

Living on a boat in Panama

Written by T. Rob Brown (aka Roberto Chocolate)

Wednesday, 09 September 2009 13:54 - Last Updated Tuesday, 04 May 2010 18:48

This is an enquiry e-mail via <http://www.retirementdetectives.com/> from: L. O'M

I will be visiting Panama in Dec. for nine days to see if it is a place where I may want to retire in the next year. I am not that interested in purchasing real estate in Panama at this time since I live on a 42 foot trawler and would hopefully continue to do so in Panama. Most of the information I am finding about visiting the area is focused on purchasing real estate. I realize nine days is a short amount of time to experience a culture, but I am hoping you may have some suggestions for areas I should make an effort to see. I will be flying into Panama City. Should I book a hotel in the City for the full time and explore from there, or would you suggest I try to stay in several locations? I would appreciate any ideas. Thanks.

L. O'M, Olympia, Washington

Dear L. O'M,

Irish perchance? My ancestors are one of the thirteen tribes of Galway - Mary Brown's front door arch is the oldest remaining structure in the town. Nine days is twice the time most people give themselves, and half the time you really need. However you can get a pretty good feel for the place in that time.

I am looking into buying a boat to use as a writers studio and weekend retreat, so I'll share what I have found out so far;

There are still pirates in Panama, mostly involved in the drug trade on the Caribbean side, so my recommendation is to stick to the Pacific side (which is also much drier by the way). If you are intent on the Caribbean side, check out Cristobal Yacht Club. There is also a new marina at Shelter Bay, Fort Sherman near Colon. There is a marina in the city of David which is either another flight or a five to six hour drive away from Panama City in the western end of Panama.

The majority of yacht clubs or marinas are in Panama City, but docking is not cheap. The best in my mind is Flamenco Marina on the Amador causeway. They sell a four year dock lease for \$45,000 which works out to \$800 a month but that does not include water or electrical which works out to another \$1,000 a month for a total of \$1,800/month instead of the \$3,500/month they charge for transient docking. This is based on a 65 foot Viking motor yacht with no-one living on board, but a lot of equipment and fridges/freezers running. The owner of the Viking has been there four years, and says they have never had anything stolen, and that the security is excellent. There is a Bennegans (US Style restaurant chain) at the foot of the docks and four other restaurants right near the marina, a shopping plaza including a tax free shopping just center steps away and all boat repair services nearby.

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There is also The Miramar Yacht Club right downtown Panama, but during low tide it is a mud flat and the traffic, noise and diesel pollution and smell makes it unappealing.

I am looking into anchoring out either near The Decameron or near Playa Blanca (Pacific beaches area where I live) where I can moor and dinghy out for about \$200 - \$300 a month. I will hire a security guard to watch my boat every night for another \$300 a month. Breaking and entering and petty theft is a problem in any Latin American country and in fact everywhere you have very poor next to comparatively wealthier people. That is the bad news. The good news is personal safety is not as serious a problem as most places in the world. Mooring out will mean no docks and I will be on generator power but it is a lot cheaper, and for me, closer to home. The dry arch as they call this area has the best weather in Panama, the most beautiful beaches, it is a short cruise to The Pearl Islands, to Panama City, to the Panama Canal and to Costa Rica to the west.

If you obtain a Pensionado Visa you are entitled to bring a vehicle into Panama tax free every two years, so your boat would be duty free. You are also permitted to bring in \$10,000 in personal effects duty free.

To fully cover the country I would stay in Panama City at one of the following:

- the Fuerte Amador Resort and Marina www.fuerteamador.com (507) 314- 0932 (check and see if the resort/hotel is finished yet)
- the County Inn & Suites Amador www.countryinns.com/panamacanalpan (NOT the downtown hotel - ask for water-view room) (507) 211- 4500 E-Mail: country@unesa.com
- Hotel Amador Ocean View www.amadoroceanview.com (507) 314- 3333

Stay for three or four days to check out the Amador Yacht Club, the Flamenco Yacht Club, and take a cab to check out the Balboa Yacht Club (moorings only) (507) 211- 0827 or 228- 2313.

I would then book yourself into either The Royal Decameron Resort (www.decameron.com (507) 993- 2255) or the Barcelo Playa Blanca www.barcelo.com (507) 264- 6444 (both all-inclusive beach resorts very near each other) for two or three days, check out the Pacific beach/dry arch area, take a side trip to the beautiful El Valle mountain town.

Then rent a car (National car rental office onsite at The Decameron - check and see if you can

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drop off the car at the airport - drive yourself to your flight) and drive to David to check out Boca Chica Marina (very rustic) and the port in the city of David. Stay at the Gran Hotel David www.hotelnacionalpanama.com E-Mail: hotnacional@cwpanama.net.pa (507) 775- 2221)

Hope this helps. Roberto

PS: See my

"101 Exciting Things to Do In Panama";

article (Go to Destinations - Panama section). At the end of the article is a resource section which lists yacht clubs, marinas, boating equipment and supplies.