

Paradise Post

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Tours for Baby Boomers to Exotic Places

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You may have noticed I'm shifting our company from a Costa Rica real estate company to a tour company for baby boomers.

My database consists of Baby Boomers. Most of you are retired or nearly retired. Many of you want to travel but are not looking for adventure tourism and would like to travel with other like minded people, singles and couples from the US and Canada. You don't typically take "tours" but like having someone who knows the area, especially for places a bit "off the beaten path" of typical travel."

My experience running tours to places like Costa Rica, Cuba, Mexico, and Panama taught me what was important to folks like you. You don't want to travel alone, might have dietary constraints, aren't looking for adventure tourism but would love to visit places like Cuba, Guatemala, or Colombia.

My million mile airline status, bilingual-ism and expertise on "off the beaten path" has led me to offer tours that my readers have expressed interest in.

This year we are offering tours to Cuba, Costa Rica, Panama, Guatemala, and Colombia. We had Marrakesh, Morocco on the list but the recent earthquake there has pushed that back. We are also adding Argentina later next year. Some are potential retirement destinations while others are *emerging* tourist destinations.

My personal experience with Cuba turned into "tours to Cuba". I've now run multiple tours to Cuba, in compliance with tricky State Department rules, with my clients raving about those tours. So read on and learn about some of these tours. It's not what you did in life that you regret, it's what you didn't do.

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8 Day Cuba tour info November 13 - 20 go here
<https://www.pacificlots.com/cuba-tour-itinerary>

8 Day Medellin Colombia Tour December 2 - 9 go here

<https://www.pacificlots.com/medellin>

10 Day Costa Rica Tour - January 5 - 14 go here

<https://www.pacificlots.com/10-day-tour>

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Tour Cuba in Compliance with OFAC and State Department Regulations

On September 10, 9 “guests” showed up in Havana to take our 8 Day Cuba Discovery Tour. State Department regulations require Americans to go in compliance with one of 12 “reasons” to be allowed to visit Cuba. We visit “In Support of the Cuban People”. Americans are prohibited from giving any money to the Cuban Government, which makes hotels, state owned restaurants, and public transportation off limits to our use. I scoured the metro Havana area to find a “Casa Particular” (think air bnb) that had enough rooms, AC in every room, private baths, and small hotel safes in every room. I also hunted to find a rare Cuban who had a van capable of moving a group of 10 people. I spent weeks traveling around Cuba putting together a great itinerary, one that doesn't involve too much travel time, meets our needs to eat, has lots of things to do and involves interaction with Cuban People (State Department requirement). I prohibit any discussion of US politics on my tours but I've compiled a complete history of Cuba, their struggle under Spanish rule, their war of independence, life under dictator Batista

(backed by the US Government), the Revolution under Fidel Castro, and the current situation in Cuba.



Our tour includes Old Havana, El Cabana and el Morro Fort (the third largest in the Americas), protecting Havana Harbor. Havana is a Unesco World Heritage site, along with Vinales, that we also visit. We tour museums, hear great Cuban music, visit artesian markets, see the Museum of the Revolution as well as the Christopher Columbus Cemetery. We tour old Havana in 1950's classic convertibles, visit the Cathedral, do a walking tour in Old Havana with an expert Cuban historian. We eat great Cuban food, tour Havana Centro in Pedicabs, take a Salsa Dance class and see the famous oceanfront “Malecon”. We also stay two nights at the famous Veradero Beach, again in Casa Particulars. We'll use many forms of transportation, Coco Taxi's are a favorite.

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We'll also eat delicious Lobster tails.



This tour is all inclusive, all meals, lodging, transportation (except airfare), activity and entrance fees are included. We also see the Capitolio, a replica of the US Whitehouse, as well as the National Theatre. We'll see the famed Sloppy Joe's Bar, a favorite haunt of Ernest Hemingway, as well as La Floradita, birthplace of the Daquiri, and the Bogadita de Medio, home of the Mojito. Best of all is the interactions we have with the Cuban people, the Cuban Culture, Music, Food, History, Politics and Photo Ops.

Don't miss our next Cuba Tour, 8 days scheduled for November 13 - 20, 2023

Learn More Here and Sign Up

8 Day Tour to Medellin Colombia - December 2 - 9, 2023

Our new 8 day tour of Medellin, Colombia and surround area is now a go. Medellin was the “Most Dangerous City in the World” when Drug King Pablo Escobar ruled the turf. Pablo is long gone and Medellin, the 2nd largest city in Colombia has emerged as one of the most hip and cosmopolitan cities in the region.

Our tour starts in Poblado, a popular tourist area know as Comuna 14. Poblado is a popular destination for expats looking for upscale living, dining and shopping. The New York Times put Poblado as one of the top 52 places in the world to visit. We visit El Castillo, a Medieval Gothic Castle built for Jose Tobon Uribe. We also visit the Museum of Antioquia, housing the largest collection of works by Fernando Botero, as well as Plaza Botero, containing a collection of 23 large bronze sculptures by Botero. Next we take the subway and one of the cable cars. Medellin is the only city in Colombia to have a mass public transport system, including two main lines, 5 connecting gondolas, a rubber wheeled tram system and connecting bus routes. The gondolas provide access to the hills surrounding Medellin and allow access to many areas previously inaccessible to public transportation. We also take the metro to Comuna 13. This area had the highest

murder rate in Medellin in the 1990's, as drug cartels and terrorists reigned under and after the death of Pablo Escobar. In October of 2002, the government raided the Comuna and many lost their lives in the conflict, but the area was rid of conflict. Around the same time, the metro arrived to Comuna 13 and the government built a series of escalators to access the hills above the city, making a 45 minute climb into a 6 minute easy ride. The neighborhood has now become a symbol of peace in Medellin, adorned by massive graffiti projects depicting the struggle and peaceful end. It is now a hip place to visit, with street art, performers, shops, restaurants and views of the city below.

We also take a day trip to Guatapé, visiting el Penol, a huge granite monolith that juts 656 feet into the air. In 1956, Luis Eduardo Villegas López & 2 friends climbed the rock, and Lopez ultimately bought the rock from local farmers. He masterfully crafted stairs into the crack in the rock, charging visitors to climb the 708 steps to the top. The views of the lake formed when the valley was flooded to create the largest hydro-electric plant in Colombia, are amazing. We visit the town of Guatapé and take a boat ride on the lake. We continue to tour around Medellin, visiting Laureles, Lleras and surrounding areas. We also plan a visit to the Botanical Gardens as well as trip to El Centro, to visit El Hueco (the hole) a huge shopping area with city blocks of shops selling everything under the

sun. El Hueco is worth a visit since I have never seen so many knock off US and world products that appear to be genuine but based on price, clearly are not.

Medellin has some great restaurants and we'll dine in style. We'll also see some great street performers, visit some of the many outdoor parks in Medellin, which makes the city so liveable. Throughout the tour, we'll also see the Venezuelan migration issue, which many Paisa (what Colombians call themselves) will say is terrible for the city. Medellin offers super affordable living in a emerging world class city, the 2nd largest in Colombia.

For more information on this tour and to sign up, visit <https://www.pacificlots.com/medellin> Copy and paste the link into your browser.



Havana, Cuba





About Retirement

Thinking about retirement? First consider the reality of your financial situation. Next, your health. What's important in your life? Family & friends, climate, cost of living, travel, medical care, etc. Some people seek constant adventure and stimulation while others can sit on the porch, play golf and relax, which are you?. On Social Security, you get an additional 8% for each year you wait after you are eligible. A little known fact is that if you wait to collect until "full retirement age", your payments aren't affected by earnings. If you start to collect before "full retirement age", other income can lower what you receive from Social Security. Figuring out when to start taking social security is a science

If you choose to retire outside the US, you'll likely have to pay for health insurance, as Medicare doesn't cover you abroad. Those with medical issues may need to stay in the US. Health insurance is significantly cheaper outside the US, but perhaps not as cheap as Medicare. There are a host of good international health insurance companies; Aetna International, Allianz Care, Bupa Global, Cigna Global, to name a few.

Canada is the top destination for social security checks sent outside the US. Japan is second, Mexico is third. Roughly 1% of retired Americans receive their Social Security checks outside the US.

I've been visiting new countries with the thought of retirement destinations. In February, I visited the capital cities of Argentina, Uruguay, and Colombia, and here are my thoughts on each destination and the ability to rent your apartment or condo when you aren't using it.

Buenos Aires was a very nice city and the recent loss in value of the Argentine Peso made it VERY affordable, with average per capita income of about \$10,000 annually. Apartments are inexpensive, ranging from about \$500 (studio) to \$1,500 (3 bedroom). One challenge is restrictions on withdrawing money from ATM's. Buenos Aires was very European and a very livable city. I'm sure you could easily rent your apartment in Buenos Aires when not using it personally.

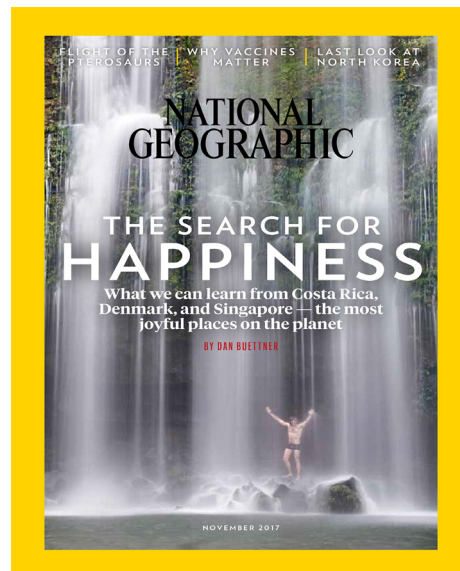
Montevideo was a bit more sleepy than Buenos Aires, but it is noted as one of the safest democracies in South America, with Average GDP of \$18,000. cost of living was noticeably higher than in Argentina but rents were inexpensive, from \$500 to \$1,500 per month, and you could buy a

decent place for less than \$150k. Though a nice place to visit, I wouldn't want to live there and I'm not sure whether you'd have rental demand for your place when you weren't using it.

Medellin, Colombia was very cheap. The Colombian Peso has lost 25% of its value in the last 8 months. Is Colombia dangerous? The murder rate in Colombia is twice that of Uruguay and nearly 4 times of Argentina. But by comparison, Mexico's murder rate is 23% higher than Colombia. (2020 statistics). Things are changing fast in Colombia, tourism is having a huge surge and GDP has been increasing. With coastline on both the Pacific and Caribbean sea, Colombia has much to offer. In December of 2016, Colombia came to a peace agreement with FARC, but displacement of people continues as other rebel groups fill the void. Venezuelan immigrants have also added social and economic pressure in Colombia but Colombia is a new up and comer for those who are willing to take more risk. I also think you'd be able to rent your property through Airbnb or VRBO if you keep in mind what an American tourist is looking for.

Costa Rica's political stability, high standard of living and strong system of social benefits continues to rank high in quality of life and happiness. Access to education, healthcare, clean water, electric and good sanitation continues to keep

Costa Rica Tops Happiest People List in National Geographic



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Costa Rica as one of the highest on my list of retirement destinations. But with per Capita income now over \$20,000, Costa Rica is a more expensive place to retire but there's good demand for short term rentals if you decide to rent out your place when you aren't using it. High youth unemployment is contributing to social problems and needs to be addressed, especially in and around the central valley of San Jose.

Montevideo, Uruguay



Buenos Aires, Argentina



Iglesia de Nuestra Señora del Carmen Cool Church in La Candelaria, Bogota



Our Next 10 Day Costa Rica

When? January 5 - 14, 2024

You asked for it and so we've brought back our Pura Vida 10 Day All Inclusive Costa Rica tour. We'll start in San Jose, head to La Paz Waterfall Gardens, tour Doka Coffee Plantation, visit Arenal and La Fortuna, visit the Monteverde Cloud Forest before heading to the west coast. Along the coast we'll also visit Manuel Antonio national park, Dominical and Ojochal. After a river ride on the Sierpe river we'll then head back to San Jose on the inland route, the Cerro De La Muerte. This tour is mostly about tourism but we will have one optional tour of our developments in Ojochal, for those of you who are interested in investment or retirement. The tour includes all lodging, all breakfasts and some lunches and dinners, all in-country transportation and all activity fees. It does not include alcoholic beverages. The cost of the tour is \$2,400 per single in a single room and \$3,400 per couple. We'll see the highlights of Costa Rica while touring in our luxury 16 passenger Mercedes Sprinter van. We limit the tour to 12 people and have an excellent tour guide. This tour is usually a sell out so book early to avoid disappointment. Copy and paste the link below in a browser for the itinerary and sign up link.

<https://www.pacificlots.com/10-day-tour>



Seniors Can Downsize and Give Themselves a New Lease on Life

When the kids are gone and we begin to age, it's time to take stock of our spatial situation. Do you really need all that house anymore? What about all the stuff you've amassed over the years that fills said house? Wouldn't life be easier if you were to simply get rid of what you don't need and learn to live with a smaller footprint? For many, the answer to this is absolutely. Here's how you can begin to downsize.

First things first: declutter

Any downsizing project must begin with getting rid of excess belongings in your home. This is no easy task. Not only are many of us inclined to hold onto just about everything (I may need it someday!), but we form sentimental attachments that can cloud our better judgment. Easy or not, it's vital.

How do you know what to get rid of? Sometimes, you have to get creative.

A good way to start is by implementing the 12-12-12 rule. It's simple - all you do is throw 12 items away, donate another 12, and keep another 12, but make sure they have a real home and aren't just shoved into a closet somewhere. The good thing about following this is that for every few dozen items you come across, 66 percent

are leaving your home. That's a fast way to get rid of clutter.

Next, tackle your clothing. We don't wear most of our wardrobes, and seniors usually have an exorbitant amount of clothing from bygone eras. Ask yourself some simple questions: Have I worn it in the past year? Would I buy it right now if I saw it in a store? Does it even fit? If the answer to any of these is no, then donate it. When downsizing your stuff, always stick to this rule: Everything in its designated place. That means everything gets assigned to the "throw away," "donate," or "keep" pile. You do not want to have a "maybe" pile, as everything will somehow find its way there. But what about the sentimental stuff?

If you are ruthless when downsizing your non-sentimental items (do you really need two coffee makers?), then you won't be forced to get rid of too much of the sentimental stuff. But if you don't want to part with your kids' mementos and old photos, ask your family to hold onto them. Another tip is to digitize what you can. If it's flat, it can be scanned. You can house thousands of old photos on a thumb drive the size of a quarter.

Think about moving to a smaller home

One way to "force" yourself into downsizing is to get rid of excess space. Your longtime family home may be too large for you now that the kids are gone. By moving to a smaller home, you can save time, energy and money on maintenance and upkeep. The benefits are grand and far-reaching. You can also pick a home that better suits your physical needs. There are many homes that are already built for accessibility, meaning you can comfortably age in place no matter how your needs change over time.

For seniors, health problems and mobility issues will likely get worse over time. When house hunting, you don't have to find your "goldilocks" home right away - it may not exist. Just know that you may need to make modifications, and work that into your budget.

Downsizing is not giving up and sliding meekly into old age. It's quite the opposite. Downsizing can give seniors more independence - physically, financially, and emotionally. Think of it as a new lease on life, and it will be easier to give up all the stuff you don't truly need to be happy.

Thinking about relocating to a Foreign Country?

Many Baby Boomers are reconsidering what's important in their retirement. Many of you don't want to spend your golden years living in a place like the villages, surrounded by people like you, playing pickle ball and golf. A growing number of Boomers are seeking out locations outside the US. There are many reasons why someone might make this choice. A lower cost of living and higher quality of life, a new lifestyle, a new career, a stimulating environment, a desire to learn a new language, a new culture, a new climate. Perhaps you want to leave your past behind, take a new look on life, reinvent yourself. Travel is a great way to add excitement to your life, make new friends, have new experiences. Top destinations for expats include Mexico, Costa Rica, Panama, Ecuador, Portugal, Spain, or more exotic locations like Morocco, Guatemala, Colombia, Argentina.

What to consider when deciding to move abroad. First think about accessibility. How easy is it to get home when you want to? What other countries are served by your new local airport? How easy will it be to learn a new language? Are there other Americans or expats from other countries to provide a sense of community. Should you buy or rent? Will you need a car? What's the healthcare like? How about cost of living? Will your friends and family want to visit. Choosing a location with easy air access is key, a location with affordable and abundant flights.



Vacation destinations versus where to own Property - Exchange Rates 101

As a frequent international traveler, I look for places to travel “at a discount”. Discount travel exists when the currency of the country you are visiting has recently lost value against the dollar. Discounts can also exist when a country is having difficult economic times, causing prices to fall. I’ve recently traveled to Cuba, Argentina and Colombia, all experiencing currency exchange issues. Fact: The Cuban Peso has no value outside of Cuba, i.e. no currency exchange exists once you leave Cuba. Cuban Pesos can’t be purchased in advance of your vacation and neither credit cards nor ATM cards work in Cuba. In order for a Cuban person to visit another country, they must exchange Cuban Pesos to another currency before leaving Cuba. The official exchange rate of a Cuban Peso is 23 per USD. Yet while in Cuba, you’ll be offered 3 or 4 times that amount just so the person can turn their Cuban Pesos into dollars.

Argentina currently is in a similar situation. If you visit, you will find withdrawal limits on your ATM card, because the Argentine Peso has been rapidly losing value against the dollar. These situations create opportunities for travelers. By trading dollars on the street, you’ll get a much better exchange rate than at a bank. In fact, the Cuban government has strict restrictions on Cubans exchanging Pesos for other currency. In both Cuba and Argentina, people hang around in tourist areas offering to “change money”. There are also “Casa de Cambios” (exchange houses) that will often pay much more than the official bank rate. As a currency is losing value, the sooner locals can change it into a stable currency, the less value they stand to lose. In March of 2022, the official bank rate of the Argentine Peso, was 107 Pesos to one USD. Less than a year later, the bank rate was 197 Pesos to the dollar. The Argentine government restricts exchange, attempting to stabilize their currency and avoid a “run on the bank”. People with large amounts of currency are losing buying power.

One might think that would create opportunities for buying property. The answer is “maybe”. If local market pricing is always in the host country currency, property you purchase there might lose value as the currency loses value. Here’s the example. You purchase a condo in Medellin, Colombia and pay in Colombian Pesos. In March of 2022, the Colombian Peso was trading at 3,700 Colombian Pesos to the dollar. You buy a 2 bedroom condo for 370 million Colombian Pesos, (\$100,000 at the exchange rate at that time). Ten months later, in November of 2022, one USD was worth 5,100 Pesos. If you sold the condo for the same amount you bought it for, 370 million Colombian Pesos, you’d only receive \$72,550 USD when you convert those Pesos back to dollars. So though your vacation is a bargain during periods of devaluation of a currency, purchasing property might not be a good idea. For that reason, many markets price property in USD, eliminating the fluctuation exposure when pricing in a local currency. We have seen some great deals created by currency fluctuations. In Argentina recently you could buy a new Mercedes for about half the world market value, simply by purchasing Argentine Pesos for dollars on the street market and then paying in Argentine Pesos at the Mercedes dealer. The street market was offering 390 Argentine Pesos last week when the official “bank” rate was 193 Pesos to the dollar. You are literally more than doubling your money just on the currency exchange. So in these cases, Cuba, Colombia and Argentina might be a great place to spend the winter, take a nice vacation or buy real goods but if the local property market is prices in local currency, you might lose money quickly in those purchases. When I returned home from this recent vacation, Expedia had quoted me \$109 for a room at the Embassy Suites hotel in Bogota, yet the transaction was in Colombian Pesos. When the transaction posted to my credit card, it came in at \$51 less than the rate quoted by Expedia. The Embassy Suites received the same amount of Pesos as they’d priced at but those Pesos cost me much less when purchased with dollars. Watch for our tour to Cuba this summer, I have the tentative dates set at June 10 - 17 at \$1,550 per person. It will be a bit primitive, but so much fun, and a great look at how communism works or doesn’t work. Text me at 305-295-0137 to reserve a spot, go to <https://www.pacificclots.com/cuba-tour-itinerary>

If I could only buy Cuban Automobiles with Cuban Pesos - I took these photos in Havana on my last visit

