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Residential Tourism and Economic Development: Imagineering Boquete and Penang

This chapter advances understandings of the relationship between lifestyle migration and residential tourism. It takes as its starting point the need to complement the bottom-up perspective common to lifestyle migration research with the top-down approach that the scholarship on residential tourism offers. As we argue, bringing residential tourism into conversation with lifestyle migration offers insights into some of the structures that promote, inform, and shape this social phenomenon.

Our focus here is on understanding residential tourism as a state-led process of encouraging foreign residential investment and in laying bare the practices that support this. We highlight the ways that infrastructures are developed by countries to support a property market that specifically targets investment by foreign nationals in second-home ownership or more permanent relocation. While this characterisation of the market for us emerges through tourism scholarship, we acknowledge here briefly the work ongoing in cognate fields including critical geography and amenity migration research. Critical geography is attentive in particular to the power inequities rendered by such (foreign) investments. It highlights the geopolitics of global real estate investment (see, for example, Rogers 2017), and the transnational and translocal drivers of gentrification in

the Global South (see, for example, Sigler and Wachsmuth 2015; Hayes 2018; see also Lees et al. 2016). Global amenity migration research takes as its starting point how migration intersects with rural development and transformation (Gosnell and Abrams 2009), highlighting how the pursuit of (environmental) amenities by migrants impacts local communities, cultures, and economies (see, for example, Moss 2006; Moss and Glorioso 2014).

Notwithstanding the significance of foreign investment in exacerbating social and spatial inequality through housing, our ambition here is to advance ongoing discussions of residential tourism to consider the factors that make such markets in Malaysia and Panama successful. Within this, we make explicit residential tourism as a part of economic development strategies, revealing residential tourism as one way that governments woo and court FDI. In this way, we move beyond economic explanations of such markets, and into considerations of imagining and place-making; simply put, how certain representations and understandings of destinations are constructed and peddled within such markets. Malaysia and Panama are cases in point, heavily promoted as areas of residential property investment, particularly targeted at attracting foreign owners. We make clear what gets imagined and marketed, as well as what these exclude, and demonstrate the life of imaginings beyond the marketing, co-opted, adapted, and amended by those settling in these destinations.

This chapter begins by examining the rise of residential tourism as a development tool through a focus on Spain as the paradigmatic example. We highlight residential tourism as the structural shaping and reshaping of destinations and the policy of 'residential tourism' as a way of attracting foreign income, and critically discuss the impacts of residential tourism as a process in postcolonial contexts.

About Residential Tourism

In this section, we examine the concept and practice known as residential tourism. Residential tourism has become a widespread development tool adapted from the Spanish model (sometimes explicitly) for

destinations worldwide. The term has served as an umbrella concept for understandings of second-home ownership, long-term tourism, and individual investment linked to forms of migration and mobility. However, we adopt a more precise framing of the concept here that focuses on practices of attracting investment, shaping places, and enabling property development. In this way, we disentangle residential tourism from the more individualised practices that lifestyle migration describes, with its focus on individual homeowners and migrants. Such conceptual clarity allows for a productive conversation about the relationship between these practices.

Spain, the Paradigmatic Case of Residential Tourism

Residential tourism is most commonly used, in an academic context, by Spanish academics as referring to second-home tourism involving the articulation of migration and tourism; it is a practice that, as Huete and Mantecón (2011: 161) highlight, 'has left a more profound mark' (see also O'Reilly 2003). Possibly the first use of the phrase was by Francisco Jurdao (1990) in his book *Espana en Venta* (Spain for Sale), a sociological but polemical critique of the impact of tourism on the small town of Mijas in the province of Malaga, in the Costa del Sol. Jurdao was concerned about the loss of agricultural land and the undermining of village life occurring as a result of massive building projects where tourist properties and second homes were constructed specifically for the older North European market. This tone of critique has permeated most work on the topic that has since been published in Spanish (Aledo 2005; Mantecon 2008; Mazon 2006) and can be associated with a top-down analysis that focuses more on wider socio-structural shifts than on daily practices of agents. Spain, then, has emerged as the paradigmatic case of residential tourism.¹

With mass tourism—which had been a major source of income to their economy post-dictatorship—in decline in the 1990s, residential tourism was established as an alternative tool of economic development and essential to Spain's modernisation. This was essentially a way of encouraging a mode of tourism that was less affected by the seasons and

which would bring greater income to the Spanish economy through investment in property, longer periods of residence in Spain, and the local spending that that would entail (O'Reilly 2000). The Spanish tourist board pioneered the use of tourism-marketing techniques to promote this, attracting people to rural areas and to the history and culture of Spain. It is significant that the consumers of residential tourism were imagined as tourists, spending only part of the year in Spain, rather than migrants. As has been documented, the uptake of the property developed in this way includes second-home owners, but also North European and especially British populations making Spain their home year round (Huete et al. 2013). We could go so far as to say Spain's entire modernisation process in recent decades has been massively boosted by what has become known in Spain as residential tourism (Mantecón 2010).

Since the Spanish financial crisis that started in 2008, residential tourism has taken something of a tumble. Unsustainable property-development-led economic growth in Spain—including residential tourism development—has been widely recognised as a significant factor in its sovereign debt crisis, leading to the depreciation in the value of homes. This incurred massive job losses, especially in construction and real estate, widespread rises in unemployment, a property market crash that is taking years to recover, profound local effects, especially in small towns dependent on tourism, as well as devastating social and economic problems. Unmortgageable properties and repossessions are thus a feature of the housing landscape that affects foreign nationals and Spanish homeowners alike, along with other locals living and working in these areas.

When we talk about the Spanish economic crisis, we are dealing with a drastic change ... the unemployment rate went from 8.5% in the first quarter of 2007 to 27.2% in the first quarter of 2013, and 2.5 million jobs were destroyed during that period. Almost half of them were jobs in the construction sector and the real estate market. A large number of towns, particularly on the Mediterranean region, had based their economic development on the large-scale construction of second homes, which led to many local economies being dependent on real estate markets characterised by speculation and hyperinflation: property costs increased by 207% between 1995 and 2008. Prices reached their highest point in 2008, just

when the real estate sector collapsed, and subsequently the destruction of jobs caused by the chain reactions in the whole business sector could not be stopped. (Huete et al. 2013: 337)

This chain reaction includes a downturn in tourism, empty properties, and although the pattern is very variable (and difficult to decipher for a number of reasons), statistically it can be argued that many, especially working-age, migrants have returned home (see Huete et al. 2013).

Residential tourism in Spain has thus not been an unqualified good. It has left severe and long-lasting impact: ‘excessive exploitation of the region’s scarce water resources, and the destruction of natural areas of immense value due to the aggressive process of urbanization of the territory’ (Huete and Mantecón 2012: 162), as well as profound sociodemographic changes that are often the result of the lack of understanding of the complexity of the phenomenon (ibid. 2012). In other words, because it has not been fully understood, in terms of who moves, why, for how long, with what ambitions, expectations, and resources, its consequences had not been fully anticipated either.²

Despite its downfall in Spain, the development of markets in residential tourism has been adapted as a development tool in diverse settings, including Panama, Malaysia, Mauritius, Morocco, Egypt, and elsewhere. As we outline in the next section, its uptake in these settings is closely linked to economic development, considered as a form of FDI within the restructuring of national economies.

Residential Tourism as Economic Development

Although briefly stated, Janoschka and Haas (2014) make clear that residential tourism should be understood as a state-led strategy for economic development. Sigler and Wachsmuth (2015) render this mechanism particularly visible in their account of the regeneration of Casco Antiguo, a historic neighbourhood in Panama City. They demonstrate how this urban transformation was made possible by ‘leisure-driven migration to spatially distant neighbourhood reinvestment schemes that existing local demand may not have allowed for’ (2015: 707)—these foreign incomers

settling and investing in the neighbourhood. Residential tourism thus interacts with wider transnational forces resulting not only in the production of a market but also in its success. In turn, nation-states underpin this strategy through policy and legislation that might include, among others, land reform (particularly the zoning of land for residential tourism development), legislating for the foreign ownership of land.

Concerned with issues of social justice and inequality, an increasing number of studies examine the impacts of residential tourism. Janoschka and Haas (2014: 6), for example, draw attention to the 'consequences that cities, villages, landscapes and places suffer if an important part of their constructed environment is empty during broader parts of the year'. Sigler and Wachsmuth (2015) argue that the transformation of Casco Antiguo is a form of transnational gentrification, focusing therefore on the mechanisms that bring about the displacement of long-term residents. Escher and Petermann (2014) look at the displacement, gentrification, and sexual exploitation that result from a 'massive influx' of foreign residents into Marrakesh. Bastos (2014: 48), who works with the Mezcala community on the Chapala Lakeshore, examines 'their efforts to maintain the integrity of their territory' in the face of diverse and widespread forms of second-home purchase and retirement migration through what he terms a process of real estate 'accumulation by dispossession' (drawing on Harvey 2005). Lipkina and Michael Hall (2013) studied Russian second homeowners in Finland, with a special focus on the impact on local residents. Hayes (2018) highlights how lifestyle migration to Cuenca, Ecuador, is caught up in the UNESCO-ification of the city, while also further entrenching the class and racialised inequalities of this social landscape. Finally, Sin Yee (2017) examines the roles of real estate developers and their agents in facilitating middle-class investor migration in Asia, including Malaysia.

As this literature makes clear, while academic commentators and indeed the media have highlighted the limitations of this model of development—the unintended consequences, and financial perils for individuals and for local state actors—it has been lauded as a successful model and is being rolled out in many nation-states. However, it is important to highlight that the direction of travel for countries pursuing this strategy is not always positive. Indeed, over the years, we have witnessed the

limited success of some such strategies. For example, in the mid-2000s, the Egyptian tourist board promoted Egypt for the purposes of residential tourism. Their marketing strategy drew on similar tropes to those used elsewhere, notably the rural idyll, which always seemed to us at odds with the desert landscape with which the country is ordinarily associated. Perhaps as a consequence of this, paired with the political instability of the region, Egypt never really took off as a destination for this form of investment in the way that other countries did.

As we outline in more detail later in the chapter, the explicit pursuit of migrant capital through property investment is embraced by nation-states as a channel for FDI. It intersects with global markets in tourism, lifestyle, and retirement. Such state-led development strategies, and the marketing thereof, are a significant feature of the structures that support and facilitate lifestyle migration.

Residential Tourism, FDI, and the Individualisation of Risk

While FDI most often refers to investments by businesses and corporations based in one country, in enterprises operated out of another economy, the residential tourism market represents a more individualised form of FDI. Simply put, property development through residential tourism, or what Sin Yee (2017) refers to as ‘property tourism’, most often relies on individual investment in off-plan housing, either within areas rezoned for residential development or on individual plots, or renovation/refurbishment projects. As we discuss later, the opportunities such zoning opens up are promoted exclusively to foreign investors. Significantly, the upfront investment by individual households often provides the cash flow for property development to take place. In consequence, we see individual households becoming the primary source of (property) development finance, thus attracting FDI (Barrantes-Reynolds 2011; van Noorloos 2011a, b). This model of investment reduces risk to financial institutions, but increases the risk to individual households (and, in turn, to neighbourhoods, communities, and environment). It also inflates the cost of property, which can create patterns of displacement

and marginalisation that resemble gentrification (Torres and Momsen 2005; McWatters 2009; Gómez et al. 2009; Prado 2012).

This mechanism of housing development and its link to national economic development through FDI, with foreign nationals at the level of the household financing property development (rather than state- or financial institutions), is notable. Of the two cases examined in this book, this model of investment is particularly prominent in Panama, linked closely, as we laid out in the previous chapter, to an economic strategy focused not on the development of domestic industries but on attracting trade and investment. With many countries involved in courting FDI through such mechanisms, there is a competitive arena for such investments, an international and global market in international property investment (see also Rogers and Koh 2017). MIPIM (*Le marché international des professionnels de l'immobilier*) might be the most high-profile event promoting this market, but less widely known and commented on is the vast industry that has grown up around international property investment including the myriad smaller property fairs, magazines, investment seminars and workshops, and broadcast media (see also David et al. 2015; Hayes 2015). Notably, it is precisely through this industry—targeted at the world's middle classes rather than at the super-rich—that both Malaysia and Panama have been promoted. In other words, lifestyle migration and residential tourism in these sites are situated in the broader global market of international (residential) property investment.

It is also clear that this market is located in a broader context within which changing agendas drive the development of new industries. One example of this is healthcare. As Toyota and Xiang (2012) demonstrate in their exploration of the emerging 'retirement industry' in Southeast Asia, such agendas interplay with wider social structures (see Chap. 1) such as transnational forces where the needs of an increasing elderly population in Japan are paired with the development and promotion of a healthcare industry in Malaysia, Thailand, the Philippines, and Indonesia to produce diverse new structures framing migrations and mobility to these destinations (see also Chap. 8).

What we want to make clear in laying this out is that the international property investment market is more complex and far reaching than the

simple equation that sees the global elite shoring up their capital by investing in 'secure' property markets, creating 'buy to leave' markets, global cities such as London deserted, dark and empty as night falls, left by their owners. The global middle classes, the prime neoliberal entrepreneurial subject, are courted and rewarded, their needs and desires for a better way of life met, through an industry that has been set up to pursue international and individual investment capital. As Sin Yee (2017: 26) has noted for Asian destinations (including Malaysia), 'property tourism' and its intermediaries 'facilitate diverse and multiply overlapped migration mobilities amongst investor-migrants (e.g. tourism, temporary, transnational, retirement)', and not only of Westerners.

Promoting Malaysia and Panama as 'the World's Best Places to Retire'

How residential tourism markets function is not simply a question of economics; how a place is imagined both by those promoting a destination and by (future) consumers is significant in making sense of why some locations are selected over others and why some destinations reach the heady heights of 'The World's Best Places', while others flounder and or disappear into obscurity (as the case of Egypt might suggest). Selling and buying destinations and the lifestyle available there, such as can be seen in the cases of Malaysia and Panama, is a notable dimension of international property investment, this time paired with migration, that is worthy of examination. Significant work goes into making investments of this type attractive in a highly competitive market where states vie for international capital. Putting places on the global investment map involves the careful curation of imaginings about the lives available there, making living abroad imaginable and attractive. As authors including Ono (2014), David et al. (2015), and Hayes (2015) stress, such promotion is facilitated by a global lifestyle industry. While research has focused on the role of property agents in promoting specific destinations (see, for example, Hoggart and Buller 1994; Akerlund 2012, 2013; Eimmermann 2015), we focus in particular on the work of international lifestyle media,

and other media and fora within the industry, before turning to consider specific ways in which Malaysia and Panama are imagined.

Lifestyle Media

At the time of writing in 2016, Panama and Malaysia are listed in the top five destinations to retire to in *International Living's* Annual Global Retirement Index, 'the ultimate resource for helping you find your ideal retirement haven' (International Living 2016a: n.p.). Both Malaysia and Panama have regularly featured in this publication, which started life 35 years ago as a newsletter focused on a simple message, 'You can live better, for less, overseas' (International Living 2016b). Today, it offers a glossy monthly magazine, a regularly updated website, an e-letter, conferences and seminars, and an annual research report, all aimed at equipping its readership to make educated decisions about where best to relocate to. *International Living* is just one of many publications that propound the virtues of moving abroad, providing tips on an improved (retirement) lifestyle paired with the optimisation of financial resources. This exists alongside glossy real estate magazines (such as *Panama Real Estate*), their pages of real estate listings occasionally interspersed with 'how to' articles and up-to-date advice on visa regulations. The narrative writ large through the pages of such publications is underscored by what Hayes (2014) has referred to as geographic arbitrage, where the resources accumulated in high-cost labour countries are used to facilitate lifestyles elsewhere, often in places where the labour market operates at lower cost. The onus is placed on the individual (retiree) to pursue ways of improving their retirement, with increasing insecurity over pensions and the cost of healthcare remaining an invisible context. Living abroad, at least as these publications present it, becomes a way of enhancing or enriching quality of life at a lower cost.

Such lifestyle media then foreground the neoliberal (migrant) subject and provide advice on the locations that would offer such opportunities. This is clear in the way they avoid framing these movements as migration. They appeal instead to the idea of living or retiring abroad, and the contributors who 'inform' the Index and whose stories feature in each

publication are described as ‘expats’. This is undoubtedly a deliberate strategy that creates distance between the figure of the migrant and the (Western) retirees whose imaginations they seek to ignite. However, as we have made clear in Chap. 1, such distinctions go right to the heart of the political economy of migration, elevating white, relatively affluent populations to a position where they are considered as outside the migration paradigm, and distorting contemporary understandings of migration. This pairing of (financial) investment and lifestyle as a discourse in support of migration—albeit for those relatively privileged within global power structures—is an addendum that calls into question taken-for-granted understandings of the relationship between migration and economics, both as this is understood in relation to individual migrants and as this is embedded in political discourse about migration and in migration (and tourism) governance structures. Further, rather than benign forces, such lifestyle media promoting geographic arbitrage are caught up in the wider political economy of migration, part of a nexus that also includes property developers and government ministries. And yet, this is a story that is not so readily on view. What we present here develops understandings of the structural conditions that support lifestyle migration to Malaysia and Panama, and highlights how in the contemporary world such migrants are wooed, courted, and actively recruited.

Lifestyle Intermediaries

Such international lifestyle media exists alongside other media which, while it does not explicitly market destinations and the lives there, contributes to overall imaginings. We broadly characterise these here as lifestyle intermediaries, alongside real estate agents and other more obvious lifestyle brokers. Such intermediaries include travel writing, guide books, information leaflets, blogs about living abroad, Internet fora, and location-specific English language media. Both Ono (2014) and Etrillard (2014) have considered the work of travel writing in promoting lifestyle migration; the evocative title of Etrillard’s piece ‘This book will trigger dreams’ clearly conveys the sentiments that inspire Ono’s statement that travel writing ‘plays an important role in the promotion and diffusion of

the idea of long-stay tourism' (2014: 8). Location-specific publications such as *The Expat Magazine* ('provides information about all things Malaysian to expat residents'), *The Panama Post* ('Revealing Panama to the world'), the *MM2H* magazine (run by an Englishman who has lived in Malaysia for over 25 years) also feed into the ways that these locations are constructed as places to live.

Although they are too numerous to list, specialist 'expat' Internet fora and Facebook pages also provide material on retiring or moving to Malaysia and Panama. And we can't ignore websites like Trip Advisor, which blur tourism and migration in their promotion of destinations. However, it is also clear that individual blog authors are increasingly important; for example, in Malaysia Tropical Expat (<https://tropicalexpat.wordpress.com>), 'A blog about living in and travelling from tropical Penang' was widely circulated, while in Boquete, Richard Detrich's (<https://richarddetrich.com>) blog about living in Panama and Boquete Guide (since defunct) similarly provided advice. Through her work with North Americans in Mexico, Bantman-Masum (2015) highlights that such bloggers become 'migration brokers', central to the creation of a community of practice that links migrants to the businesses and professionals that can support them, a point that we take up further in Chap. 7.

Our purpose here is to highlight that such media encourages future migrants-cum-investors to follow suit, by playing

a fundamental role in creating the perception of lifestyle migration ... (presenting) stylized forms of mobility ... discursive constructions of lifestyle mobilities are in turn controlled and constructed by pioneer migrants who have their real, personal experiences published and shared via social media. (Ono 2014: 8)

The practice of these lifestyle intermediaries and other media commentators thus clearly lead to the creation of new emergent structures out of the practice of lifestyle migration. We now turn specifically to the consideration of how such lifestyle media and intermediaries promote Malaysia and Panama.

Imagineering Panama and Malaysia

In this final section we focus on the tropes and themes that are used in the promotion of Panama and Malaysia for residential tourism. We start with Malaysia, demonstrating the active role the government takes in promoting Malaysia. This case also provides the opportunity to explore how the imagineering used to attract people to the Malaysia my second home (MM2H) visa draws from that used in the case of tourism. We also demonstrate how migrant testimonials co-opt such imagineering, as is clear in the promotion of Malaysia and Penang in particular. We then move onto Panama, tracking through the different intermediaries involved in the promotion of 'Destination Panama'. In focusing on the imaginings that circulate about Panama and Boquete in particular, we consider how these are taken up by migrants themselves, both co-opted and adapted in their own promotion of the destinations, its attributes and amenities, and their expertise of how to live in Boquete.

Selling Malaysia

In Malaysia, the government plays an active role in curating the country as a destination for property investment. This is paired with their promotion of the MM2H visa, a long-stay visa tied to investment in residential property, which we discuss in more detail in Chap. 4. What we want to draw attention to here is the way that the government, through its portal promoting MM2H, discursively constructs and curates particular imaginings of the country to these would-be investors.

The official portal for MM2H portrays Malaysia as wealthy, multicultural, green, safe, exotic, and offering great local and international cuisine. The first thing the site mentions is that this special visa is sponsored by the government—so you know you would be welcome. The website is in English. Their four banner images are of an Indian couple in a shopping mall, a Western family on a pristine beach, a Muslim couple in an exotic bazaar, and happy locals working amongst rolling green hills. Images are of high-end properties, in gleaming streets, opera, universities, shopping malls, as well as jungle, mountains, and beaches. Such images

depict a very modern Western-facing paradise with a rich history, environment, and culture.

The portal includes testimonial videos from other 'expats', a way of sharing people's personal experience with would-be migrants; such testimonies feed into the discursive construction of the lives available in Malaysia in much the same way as Ono (2014) highlights in the case of blogs. Despite the diversity of nationalities who actually take up the visa (see Chap. 4), three of the four names of those giving testimonials are Western names. The testimonials mention climate, muticulturalism, friendliness, peace and stability, different architectural styles, natural beauty and rich environment, the ability to buy property, and the fact English is widely spoken. Several more testimonials are available on YouTube, via a link from the government website.

The promotion of Malaysia for retirement or second-home ownership is not entirely distinct from its promotion for tourism; indeed, MM2H is promoted as a type of tourism. The themes briefly outlined in the opening paragraph of this section echo those used to encourage tourism to the area. As in other forms of tourism, these are consciously 'engineered' to sell particular locations:

city marketing or selling the city has become part of the urban competitiveness strategy. Place marketing which includes physical development as well as the promotion of place image uses engineering concepts to construct the competitive image. (Teo 2003: 546)

As Philo and Kearns find, 'the conscious and deliberate manipulation of culture' in the selling of places aims at a target which includes the 'relatively well-off, the up-market tourists and organizers of conferences and other money-spinners' (1993: 3), indicating a heavy dose of profit motive behind the engineering process. To cater to such a wide appeal, places are reduced to a 'few simple recognizable and marketable characteristics' (Ashworth and Tunbridge 1990: 54).

Malaysia has a strong heritage tourism (see Butler et al. 2014), with a rich and diverse religious, ethnic, and architectural heritage as a result of long-term settlement of different communities. Ono (2014) refers to this as 'commercializing Malaysia's cultural diversity'. But this emphasis on

cultural heterogeneity is downplayed because the country is working hard to achieve a sense of collective identity. Instead multiculturalism is celebrated but glossed over in terms of specific detail. 'Malaysia ... appears to have identified the importance and strengths of utilising its myriad cultures and ethnic groups to support and further develop a collective identity to attract tourists' (Butler et al. 2014: 202) (Figs. 3.1 and 3.2).

Imagineering Penang

Despite lots of competition in the region, tourism remains buoyant in Penang. Infrastructure and travel routes established over centuries form a bedrock for current visitors and long-stay migrants. Here tourism promotes Penang as the gateway to peninsular Malaysia; for business travel;



Fig. 3.1 The luxurious entrance to a hotel where Karen met one couple for lunch



Fig. 3.2 A beach front for tourists, accessed via an apartment block

for domestic and international tourism; as a centre for arts, culture and education; and for health and medical benefits (Teo 2003: 555).

‘While sun and sea, culture and heritage have always been part of Penang’s attractiveness ... the Imagineering of Penang involves the development of a few core products’ (Teo 2003: 555). Such products include nature-based products such as the botanical gardens, conservation areas, and hiking trails; individual heritage attractions including a George Town heritage trail, churches, mosques, and temples, which also serve to promote Penang’s multiculturalism (see Fig. 3.3); historical and cultural areas such as Little India and Chinatown; agro-tourism that draws attention to kampong (village) life, cottage industries, and exotic produce; the Swettenham Pier, with its luxury liners and wide berths; and the Chew Jetty, which started life as a home on stilts on the shores for the Chew Clan community (Chinese migrants who worked on the port



Fig. 3.3 A photo sent by Sally, who took part in Karen's research, to illustrate 'multicultural Penang'

in the nineteenth century) and is now an example of living heritage, where inhabitants and tourists co-mingle.

In Penang, 'Festivals and mega events occupy the whole calendar year', and these are in addition to the 'normal local festivals such as Deepavali; Lunar New Year; Christmas; and Hari Raya Puasa' (Teo 2003: 556). Karen witnessed a few of these during fieldwork, and was told excitedly about others by those she met. As Teo (2003) says, these contribute to a year-round carnival-like atmosphere in Penang. Penang is also celebrated for its cuisine, as we discussed in Chap. 2, and more recently, George Town has become renowned for the street art of Lithuanian artist Ernest Zacharevic (Fig. 3.4).

The way that Penang is imagineered has been co-opted in the way that it is presented by those migrants who live there. Numerous of our interlocutors, discussions on online forums, and personal web blogs celebrate Penang's multiculturalism, food, tropical climate, festivals, and friendliness, contributing in their way to the social construction of a space for



Fig. 3.4 Karen on Chew Jetty, standing beside an example of the street art of Lithuanian artist Ernest Zacharevic

consumption. Testimonials from those who had settled there similarly convey this framing of Penang and the celebration of its exoticism and excitement. For example, the following excerpt of an interview with an American expatriate living in Malaysia was published in *Expats Arrivals* (<http://www.expatsarrivals.com/article/interview-with-michele-chanthomson-an-american-expat-living-in-malaysia>; last accessed June 2016):

Penang is exotic enough to be exciting but not so exotic that I had trouble adjusting to life here. As a former British colony, many locals speak English in addition to their native tongue, so language has not been a problem. I absolutely love the centuries-old mix of British, Malay, Chinese and Indian cultures. The historic part of the city is a UNESCO World Heritage site, and it's a delight to explore. The food is quite tasty, too. We've done so much travelling since we arrived in Malaysia because of the cheap airfare and close proximity to so many exciting destinations. Although Malaysia is

classified as a developing country, the quality of life is quite high for expat Westerners.

Similarly, this theme of being exotic, but not threatening or dangerous, permeates this account on *International Living*:

My wife and I moved to the island of Penang in early 2010. A small island—15 miles long and 12 miles wide—on the west coast of Malaysia, Penang, which is connected to the mainland by a six-lane bridge, is just two hours' drive south of Thailand. When we decided to move I wanted it to be to somewhere exotic—somewhere with great beaches, a low cost of living, and a place where I didn't have to learn another language. Penang ticked all the boxes. Our cost of living is one third of what it was before, we enjoy average daily temperatures of 82 F year round, and English is widely spoken here. Even better, when my wife suggested that we move here I knew it would allow me to continue what was quickly becoming my profession. Before I moved to Malaysia, I was a dive instructor, and before that an investment banker. But what I really wanted to do was write, something that I attempted to do before moving to Penang. (<https://internationalliving.com/2014/04/i-thank-my-lucky-stars-that-i-moved-to-penang-malaysia/>) (accessed 9 August 2016)

What we have drawn out briefly here is the way in which Penang is imagineered as a tourism destination. The tropes that feature prominently within this are also deployed to discursively construct it as a destination for long-stay tourism, closely paired with the MM2H visa. It also becomes clear that these tropes appeal to and are perpetuated by those taking up these opportunities, their testimonials further supporting the promotion of Penang as a place to retire to, or to enjoy. We return to some of these themes in Chap. 6, where we talk about the work migrants put in to making a home for themselves.

Panama for Sale³

In this section, we lay out some of the prominent themes within the way Panama is imagineered, represented and imagined within such marketing and promotion. What becomes clear is the extent to which 'Destination

Panama', as Jackiewicz and Craine (2010) so evocatively describe it, is produced through a nexus of migration, tourism, and development.

Why do so many expats choose Panama? Often the intangibles ... the feel of a place ... play a big role. But there are also a lot of concrete, quantifiable reasons Panama is so appealing, starting with its modern infrastructure.

Panama's cosmopolitan capital, Panama City, is the only true First World city in Central America. The beautifully maintained Pan-American Highway runs the breadth of the country, making travel easy. High-speed Internet and cell coverage are remarkable ... as are the power, air, and water quality.

For expats from the U.S., Panama is also convenient because the currency is the U.S. dollar. No matter where you're from, you're likely to appreciate the fact that there are many English speakers in Panama, especially among the well-trained medical community. The hub that is Tocumen International Airport makes it easy to fly from Panama to nearly anywhere in the world ... often with no layovers. (International Living 2017)

International Living has been a long-standing promoter of Panama; its country profile of Panama focuses on the 'First World' credentials of Panama City, the 'modern infrastructure', its easy connections to the rest of the world, but also the US dollar economy and the English-speaking medical service. Branded as 'First world convenience at Third World Prices', Panama is presented as a safe, secure, and relatively cheap place to invest.

In the video accompanying International Living's country profile for Panama, their Panama editor stresses that Panama is a 'land of opportunity' and it offers 'something for everyone', from its cool highlands and laid-back beaches, to the international feeling of Panama City with its high-rise apartments and 'beautifully restored colonial homes', the low cost of living, proximity to the United States, low cost of 'little luxuries' such as domestic help that you might not be able to afford back in the United States, the biodiversity of flora and fauna, and active 'expatriate' communities across the country are presented as further attractions. Within such framings, the people of Panama are rarely mentioned; the

indigenous populations get the occasional nod in the promotional material, presented alongside the account of biodiversity, an example of the richness and colour of Panama. The pitch instead concentrates on the other ‘expatriates’ who have already made the decision to move to Panama.

It is telling that this image of Panama has a life beyond *International Living*, permeating the literature—notably, the ‘how to’ guides and comical biographical accounts of settling in a new country produced by North Americans living in Panama. Indeed, the sense of Panama as an investment opportunity is captured in the subtitle of Howard’s (2006) *Living and Investing in Panama: A Guide to Inexpensive Living, Retirement and Making Money in Central America’s Most Overlooked Country*.

Making Boquete as a Lifestyle Destination

Boquete is one of the sites that has become particularly prominent in the marketing of Panama to North Americans and other residential investors. As the quotation above illustrates, the tropes of investment and opportunity are refined to appeal to the incoming elite migrant population. The narrative that promotes Boquete as a destination is one that privileges residential tourism. The early promotion of Boquete emerged hand in hand with major property development in the area. Indeed, as Winston, a retired doctor explained:

My wife had been collecting those pamphlets on where to retire to, how to retire to Mexico etc. And we had been reading *International Living*, and it was about the time when they were focussing on Sam Taliaferro and his development of Valle Escondido ... We bought our small finca outside of the town. I guess we have Sam to thank. We were taken in by the *International Living* hoo-ha.

The success of the discursive construction of Boquete as a place to retire is attributed by many of those who have now made Boquete their home to Sam Taliaferro and his development of Valle Escondido. Indeed, this was the first of several major real estate developments in the area marketed to foreign residents—the development that put Boquete on the

(international retirement) map. The site is marketed on the surrounding pristine nature, the raw rainforest in clear view; before development—at least according to the developers—the only people who knew about the area were the local indigenous population. Such imagery is rendered visible in the floor to ceiling murals on the walls of the Tuscan-inspired chapel in the centre of the resort, Valle Escondido depicted as the primal scene in Genesis, the Garden of Eden, home to Adam and Eve, site of the fall of man. As Osbaldiston (2011, 2012) has highlighted, such paradisaical renderings of destinations are powerful signals to lifestyle migrants. Indeed, this is clearly not lost on the developers of Valle Escondido; at the gates to the complex stands a sign that reads ‘Welcome to Paradise’ (Fig. 3.5). What this highlights is the way that developers may act as intermediaries within this lifestyle mobility industry—in the case of Boquete, instigating the imaginering of the destination for consumption by North American retirees.



Fig. 3.5 Sign at the gates of Valle Escondido, Boquete

It is also clear that Boquete's promotion as a destination exists within a wider industry aimed at foreign investors to Panama. Perhaps unsurprisingly, marketing highlights the investment opportunities available, the lifestyle, and all the incentives that go with this.

Equally significant is the role played by some of the migrants in presenting Boquete on their terms to a wider audience. When Michaela first travelled to Panama, she noted several prominent blogs authored by individual migrants providing insights into what life in Boquete is really like, almost giving a behind-the-scenes tour. Boquete Guide, a blog that was prominent when Michaela first started her research but which is no longer in circulation, described its purpose as follows: 'As time allows I am going to blog our experiences for all who care to read about them, for visitors and other residents.' While expounding the virtues of Boquete, the beautiful and tranquil surroundings—indeed, its paradisiacal qualities—the proximity to nature, the slow pace of life, these also offered practical advice on managing your daily life in a new environment. Just as the migrant testimonials of life in Penang demonstrate, the tropes common to the ways that Boquete is imagineered are co-opted in these bloggers' descriptions.

The authors of these blogs were some of the first people that Michaela spoke to; they described how these had become go-to sites for potential visitors or migrants, many of whom would get in contact asking to meet up when they travelled to Boquete—a request that was often welcomed by the authors—or with specific questions about living there. Indeed, looking through the posts on Richard Detrich's blog (<http://www.richarddetrich.wordpress.com>), Michaela found the following request: 'We would like to talk to you directly via email if possible as we are planning a trip to Panama in 2009 to have a look.'

For those living there, however, what Boquete offers extends beyond these headlines of investment and the environment; in this way, they adapt and amend these representations of place. As the Boquete experts—expertise drawn from their own experience of being North Americans living in Boquete—stress in their promotion of the fourth edition of Heidke's (2016) *The Boquete (Not for Tourists!) Handbook*, there is more to moving to Panama than the headlines about the investment opportunities suggest:

Panama, Panama, Panama ... everyone is talking about Panama ... Invest in Panama, flip Panama, buy a condo for a song and live like a king for pennies a month ... yeah yeah ... we've all heard it. We've all seen the retirement websites ... BUT listen, before you buy their BS and plunk down your hard-earned \$\$\$\$, you'll want to find out if all this stuff is true. Are these people actually experts in the places they tout? Do they actually LIVE in these places and for how long? If you want to know the real scoop on this area and the important issues you need to think about BEFORE & while moving, check out the Boquete Handbook. (Boquete Experts 2017: n.p.)

The customer reviews and endorsements of the books offering advice on moving to Boquete written by and self-published by members of this migrant community (Heidke 2016; Detrich 2014) highlight and the case studies that feature in the promotion of Boquete by lifestyle intermediaries demonstrate that such 'real life' expertise is valued by potential migrants. While people might find Boquete through the promotion by intermediaries, these personal accounts of living there—whether blogs, fora, or publications—become part of the landscape through which lifestyle migration is imagined and facilitated (see also Bantman-Masum 2015).

The case of Boquete, as with Penang, illustrates how migrant bloggers and migrants themselves act as intermediaries within the lifestyle mobility industry. At first site, imagineering appears as a top-down process, engaged in by property developers and promoted through international lifestyle media. However, it is also clear that migrant bloggers and authors also have a voice within this. Presenting themselves as local experts, they co-opt, adapt, and amend these imagineerings to present Boquete on their terms and through the lens of their experience.

Conclusion

This chapter has examined some of the structures that promote, inform, and shape lifestyle migration through the consideration of practices of residential tourism. It has highlighted the ways in which Malaysia and

Panama, Boquete and Penang, are imagineered and promoted to encourage individual foreign investment. We argue that bringing lifestyle migration together with residential tourism—a concept we employ here to draw attention to the practices of attracting foreign investment, the shaping of places, and enabling property development—provides important context about how structural conditions interplay with individual actions.

Specifically, we have presented the emergent residential tourism markets in Malaysia and Panama as thoroughly entangled with not only economic development strategies but also sociological processes and practices. In targeting the needs and desires of particular (imagined) populations, considerable work goes into the imagineering of destinations, the curation of places in which such ‘residential tourists’—the prime neoliberal subject—might want to invest both their capitals and ambitions for a better way of life. The success of these imagineerings depends on its uptake by various brokers—the international lifestyle media (e.g. *International Living*), Internet fora, property agents, but also migrant bloggers.

What we have made clear is that the promotion of residential tourism markets in Malaysia and Panama has been particularly successful, with the result that both destinations are regularly listed as the best places in the world to retire. Significant work has gone into making investing in these locations attractive to individuals as they are courted and rewarded by an industry that has been set up precisely to pursue individual investment capital. Through our discussion of Malaysia, we demonstrated the role of the government in marketing international investment in property. The case of Panama makes explicit the work of lifestyle media in circulating these imagineerings, and the further brokerage of sites by migrants themselves, who claim their own lens on the destination.

To conclude, we want to make clear here that the close observation of the workings of these residential tourism markets draws attention to the wider structural conditions that support lifestyle migration. At a national level, both Malaysia and Panama are actively seeking to attract individual foreign investment to complement the FDI they generate through other mechanisms. Making residential investment in Boquete and Penang attractive to such foreign nationals is a feature of wider economic development strategies. While perhaps migration is not the assumed outcome

of this—as in the case of Spain, the population are imagined as temporarily resident—what this makes clear is how lifestyle migration interplays with economic development in ways which have not been fully acknowledged to date. To continue our practice stories of lifestyle migration in Malaysia and Panama, we next move on to the practices of governance, with a special focus on the proximate structures shaping this migration, namely, visa regimes and entry-exit controls.

Notes

1. Residential tourism has also been used by real estate agents, tourism agents, and some state agents as well as academics in Costa Rica, Egypt, and Panama among others (see, for example, McWatters 2009).
2. Huete et al. (2008) rehearse a lengthy and critical discussion about residential tourism as a concept and a phenomenon.
3. This subtitle mimics the title of the recent docu-film *Paraiso for Sale* (2012). Directed by Anayansi Prado, it documents the ongoing struggles over land titles and property ownership in Bocas del Toro Province, Panama.

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