

Best place to use as a base to explore Panama

Written by T. Rob Brown (aka Roberto Chocolate)

Monday, 31 May 2010 20:55 - Last Updated Thursday, 03 June 2010 16:14

□ ***This is a question that came in on where best to set up a base to explore Panama.***

Roberto Hola Roberto

I have been on your mailing list for a little while and I have been impressed with the straightforward, good-humoured and knowledgeable advice you have been kindly dispensing to those interested in Panama as a place to live or work. So I thought I would ask for your input on our own case.

My wife and I live in Toronto, are considering retirement and intend to spend at least part of our time after we stop working here (probably next year) living outside Canada.

Our first idea was Mexico where several people we know have happily retired and we have explored a few options there without yet finding the "right" place. We have been reading many good things (including your own writings) about Panama and have decided to explore options there as well.

We plan to come to Panama for a couple of weeks over this Xmas holiday period for our first contact with the place and would like to see a few of the most popular areas which already have North American ex-pat communities, a variety of accommodation/real estate options, are no further than two hours from an international airport and are in pleasant surroundings (not Panama City) not too far from the coast.

Could you give us any suggestions on an area or town which would be a good base from which to explore (in the limited time we have) the places you might recommend? We would rent a place for the time we were there. That would be much appreciated.

Keep up the good work!

Dennis

Dear Dennis,

Thank you for your encouragement and kind words. I enjoy what I do, and positive feedback keeps me going.

You have given me a good idea of where you want to be, and I have do have a suggestion.

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Two hours from an international airport - I assume (always dangerous) you mean from where flights from Canada land? That is not the same as an international airport - David (pronounced Dah veed) has an international airport - flights come in from Colombia, Mexico and Costa Rica.

Right now Toucomen Airport is the only airport where flights from Canada land, but that may be changing in a few years. Penonomé in Coclé Province (interior, Pacific Coast) is building an international airport, as as the only three all-inclusive resorts in Panama are within 30 minutes - it is likely that charter flights will now land there when it is built. (Remember Panama Time - don't hold your breath).

Your best bet if you are only staying for a few weeks is one of those three all-inclusives; Breezes, Playa Blanca or The Decameron. Check them all out.

Breezes is new and people seem to love it. The Decameron has over 800 rooms, but all are only 3 story high with beautiful grounds. Not known for it's food. Playa Blanca has one-half of the "World's 2nd Largest Swimming Pool in the World" built, but as a guest of the all-inclusive, you are not allowed to use it. Go figure.

Rent a car after you get here, not at the airport (relax a little first) and then go see;

1) Coronado - huge gated expat community (read McDonalds)

2) El Valle - a crater in the mountians with a mix of expats and wealthy Panamanians - spring-like temperatures all year around

3) These three towns: Gorgona, San Carlos and Chame - not gated communities, some expats, nice smaller single family homes near the beaches

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4) Anton and Penonomé - nice local towns, again not gated, nice towns.

It all boils down to how much you want to spend. If you have under \$200,000 to spend, the places I listed are great. If you have more, your options increase - including golf courses, equestrian centers, spas, and lots of other goodies.

It also depends if you are going to be here full-time or just in winter. You do not want to leave your house unoccupied for months at a time. If this is a part-time home, you are better off in a condo or in a gated community (or a condo in a gated community).

Hope this helps! Roberto

PS: Let me know when you are coming and we will try to get together for a cold one.

PPS: There are lots of Canadians down here - I warned them, if they didn't spray the Canucks would spread, and we have!!!