

Save Money with the Escapeartist Daily Deal Program - EFAM | Escape From America Magazine | EFAM

Save Money and Travel the World

*"Live where you want to live... Live how you want to live... And **save** money doing it!"*

Have the time of your life, make new friends and enjoy exciting adventures in exotic locations around the world. If you're thinking, "Who will pay for these exciting trips?" EscapeDeals may just be the answer you've been looking for. EscapeDeals is a new daily deal program launching August 29, 2011 which will provide incredible discounts on the destination spots you dream of visiting.

Escapeartist Deals has been designed with the budget-conscious traveler in mind. If you are like most travelers in this financially challenged economy, your dream escape may simply be out of your reach. It has become necessary to search for the best deals and offers to even begin thinking about planning an escape. Like most travelers looking to maximize their travel budget, you scour your e-mail inbox for great deals from the corporate big boy deals sites such as Groupon or Living Social. Yet, most of the travel offers they provide are the standard garden variety – if you want to go to a heavily-traveled tourist spot – great, but they don't negotiate incredible offers with the unique and off the beaten path places Escapeartist knows you want to visit.

Imagine yourself on a tranquil, exotic island in the middle of the Pacific. The sun glimmering off the beautiful blue-green ocean, the waves crash behind you, mingling in with the noises of the local wildlife creating a beautiful score in the backdrop. Touring the island, getting to know the locals and their culture. Buying local goods and wares. Eating native prepared cuisine the locals pour their heart and soul into each and every morsel. Discovering a new way of life through your EscapeDeal!

Escapeartist Deals wants to help you find travel-oriented deals exactly like this. Deals that connect you with the globe and its citizenry, rather than merely offering you a vacation to a typical hotspot where the locals are quite likely to be your neighbors from back home!

So rather than visiting generic, wide-ranging travel deal sites, Escapeartist wants to know about the locations you would like to see featured in order to create inviting packages to off the beaten path resorts, small local merchants offering tours, and the off-overlooked, out of the way destinations no one seems to know about. Escapeartist has been delivering this for 15 years.

You now have the opportunity to sign up for Escapeartist Deals to provide the precise details of the Escape Deal you would like to have. We will take this information and search for packages that fit these specifications! No more inbox hunting, no more Googling – you now have access to a one-stop deal program where you can find the sort of offers you are really searching for.

Escapeartist Deals isn't solely a deal site either. Escapeartist Deals is an extension of our community. We are offering a forum on EscapeDates.com, where savvy travelers can connect with like-minded individuals to discuss the deals and destinations, while possibly providing insight to that particular locale. Plan a meet-up with your fellow travelers to these remote locations, and experience the sense of community across the world.

We Are Dedicated to the Escapeartist Dream!

It's a dedication that's helped countless couples, singles and families realize their "Escapeartist Dreams". That's how Escapeartist earned its place-in the top 1% of most-visited Internet sites in the world, with over 1 million unique visitors per month for more than 5 straight years! Escapeartist serves 400,000 ongoing subscribers...and growing.

Escapeartist.com is an Internet publishing company that specializes in **informative and authoritative content** specifically about living, traveling and working abroad. As our readers know, we showcase the stories of real people who are actually living what they're telling us. If you're planning on traveling, we are THE source for the best travel offers.

Escapeartist Deals will be the primary internet source for obtaining information regarding steeply discounted deals on resorts, all inclusive packages, airfare and travel gear. To that end, we will let the voice of the people be heard on the exact deals and destinations they are looking for, and work to construct packages that meet those requirements.

Fiji - Doing Business from Heaven - EFAM | Escape From America Magazine | EFAM

Freelancer Heaven with Sunsets, Palm Trees and 3G

The world is spinning out of control...it seems like there is nothing but bad news out there. We have been let down by our elected officials as much as by the corporations who only measure progress in units sold. "Life-time value" is now the goal – the amount that can be extracted from an individual through selling him/her products over the course of their life. So this article is about extraction – extracting yourself from systems that keep you in place, keep you chained down by debt and dumbed down by media.

So ask yourself – do you really need a TV and constant fear in your life? Would you not rather lower your cost of living by at least half? Reclaim your own time by working from home? Spend more time being active with kids and the wife? Be in a place where your dollar buys 1.6 times its value and the cost of food is about half?

Let's look at the following: If you are 45 years or over, you can legally [reside in the Fiji Islands](#) if you make an investment of F\$100,000 (about US\$60K) by buying land or a home. This initial investment can even be financed at 10% down, and you can still qualify to stay here year-round.

For those of you that have some money stashed away, use it while it is still worth something – the devaluation is coming as sure as the currency loss is already here. [Buy some property abroad](#). For those of you who don't have enough yet, make a deposit and get your foot in the door. The time where wealth will be measured by having your own piece of land where you can grow some food is approaching rapidly.

Today there are a myriad of jobs you can do over the Internet, and if you are retired, US social security can be paid to you in any country of residence you may choose. So my suggestion is: If you have a brick and mortar job, see if you can change careers or modify your work in a way that you can do it online. A lot of employers would be happy to accommodate you. Break free. But make it easy for you – choose an English-speaking country that is safe, without guns or high rates of violent crime, and one that is technologically advanced enough to support you still making an income from abroad. Fiji is that place.

We are looking at an unprecedented change in our lifestyles within the next 25 years. Financial collapse, environmental degradation, overpopulation (we are adding 3.5 Billion people until 2050), and further continued growth of the gap between rich and poor. Where you will be will largely determine the quality of life you will live – ask yourself today if you want to be in a country that has the largest inequality between rich and poor in the Western World, that spends more on arms than all other countries combined, that fails in Health Care, Education and Safety of roads and infrastructure when compared to most other industrialized nations? Where healthy food is either too expensive or simply not available? Where Health Care is so expensive it is becoming out of reach for the average wage earner? Where you have to work until you are 72 to get Social Security?

Or, would you rather be in a country where family and tradition still matter, where food is cheap and locally grown, where guns are outlawed and you can have sunny weather year-round? While we don't have some of the conveniences of modern western life, ask yourself, how much do you really need? How much WalMart, Starbucks and Pizza Hut does anyone need? How many TV channels?

You can retire in Fiji much earlier and for much less than in the US, so I strongly suggest looking at relocation as a valid alternative.

We have been helping people arrive on Fiji's shores for 17 years, and we are getting more requests for information at the moment than ever. Contact us for more information and how you can be one of the people that make the transition into a better future for you and your family.

Contact us for more info at info@fijirealestate.com or watch our [YouTube Channel](#)

8 Signs that the US Government is Making it Harder For You to Become an Expat - EFAM | Escape From America Magazine | EFAM

Have the terrorists won?

One of the most common reasons for wanting to expatriate from the United States is the concern about government overreach. Many feel that the expansion of government in recent years has been chipping away at the freedom and liberty that the country was founded upon. What with more and more agencies, regulations, surveillance, and mandates, the right to privacy and self-determination is steadily shrinking right along with financial outlooks.

So, are you among the increasing number of people who feel that the only real solution is to get out of the country? Well, using the exact same tactics that are driving you away, the government appears intent on preventing you from leaving. Changes that have recently been put in place as well as proposals for future changes in rules and regulations might be intended to discourage. But they might also drive your resolve to take your destiny into your own hands and do whatever it takes to make your move overseas.

1. Escalating Cost of Passports

From \$35 a few years ago the fee for a US passport has ballooned to today's \$135 for adults (16 and older) and \$105 for minors. Renewals cost \$110. If you need it in a hurry, there is another \$60 expediting fee, and you have to provide a preaddressed prepaid express mail envelope, if you want it back in less than the 6-8 weeks required. The Passport Agency of the Department of State in 2010 issued 13,883,129 passports as well as 1,596,485 items of a new product called the "passport card," which is good for reentry from anywhere within the Western Hemisphere. This product, which costs \$55 for adults, \$30 for previous adult passport holders, and \$40 for all minors, was created at the behest of heavy lobbying by the cruise industry.

2. Proposed Biographical Questionnaire

In February 2011, the US Department of State proposed the use of a new biographical questionnaire "to supplement the DS-11 only when the applicant submits citizenship or identity evidence that is insufficient to meet his/her burden of proving citizenship or identity." The estimated burden to fill out [proposed Form DS-5513](#) is 45 minutes, but such details as your mother's places of residence one year before, at the time of, and one year after your birth are only the beginning of a long list of obscure information that it would be impossible to ascertain in that amount of time or possibly any amount of time. Despite the State Department's reassurances that it is all about preventing terrorists and other treasonous individuals from gaining US passports, this is very problematic because an unapproved version of the form is [already being used](#) to deny passports to US citizens, and there are no set guidelines as to who will to be subjected to it.

3. Air Travel Difficulties

In their supposed pursuit of would-be terrorists and other criminals, the US authorities have overreached their jurisdiction. Recently they forced an international flight from Europe to Mexico to land in the US because one of the online gambling impresarios from Costa Rica was on board. But violation of international law and sovereignty has become an everyday occurrence.

In another recent case, a flight from Mexico to Spain was denied access to American airspace and turned back ninety minutes after takeoff because a Mexican citizen who was once accused of involvement in a guerilla uprising in Bolivia was on board. She suspects that she is on the infamous passenger blacklist. But it is kept secret, so there is neither a way for travelers to find out if they are on the list nor any way to clear their names.

4. Airport Security

One of the most glaring cases of government overreach is of course that of the highly invasive "enhanced screening procedures." If having to remove shoes and belts to walk through metal detectors and being subjected to the Advanced Imaging Technology units were not degrading enough, "anomalies," refusals to enter the unit, or metal detection alarms require further thorough pat downs that are justifiably upsetting.

But think twice about complaining. Behavior Detection Officers are stationed at the security checkpoints to watch for "behavioral indicators" such as stress or fear. Other indicators that they look for are [attitudes toward security](#), so anger and resentment about having to surrender the right to privacy becomes the evidence for why your right to privacy should be surrendered. The circular reasoning is dizzying.

5. World wide of invasion of privacy

Whilst outrage over TSA airport screening has amplified the accusations of government tyranny, little is being said about the NSA's continuing surveillance of electronic data – domestic emails, Internet searches, and social network activities. The USA Patriot Act also gives the NSA the power to conduct surveillance of domestic financial information such as bank transfers and credit card transactions as well as travel and telephone records, and the World Wide Web has globalized their reach. Some may excuse these unconstitutional invasions of privacy as being necessary in these dangerous times, where anyone who is not engaged in illegal activities should have nothing to hide. But again, the arbitrariness and the potential for abuse of power based on private information gleaned from all this surveillance can be yet another impediment to freedom of movement and

the right of individuals, wherever they are on the globe, to conduct their lives without the constant fear of interference from Big Brother.

6. Taxation of foreign income

By taxing foreign income, the United States considers all citizens, wherever they are in the world, as subject to taxation. There are foreign earned income exclusions and foreign tax credits, but they only apply when you either spend 330 days abroad earning your income or you meet the bona fide residency test by proving that your principal residence is in a foreign country for at least one full tax year beginning on January 1.

A strangely named provision called the Tax Increase Prevention and Reconciliation Act (TIPRA), enacted in May 2006, actually raised the amount of taxes due after the foreign earned income exclusion. The changes brought by TIPRA also capped housing allowances, affecting those in higher cost housing markets the most.

7. Financial reporting requirements

According to American Citizens Abroad, US requirements for banks both foreign and domestic have turned expats into "[toxic citizens](#)." A law incorporated into the 2010 Hiring Incentives to Restore Employment Act (HIRE Act) has caused foreign banks and financial institutions to deny services to US citizens because of intrusions by the US government that make servicing those accounts too difficult and burdensome. The Foreign Bank and Financial Account Form (FBAR) calls for foreign institutions to submit account details of all Americans with a cumulative balance over \$10,000 at any point during the year to the US Treasury or face major withholding penalties on their US assets. The result has been that many American's accounts have been closed.

Yet, Title III of the USA Patriot Act, known as the "International Money Laundering Abatement and Financial Anti-Terrorism Act of 2001" enacted requirements concerning how US banks verify their clients' identities, making it more difficult for those without a permanent US address to maintain accounts from abroad.

The right to privacy in financial matters has been further invaded by new banking rules that the United States has been pushing for through the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development. The OECD compiled a blacklist of countries it deemed "uncooperative tax havens." To be removed from the list, these countries were required to sign bilateral tax information-sharing treaties with other countries and adhere to an international taxation standard that is eliminating privacy in banking everywhere in the world.

Then there is the requirement to report the amount of money you are taking out of the country to the US government. Here is the text from the [Customs and Border Protection website](#):

You may bring into or take out of the country, including by mail, as much money as you wish. However, if it is more than \$10,000, you will need to report it to CBP. Ask the CBP officer for the Currency Reporting Form (FinCen 105). The penalties for non-compliance can be severe.

"Money" means monetary instruments and includes U.S. or foreign coins currently in circulation, currency, and travelers' checks in any form, money orders, and negotiable instruments or investment securities in bearer form.

This requirement goes back to when President Nixon removed the last vestiges of the Gold Standard from the US currency in 1971. The explanation for it is that drug dealers were taking millions in illicit gains out of the country. Threats of fines work on institutions, but as for drug dealers, I can just see them declaring those suitcases of money out of fear of a fine.

This rule affects mostly people wanting to move abroad for a better and freer way of life. But when you fill in that FinCen 105, you immediately draw attention to yourself. If you want to take your fortune out in the form of cashier's checks or bearer bonds, and you declare it, you will probably end up being detained while the CBP calls your accountant and your bank to have them send proof of it being legal and properly taxed.

All of these requirements, along with all the documentation necessary for expats to pay their taxes (the guide to the Foreign Tax Credit for Individuals is 39 pages long), constitute major bureaucratic hurdles to living and working overseas.

8. The IRS is becoming even more aggressive

The IRS was not satisfied with the power it already wielded over international financial institutions, so the government has recently been instituting and considering even [more aggressive measures](#) for collecting taxes on Americans who wish to live and keep their assets overseas.

One such measure being considered by the Justice Department is whether it can apply FBAR penalties on foreign banks and institutions that they determine to have violated US tax laws. While the \$780 million in fines that Swiss banking giant UBS paid in 2009 were for selling illegal offshore financial products to Americans, the FBAR penalties would dwarf this amount.

Federal prosecutors are already going after a former Credit Suisse banker for \$19 million in FBAR penalties for personally aiding and abetting American clients who failed to disclose their foreign accounts to the US government.

Another onerous tactic that the US government is considering is to deny passports from citizens with unpaid taxes.

A farewell gift

So if you have had enough of the US government imposing its will on you, treating you as if you were a terrorist, infringing on your rights and limiting your freedoms, enslaving you with its crushing debt, and impeding your ability to live and work abroad, and you have decided once and for all to [renounce your citizenship](#), you will have to fork out \$450 to the US government for this

irrevocable privilege. But be aware that under [Section 212\(a\)](#) of the Immigration and Nationality Act, if the Attorney General decides that the renunciation was undertaken to avoid paying taxes, you are ineligible for a visa or admission back into the United States.

All in all, it appears that the terrorists of September 11, 2001, whoever they were, have won. You get to stay put in the US so they know where to come and get you next time.

About the author: Susan Beverley is a writer and editor for Escape From America Magazine and also writes for and maintains [Expat Daily News](#) – the expat news blog for [EscapeArtist.com](#). She traveled extensively before becoming an expat herself having found a place to call home in South America where she has lived since 2005. She understands the concerns, needs and difficulties that expats face from first-hand experience and is dedicated to supporting and encouraging anyone who is looking for a new nation to call home. [[send her an email](#)]

Over the Border and on to Xcalak Mexico - EFAM | Escape From America Magazine | EFAM

And We Thought We Were Overpacked - photo by Jonathan Look

About eighteen months ago Vonda and I decided that we were going to take early retirement and see the world, one country (or area) at a time, one year at a time. We calculated that if we sold our house in Texas and downsized everything else to the point that we wouldn't be burdened by having to store or transport too many belongings we could make this dream work. We had to pay off our debts, figure out ways to mobilize everything else and determine exactly what was essential, what would be nice to have and what we could do without.

Without much hesitation we put our plan into action. The next year and a half became a controlled frenzy of implementation. We cut back on frills and started eliminating debt. If we saw something we wanted but didn't see it in our plan we didn't get it. We became ruthless sorting out, selling, donating, giving away or otherwise disposing of almost everything we owned. It was hard at first but the further we got into it the more liberating it became. Once we got past our attachment to objects the easier it got. The goal was to get everything we owned into a single vehicle; and we got pretty close.

We had arrived at our decision to do it soon after a trip we made to a small fishing village on the far southeast corner of [Mexico](#) called Xcalak. From the moment we laid eyes on the place we fell in love. Life here was simpler, closer to the bone; more authentic. The rampant consumerism that we had tired of back home didn't exist here. We found people who were not shielded from their community or their surroundings; they were a part of it. Also, for two beach loving SCUBA divers, crystal clear water, white sand beaches and a protected coral reef just off shore didn't hurt either.

Concurrent with all of this we were slowly revealing to our family and friends what our plans were. Although many were supportive, when others found out that Mexico was our first stop the naysaying and cynicism began. "You guys are crazy." "I saw on cable news how dangerous it is down there?" When we added that we were going drive to our new home, the rhetoric got even more animated. "My friend visited the border once and told me everything there is in anarchy." "How can you drive there? My uncle says the roads are nothing but rutted smugglers trails." OK, I exaggerate a little, but there were people – people we barely knew – people anchored eternally in the United States, that [generously] wanted to give their strongly held [yet remotely formed] opinions of our new home.

We had done the work of downsizing but still it was not easy squeezing, maneuvering and crushing everything we deemed essential into and onto one small "Voodoo Blue" Toyota FJ Cruiser. When you consider we still had to also add Vonda, me and three exotic pet birds it got a little harder and a little more crowded. In the back of our minds we were also carrying the words of our critics and naysayers but we had done our own research, looked at the statistics, weighed the pros and the cons and knew one thing we were not going to carry – *regret*.

Thursday, June 30, 2011 – We arrived promptly at 7 AM and queued at the "Gateway to the Americas Bridge Number One" in Laredo. We got into the "Carril para declarar" line. At about 7:20, the line started moving. We crossed the river into Mexico. Well, sort of. Actually, we had crossed the Rio Grande, but were promptly directed into a mammoth parking area for inspection. A perky Mexican Customs agent greeted us, and asked us to remove everything from the car. You have to understand, we had a lot of stuff, and the last thing we wanted to do was to unpack EVERYTHING!

I explained to her in my terrible Spanish that everything in the car was for personal use and we were only in the "Carril para declarar" line because of the birds, which had previously gone unnoticed. We had all the documentation that we needed, but apparently it is not every day that Americans are importing pet cockatiels into Mexico. Finding sympathy on us, she said don't unpack and wait while they figure out what to do. Slowly we began to attract more officials. Everyone was helpful and kind, but it was clear that our situation had created a bit of a head scratcher bureaucratically. So we waited. Poorly and in two languages we talked about the weather. Where to get cell phone service. What music they were listening to on their iPhone 4s. Life in Nuevo Laredo. I shifted my weight back and forth from leg to leg. We looked at darkening skies and waited.

Between the many awkward pauses in our challenging conversation, I noticed something very interesting: there were a lot of Americans there, with vehicles packed similarly to ours. Many had roof racks full of stuff. Others were laden with bike racks. Some even had trailers loaded with what appeared to be camping gear and sporting equipment. There were families with laughing children. Elderly couples in motor homes. Wasn't this supposed to be the "scary border"? Are these people crazy or did they look at the statistics as we did?

View of the Beach from Jon and Vonda's new home - photo by Jonathan Look

We waited a little more and finally someone came and got Vonda and the birds. OK, we are moving now, they got Vonda and the birds. Wait. Someone has Vonda and the birds, I don't know where they are going and I am in Mexico, kind of, without my companions. So nervously I waited. The agents and I talked some more. One asked if I had any knives and I showed her my Swiss Army deluxe. She asked if I had any electronics and I showed her my iPhone 3G (which now that I was 100 yards across the border didn't work). She looked at her watch, I looked at my old inferior iPhone which now was little more than a clock, and we waited. Finally a smiling, official-looking guy from the "Servicio Nacional de Sanidad" (SNS) brought Vonda and the birds back! He explained that we were going to have to follow him in his truck with our vehicle to the SNS office in town. The birds got the rides of their lives in the bed of that truck. Their travel cages became zero gravity roller coaster rides as we followed on the back roads of Nuevo Laredo. I had to run every stop sign just to keep up.

We arrived at the SNS office and after a bit of handwringing and standing around it was finally determined that we had to get a

“Certificado Zoosanitario Para Importación” for these three little birds. It took a while and a pretty hefty fee (\$140 US), payable via bank certificate, but we had what we needed; the birds were legal! But were we? We didn’t have our visas. The truck hadn’t been certificated. Vonda and I were free but not exactly free to go in Nuevo Laredo. What to do?

We decided to drive back to the border to get what we needed paperwork wise. It really wasn’t an issue. We found the “Banco Nacional del Ejercito” office (for car permits) and immigration right next to each other in the same building. We waited in line, and it took about an hour to get our visas and a window sticker and certificate to temporarily import the car. There was a little food court, so we picked up some food and drink for the road.

Not knowing exactly where to exit parking, I headed toward a little guard shack at the far end of the lot. Confused, the attendant looked at me and asked if I *really* wanted to surrender the vehicle importation permit I had just waited in line for. Sheepishly I acknowledged that I was in the wrong line. I thanked her for not checking us out of the country after getting in the wrong line. She just smiled, raised the barrier and with a smart wave motioned us through. Bureaucracy is always frustrating but looking back at it, it could have been worse, much worse. We have heard of many more difficult stories, on both sides of the border.

One for the road – photo by Jonathan Look

OK, we were in. Really in. It was after lunch instead of after breakfast, but we were legal and everything! I turned on the GPS and remarkably found that we were already on the right road to begin our trek: Highway 85, southbound to Monterrey. It was kind of barren. Good road, but all in all unremarkable. Flat dry, unremarkable. We looked for signs of banditos, but only saw what would pretty much pass for ordinary traffic in the states; albeit, mixed with many of the same heavily-laden, southbound, US-plated vehicles that we had seen at the border.

As luck would have it, we crossed the border southbound right as tropical storm Arlene was crossing the eastern border westbound; in other words, right across our path. We endured a mixture of everything from torrential rains and moderate winds to breaks in the overcast with little shafts of sunshine and even rainbows. It was obvious that the area needed rain, like most of the middle of North America in the summer of 2011. Many places had been charcoaled by recent fires. We were making pretty good time, but it was becoming more and more obvious that we were not going to make our first night’s destination, San Miguel Allende.

Figuring we would just “wing it” and hopefully stumble upon some place to stay, we decided just to press on and see where the road took us. By the time we circumnavigated around the west side of Monterrey, the weather was deteriorating. There were low wispy clouds and the rain intensity was anywhere between drizzle and downpour. Visibility fell to just a mile or two and we were both struck by the eeriness of the landscape. The charred mountains were blanketed with factories, all billowing smoke into a fog being whipped by the tropical storm.

We joined Highway 40 toward the historic town of Saltillo then turned southbound on highway 57, missing what I am sure is a fascinating and charming city; at least the guidebooks made it sound that way. We were tired. The day’s activities were starting to catch up with us. We were stiff, thirsty and a little grumpy. Unthinkingly, we got gas, soft drinks and stretched our legs at the Pemex in Providencia. Then we continued south on 57.

It was starting to get dark as we approached the outwardly non-descript town of Matehuala and pulled into the Las Palmas Inn. The inn had clean rooms, covered parking and a restaurant AAA described as “relaxing” with a menu that “centers on Continental Fare”. It has been a few years since I have been on “the continent” but I found the food more vaguely IHOPish than “continental”. All in all I found the Las Palmas complex to be overpriced, underwhelming and adequate. There were many more hotel choices nearby but we were too tired to investigate. We certainly will next time.

Friday, July 1, 2011 – 6AM came early. Well, OK, it came at the same time it always does, but it seemed early. For the sake of brevity, let’s just say that we really weren’t looking for another day of driving, but here it was. We had been on the road for about 30 days straight – Texas to California and back, then moving out of our home, and now on our way to Xcalak. We wanted to be on the road at first light, not an hour before first light. But here we were, back on Highway 57 southbound. In the dark. And, then there was the weather...

Tropical Storm Arlene was still there, dumping much needed rainfall on Mexico. She was also causing quite a few traffic accidents. A huge three trailer semi-truck had jack-knifed in the early morning gloom, and we barely inched down the road as the sun came up. I was struck by how much in stride people seemed to take such an event. I saw none of the, “I’m not waiting like you suckers, I’m taking the shoulder” attitude. There was no honking, no apparent aggressive jockeying for position, just a resigned, slow moving procession of people waiting their turn to get by the accident and on their way.

Vonda and I were both feeling caffeine deprived, so instead of taking the bypass at San Luis Potosí, we decided to go straight through town and find some coffee. Not a good idea. San Luis Potosí had been deluged by the storm. Roadways had become rivers, traffic lights were out and the water had caused some cars to flood, creating roadblocks. As if that were not frustration enough, we couldn’t find coffee. Even the Burger King wasn’t open for breakfast. What, these people don’t drink coffee?

We made it through town and as luck would have it, just where the bypass joins up with the road we were on, we found an “Italian Coffee Company” franchise, co-located with a Pemex station. Yes...a Mexican company, that calls itself Italian, and spells its name in English. Good coffee.

Car and bodies fueled, and a little more awake, we were back on the road. The landscape north of Mexico City is a beautiful mixture of mountains, farmland and small villages. Stand after roadside stand offered “tunas” (prickly pear fruit) and frescas con crema (strawberries and cream), right next to a highway screaming with traffic. We couldn’t resist what sounded like a wonderful treat, so we pulled as far off the shoulder as we could and tried some. Fantastic! Admittedly it was a little worrisome being parked just a few feet clear of 100 kilometer per hour triple trailer semi-trucks, but it was worth the risk. We stood on the edge of the highway savoring delicious strawberries and cream, enjoying the cool air and looking forward to being past Mexico City.

Vonda was sleeping and I guess I wasn't paying too much attention when I missed the road that would let us bypass Mexico City. The result was a plunge right into the heart of one of the world's largest and most crowded cities. Traffic was a nightmare. Road construction and detours abounded. It was obvious that the stop and go conditions were well known because, right there on the freeway, in traffic that was barely moving, vendors had set up shop. They would dodge between cars and cross up to eight lanes of traffic just to sell practically everything: fresh fruit, Bimbo bread, soft drinks, Telcel prepaid phones, jewelry and all manner of snack foods, even chargers for your portable electronics. There really was no reason to go to the store because everything you might possibly need was available right there on the freeway. I was watching a freeway carnival of commerce, a motorway madness of merchandising, a roadway retail rodeo; then I saw something weird. Right there in Mexico City traffic, on a major freeway, mixed in with the guys selling Frito Lay chips and air fresheners, was a guy with two puppies under each arm, weaving in and out of traffic trying to convince people that they needed a pet to take home to the kids. This was despicable parking lot puppy mill vending on a whole new level.

My little non-detour had slowed us down, but we were not deterred. We joined Highway 150 and headed in the direction of Puebla. The city was ringed by volcanic mountains and fields of flowers. Puebla looked like an industrial town yet, at least from the car, it still retained some of its charm. Reputation has it that Puebla is a world-class foodie town and I hope someday to return so we can see for ourselves.

One for the road – photo by Jonathan Look

Beyond Puebla we practically fell off of the high plateau into the enchanting town of Orizaba. Highway 150 suddenly ceased being highway and transformed into a kind of fantasyland of cloud-shrouded forests, waterfalls, hairpin turns and switchbacks. Looking hundreds of meters below, somewhere lost in the mist, we could catch glimpses of rocky streams, small neat houses with their fireplaces going in July and the smell of pine. At the bottom, the road opened up and Orizaba revealed itself to be a fetching town with what appeared to be a thriving adventure sports scene. OK, put that on our list too.

It was getting late in the afternoon, but we decided to press on. For some reason, at this point I felt it was important to "make time", deluding myself into believing that being on some arbitrary schedule was more essential than living in the moment. I was positive that there would be a place not too far away so we just kept driving. We were now driving in the lowlands. Everything was a sea of grass with the occasional river flowing through. It was kilometer after kilometer of low green jungle and marsh. In some areas there appeared to be sugar cane or some other warm weather crop growing, but for the most part it was lush, monotonous green. Towering cumulus clouds were building and occasionally dumped rain as daylight began to fade. We should have stopped, but we didn't. Why didn't we stop near Puebla and bask in the light of its gastronomic fame? Why didn't we stop back in the gorgeous mountains near Cordoba? For some reason, we kept driving. Driving and looking for a place to stop and not finding anything.

Finally, about dusk, some hope on the horizon: a small lonely billboard advertising the Royal Hotel in Carlos A. Carrillo, just 30 kilometers away. We arrived after dark. The town itself was having a festival of some sort around a charming central square. Bands were playing, everyone was dressed festively, and people were having a good time hanging out, dancing and gossiping. The architecture appeared to be colonial but it didn't matter, we just didn't have the strength to check it out. We wanted to find a bed and go to sleep.

We circled around a bit and found "The Royal". It was a hotel totally devoid of charm. I had to wrest the clerk from her Facebook page just to get her to give me a key, which came with a fob so large it barely fit in my pocket. From the fluorescently lit concrete bunkeresque lobby to the roach body littered stairwell to the dark bare bulb barely lit corridors it was dreadful. The room smelled of bleach and insecticide. The pillows were so thin I had to triple fold them just so I could get enough purchase to rest my head. The walls were totally bare and the fan wobbled so much I feared it crashing down upon us. I wanted to fold the pancake thin mattress to get some support but besides being impractical, I REALLY didn't want to see what was underneath. The concrete floors, walls and even the ceilings were peeling paint and stained. The "Royal" hotel was maybe not the worst but definitely among the worst places I have ever stayed – and I was grateful to have a room. I slept like a corpse.

In the morning there was a nattily dressed guy passed out, legs in the street, using the curb as a pillow. He looked so uncomfortable I was reminded that last night could have been worse and in some ways we were lucky to have found "The Royal". I think I need to plan a little more and check out some alternatives. We certainly will next time. (That sounds familiar.)

One for the road – photo by Jonathan Look

Saturday, July 2, 2011 – We were driving again. Back on the road for the last day. We traveled mechanically through towns with curious names like Acayucan, Minatitlan and Coatzacoalcos. The landscape was still flat and tropical, sometimes pleasantly interrupted by rolling hills or even what appeared to be a few mountains as we skirted Chiapas. Just outside Cardenas, I unwittingly discovered that yes; a fully laden Toyota FJ Cruiser with rooftop carrier and bicycles on the back will go airborne if given sufficient velocity while passing over a "tope". A tope is a speed bump of indeterminate size that many towns use for traffic control. Fail to see the warning signs for these at your own peril.

After shaking off that almost mishap, gassing up and buying a few groceries in Villahermosa we continued on. We were now in Mayan country. We passed just outside of Palenque and entered another area of long empty spaces punctuated by an occasional small town or a Mayan ruin. Just before Chetumal we turned on Highway 307 and we were almost there. At dusk we turned off on the highway to Xcalak. It had been a long day but tonight we were going to sleep at home! It was a home we had never slept in before, and only visited once, but it was home in a place we loved.

About the Author: Jonathan Look and his wife Vonda took early retirement in 2011 so they could see the world. Their plan is to travel for ten years and live in ten areas, one year at a time. Jonathan has positioned himself so he can pursue his passion for travel, photography and writing full time. He is especially interested in using his photography to help impoverished

peoples, endangered cultures and ecosystems. Artist Vonda Look is a contemporary abstract artist working in multiple media being inspired by nature, people and animal – especially birds. They are available for assignment work and can be contacted through the website www.lifepart2.com.

To follow our travels and experiences please provide us with your name and mail and we will send you stories and lots of pictures as we travel along...

Plastic Surgery Abroad Unsafe – Says Who? - EFAM | Escape From America Magazine | EFAM

Overseas Plastic Surgery Unsafe – Says Who?

Broad strokes of “unsafe” are being painted on the quality of medical surgery performed outside of one’s own home country (without stating which home country that is) by ISAPS (International Society of Aesthetic Plastic Surgeons).

The whole theme of “it’s unsafe anywhere but home” is odd, since the membership of the ISAPS is comprised of plastic surgeons from many countries.

Their recent press release “[Patients Have a Right to Safe Surgery](#)” alludes to all medical tourism being unsafe. They quote a “U.S. study referred to in an article in the August issue of [Aesthetic Surgery Journal, Complications from International Surgery Tourism](#)”.

I realize a press release is not the place for “full disclosure”, so I’ve initiated contact with an executive at ISAPS to ask for a phone interview, but haven’t heard back just yet. I have heard back from some subject experts who question the motivation of ISAPS and their conclusion.

Here are a few comments from researchers and subject experts who read the article and have questions about the supporting evidence quoted in the article, and about the motivation for the article:

Says an academic, “I traced the reference back to the source listing, and this full “article” is only four pages long. That doesn’t constitute a researched article – that hardly is enough space to discuss methodology. Also, I see there is a two page commentary on the report immediately following that; that to me tells me the Journal saw it as an “unsettled” piece to begin with.

Speaking with the author of the commentary might be more insightful than the PR spin that is going to come from ISAPS, as they have already pronounced their position in the press release.

It would be interesting too, if the article mentioned who reviewed it for publication (a few do, most don’t), to talk with them to see if they felt the conclusions being drawn are accurate.”

A medical tourism facilitator and T4H member says, “The survey polled 2,000 members of the American Society of Plastic Surgeons (ASPS) about their experience with medical tourism patients. More than 80 percent of the 368 respondents said they had treated patients who had traveled abroad for cosmetic procedures. That is 288 respondents. That also means that 1712 didn’t think it was important to respond”.

Here is the comment of an attendee of a recent medical tourism conference. “The ISAPC provided a scare-filled, biased presentation at the conference, so this is a tactic for them that is at least 4 years old. The AMA spoke there too, and was quite balanced, but ISAPC showed horror pictures (as if nothing like this ever happens in the US)”.

A medical professional and author of several books on medical travel is quoted as saying, “I have seen a couple of these promotional ads ding plastic surgery but I have also seen some articles in the LA times and the NYC paper that are thinly veiled ads as well – but under the bylines of real reporters. I wish I could remember the names or dates – but that’s why I was surprised to see this promotion linked to the Sacramento Bee, along with some other negative articles during my Pubmed search”.

I tend to think (and it’s only my opinion) that a lot of it is focused on India because the British press has printed several critical articles about people going to India – and I think they see India as their biggest threat.

I read somewhere that [India is poised to bring in 2.3 billion in medical tourism revenues in 2012](#).

I think plastic surgery is hurting more than other specialties since it is elective, and the economy is bad – also in recent years – American surgeons have had to reduce their fees in an attempt to compete with overseas sources. Since it’s elective people can shop around.

Also many plastic surgery patients tend to be younger, (more internet sophistication) and less fear of exotic locales to some extent. I mean, everyone on reality TV is going to Mexico for plastic surgery it seems.

To me the article screams bitter grapes – but I also think the screams are getting louder and louder – and at some point, others will take it up.. (The AMA always protects its own.)”

Says a T4H member experienced in medical travel, “I have to question the motivation of a company who highlights a problem but only offers, as a solution, their own product, (i.e., the ISAPS’s pitch for their insurance product in the same press release).”

All good observations and suggestions from people qualified to have an opinion on the subject of **health travel**.

Watch for more in-depth follow-up articles soon to come on www.traveling4health.com and <http://medicaltourism.escapeartist.com/>

Safe Medical Tourism – Is there cause for alarm?

Patients should be cautioned to do their homework when traveling for **body plastic surgery, cosmetic surgery, plastic surgery** – or any kind of surgery abroad where the health care system will be different than in their home country.

“Not all doctors finished first in their class,” is a fair motto to remember when choosing a surgeon whether at home or abroad”

Professional organizations, insurance companies, and medical tourism companies can do a lot of the vetting for you. But then it is still up to you to research the company or organization doing the referring. Gone are the days when competing companies and organizations can each parade themselves as the ultimate “Worldwide” authority.

And gone are the days when one country’s medical professionals can believably naysay all medical travel based on quality concerns.

Overseas Plastic Surgery – What are the Safeguards?

The problem, as stated in the article:

“We see [travel agencies](#) brokering surgery for their clients with surgeons they have never met. The patients have no assurance that their surgeon is properly trained or qualified to perform the procedure they will undergo, and all too often little attention is paid to post-surgical care,” says [Catherine Foss](#), Executive Director of the [International Society of Aesthetic Plastic Surgery \(ISAPS\)](#).

I agree. Patients need to know how to choose a medical travel company to reduce any risk of medical travel. A chapter in our book “[How to Plan A Successful Medical Tourism Trip](#)” is dedicated to explaining the two medical tourism company business models, and what a patient can expect from each. This is the only book written on medical travel that explains the distinction.

Often the best medical tourism or medical travel companies limit their own geographic and medical specialty reach to ensure that they can control a patient’s experience within their own vetted network.

A company has a more believable claim to cornering the market on “good doctors” if their claim is confined in geographic scope or medical specialty rather than a “worldwide all inclusive” scope. Why? Because the broader your scope, the more likely you become a “Jack of all trades, master of none”.

Here are books I can recommend on health travel:

[How to Plan A Successful Medical Tourism Trip](#). A consumer’s guide to understanding medical travel. This is the only medical tourism or travel for treatment book written with 12 leading experts in medical and dental tourism.

A series of books authored by Kristin Eckland, ACNP, for example: [Bogota!: a Hidden Gem guide to surgical tourism in Bogota, Colombia](#).

About the author: Ilene Little is CEO of [Traveling4Health.com](#). She is a reporter in the medical tourism business, and she does all of the content for the [EscapeArtist Medical Tourism Blog](#).

You ask, we answer: How can I allay fears of friends and family about moving abroad? - EFAM | Escape From America Magazine | EFAM

Relax – I am only an email away

It is only natural for friends and family to worry about you living abroad because you will be far away and in a situation that they might not be able to wrap their heads around. Their worries are mixed with sadness that you will probably not be able to attend family occasions or friendly get-togethers. They will miss you.

Your family and friends may not openly express their fears they have about you upping sticks and heading off for a new life but they will have them just the same. The editor and regular writers for Escape From America Magazine share their tips on how to address their concerns and help them come to terms with your decision to live overseas.

Susan Beverley

I had a very mixed reaction when I announced to friends and family that I had finally chosen my expat destination – Argentina! It's so far away, they kidnap children there, they can't manage their debts, we were at war with them, it's cold in winter, to name but a few. All comments from people who had traveled very little and certainly none of them had first-hand knowledge of the country I had chosen. I appreciated their concern but told them firmly my mind was made up. Their impressions were formed on (old) sensational news headlines for the most part and bore nothing to the reality I had experienced on my trip a few months previously.

To allay their fears I described what I had found, a family orientated society, great food, good schools and more than adequate health care. I reassured them that I was more than happy to take my children and raise them there.

Keeping in touch is the key to making your loved ones feel more comfortable with the idea that you are so far away in a strange (to them) land. Regular emails, phone calls and skype chats will go a long way to giving them peace of mind that you are not fending off wild bandits and succumbing to weird and wonderful tropical diseases. Once I had been here a while and got to know a few people I passed on contact information for them to my family, so that they felt that they had another point of contact if they had not heard from me in a while. That helped them tremendously.

It seemed to be important for friends and family to be reassured that I was not leaving the country to get away from them but that I had a need to experience the world and other cultures and ways of life.

Six years on and they now accept that I have made a life for myself here and that I am very happy, very healthy and not likely to return to the UK anytime soon.

Julie R Butler

Fortunately, the Internet does an amazing job of connecting people. Back when I began traveling, long distance phone calls from south of the US border were difficult to come by and expensive, so keeping in touch was not much of an option. I know that my family worried horribly about me when I was out of contact for very long periods at a time. But when I was able to connect, my reassurances were based on the fact that living in Los Angeles during the days of Crips and Bloods and race riots was just as dangerous (if not more so) as facing Mexican *banditos*, and my companion was very capable of taking care of any situation, from keeping our Ford Econoline running and running like the Energizer bunny (you would be amazed at how versatile a roll of sturdy duct tape can be) to dealing with *transitos* asking for bribes on the highway, to always being aware of our surroundings. In truth, it was probably best that they not know what we were up to most of the time, because we both had an adventurous streak that made us do crazy things like drive to Chiapas in January 1994, only days after the Zapatista Army of National Liberation instigated their revolution. ¡Viva Zapata!

These days we are perhaps no less crazy, but at least more risk-averse, and we very much appreciate being able to communicate with family and friends. And this really is the key to allaying their fears. Anyone who is living in Mexico or Central America right now probably understands how important it is to explain to those who only know these places through fantastic headlines about drug war violence that there is so much more going on in these societies than the drug war, and it is possible to feel safe and secure in many places.

Being aware of danger is important, but does not have to be crippling. And choosing your battles is part of finding your own path through life. For example, I am happy to trade the danger of contracting Industrial Disease, which is brought on by de-natured foods that have been stripped of the Vital Force, overuse of plastics and chemicals, hidden toxins, etc, for a danger that I might have some material possession stolen from me by someone who has less than I do. Maybe this is not so much allaying fear as putting life into perspective.

Trying to keep things in perspective is very constructive, though, as is helping those you are leaving behind to learn about the wonderful details of culture that they may fear only because they are unfamiliar with it. And if you show enthusiasm for the culture or for learning about it, this will put into focus what is most important: that we have passion in our lives. More than happiness, more than safety, more than comfort, knowing that a friend or loved one has something positive to be passionate about should put aside any worries or sadness due to missing them. Because I believe that passion for living life conquers space and time and affects the world and those who come into contact with it – even from afar.

Jamie Douglas

Convincing your friends and relatives that leaving the country and taking on a completely different cultural lifestyle is not always easy, but is it really necessary? After all you are leaving because you want to get away from your familiar surroundings, and perhaps your friends and family have been bugging you for a while.

Assuming that you are not completely anti-social, you probably want to have some explanations of why you want to leave your aboriginal hunting grounds behind, and for that, the brutal truth sometimes is what you need to come up with to get through to you loved ones. Here are some of the explanations which might work for you:

1. I want to go experience different cultures and lifestyles, before everything becomes so Americanized, that there will be Wal-Marts and Starbucks on every corner of the world.
2. I am doing this to further my education, so that when I come back I can get a better job.
3. Ever since I lost my job, I have been thinking of going abroad to live a different lifestyle.
4. That mail order bride thing is not working out for me. I want to go overseas myself to find a lovely girl (or boy) without paying a commission to an agency.
5. I need to have a tropical climate where people speak an unfamiliar language to hide my Turrets syndrome amongst the natives.
6. The grass is always greener and more pungent on the other side.
7. I hear that there is no formaldehyde in the beer brewed abroad.
8. I am not going to spend another winter in this dreary place.
9. The tax people are after me.
10. I need to get away from it all for a while.
11. I need to get away from you all for a while.
12. You are right, I have lost my mind.
13. Don't worry, I can always SKYPE you.
14. I will come back a little older, but much wiser than I am now.

Before the final goodbyes are said, be sure to leave some treasured personal belongings with your loved ones, as that will assure them that you WILL come back, someday. If necessary, fill a couple of containers with old newspapers to put in storage with your most attached friends, and assure them you will be back for your valuables soon. Be sure to lock them to keep up the illusion.

Show everybody that you have a roundtrip ticket with a return date on it. That is a requirement for getting a tourist visa in most countries anyways, but more importantly, a one way ticket will cost you 2-3 times what a good economy round trip ticket will cost you.

Tell your parents that, with the economy being what it is, they might want to consider renting out your room for some extra income.

Most of all, let everyone know how much you love them and will miss them. Be sure to bring a notebook computer with a built in camera, so that you can actually see and be seen when communicating on your computer and showing off your new digs in Parador, with that cute little chica looking over your shoulder at your parents, saying "Hola Mami, Hola Papi!"

Do you disagree with our answers? Do you have other options or opinions to share with our readers? What has been your experience? Please leave a comment.

Every week, we receive numerous inquiries covering a variety of subjects that are important to you. Now, we would like to invite all of you to participate in our new feature by submitting questions that are relevant to expat living, whether you are planning to retire, work abroad, study, wander, or are just curious about life as an expat.

We encourage you to submit your questions to us, and our answers will be published on [Expat Daily News](#) on Fridays. This is an effort by your editors, all experienced travelers and expats, to serve you better, and have you share your curiosities with your fellow readers.

We are looking forward to hearing from you.

[Click here and ask your question.](#)

About the authors: Susan Beverley is a writer and editor for Escape From America Magazine and also writes for and maintains [Expat Daily News](#) – the expat news blog for [EscapeArtist.com](#). She traveled extensively before becoming an expat herself having found a place to call home in South America where she has lived since 2005. She understands the concerns, needs and difficulties that expats face from first-hand experience and is dedicated to supporting and encouraging anyone who is looking for a new nation to call home. [[send her an email](#)]

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Why Uruguay is a Favorite with both Investors and Those Seeking a New Residency - EFAM | Escape From America Magazine | EFAM

Uruguay: A top spot for living and investing

Savvy investors have known for some time now that Uruguay is a great place for investing and banking privacy. But here are a few facts about Uruguay that you might not be familiar with:

Uruguay has Latin America's highest income per capita.

It is the continent's leading receptor of foreign direct investment (FDI) per capita (with 1.8 B dollars received in 2010).

In 2010, the Uruguayan economy grew at a pace of 8.5%, in the seventh consecutive year of sustained growth, and after weathering the 2008 global crisis notably well (unlike most countries, it's gross domestic product maintained positive growth that year).

What are the reasons for such performance?

Keys to the Uruguayan economy

Uruguay is a favorite with investors for many reasons – among them:

- A solid and predictable legal system.
- Political and economic stability.
- Social stability, thanks to the existence of a middle class, relatively low levels of poverty and the lowest ratio of income disparity in Latin America.
- Low rates of corruption.
- An open economy, with free flow of capital (inward and outward) and free convertibility of currency.
- Equal treatment (guaranteed by law) to local and foreign investors.
- A solid banking system with banking privacy laws.
- Generous tax incentives to investment projects, large and small.
- A dozen free trade zones, from which hundreds of global companies operate with offshore customers and clients tax free.

What follows is a brief overview of the two main tax incentive options that Uruguay offers, as well as an analysis of the economy's main industries.

Tax incentives granted to investors

Uruguay has an investment promotion law that grants investors significant tax breaks on labor-creating enterprises. This "Investment Act" (# 16,909), passed in 1998 and improved in 2007, grants exemptions in Income Tax (up to 100% of the invested amount), Value Added Tax on purchases (local or imported) and in Capital Tax.

Applying for these tax breaks is not complex: the request is made to a specialized unit within the Ministry of Finance, "COMAP", who studies projects in and analyzes factors such as jobs creation, exports, incorporation of technology and the use of renewable energy. The higher the impact of these factors, the larger the tax breaks.

The system is not restricted to large industrial projects; the range of businesses that obtain these tax breaks includes agricultural companies, call centers, professional services firms, construction companies, logistics businesses, and even movie-theater complexes.

Over the past three years, tax breaks have been granted to projects totaling over 1 Billion US Dollars each year, with 2010 seeing a record 800 projects totaling 1.2 Billion US Dollars in invested capital.

Free Trade Zones

Uruguay has a dozen free trade zones (FTZ), in different parts of the country. Some FTZs are simply warehouses, others have office parks, and some offer a mix of both. Hundreds of global and regional companies are established in Uruguay's FTZs (including the likes of Merrill Lynch, Royal Bank of Scotland, Tata, RCI, Sabre and Epson).

Companies established in a FTZ may engage in logistics and warehousing; provide services to clients worldwide (including financial and insurance services); operate in the handling, classification and selection of merchandise, and even manufacturing.

The main advantage that FTZs offer is total tax exemption of Uruguayan taxes (current or future ones). The only tax that must be paid is social security tax on local labor. Thus, a user of a FTZ will neither face import taxes or duties (since a FTZ is

considered non-Uruguayan territory from a customs-duty perspective), Income Tax, Capital Tax, or VAT. The law guarantees the FTZ user that all tax breaks, as well as any other rights and benefits shall remain unchanged during the term of the user agreement.

The only requirement that companies operating in FTZs is that 75% of their payroll must be Uruguayan nationals.

Uruguay's Main Industries:

Agriculture, livestock and forestry

Historically, Uruguay has had a strong livestock industry, which played a significant role in its economy for over a century. More recently, the use of Uruguay's ubiquitous farmland has been increasingly devoted to two other higher-yielding industries as well: twenty years ago, forestry and since 2002, an enormous agricultural expansion.

Forestry was pushed by a 1987 law which gave tax breaks to the industry, attracting companies such as Weyerhaeuser, Ence and RMK among others, who plant eucalyptus and pine. In 2007, Finnish company Botnia installed the most modern and largest pulp processing plant in Uruguay (a USD 1.B investment) and since 2010, Montes del Plata (co-owned by Sweden's Stora-Enso) is building a second USD 2 B plant.

With the increase of commodity prices in 2002, and the arrival of Argentine grain farmers in 2003, the agricultural sector initiated an expansion that has consolidated agriculture as a key sector of Uruguay's economy, with 1.2 million hectares planted in 2010. Companies from Argentina, Brazil, New Zealand, the United States, and Europe all have a foothold in Uruguay's expanding agricultural industry.

Construction and real estate

The construction industry has grown significantly since 2003, both in residential and commercial real estate.

Montevideo has seen strong growth in coastal areas, particularly in residential condominiums. And in the capital's old city, or "Ciudad Vieja", a dynamic recycling process has taken off, mostly for office space, and driven mainly by foreign investors.

In the seaside regions, Punta del Este is witnessing a record number of construction permits, from condominiums to subdivisions of land into estates for high end European, Brazilian, Argentine and U.S. buyers. Rocha, the province that still offers untouched beachfront land, has seen unprecedented development in seaside towns such as Punta del Diablo and La Pedrera, and half a dozen subdivision projects are under way along the coast.

To the west, Colonia has not escaped this growth, with the modernization of its port terminal, the opening of new hotels and a sustained real estate development in its promenade. Even in the small town of Carmelo, to the west of Colonia, and across Buenos Aires, investment has increased significantly, with new high end developments aimed at polo and golf players.

Much of this growth in real estate is driven by Argentinean, Brazilian, U.S. and European investors seeking safe assets, in a stable market, and with attractive yields.

Tourism

Tourism is an important part of Uruguay's economy. Hotel investments have continued at a strong pace, including 6 star luxury hotels in the area of Punta del Este and new offerings in places like Rocha.

The year 2010 saw a record number of tourists (2.4 million visitors) and USD 1.5 B in tourism revenue. 2011 is set to cross the USD 2 B mark.

Mining

Uruguay is, for the first time, set to diversify into large-scale mining as a new industry. The discovery of large reserves of iron-ore in central Uruguay have led Indian investor group Zamin Ferrous to initiate the installation of an iron-ore extraction plant and a deepwater port; a USD 3 B investment, which marks Uruguay's largest project in history.

Uruguay as a destination for those seeking relocation

In addition to the advantages and safety that Uruguay offers to investors, the country is also one of the most attractive options for European and North American citizens seeking to establish a new residency.

The low or null taxation on foreign income, safety, quality of life and the different options that Uruguay offers (city, coast or countryside) have motivated the tripling of residency applications in the last four years.

The process to obtain residency in Uruguay is simple, and does not require investing in the country. Basically, one must simply be able to prove a source of steady income and bear a clean police record.

In conclusion, these are some of the main reasons why Uruguay is a favorite with both foreign investors, and citizens of third countries seeking a new place to live in.

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Panama's Top Resort and Retirement Communities - EFAM | Escape From America Magazine | EFAM

From Beautiful Beaches to Cool Highlands, Which Community Is Right For You?

Bocas del Toro

Bocas Del Toro

Panama's Caribbean playground, known by the locals simply as "Bocas", offers a laid-back atmosphere and burgeoning tourism industry. Originally, it was Bocas that put Panama on the map as an off-the-beaten track vacation destination and is especially popular with surfers, sailors and sun-seekers. Most travel around Bocas is by boat via the calm and clear waters that engulf the area's many islands. Island hopping, as dreamy as it sounds, can be pleasant while the sun shines, but it is not so pleasant in the rain.

Bocas' airport makes it easily accessible from Panama City in about one hour by plane. Drive time from Panama City is roughly 8 hours to Almirante and then another 45 minutes by water taxi. If you plan to transport a car onto Isla Colon (Bocas' most populated island, you will need to get in touch with the ferry service which transports vehicles to the island. It is not common for tourists to transport vehicles to Bocas since there are limited road ways and transport by hiring boats to wherever you want to go is more convenient.

The advantages of Bocas are its many secluded beaches, wild jungle terrain, outstanding surfing, marinas for sailors, kayaking, fishing, snorkeling and the availability of a host of other water related activities. Seafood here can be quite tasty, and a wide range of new restaurants offering Indian, German, Italian and other cuisines are now open for business.

Bocas makes for an excellent vacation getaway. It offers far more outdoor activities than any of Panama's other destinations and the strong influx of tourists helps provide the base for an emerging expat community. For nature lovers, wilderness seekers, and beach bummers, surfers and sailors, Bocas Del Toro is a must-see.

The disadvantages are more acute the longer one stays in Bocas. In Bocas, it rains frequently and since one can never be quite sure if or when it will rain, planning and preparing for rain becomes an ongoing task. Cleanliness and sanitation are neglected as most garbage and sewage ends up in the ocean untreated, with limited currents to carry in fresh water. High-speed Internet can be difficult to obtain, medical facilities are somewhat rudimentary, and grocery selection is poor. These disadvantages are easy to overlook in the short-term, but for many aging expats and retirees looking to enhance their comforts rather than retract them, Bocas may not suffice over the long-term.

Real Estate In Bocas – Buyer Beware

It is now easy to find a small patch of land in Bocas to call your own. Developers have relentlessly carved the coastline into bite-sized pieces for their foreign counterparts to purchase. Most property in Bocas is offered as "right of possession" whereby buyers are sold the right to possess the property, but clear title to property in Bocas (or any island in Panama) is generally not available. Currently, there is some controversy regarding land and property that was transferred to foreign buyers illegally by the previous municipal government. Purchasing real estate in Bocas is risky business and adequate legal counsel may not always be enough to fully protect your property rights. See the chapter in the Panama 101 E-Book entitled "**Buying Real Estate in Panama**" for more information on how to engage in right of possession land transactions and how this differs from titled property.

In Bocas Del Toro, property with running water, electricity, Internet access and other basic infrastructure sells at a premium, and rightly so. Many expats buy land here with a vision of paradise, only to discover that the costs to build a livable dwelling were way more than they had imagined. Delivering construction supplies by boat, obtaining permits from the overwhelmed government agencies, and other unforeseen obstacles can make it difficult and costly to build in Bocas. Readers should be aware of these challenges before shelling out thousands of dollars to claim their slice.

Panama 101 Insider Tip – First time visitors to Bocas Del Toro should not miss Isla Zapatilla. Most of the tour promoters don't mention these idyllic islands because they are further from town and more costly to reach. However, the extra time is well worth the visit as the scenery is extraordinary and the snorkeling is among the best in the area. Dolphins are often spotted on the way so keep your eyes peeled!

Sora

About 75 minutes west of Panama City lies a gorgeous range of mountains with a year round spring-like climate similar to that of Boquete and Volcan on the west end of the country.

The pride of Sora are its fine ocean views from landscaped building sites, which have been popular for those looking for a country home in a peaceful setting. The Pacific Coast beaches are just a 20 minute drive down the mountain road, making it a popular setting for a second home. The town of Sora itself has little to offer save for a couple of basic restaurants and convenience stores, and some rural Panamanian charm. Along the Inter-American Highway, just 20 minutes down the hill from Sora are facilities like supermarkets, auto mechanics, banks, and the rest of the basics one needs to survive in today's modern age. The close proximity of Panama City makes day trips to the city feasible.

El Valle - A cool weekend getaway for Panama's wealthy elite

El Valle

El Valle (pronounced El Vaiyeh) is substantially more quaint and clean than Sora and has long served as a cool weekend getaway for Panama's wealthy elite. El Valle is more town-like than Sora and a few of the well-groomed streets and vistas are reminiscent of alpine Switzerland or Germany.

Real estate here is priced at a premium compared with most of Panama, especially for property close to the center of town.

The drawbacks of El Valle and Sora are similar. Both are small towns – villages actually, and the permanent international community is still very small. Very few modern amenities exist here, so most people drive to Panama City for their dose of fine dining and entertainment.

Over the next several years, this area has strong potential to flourish as an expat hideaway... a trend that has already begun. For people who prefer country living in a safe and healthy, albeit quiet, environment where the climate is fresh all year round, both Sora and El Valle are solid options.

Boquete - sleepy coffee country village turned international retirement haven

Boquete

Boquete went from sleepy coffee country village to international retirement haven in about two years flat. This area now attracts the lion's share of foreign residents who can stand to live away from the beach, and a good portion of those who can't. Many people who are dead set on finding a beach property still end up in Boquete due to the fine mountain air, lush panoramic vistas and peaceful nature of the inhabitants. Land prices have multiplied several times over the past few years with prices so high that agriculture no longer makes financial sense and even those with an affordable retirement home in mind may be disappointed due to the high prices.

From a lifestyle perspective, Boquete has a lot to offer. The natural basics are unsurpassed... clean air, gorgeous climate, and quality local inhabitants. However, many people realize that there really isn't much to do here over the long-term and boredom can begin to set in. For those who would like to run a bed and breakfast, a lodge, or a restaurant, opportunities abound. But on the social side, even the liveliest bar in Boquete shuts down around 10 PM or midnight on weekends. Community events for expats are few and far between. The activity list in Boquete may change in the future as more international residents move in, but don't come to Boquete looking for a wonderland full of social diversions.

The good news is, the vacation and seasonal rental market is picking up in Boquete and it is getting easier to rent your vacation home while you are not using it. This makes it easy to justify Boquete as a place to live part-time, like a breath of fresh air between workouts. A vacation home in Boquete combines exceptionally well with a place on the beach in Panama, or in Panama City.

Panama 101 Insider Tip – *By far the best breakfast in Boquete can be found at Punta Del Encuentro (translation: meeting point), just a few blocks south of the town central park (ask any local and they will point you in the right direction). Enjoy delicious fried potatoes, a basket of fresh tropical fruit, locally grown coffee, French toast, pancakes... you name it. Olga, the owner, is one of the most sincere people on Earth. She leaves bananas near the dining area to attract the many species of birds that inhabit the area.*

Coronado-San-Carlos - residential beach developments and resorts

Coronado – San Carlos

This area represents a long stretch of residential beach developments and resorts beginning about one hour west of Panama City and continuing for an additional 45 minute drive west along the Inter-American highway. As these are the closest recreational beaches to Panama City, Panama's wealthy class have gobbled up most of the beachfront and real estate prices tend to be much higher than in the rest of the country (though still a bargain when compared with plush areas of Spain, Hawaii, or Florida, for example).

On the plus side, many of the homes along this stretch of beach offer high-levels of privacy and exclusivity. For people looking for large estate homes with swimming pools and tennis courts, Coronado and the surrounding area is the best place to look. Recently, a plethora of ocean view condo towers have come on the market, mostly still in pre-construction phase. Buyers should be cautious before committing to a purchase, since many towers are nothing more than an artist rendering and actualizing the construction is several important steps away. Ask about development approvals, building permits and other infrastructure that the current development site may or may not have in place. While your friendly sales agent might insist that construction will begin "in a few weeks" that time frame could quickly become "a few years" if the developer is not properly funded, or if key approvals have not been obtained from the government.

Since the international tourism market still barely recognizes Panama, this area does not feel like a Puerto Vallarta, Waikiki or Copacabana. There are currently only a handful of large resorts spaced several miles apart (Coronado Hotel, Decameron Resort, Buenaventura and Playa Blanca to name a few) and several new "planned" residential communities. At this stage of the growth phase, readers are encouraged to buy something already existing or do a lot of due diligence before committing to a project that is still under construction.

Along the Pacific Beaches just west of Panama City, it is not unrealistic to expect empty beaches during the weekdays and a sparse number of visitors on the weekends. Festivals and special holidays are a different story, of course, when many of the beaches fill up with vacationing Panamanian families. If you are looking for that moonlit stroll along an empty beach, five

minutes from your private beachfront estate home, this is the place for you assuming your investment budget exceeds seven figures (\$1,000,000+). Nice two bedroom condos can still be found for around \$200,000.

Panama 101 Insider Tip – *If you are just looking to spend a day at the beach, lounge in a hammock, eat fresh fish, and enjoy a calm Pacific Ocean on a stunning white sand beach, Santa Clara is your finest option. About 20 minutes past Coronado heading west on the Interamerican highway (90 minutes west of Panama City), you will see a small sign pointing to Santa Clara. Just follow the road to the end, and pay the small parking fee, which should include access to the showers for a rinse after your swim. Hammocks and shaded thatch huts are a few dollars extra but well worth the investment. The fried fish served at the restaurant in front of the beach is very tasty and beer is just 75 cents per bottle. Enjoy!*

In conclusion, as a person who has moved to new cities and countries several times over the years, the author believes that a new place is generally as appealing as you make it. It can take time – many months or even years – to start to feel comfortable in your new surroundings and make new friends. People who move to a foreign country often form natural bonds with others who have done the same, which is one of the main rewards of an expat lifestyle.

About the author: [Michael is the author of the Panama 101 – E-Book Guide To Living and Investing In Panama](#)

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Medical Tourism: Bariatric Surgery Overseas for Weight Loss - An Interview with a Patient - EFAM | Escape From America Magazine | EFAM

As a part of this series of reports (see [part 1](#) and [part 2](#)) on the different aspects of medical tourism, I have been presented with this opportunity to interview a patient who, in December

bariatric surgery - for weight loss

2010, traveled to Tijuana, Mexico to have bariatric surgery, for weight loss. The subject of the interview is a 40-year-old female with two active teenage daughters. For privacy purposes, I refer to her as Pat.

J.D.: *You had a Vertical Sleeve Gastrectomy performed a few months ago in Tijuana Mexico. How did you find out about this procedure?*

Pat: I learned about this procedure through online research. I had gotten to a point health wise that I had to do something about my weight. Diet, exercise and medication just weren't doing it.

J.D.: *Can you tell a layperson what was involved in this procedure?*

Pat: Basically, they went in laproscopically with several small incisions and removed 80% of my stomach. They sewed what was left of my stomach into a small pouch about the size and shape of a banana.

J.D.: *Was any part of it covered by your insurance?*

Pat: No, this was paid for by me, not by my insurance company. Many commercial insurance carriers are starting to pay for bariatric (weight loss) surgery, but there is an extensive approval process. I was right on the line of meeting the minimum 100-pound overweight guideline that they follow. I also had been noncompliant by not seeing my primary care physician regularly for the last several years. My insurance carrier required a five year documented history of obesity. Since I had not seen my doctor regularly, I did not have that documentation, even though I have fought my weight for years.

J.D.: *How would you rate the treatment you received?*

Pat: I received excellent care! I was very happy!

J.D.: *Did you have to travel to Tijuana on your own, or were you met in the US by representatives of the clinic?*

Pat: My husband and I were met at the San Diego Airport by a driver who took us to Tijuana.

J.D.: *How long did the surgery last?*

Pat: I am not sure exactly, since I was kind of out of it when I woke up, but I think it was a couple of hours at the most.

J.D.: *What was the level of pain/discomfort you experienced? (1 to 10)*

Pat: I have a very high tolerance for pain, but I would put it at a 7-8 when the pain medication wore off. But the pain was very well managed with medication. I only took pain medication for about the first 4 or 5 days at the most.

J.D.: *How soon after the surgery, were you ready to return to your home?*

Pat: I had surgery on Saturday. I spent Saturday, Sunday and Monday morning at the surgery center/clinic. I was then sent to their "recovery house" (basically an offsite house that is staffed with a nurse and cook and the doctor visited me there to check on me) on Monday afternoon. I spent the night there. Tuesday morning they drove us to our hotel in San Diego. We took a nap and then walked around, shopped and went to a movie. We flew home the next day.

J.D.: *How long was the period of recuperation?*

Pat: From what I understand, most people take several weeks off; I took a week off and was back at work the next Monday. I was moving kind of slow and got tired easily for the first few weeks. Also I was still a bit sore, but nothing that required pain medication after the first few days.

J.D.: *How would you rate the overall experience?*

Pat: I would rate this experience a 10! I have no complaints.

J.D.: *You work in the medical field yourself. What about cleanliness?*

Pat: Wonderful! They were constantly cleaning and making sure that everything was just right.

J.D.: *How were the English skills of the clinic personnel?*

Pat: I speak a small amount of Spanish, so I did my best to try to be respectful of where I was and speak in their language when I could. That wasn't necessary though because almost everyone spoke wonderful English. The doctor had a translator with him when I spoke to him. Only one member of the staff didn't speak very good English, and on the one occasion that I needed to make myself understood, he got someone quickly that could speak English.

J.D.: *And how was the Surgeon?*

Pat: I have no complaints. He was kind and personable and did a wonderful job.

J.D.: *Did you have any post-operative complications?*

Pat: Other than a small soft tissue infection, no. One of my incisions opened due to a broken suture (I must have turned the wrong way in my sleep). That incision became macerated (basically wet and yucky) and slightly infected. They already had me on antibiotics as is standard postoperative protocol. I did not have to take any additional antibiotics and did not have to be seen by my primary care physician for this.

J.D.: *Are you satisfied with the results?*

Pat: To say I am satisfied would be putting it mildly. I have my life back. I am thrilled!!!

J.D.: *In comparing the cost to US based procedure and hospitalization, how much did you save?*

Pat: I probably saved \$14,000 taking in to account the cost to travel there for both my husband and myself, including food and hotel expenses.

J.D.: *Did you need any follow up care after returning home?*

Pat: I did not have any complications that had to be treated. As a matter of common sense I went to my primary care physician a few times after surgery to have lab work run to monitor my health. I am happy to report that all is well! As a matter of fact, I am no longer diabetic or anywhere near diabetic. My cholesterol is down and I am very healthy!

J.D.: *We have heard a lot about violence in Mexico. Did you feel safe at all times?*

Pat: Yes, I felt safe at all times. We were never alone. There was a guard on duty at night in the clinic and we did not venture into areas that would be likely to be dangerous.

J.D.: *Would you recommend this procedure to others similarly situated?*

Pat: I would and I have!

J.D.: *Would you recommend this facility to others?*

Pat: Without reservation!

J.D.: *Would you recommend the surgeon to others?*

Pat: Again, without reservation!

J.D.: *Did you check the qualifications of the surgeon before making your choice?*

Pat: I did my best to research him. There are data bases to search Mexican surgeons in, but those data bases are of course in Spanish. I had to rely on word of mouth from former patients. In doing my research, I took both reported extremes with a grain of salt. There are people on these websites that have their own axe to grind or their own agenda. All of these physicians have referral programs where they give a monetary reward to former patients for referrals. Some of these people will get so pushy about trying to send you to their doctor that they will start to slander other doctors. I also know from my experience in the medical field that even in the US people get infections and die every day. Just because this is Mexico does not make it a guarantee that you will not get good care. There are excellent physicians in Mexico and horrible physicians in the US also.

J.D.: *Did you check out alternate facilities either in or out of the USA?*

Pat: Yes, I did.

J.D.: *What was the major factor in helping you choose this facility and surgeon?*

Pat: Cost was obviously a big factor, but I also went with my gut feeling as far as where I felt was the safest and most comfortable after talking to people who had already had the surgery. I also spent a lot of time on the phone with Louise (the patient coordinator). She was very patient and kind when answering my questions and did a lot to put me at ease.

J.D.: *How much has your weight loss been due to the surgery?*

Pat: I've lost about 78 pounds so far since December 18th. My goal is to lose at least 12 more.

J.D.: *Thank you very much for sharing your experience with our readers and congratulations on your success.*

So, there you have it. I am impressed with Pat's enthusiasm, and the incredible weight loss she has accomplished. The implications of obesity on your health and longevity are well known, from heart disease to diabetes to self-image, and controlling one's weight is very important indeed.

If you are interested in finding out more about the options that Pat chose, have a look at the website of the clinic at <http://hospitaljerusalem.com.mx/index.php>, or call the patient coordinator Louise Johnson at 866-806-4286 or 727-423-5662. Good luck in your quest for better health.

This article concludes our 3 part series on medical tourism but for lots more information and resources on healthcare overseas visit [Escape Artist Medical Tourism](#).

Or if you are asking questions like Who to trust? Where to go? and How much will I save? you will be interested in our ebook [How to Plan a Successful Medical Tourism Trip](#) available to download now.

About the author Jamie Douglas is an Adventurer, Writer and Photographer with an amazing array of Nikon equipment, and a lifetime of experience traveling and documenting. He currently enjoys the great weather and fine wines of Mendoza, Argentina, and edits [Expat Daily News](#) and [Expat Daily News Latin America](#)

Top Ten Tips for Families Who are Considering Becoming Expats - EFAM | Escape From America Magazine | EFAM

Top Ten Tips for Families Who are Considering Becoming Expats

Divorce is especially tough for expats

It's a sad fact that many marriages end in divorce and when children are involved things can often become complicated. The problem is compounded even further when the couple concerned are expats or originate from different countries.

A [recent decision in UK court](#) highlighted the difficulties faced when one party wishes to return "home" and take the children with them.

Jeremy D. Morley, a family lawyer based in New York shares his top ten tips with our readers to help them avoid potential problems relating to a breakdown in their marriage and arrangements for custody of the children.

- **1. Before you move overseas**, realize that if you have children in a new country you may find yourself trapped there. An example: Angie the American and Gus the Greek (from Cyprus) moved to Cyprus with their baby. Life in Cyprus didn't work out for Angie. In fact, she hates it there. But Gus refuses to leave and he refuses to allow Angie to take the baby back to the States to live. Since both Cyprus and the U.S. are parties to the Hague Convention on the Civil Aspects of International Child Abduction, Angie will be in big trouble if she takes the child back to the States without Gus' permission. Angie wishes she had consulted an international family lawyer before she moved overseas. Now she's stuck there.
- **2. If you make a deal** with your husband or wife that you're going overseas just for a trial and that you'll return if it doesn't work out – Get it in writing. Verbal agreements always seem to be forgotten when things blow up. But also know that even a written agreement may not work. A foreign court handling your child custody case may well that it doesn't care what your deal with was with the other parent; it must only consider what's best for the kids.
- **3. Before you switch residences**, consider how it might impact a possible divorce. An example: Arnie and Alice in America signed a prenuptial agreement before they married. Not only that, but Arnie made pretty sure that it was watertight not only by having it drafted by his own lawyer but also by insisting that Alice have her own independent lawyer, and by putting term sin the agreement that are pretty fair to Alice. Arnie feels secure. Then they move to London, England oblivious of the fact that their prenup may well be unenforceable in a divorce court in England. English courts still hold that prenuptial agreements are against public policy and, while this policy is supposed to be changing, it most certainly hasn't changed yet. To make matters much worse for Arnie (who had bags of money before the marriage and thought he was fully protected by the prenup), there is no distinction in England between marital property and separate property acquired before the marriage. He could be blowing half of his pre-marriage assets just by moving the family to England.
- **4. Before leaving home**, you should hope and plan for the very best. But you also need to be prepared for the very worst. So if you are a "trailing spouse," consider the following:
 - Don't sell the house. If you maintain an address in the States it will be easier to claim that you maintained your home as your permanent residence. Certainly it will indicate that it continues to be your "domicile" (the place you live in indefinitely which remains as your domicile even if you move temporarily to another place remains your home. Having a place to return to will also make your case a lot stronger if you need to prove that your kids should be allowed to move "back home."
 - Keep your contacts with your job. Prepare for the day when you may want to re-enter the job market back home. Perhaps you can even continue to do some work even while overseas.
 - Keep your network of friends and family at home.
- **5. If you're overseas** and are "planning" to get divorced, be as strategic as possible. Plan your moves. Consult someone who really understands the big picture. Figure out where it's best for you to be at the time you tell your soon-to-be-ex that it's all over. You may need to move yourself, the kids, the soon-to-be-ex and the marital assets to another place before you break the news that you want out of the marriage. And don't leave without the evidence. It's very frustrating when a client tells me a story of the other spouse's gruesome physical abuse and shameless hiding of marital assets and when I ask for the evidence I'm told that it was all left behind in the foreign country before the client came back home. Intelligent planning, with strategic professional advice, is the key.
- **6. If you're feeling stuck overseas** and have children with you, don't just bolt for the (airplane) door with the kids and run 'back home' to the States. Plan things out first. If you take the kids you may be guilty of international child kidnapping. You could even be arrested at the airport before you leave. If you make it to the States, you'll probably be forced to return by an American court – and then, to completely add insult to injury, you'll probably have to pay your spouses's legal fees and travel expenses as well as your own. When you return your case will be heard in the foreign court, where you will be branded as an international child abductor. Consult knowledgeable international family law counsel sooner, rather than later.

- **7. On the other hand**, if it's your spouse who's feeling unhappy and upset and who may "do a runner" back home, there are lots of things that you should be doing. Some are pretty obvious: Be kind; be understanding; and don't stay out all night with the guys or gals from the office. Other tips are not so clear, and whether you implement them depends very much on the circumstances. Hide the passports. Befriend her travel agent, who may tell you if she's making an airline reservation. Consult her friends. Suggest counseling. Have a plan to call the police and alert the border guards if you discover that she has taken the kids.
- **8. If you're overseas and pregnant**, and not 100% confident that you'll always want to live in the overseas country, consider very seriously getting out of there now. If your baby is born overseas, whether in Sweden or Saudi Arabia, the child's "habitual residence" for purposes of the Hague Convention will be Sweden or Saudi Arabia – and that can create terrible problems if you want to take your baby "back home."
- **9. Don't assume** that the local authorities won't help. So many times, expats feel that the local social welfare agencies won't understand and that they will automatically side with the other spouse who is a citizen. In fact, in many countries the support services are excellent and you should try them. Plus, an American court in a Hague Convention case won't accept your defense that returning a child to the foreign country will put the child in grave risk of harm unless you can show that the foreign support services are unable to provide the needed protection.
- **10. Local divorce lawyers** may not be your best bet. They want your business. They have an incentive to encourage you to bring your lawsuit in the place where they practice and they usually don't know anything about the laws in other places. An international divorce lawyer, who consults with local lawyers as appropriate, can give you much more objective "big-picture" advice.

This article first appeared on <http://www.international-divorce.com> and has been re-posted with their permission.