

My husband's pension is not big enough

Written by T. Rob Brown (aka Roberto Chocolate)

Friday, 26 November 2010 12:08 - Last Updated Friday, 26 November 2010 12:58

This lovely letter came in from Natalie in Northern Ontario this morning. Roberto

Hello Roberto,

My husband and I have been reading your website for the last week and learning so much about retiring in Panama. We live in Northern Ontario and would love to relocate to Panama. Unfortunately my husband's govt. pension isn't enough for both of us to get a Pensionado visa, in Canada we own a Bed and Breakfast and I am a hair stylist and Esthetician. Our dream is to move to Panama permanently and for myself to obtain employment in the beauty industry or even open another Bed and Breakfast in a touristy area. We keep hitting a lot of road blocks it seems and I guess my question for you is "Do you think its possible for us to make a life in Panama" and "are there other options for us to obtain a permanent visa";

More than anything we would love to live in a beautiful tranquil environment with NO winter!!!
HELP!

Dear Natalie,

I assume trading in your husband for someone with a bigger pension is not an option? Good for you.

I do have some good news for you - however I strongly suggest you speak to a lawyer about this. I do not like to give immigration advice, as I am not a lawyer.

My immigration expert/lawyer is Yasser (Alexis) Williams Arosemena. He is away in San Francisco until Dec. 1st. Contact him after that. He speaks perfect English and does not charge for the initial consultation. (www.roselaw.com)

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The good news is you can visit Panama for 6 months without a residency visa. I have friends who stay for 6 months, then take a bus to Costa Rica (a few hours away) - spend the weekend (72 hours), then come back for 6 more months.

There are 14 ways to Immigrate to Panama - ask a lawyer to describe ALL the ways - not just the easy one (Pensionado) which requires \$1,000 a month for your husband and \$250 for you or any dependents. (I think you can combine pensions to make up the \$1,250 - but again, ask your lawyer). Perhaps only one comes as a Pensionado? You could just be his girlfriend - that could be fun... Sorry - back to the story.

For example, the Panama Film Commission has an incredible deal - invest \$150,000 in a film in Panama and you get instant permanent residency!!!!
(<http://www.panamafilmcommission.gob.pa>).

Depending on how much you invest in a B + B you may be eligible for an Investor Visa - make your lawyer work - find you a way. There are also reforestation/ teak farm visas.

As a Pensionado, you cannot legally work in Panama. The thinking behind this is they don't want you to come down here and take a job from a Panamanian - in other words - work as an employee. That is fair.

However - if you open your own business (a B + B, a Hair Salon, a Spa - etc) and hire 3 Panamanians (which can be your maid, your gardener, your cook) you are permitted to manage your own business. You are creating jobs.

If you cut a few friends hair and they buy you the occasional drink, that is not the same as hanging out a shingle and competing with a local salon. You are supposed to ADD to the country - not take from it.

They set the rate of \$1,250/month for a couple because that is what it really costs to live here - despite the smoke the real estate websites try to blow up people's skirts. The government don't want someone to come down here and get into financial trouble. Desperate people do

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desperate things. As I have said many times - the most dangerous animal in Panama is the broke gringo.

My brother is on a tight budget (or maybe he is just cheap - I am not sure). He found a 3 bedroom unfurnished house with some land in a nice neighborhood in Santiago for \$375 a month. (Cable TV, electrical, internet, telephone, water are extra). He is not a beach person, so for him, it is perfect.

Anywhere close to a beach - or in a touristy area - will cost \$1,200 ++ a month - or more.

I have found \$40,000 houses for my brother to look at - but they were smaller, Panamanian-style houses. If you want a North American style house within walking distance of the beach, count on \$250,000 and up.

There are better deals around - but you have to be here, and know people - to hear about them. I suggest you come for an extended visit - and see if you like the place, where/what areas you like the most - and can afford - and then rent for a year.

Beer is .49 cents in the grocery store. A great road-side BBQ meal (Fondas they are called) of a pork chop, rice and beans and salad will set you back \$2.50. Beer in a Fonda is a whopping .70 cents.

In a gringo bar, a burger will cost you \$6 - \$8 bucks, and beer is \$1.50 - \$2.00. The Marriott Hotel in Panama City is \$400 a night. The rooms at Xoko's Restaurant in Santa Clara are \$25 night with air conditioning. Your life-style will dictate your costs.

I did my time in the Great White North - I survived days of minus -150 degrees (with high wind-chill factor) in Goose Bay, Labrador. I walked to school in North Bay and Cochrane. I earned my life in Panama - so I feel for you.

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It was sunny and 86 degrees here yesterday - it will be the same today. My banana trees are full, my lime trees and orange trees are weighted down with fruit. I bought a fresh five-pound red snapper from a local fisherman right at my gate last night for \$9.00 (he even cleaned it for us). If you go to the fish market or buy directly from the fisherman, it is only \$1.50 a pound for fresh - never-frozen snapper, grouper, lobster, giant shrimp...

In short - my life sucks, but someone has to do it. The pool is cool - what are you waiting for?

Roberto

PS: Your husband is a lucky man - tell him that - everyday. My wife does. LOL