “Passport to Freedom: The World’s Top Havens for Residency, Citizenship, and a Second Passport” for full details.](#)

## **Inversionista (Investor)**

Any investor visa route gives you a two-year temporary residence permit, at the end of which you can apply for permanent residency. The funds for the investments must come from abroad.

Under this umbrella, you've got a few options...

1. **Business Investor Visa:** Invest a minimum of US\$160,000 in a new or established business in Panama (note, though, that there are some restrictions on the types of businesses foreigners can own and operate in Panama) and hire a minimum of five permanent Panamanian employees.
2. **Real Estate Investor Visa:** Invest a minimum of US\$300,000 in real estate in Panama.
3. **Forestry Investor Visa:** Invest a minimum of US\$80,000 in an approved reforestation project of at least 5 hectares in Panama (plus US\$2,000 per dependent). Your forestry investment must be kept until final harvest, which is approximately 10 years.
4. **Agricultural Investor Visa:** Invest a minimum of US\$60,000 in an approved agriculture or aquaculture industry in Panama (plus US\$500 per dependent).

If you're interested in learning more about the opportunity to invest in hardwood for residency, [you can get in touch with one outfit offering teak parcels here](#).

If agriculture is of interest to you, we work with another group that offers an approved planation of crops, [you can get in touch with them here](#).

## **"Friendly Nations" Visa (Visa Países Amigos)**

Panama is experiencing unprecedented growth, and with a population of only 3.5 million, there's an increasing demand for qualified labor. The objective of this, Panama's newest residency program, is to fill the employment gap and make it easier for foreign nationals to work and conduct business in Panama.

This very popular visa is known alternately as the "Friends of Panama" visa, "Friendly Nations" visa, and "Specific Countries." It's an immediate permanent residency program and even offers a work permit. The ease, simplicity, and affordability of this residency option renders Panama's other visa options obsolete for citizens of these 50 countries.

Unlike other, more tedious residency programs around the world, the Friendly Nations program grants immediate and permanent residency with just one application. At the time of application, the government will issue an interim residency card. After processing, which is estimated to take 3 to 6

months, applicants will receive an official cédula (a national ID card) and become permanent residents.

Note that this residency program is the quickest and cheapest route to Panamanian citizenship if that is your goal.

In addition to the principle applicant, the following dependents are also eligible for residency:

- Spouse and parents of the main applicant;
- Children under 18 years old;
- Children with disabilities;
- Children 18 to 25 who are single and registered at universities.

The most recent list of friendly countries now offers residency to citizens of the following 49 countries:

1. Andorra
2. Argentina
3. Australia
4. Austria
5. Belgium
6. Brazil
7. Canada
8. Chile
9. Costa Rica
10. Croatia
11. Cyprus
12. Czech Republic
13. Denmark
14. Estonia
15. Finland
16. France
17. Germany
18. Greece
19. Hong Kong
20. Hungary
21. Ireland
22. Israel
23. Japan
24. Latvia
25. Liechtenstein
26. Lithuania
27. Luxembourg
28. Norway
29. Malta
30. Mexico
31. Monaco
32. Montenegro
33. Netherlands
34. New Zealand
35. Poland
36. Portugal
37. San Marino
38. Serbia
39. Singapore
40. Slovakia
41. South Africa
42. South Korea
43. Spain
44. Switzerland
45. Sweden
46. Taiwan
47. United Kingdom
48. United States
49. Uruguay

The program requires one straightforward application. Candidates must deposit a minimum of US\$5,000 in a local bank account, with an additional US\$2,000 for each dependent.

You'll also need to show:

- Ownership of Panamanian property;
- Ownership of a Panamanian corporation with business license;
- Offer of employment and contract from a Panamanian business.

### **Getting A Work Permit:**

Perhaps the most appealing aspect of this visa is the ability to apply for a work permit.

Once the application is approved, those wishing to work in country (those entering with an employment offer) can apply for the work permit.

### **Decree... Not Law:**

One caveat for the Friendly Nations residency is that it could change at any time.

This program was implemented by presidential decree—not by legislation. Former president Martinelli bypassed approval in the National Assembly by pushing the decree forward this way. Many suspected that his replacement would revoke the executive order upon taking office. Two presidents later, that hasn't happened and the option is still as valid as it ever was... but you can't be at all sure it'll stay on the books... or when it might be taken off. The current president was considering removing the option until the Covid pandemic started.

Fortunately, though, this permit grants permanent residency immediately and it's not necessary to renew the permit multiple times. Should the decree ever be revoked, those who have obtained residency under this new program shouldn't have a problem; Panama has a history of grandfathering people already in the system.

Because this program has been and remains subject to amendments, it is necessary that you work with a lawyer during the application process.

If Panama is on your radar and you're from one of the 50 "friendly" countries on the list, this is the best opportunity and now is the best time you're going to have to obtain easy and quick permanent residency in this country...even a work permit.

## **Applying For Residency**

In addition to the specific requirements as prescribed per visa outlined above, you'll need to submit the usual roster of personal documents, all translated and authenticated.

In general, for any Panama residency visa, you'll need the following:

1. Your original passport must be valid for at least another six months or more from the date of application (to be safe, the passport should be good for a year from the date of application, just in case of any delays);
2. A report from the national law enforcement agency in your home country, certifying a clean criminal record within the last five years (must be notarized);
3. A medical exam report from a doctor in Panama, and blood test results, including the results of an HIV test;
4. Marriage certificate (if applicable);
5. Birth certificates of child dependents (if applicable);

For more details on the application process and more details about the specific documents you'll need to apply for the visas listed here, [check the Panama chapter in our "Passport to Freedom: The World's Top Havens for Residency, Citizenship, and a Second Passport."](#)

All residency visa applications in Panama must be made through an attorney. Lawyers do not charge a standard rate for visa applications, but you don't necessarily want to choose the lawyer with the lowest fee. In many cases, you get what you pay for. Your visa application process will be quicker and easier if you hire an attorney that focuses on immigration.

There are many attorneys to choose from for residency in Panama, but you need to make sure the one you hire is fluent in English, reliable, honest, and knowledgeable. [Get in touch with our preferred attorney in Panama here.](#)

## **Why Panama?**

We call Panama the world's top "Do-Anything" Haven... it's bursting with opportunity, no matter your goals...

Panama is the best place in the world to base your business... and an entrepreneur's playground...

It's a tax haven. As a foreign resident, you can pay zero local tax... and you can operate your business here tax-free, too...

And an international banking center (where, yes, it is still possible to open an offshore account, even as an American)...

And, of course, the easiest and most advantaged place in the world to establish residency.

Home to the smartest beach, river, and mountain property buys anywhere on the planet today... And it's one of the few Latin markets where it's possible for you, as a foreigner, to borrow locally to buy real estate.

Plus, it's one place in the world that's enjoying continued growth and prosperity and that is positioned for a whole lot more of the same over the coming decade...

Finally, it's simply a great place to call home...

We've been making this case for more than 20 years, and we're more bullish on the opportunities and upsides on offer in Panama than ever before.

Bottom line, if you are in the market right now for a place to live, retire, invest, or do business overseas, you're doing yourself a big disservice if you aren't looking closely at this little country at the hub of the Americas.

The people here are friendly, and, outside of Panama City, the atmosphere is generally quite laid back and easy going. With a population of less than 4 million, the country does not feel overly crowded.

Blessed with two long coasts and hundreds of sand-fringed islands, you'll find some of the best deep-sea fishing, surfing, snorkeling, and scuba diving in the world here. Not a beachcomber? The interior is filled

with dense jungle and beautiful mountains. This is a natural wonderland—home to more than 940 species of birds as well as 220 mammals and 354 reptiles and amphibians... from howler monkeys to caimans, from tiger cats to turtles, from ocelots to crocodiles, and from pelicans and toucans to king crabs and iguanas... plus the Central American tapir, the American crocodile, the scarlet macaw, many species of eagle, humpback whales, dolphins, and hammerhead sharks...

What about the health care? Have no fear. Panama offers high quality at a low cost and has become a regional haven for medical tourism, even boasting the only Johns Hopkins-affiliated hospital in Central America.

Panama is also a U.S. dollar jurisdiction—that is to say, Panama has been using the U.S. dollar as its currency for about 100 years, meaning stability and simplicity in your financial transactions.

The cost of living is affordable. Outside Panama City, it remains downright cheap. A couple could live comfortably in the interior of the country (including in many of the less developed beach towns) on as little as US\$1,000 a month, perhaps less.

The infrastructure is of a high standard. This is a place where things generally work—the internet, cable TV, phone service, etc., are all nearly as reliable as anywhere in the States. The roadways and highway systems being constantly expanded and improved.

And if you're moving with school-aged kids, Panama is one of the best options in the Americas, home to more than two dozen international schools.

## Peru:

### **A Rich Haven With A Long History And Promising Future**

Peru has an illustrious history. It was the center of the Incan Empire and then the capital of Colonial Spain's Empire in the Americas, as such it enjoyed a privileged position of power in the world for hundreds of years.

Today, it offers some opportunities for residency and diversification that are worth a look.

While Peru offers many types of temporary visas which are usually specific (for religious purposes, journalists, artists, students, etc.), plenty of permanent visa options

exist as well. However, only a couple of them make sense for most would-be expats or investors. The viable choices are competitive with some of the best backup residency options in the world.

#### **Low-Maintenance Residency (With Low-Capital Requirements)**

In terms of relevant long-stay visas, you've got two kinds – a professional visa and a *rentista* visa.

The *rentista* is likely the easier and more useful for most expats to avail of; you've only got to prove an income of US\$1,000 a month to qualify (plus US\$500 for any dependents), and it is typically processed within just a couple of months. The catch is that you can't work under this visa—it's essentially a retiree visa. The big benefit? You only need to be in the country one day a year to maintain your status, meaning this is a perfect backup residency option.

When applying for the *rentista* you'll need an original legal document proving that you receive the income regularly and permanently, issued by the country where you're earning it. That has to be authenticated by the Peruvian consulate and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs or apostilled. You also need to bring that amount into the country every month and show that it's coming in through a bank, typically they want to see that at least two months' worth of the income have been brought into the country. You'll be asked to sign a declaration stating you're in good health and are not a registered criminal.

If you're looking for an easy spot to set up a backup residency, Peru's *rentista* is a great option, it's cheap to qualify and requires merely a day of your presence per year to maintain.

Another visa that may be of interest is the independent investor. This requires a capital investment into the country (a minimum of US\$30,000) and a business plan that includes a plan to create jobs for at least five Peruvians in the first year of operation.

The basic requirements for any visa here include the usual suspects: application form, copies of passport, and processing fee; anything in a foreign language must be translated into Spanish by a certified translator.

## Working In Peru

Foreigners can get work permits in Peru. One Peruvian lawyer reports that working residency visas are the majority of what he processes. The most common scenario among his clients is that of a Peruvian marrying a foreigner, and the couple settling in Peru. The foreigner then finds employment.

If you are looking to work in Peru but skip the marriage, you can apply for either the dependent or independent professional work visa.

The dependent professional visa would apply to those being placed in Peru, think a corporate placement, or those seeking employment in a local company. For this one you'd need a company sponsor, and your labor contract has to be notarized and included with your application. You'd also need to include the company's RUC number, so they can verify the company is real and active.

The independent professional would apply to those looking to work for themselves, think online work of any kind. For this you'd only need to provide an authenticated copy of any relevant qualification materials for regulated professions: law, accounting, engineering, medicine. In the absence of a regulating body, you'd have to get your professional title validated by a local university recognized by the *Superintendencia Nacional de Educación Superior Universitaria* (SUNEDU).

There are no restrictions on foreigners opening businesses in Peru, with just a few exceptions in the mining industry. There are no "protected industries" that are reserved for citizens, so doctors, lawyers, accountants, engineers, and other typically hard-to-enter-overseas professions are open to foreigners here. The only requirement is that you re-qualify yourself in the profession locally. In other words, you'd have to retake the bar in Peru in order to be able to practice locally, likewise, you'd have to take any qualifying exam for the other professions mentioned above, too.

## Why Peru?

Peru enjoys a unique geographical position. It's an equatorial country, but, unusually, its climate is not only tropical. The country is protected by the Andes and on the path of the Humboldt Current, which has a significant cooling effect on Peru and its coastal neighbors. The Humboldt is sometimes called the Peru Current and is the source of all the country's amazing seafood, thanks to the abundance of marine life that migrates with its movement.

Largely due to these two factors, Peru's territory offers a variety of climates and topographies. The coastal regions (costas) are moderately warm with almost zero precipitation but high relative humidity. The sierra region (the mountains) gets frequent rain in summer (January to March), and things get colder as you move closer to the icy peaks of the Andes.

Altitude also plays a part, Peru's peaks generally reach the 6,000 to 7,000 meter range—it's at these climes that

coca leaves are famously chewed by the indigenous to ease the effects of the heights.

The country is also home to plenty of rain forest, where it rains heavily year round. The jungle (selva) areas are the tropical ones, here you'll find the high humidity, sweltering heat, and thunderstorms typical of equatorial countries. Even here, though, diversity plays a role; at the southernmost edge of Peru's rain forest the winters get cold.

The native population of Peru, the Incas, met their downfall with the arrival of Francisco Pizarro in 1532. Within a decade, the region had become so pivotal to Spanish Colonial affairs that Peru was established as a Viceroyalty of the Spanish crown, essentially making it the administrative capital of the Spanish colonies.

From 1542 all the way up to the 19th century, all goods extracted from the South American continent had to pass through Lima, where they were then shipped to Panama to be carried overland and sent back to Spain. The wealth from this period is still evident in the beautiful colonial buildings of Lima's Centro Historico.

During this booming period of prosperity, Peru, and Lima in particular, attracted immigrants from all over the world, giving rise to an international population that has

trickled down to the current generation. A significant portion of the Peruvian population today has dual citizenship.

Lima is the center of the country, both literally and figuratively, as well as the fifth largest city in Latin America. Once the capital of the colonial world, then often called the City of Kings, it remains the capital of Peru and the major economic center of the country.

Sometimes called La Perla del Pacífico (The Pacific Pearl), Lima is home to some of the best restaurants in the world, and it's got years' worth of awards to prove it. In fact, the capital is considered the gastronomical capital of the Americas; several of its restaurants are consistently named in the top 25 in Latin America.

The European, Asian, and Andean influences have created a unique cuisine known as Limean. These influences contribute to an ethnic diversity that shows in the local cuisine, and ensures international-level standards. Plus, you'll find restaurants here from all over the world—including ubiquitous Chinese food.

The country also has impressively liberal personal freedom laws... for example, Section 299 of the Peru Penal Code allows for the possession of small amounts of drugs for personal consumption, specifically marijuana and cocaine.

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