

## FAQ: Panama or Costa Rica?

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**Question:** I am considering retiring in Costa Rica or Panama. I have learned that Panama has many more and better incentives to retire there. As people who have lived in Costa Rica perhaps you may be able to tell me which Country is better for retirement. Why are you looking to move to Panama?

**Answer:** By David - Costa Rica has become a very dangerous place for Gringos who are singled out as a better mark. I lived there for ten years from 1992 to 2003 and accumulated a wide circle of friends. All of them had been assaulted or robbed at least once. After awhile you become radicalized and double lock everything and are fearful to walk on the street without constantly checking behind you for the lurking ladrone. Costa Rican culture is NON CONFRONTATIONAL and no one will come to your aid if you are attacked so the banditos are very brazen. Oftentimes they are intentionally overlooked by the police for propina or family/friend associations. I got out, and ALL OF THE GRINGOS I know are either out or in the process of leaving, many to Panama and Nicaragua, some to Asia. I don't believe it will profit you much to visit there for a short time to get the feel of it. In my opinion it takes at least a year to penetrate the veneer of a culture to see what's really going on. I suggest that you read AM Costa Rica on your computer every Monday for more information, bearing in mind that they are also "selling papers" and so are not completely objective.

**CR Getting Worse:** By bull\_ann: Seems like the Costa Rican dream for gringos started to sour in the early 90's. I've never lived there but spent a week there in 1995 in San Jose and was really disappointed. Addicts openly smoking crack in the streets was not an unusual sight. Streets were potholed and San Jose just had a drab look about it. The Ticos I met were great people, similar in that regard to Panamanians. We hooked up with a taxi driver and used him for everything including a 50-mile or so trip up to the ox cart town where we bought a beautiful kitchen table and eight-chair set. It ended up costing me almost as much in Panamanian duties as it did for the purchase price. Best aspect of the whole deal was Flete Chavales only charged me \$25 to haul it down from the customs warehouse in David to my apartment and tote it up three floors. I hope the same thing doesn't happen in Panama in terms of the dream going sour but living the expat life automatically involves a little dice rolling now and then. Long as they don't come up craps you're okay. Speaking of dangerous places, anybody else notice that the top two most dangerous cities in the US are St. Louis and Detroit in that order. Maybe that's why the Cards' fans stayed in the stadium an hour after the game!

**Visit Both:** By Hunter - Highly suggest you visit both. I lived for 7 months in CR before moving to Panama. Basically, CR has a very good marketing department though Panama is hotter. however, you would be amazed at how altitude plays an important part in terms of your comfort level. A 10th floor and up condo in PC requires a blanket in the morning or you will be cold. The breezes are very nice. Having the dollar as your money is great. I get a lot of emails from people looking to make the move from CR to Panama. It's not quite a friendly to retirees up there and the costs are escalating. Living in Panama is a lot easier than CR. Period. The roads are better, the money doesn't lose value and overall taxes are lower. Prices for consumer goods are lower here in Panama too. That pound of butter you get here from Denmark (blue and foil packaging) is \$8 up there. \$3.85 here at Riba Smith. Still, you will find a lot of people who swear they would rather live nowhere else. Good on them. That's why you ought to rent a few months in each country and get to know it. Then make your decision and move down and rent a place for 5 months to a year unless you have lived outside the US before and know Spanish. That helps a lot.  
Hunter