THE GLOBAL EXPAT HUB

Country Relocation Guide

PA

Panama

Your complete guide to moving abroad

Dollar economy, friendly visas and a capital that feels like Miami with rainforest an hour away.

CAPITAL	CURRENCY	LANGUAGE	REGION
Panama City	US dollar / balboa	Spanish	Central America

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WHY PANAMA

An honest snapshot

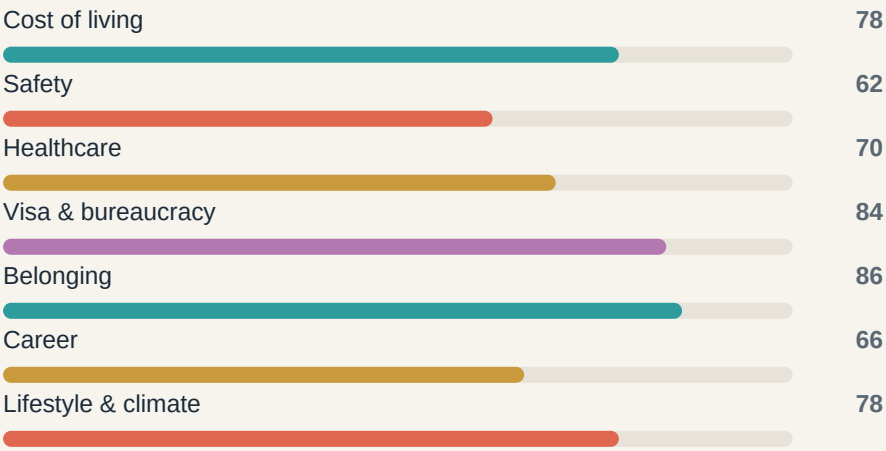
Panama is scored the same way as every country on The Global Expat Hub: seven weighted dimensions combined into one liveability score, kept independent of any advertising. Here is how it rates, and what that means for a move.

75 /100

Liveability score

Safety rating: 62/100

Region: Central America



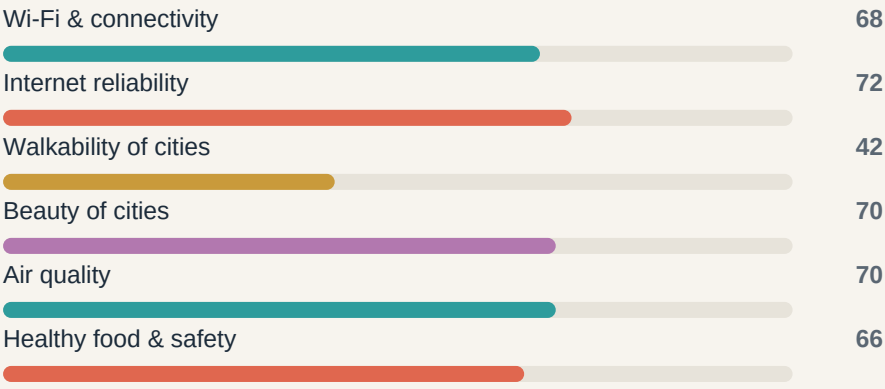
Scores are editorial estimates for planning, not legal, immigration or financial advice.

PANAMA BY THE NUMBERS

Cost of living & essentials

Worth of the dollar	$1 ≈ $1 (US dollar (balboa pegged 1:1))
Utilities (85 m² flat)	$130/mo · electric, water, sewer, garbage
Home internet	$40/mo
Mobile / eSIM	$25/mo local · travel eSIM ≈ $22/10GB
Fuel	$0.95/litre
Doctor visit	$40 (private)
Emergency room	$250
Dental	$40 / $60
Cost to give birth	Public near-free for residents / private $2,500–5,000
Life expectancy	79 years
Unemployment	8%
Adult literacy	96%
Rural land	$2,000–8,000 rural; $20k+ near the coast

Connectivity, walkability & beauty



English day-to-day	Moderate
Remote-work time zone	Good US overlap, hard for EU

LIVING IN PANAMA

Climate, law & getting around

Tropical; hot and humid year-round with a May–Nov wet season and a Dec–Apr dry season. Cooler in the Boquete highlands.

27°C	28°C	27°C	27°C
81°F · Jan	82°F · Apr	81°F · Jul	81°F · Oct

Rainfall	about 1900 mm (75 in) a year
Snow	None
Severe weather risk	35/100 — Outside the hurricane belt; heavy rains, flooding and occasional earthquakes
Time zone	EST (UTC–5), no daylight saving; same as New York in winter
Drive on the	Right
Taxes (property)	0–1% of registered value; new builds often exempt 5–20 yrs
Taxes (income, local)	None; territorial system taxes only Panama-sourced income
University	Public university (UP) near-free for residents; private $4–10k/yr

Official law & sources

Legislation: Gaceta Oficial de Panamá — https://www.gacetaoficial.gob.pa
US Embassy: https://pa.usembassy.gov · Wikipedia law overview available on the country page.

GETTING IN & STAYING

Visas & residence

- Friendly Nations visa (residency for citizens of ~50 countries with a local tie such as a job or property)
- Pensionado visa for retirees with a lifetime pension
- Qualified Investor visa via real estate or bank deposit

Retiring in Panama

The Pensionado programme is one of the most generous in the world: permanent residency plus discounts on utilities, flights, restaurants and medical bills.

Schemes that attract expats

- Pensionado: lifetime discounts of 15–50% on medical, dining, flights, utilities
- Friendly Nations visa for ~50 nationalities
- Territorial tax: foreign income untaxed
- Property-tax exemptions on new builds

Remote work & digital nomads

Short-Stay Remote Worker visa (9+9 months) for income over $36k

PLAN · AFFORDABLE MOVE

Affordable Move

Estimated first-year setup

$8,900

You're moving on savings or a modest income, doing the paperwork yourself, and treating the first year as a test. You'll rent furnished, fly economy, ship almost nothing, and learn the language in group classes.

Ongoing monthly living for one adult on this tier: about $950/month, plus utilities around $130.

First-year cost breakdown

Scouting trip flights *one to two return tickets*	**$750**
Scouting trip stay *two to four weeks in the neighbourhoods you might live in*	**$750**
Visa, permits & translations *government fees, apostilles, translations; luxury adds an immigration lawyer*	**$750**
Relocation flights *one-way, with extra baggage*	**$750**
Moving & shipping *affordable: suitcases only; luxury: full container and white-glove*	**$800**
Housing deposit & first rent *deposit plus first month, scaled to the local rental market*	**$1,300**
Furnishing & setup *affordable leans on second-hand and furnished lets*	**$500**
Health insurance, first year *basic international cover through to premium global plans*	**$1,100**
Language classes *apps and group classes through to private tutoring*	**$250**
Local admin & first-month living *registration, SIM, transport, groceries before income settles*	**$1,150**
Contingency *10% of the total above*	**$800**
Total	**$8,900**

Timeline

Decide & research — ~8 wks

Shortlist two cities, read every section here, join local expat groups online, start a language app, open a savings tracker.

Paperwork — ~10 wks

Gather documents, get apostilles and translations, apply for the visa yourself, arrange basic international health insurance.

Scouting trip — ~3 wks

One trip, two to three weeks, in a furnished rental in your first-choice neighbourhood. Visit a supermarket, a clinic, a bus route and a coworking space.

Move — ~4 wks

Sell or store what you can't carry. Two suitcases each. Book a one-month furnished rental to land in, then find a lease locally.

Settle — ~8 wks

Register your address, get a SIM and a bank account, join group language classes, say yes to every meetup for two months.

AFFORDABLE MOVE · CHECKLIST

Your affordable move checklist

Tick these off as you go. Everything here is scaled to this tier and to Panama's own prices, visa routes and timelines.

- ☐ Two-city shortlist with a written reason for each
- ☐ Visa route chosen and requirements printed
- ☐ Passport valid 18+ months
- ☐ Documents apostilled and translated
- ☐ Basic international health insurance quote
- ☐ Six months of living costs saved in cash
- ☐ Scouting trip booked in a furnished rental
- ☐ Furnished landing rental for month one
- ☐ Pet paperwork started (if applicable)
- ☐ Belongings reduced to two suitcases each
- ☐ Bank told you're moving; a no-foreign-fee card in hand
- ☐ Language app streak of 60+ days
- ☐ Group language class booked for week two
- ☐ Expat group memberships joined online
- ☐ Contingency fund kept separate and untouched

PLAN · MID-RANGE MOVE

Mid-range Move

Estimated first-year setup

$17,550

You have a steady income or remote job, want the move to be smooth rather than cheap, and will pay for help where it saves weeks. You'll ship some belongings, rent a proper apartment, and use a relocation agent for the hard parts.

Ongoing monthly living for one adult on this tier: about $1650/month, plus utilities around $130.

First-year cost breakdown

Scouting trip flights *one to two return tickets*	**$1,150**
Scouting trip stay *two to four weeks in the neighbourhoods you might live in*	**$1,700**
Visa, permits & translations *government fees, apostilles, translations; luxury adds an immigration lawyer*	**$1,100**
Relocation flights *one-way, with extra baggage*	**$1,250**
Moving & shipping *affordable: suitcases only; luxury: full container and white-glove*	**$2,750**
Housing deposit & first rent *deposit plus first month, scaled to the local rental market*	**$2,350**
Furnishing & setup *affordable leans on second-hand and furnished lets*	**$1,400**
Health insurance, first year *basic international cover through to premium global plans*	**$1,850**
Language classes *apps and group classes through to private tutoring*	**$450**
Local admin & first-month living *registration, SIM, transport, groceries before income settles*	**$1,950**
Contingency *10% of the total above*	**$1,600**
Total	**$17,550**

Timeline

Decide & research — ~6 wks

Shortlist two or three cities, read every section here, book a consultation with a relocation agent, start language lessons.

Paperwork — ~8 wks

Documents, apostilles, translations; a lawyer or agent files the visa; comprehensive international health insurance arranged.

Scouting trip — ~3 wks

Two to four weeks across two neighbourhoods, in an aparthotel or boutique hotel. View apartments with an agent, tour schools if needed.

Move — ~5 wks

Partial shipment of furniture and personal items; sell the rest. Fly with pets in the hold or via a pet relocation service. Land in a serviced apartment.

Settle — ~6 wks

Agent handles registration and utilities. Lease signed within a month. Weekly private language lessons; join clubs and classes, not just expat groups.

MID-RANGE MOVE · CHECKLIST

Your mid-range move checklist

Tick these off as you go. Everything here is scaled to this tier and to Panama's own prices, visa routes and timelines.

- ☐ City shortlist scored against the sections here
- ☐ Relocation agent or immigration lawyer engaged
- ☐ Visa filed with a tracked timeline
- ☐ Comprehensive international health insurance in place
- ☐ Scouting trip: two neighbourhoods, apartment viewings booked
- ☐ School applications submitted (if applicable)
- ☐ Moving quotes from three companies; partial shipment booked
- ☐ Pet relocation service booked
- ☐ Serviced apartment for the first month
- ☐ Bank account and money-transfer service opened
- ☐ Tax advice taken on residency timing
- ☐ Private language tutor booked
- ☐ Driving licence exchange researched
- ☐ Furniture and appliances plan for what's not shipped
- ☐ Contingency fund at 10% of the plan

PLAN · LUXURY MOVE

Luxury Move

Estimated first-year setup

$50,000

Time matters more than money. You'll hire a full-service relocation firm, an immigration lawyer and a buyer's or leasing agent, fly business, ship everything, and land in a home that's ready.

Ongoing monthly living for one adult on this tier: about $3750/month, plus utilities around $130.

First-year cost breakdown

Scouting trip flights *one to two return tickets*	**$3,500**
Scouting trip stay *two to four weeks in the neighbourhoods you might live in*	**$6,000**
Visa, permits & translations *government fees, apostilles, translations; luxury adds an immigration lawyer*	**$2,600**
Relocation flights *one-way, with extra baggage*	**$3,500**
Moving & shipping *affordable: suitcases only; luxury: full container and white-glove*	**$9,550**
Housing deposit & first rent *deposit plus first month, scaled to the local rental market*	**$6,550**
Furnishing & setup *affordable leans on second-hand and furnished lets*	**$4,200**
Health insurance, first year *basic international cover through to premium global plans*	**$4,100**
Language classes *apps and group classes through to private tutoring*	**$1,150**
Local admin & first-month living *registration, SIM, transport, groceries before income settles*	**$4,300**
Contingency *10% of the total above*	**$4,550**
Total	**$50,000**

Timeline

Decide & research — ~4 wks

Relocation firm briefed. Two private scouting itineraries prepared. Lawyer confirms the best visa route, including investor and talent options.

Paperwork — ~6 wks

Lawyer files everything; you sign. Premium global health cover with medical evacuation. Tax structuring advice before you become resident.

Scouting trip — ~2 wks

Private itinerary in a five-star or boutique property, drone and video previews of homes before you fly, viewings with a buyer's or leasing agent.

Move — ~4 wks

Full container with white-glove packing and unpacking. Pets flown with a specialist. Home leased or purchased and furnished before arrival.

Settle — ~4 wks

Relocation firm completes registration, utilities, schools, staff and vehicles. Private language tutor. Introductions to clubs and community.

LUXURY MOVE · CHECKLIST

Your luxury move checklist

Tick these off as you go. Everything here is scaled to this tier and to Panama's own prices, visa routes and timelines.

- ☐ Full-service relocation firm engaged
- ☐ Immigration lawyer engaged; visa route confirmed
- ☐ Tax and estate advice taken before residency
- ☐ Premium global health insurance with evacuation cover
- ☐ Private scouting itinerary with home previews
- ☐ Buyer's or leasing agent appointed
- ☐ Home secured and furnished before arrival
- ☐ Full-container shipment with insurance
- ☐ Pet specialist booked door to door
- ☐ School places confirmed
- ☐ Vehicle purchase or lease arranged
- ☐ Private language tutor scheduled
- ☐ Banking and wealth management set up locally
- ☐ Household staff or property management if needed
- ☐ Contingency at 10%, held in local currency

PLAN · RETIREMENT MOVE

Retirement Move

Estimated first-year setup

$25,200

You're moving for good on a pension, savings or both, and the priorities are different: a visa that doesn't depend on a job, healthcare you can rely on as you age, a tax outcome that doesn't shrink your income, and a community you'll actually enjoy. Comfort matters more than speed; certainty matters more than either.

First-year cost breakdown

Scouting trip flights *one to two return tickets*	**$1,150**
Scouting trip stay *two to four weeks in the neighbourhoods you might live in*	**$1,700**
Visa, permits & translations *government fees, apostilles, translations; luxury adds an immigration lawyer*	**$1,100**
Relocation flights *one-way, with extra baggage*	**$1,250**
Moving & shipping *affordable: suitcases only; luxury: full container and white-glove*	**$2,750**
Housing deposit & first rent *deposit plus first month, scaled to the local rental market*	**$2,350**
Furnishing & setup *affordable leans on second-hand and furnished lets*	**$1,400**
Health insurance, first year *basic international cover through to premium global plans*	**$1,850**
Language classes *apps and group classes through to private tutoring*	**$450**
Local admin & first-month living *registration, SIM, transport, groceries before income settles*	**$1,950**
Retirement visa, lawyer & pension certification *immigration lawyer, apostilled pension letters, medicals, translations*	**$2,050**
Private health insurance, first year (age 60+) *comprehensive cover until public-system access*	**$3,750**
Tax & estate advice *double-taxation, pension treatment, wills*	**$1,150**
Contingency *10% of the total above*	**$2,300**
Total	**$25,200**

Timeline

Decide & research — ~10 wks

Shortlist two places using the retirement page, the healthcare and hospitals pages, life expectancy, climate and the 'by the numbers' section. Read the retirement-visa route and the tax scheme for pensioners. Talk to two retirees already there.

Paperwork — ~14 wks

Pension or income letters certified and apostilled, police certificate, medical, birth and marriage certificates translated. Apply for the retirement or passive-income visa with a lawyer. Quote private health insurance for your age with pre-existing conditions declared.

Long scouting stay — ~6 wks

Six weeks in the town you'd live in, in the season you'd like least. Register with a GP or clinic, visit the hospital, price a pharmacy run, join a club, test the walk to shops.

RETIREMENT MOVE · CHECKLIST

Your retirement move checklist

Tick these off as you go. Everything here is scaled to this tier and to Panama's own prices, visa routes and timelines.

- ☐ Retirement, pensionado or passive-income visa route confirmed with a lawyer
- ☐ Pension and income letters certified, apostilled and translated
- ☐ Police certificate and medical done within validity windows
- ☐ Private health insurance in place for age and conditions, until public access
- ☐ Prescriptions and medical records for a year, translated summary
- ☐ Tax residency date, pension treaty and estate advice taken
- ☐ Home-country pension paid to a local or multi-currency account
- ☐ Six-week scouting stay completed, including the hospital visit
- ☐ Home rented before buying; at least one year
- ☐ Local will and power of attorney prepared
- ☐ Registered with embassy or consulate
- ☐ Community found: club, faith group, volunteering or class
- ☐ Plan for care needs: home help, assisted living options and costs
- ☐ Return-trip fund kept for family emergencies
- ☐ Contingency at 10%, held in local currency

PRACTICALITIES

Getting there & the calendar

Main gateway airports

Panama City Tocumen (PTY)

Low-cost carriers: Copa (hub, not low-cost but the regional connector), Wingo, Spirit, Avianca

Tocumen is the 'Hub of the Americas'; most US and Latin American cities have non-stops.

Holidays & festivals

National day: Independence Days, 3 and 28 November.

- Carnival in Las Tablas (Feb/Mar)
- Fiestas Patrias parades, all November
- Corpus Christi devil dances in La Villa de Los Santos
- Panama Jazz Festival (January)

BEFORE YOU GO

Three ways we can help

Search jobs for free

Our job board is free for everyone. Browse remote and in-person roles that hire foreigners, filter by country, and apply directly. Employers post for a flat fee; you never pay to look. Start at theglobalexpathub.com/jobs.

Follow us on social

Find us on Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, LinkedIn and TikTok for country guides, expat stories, drone films and launch news. It is the fastest way to hear what is new and to reach us with questions.

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Ready to research your move?

This guide is a companion to the full, always-updated Panama page on The Global Expat Hub, where you'll find live travel advisories, official links, the job board, partner listings and more.

VISIT THE FULL GUIDE

theglobalexpathub.com/country/panama

All figures are editorial estimates for planning and were current at publication in 2026. Tax rules, visa schemes and prices change; verify before you rely on them. This guide is not legal, immigration, medical or financial advice.

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