

VickiWongTeam.com  
Finding Your Shangri-La (text edit)

Tab: Vacation/Retirement Properties

## **Finding Your Shangri-La**

**Some say that “Shangri-La” is just a state of mind, and to some extent they are right. But getting into that “Shangri-La” state of mind is a bit easier when you wake up in the gorgeous home of your dreams with balconies overlooking sweeping vistas of endless ocean and beach, or walls of windows framing a painted desert with a bright, orb-like sky, or multi-level decks opening into a forest thicket blanketed in snow and ringed by majestic mountain peaks... or whatever stunning vista is your own personal mojo.**

We firmly believe that life is in the living and that you can live anywhere that makes you happy. Where is your Shangri-La? If you already know or if you need a little guidance, the Vicki Wong Team can help. In this section of our web site, we'll tell you about the most beautiful and exotic locales in the world, we'll tell you about the culture, what lifestyles are offered, what amenities you can find there, and give you an idea of the cost of living.

We'll let you in on locations around the world that have yet to be discovered by the mainstream – the true “get-aways” that are well within your reach – both physically and financially. We can show you that your “Shangri-La” does exist outside of your mind, and that you can own a parcel of it probably for less than you think – and yet have so much more!

Its simple – you dream, we find it, and then together we make your dream of living in Shangri-La come true. Start discovering the world of your dreams now by clicking on the links provided.

(ADD LINKS HERE TO "GREAT DESTINATIONS", "INTERNATIONAL LIVING", "TAX-FREE HAVENS", "YOUR GOLDEN YEARS" & "CONTACT US")

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## **GREAT DESTINATIONS TAB**

*Head: What is the color of Paradise?*

*Subhead: The answer can help you figure out the rest of your life!*

Text:

**We all get to a certain point in our lives where we want and need to start looking outside of our own backyard for fun and fulfillment. The good news is that there is plenty out there to discover – fascinating people, inspiring monuments, stunning natural beauty, extraordinary cultures. Extraordinary places exist – they are only awaiting our arrival.**

Most of us start out by dreaming about Paradise. Let's do a little experiment right now, close your eyes and envision yourself in Paradise – what colors do you see? Reds, greens, blues, pinks, oranges...the truth about Paradise is that it comes in every color imaginable. There is a place out there to match all the colors of your personal Paradise.

Now let's stop *dreaming* about Paradise and start *discovering* it. The "Great Destinations" section of VickiWongTeam.com is devoted to just that. Check back here frequently, because we'll be consistently adding descriptions of exotic locales around the world.

When you read something that catches your fancy, contact us. We're ready and able to help you find the vacation, retirement or full-time home of your dreams anywhere on the globe.

Click on the links below and get ready to be transported to Paradise!

VickiWongTeam.com  
International Living

***Tab: Vacation/Retirement Properties***

***Sub Tab: International Living***

**What are the world's locations that make ears prick up at dinner parties? Paris, Florence, the Mediterranean coast of Spain? Alluring, beautiful, exotic – but not too exotic - an American can easily adapt to these places because their modern culture is similar to ours.**

**But what if you're looking at the world map as an investor, not as a tourist? Where's the best bet for life outside the United States that offers scenic beauty, social cachet and a good return on investment?**

The Vicki Wong Team specializes in aiding clients with their International Living choices. We help real estate investors find the most lucrative emerging locales and we help people find their dream get-away in gorgeous and fascinating parts of the world.

Fun and profit – an unbeatable combination! Want to get started on finding your international investment opportunity? Click here to [Contact Us](#).

Or, read on for more information and tips on picking the right international investment location:

***Vicki Wong Team Tips for Finding International Investment Properties***

- Consider locales beyond the European. Careful though, many factors effect places off the beaten path: political unrest, fluctuating currency exchange rates, and rising costs of living. A developing nation can be charming and cheap, but less so of both once it is deemed favorable by the masses or succumbs to civil unrest. Know if and when to get in and if and when to get out.
- Look out for “turning point” events. A disaster (natural, political or otherwise) can change the face of a region overnight and leave investors scrambling. Take for example the turn over of Hong Kong by the British to the Chinese in 1997. Okay, so we all knew it was coming, still Hong Kong had been a great investment haven. With the Chinese taking over, the monied population needed to find a new place to take their money. Predicting where they might relocate to, and investing ahead of them, was extremely profitable.
- Favor countries with a free market tradition. In other words, “invest for growth”. Case in point: Vanuatu, a lovely island nation in the South Pacific. Remember James Michener's “Bali Hai”? That is Vanuatu. This country's agenda is one of

peace and prosperity. Property values, especially beachfront, have been steadily on the rise.

- Buy beachfront. Why? Beachfront sells. Not only Americans but anyone with money around the world prefers coastline property to any other kind of real estate. As the Baby-Boomer retirement revolution proceeds, competition for the world's best beaches will grow. U.S. coastlines are becoming less affordable, but there are prettier coastlines around the world that are still reasonably priced.
- The “city-brand” is an important consideration. Certain cities have distinct auras and personalities. Living or owning property in them says something about you – your sense of adventure, your free and wild spirit! Would you rather talk to someone at a dinner party who lives in Detroit, or someone who lives in Vanuatu? Or the Left Bank of Paris? Or Ras Kutani on the unspoiled coast of Tanzania?

As Americans we have many advantages when it comes to living and investing worldwide. Not just our dollar, but our skills, connections and attitudes have great value outside of the U.S. Cultures around the world love Americans – despite what you may hear on the evening news. The world truly has its arms open to America citizens. Yes, they like our money...but they really do like us as people too.

Are so-called third-world countries risky? Could be, but there is always risk, no matter where you invest. Having a good partner like The Vicki Wong Team who can do the due diligence and can give you experienced advice, significantly diminishes the risk you take when investing abroad.

There is great opportunity out there. Why not get in on it? Click here to [Contact Us](#) now and set sail for your land of adventure!

(end)

## “Tax Free Havens”

### The “Tax Free” Haven...Is There Such A Thing?

**Well, yes...and no. Why don't we split the difference? There are options for those looking to buy property, do business or live either in the United States or abroad and enjoy tax “friendly” havens. Knowing which type of tax you are most liable for will determine where to find your tax friendly spot.**

Ben Franklin was right when he said the only certain things in life were death and taxes. It may in fact be truer today, than ever before. Why? The global village talked about so much in the 1990's is now a reality. Even in what seems like a remote area of the world, has some electronic link to the rest of the world – we're leaving our footprints everywhere. Most countries have tax information exchange agreements with the United States, and even if you venture to one with no such agreement, the IRS won't be far behind you.

But enough with the gloom...there is a light on the horizon – several actually. Your first step to finding a tax friendly spot is to know which tax is your greatest liability. At the bottom of this page, you'll find a partial list of tax liabilities and the places to best avoid them – but remember, as a U.S. Citizen, you'll always have to fulfill your obligation to Uncle Sam. Even if you renounce your citizenship and move to another country, you'll owe the IRS for years to come.

**Under U.S. tax laws, the worldwide income of any U.S. citizen or resident alien is subject to tax.** Whether you're living in the United States or overseas, and even if the money came to you as wages, independent contractor payments, or unearned income from investments, pensions, rents, royalties, etc. The IRS is legally due a percentage.

Didn't we say enough with the gloom? OK, here's some more sunshine: **There is a break for U.S. taxpayers who live internationally.** These U.S. citizens may be able to exclude all or some of their foreign income from American taxes:

There are two simple ways to see if you qualify for this exemption:

- ♦ You have a tax home in a foreign country, **AND**
- ♦ You meet either the Internal Revenue Service's “bona fide residence” or “physical presence” requirements.

A tax home is your principal place of business, employment or post of duty. You have to show the IRS that you actually live abroad, that you're not just a "tourist" of sorts that travels and earns money in other countries. That might get you off the IRS tax, but remember - if the country you live and work in has income tax laws, you are responsible for paying them. Be sure you are familiar with that country's tax laws BEFORE you move, buy a home or take a job.

The other way is to establish a genuine home in a particular foreign country for a full tax year OR spend a minimum of 330 days abroad earning money.

### **Even more sunshine: Overseas Housing Tax Break**

If you are living in a foreign country and earning money, and you qualify for the foreign income exclusion, you may be able to claim part of your overseas housing costs. Here are some things to consider:

- ♦ If you are an employee, you can exclude from U.S. taxes a portion of your salary that you pay toward your overseas lodgings.
- ♦ If you are self-employed, foreign housing costs can be claimed as a deduction.

If you're going to claim both income and housing exclusions, figure your housing tax break first as that will limit how much of your foreign income you can exclude. If your foreign earned income is less than your housing costs, you cannot claim the housing costs. Here are the allowable expenses:

- ♦ Rent
- ♦ Repairs
- ♦ Utilities (but not the telephone)
- ♦ Property Insurance
- ♦ Furniture Rental
- ♦ Parking

Careful though, because the IRS specifically excludes "lavish" or "extravagant" foreign housing allowances. Good to know when scouting for real estate abroad.

**IRS Forms You'll Need** (click on the links to be taken to the IRS web site and downloadable forms):

- ♦ [Form 2555](#) + your U.S. tax return to claim the foreign-earned-income exclusion and the foreign housing exclusion or deduction

- ♦ [Form 2555-EZ](#) if you don't have any housing expenses to claim

### **U.S. Possessions Don't Qualify as Foreign Countries**

So, if you're living in the U.S. Virgin Islands or Puerto Rico you cannot claim the foreign-earned-income exclusion.

However, if you're a U.S. citizen living in American Samoa, you could possibly claim a "U.S. possession exclusion". A similar exclusion will soon be available for those living Guam and the Northern Marianas when new agreements with the United States take effect. Click here for details: [Publication 570, Tax Guide for Individuals With Income From U.S. Possessions](#).

**There is more information from the IRS on all of these topics, just click here to access:**  
[Publication 54, Tax Guide for U.S. Citizens and Resident Aliens Abroad](#).

### **Best Course of Action for Finding Your Dream Home in a Foreign Locale**

Investigate tax ramifications thoroughly! Before you choose your dream locale, see what taxes you may have to pay there. The U.S. currently has [tax treaties](#) with over 50 countries. These agreements allow for U.S. citizens residing in foreign countries to be taxed at a reduced rate or to be [exempt from U.S. income taxes on certain foreign earned income](#). By and large, these treaties allow each country to credit the amount of tax paid to the other country in pretty much the same way that U.S. states allow residents to deduct their federal income tax. Knowing which countries have treaties and what their particular tax laws are is KEY to being able to enjoy your overseas home.

**Click here to see the countries that currently have treaties with the U.S.:** [Tax Treaties](#).

And here's that list of tax friendly U.S. states and foreign countries that we promised you earlier. Remember that tax laws change quite frequently, so we cannot guarantee the accuracy of this information. The Vicki Wong Team cannot and does not give tax advice, we only suggest some areas for you to explore and things to be aware of. Always consult a professional tax law specialist or accountant and be aware that tax laws can and do change.

### **Tax Friendly U.S. States:**

#### No state income tax\*:

- Alaska
- Florida

- Nevada
- New Hampshire \*(income tax limited to dividends & interest only)
- South Dakota
- Tennessee \*(income tax limited to dividends & interest only)
- Texas
- Washington State
- Wyoming

No state sales tax\*:

- ♦ Alaska
- ♦ Delaware
- ♦ Montana
- ♦ New Hampshire
- ♦ Oregon

*\*Counties and other localities can and do levy their own sales taxes, plus property taxes, fuel, alcohol and tobacco taxes.*

**Tax Friendly Countries Outside the U.S.**

No personal income tax\*:

- |  |  |  |
|--|--|--|
| ▪ Andorra  | ▪ Channel Islands                                      | ▪ Ireland *(no tax on foreign earned income) |
| ▪ Bahamas  | ▪ Monaco   |  |
| ▪ Cayman Islands<br>*(no tax on foreign earned income) | ▪ United Kingdom<br>*(no tax on foreign earned income) | ▪ Vanuatu                                    |

No property tax:

Vanuatu

No capital gains tax:

Bahamas

Vanuatu

No inheritance tax:

Bahamas

Vanuatu

No withholding tax:

Vanuatu

Tax friendly (low tax rates or other incentives for individuals and/or companies)\*:

- Anguilla
- Antigua & Barbuda
- Aruba
- Bahamas
- Barbados
- Belize
- Campione d'Italia
- Cook Islands
- Cyprus
- Latvia
- Liechtenstein
- Luxembourg
- Macau
- Malta
- Nauru
- Netherland Antilles
- Nevis
- Panama
- Samoa
- San Marino
- Seychelles
- St. Kitts
- St. Vincent
- Grenadines
- Switzerland \*(if you become a resident)
- Turks & Caicos

**Great Destinations**

**International Living**

**Your Golden Years**

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**Daily Consumer News and Advice**

## Not Your Grandparents Retirement Plan

**Time was, when people reached retirement age, they headed straight for Florida, Arizona or a local retirement community that catered to special interests like golf, social activities and day trips. For some, these destinations still hold much allure. But more and more, those now reaching retirement age are thinking way outside the shuffleboard box when it comes to where – and how – to spend their golden years.**

In today's global village, it is possible to live just about anywhere you like. For retirees, that means the freedom to look beyond traditional retirement spots. Now that the kids are grown and on their own, its time to finally embark on your adventure of a lifetime!

The Vicki Wong Team has been helping retirees find their dream retirement destinations for years. Our group of talented and insightful real estate professionals knows where to find just the lifestyle you're seeking. Whether your dreams lie in the southern United States – or in the Southern Hemisphere – we can help with information on home costs, quality of life, available amenities and activities, and any other information you'll need to make the most of your golden years.

### 5 Important Considerations for Today's Retirees

No matter where you want to live or what sort of lifestyle you desire, there are 5 important considerations for you to give some thought to, here are our top 5:

#### 1. Cost vs. Value

Whether you're looking at a new home in the U.S. or internationally, you must weigh the cost of the home against the overall value that you will get. These are your golden years remember...the reward you've earned...and helping you get the most “bang for your buck” is something the Vicki Wong Team specializes in. Here are a few items to be aware of:

- ♦ **Taxes** – with rising property values, you'll find rising property taxes. It is imperative to your lifestyle and your wallet, that you fully understand the tax implications of your new home. Interestingly enough, there are some fabulous locations where you can buy a beautiful home in an excellent environment and pay very little taxes...read more about that in our “Tax Haven” section!

- ♦ **Property Value** – they say that the best investment is real estate, and for the most part they are very right! However, just because a particular home seems to have everything you're looking for doesn't mean that you should pay whatever they ask. The Vicki Wong Team has experienced agents the world over whose job it is to know true property values and study local pricing trends. Let us be your guide. Our contact information is at the bottom of this page.
  
  - ♦ **Maintenance & Other Fees** – if you're looking at condominiums or planned communities, factor in maintenance fees. Having someone else responsible for taking care of things is definitely a plus – but know what the fees are before going in and be sure they are in your budget. Understand that these fees are usually not static – they tend to rise at given intervals.
  
  - ♦ **Renting vs. Buying** – some retirees might find it more beneficial to lease a new home, condo or apartment, rather than buy. Perhaps you don't want the responsibility of owning a home which includes the costs of maintenance and repair. Or maybe you don't have the amount of money needed to actually purchase a home in your dream locale. And if you're undecided just exactly how to spend these golden years why not give yourself the option of trying out a couple of places without the hassles of having to sell a home when you're ready to move on. The Vicki Wong Team can also find you property to lease!
2. **Crime Rate** – perhaps one of the most important considerations when scouting for your new home. It's ugly, we don't like to think about it, but it can mean the difference between enjoying your new life and being trapped in your new home – no matter how beautiful the setting. Certain areas of the world – and within the U.S. – do not have a handle on their crime situation. It is imperative that you research the current crime statistics for any area you are considering moving to. Two great web sites for researching crime statistics are: The FBI's "Be Crime Smart" page - <http://www.fbi.gov/becrimesmart.htm>, The U.S. Department of Justice - <http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/bjs/welcome.htm>, and the United Nations Crime & Justice Information Network - <http://www.uncjin.org/index.html>
3. **Climate & Locale**
- So you thought this part was a no-brainer, eh? Well as we alluded to earlier, retirement these days often means more than palm trees... The key to finding your perfect spot, is knowing how you want to live.

Thinking exotic? Spectacular vistas, perfect weather for all your favorite outdoor activities, unending discovery, fascinating culture, peace and quiet off the beaten path, ...how about the South Pacific, Mexico or Central America? Increasingly, exotic locations like this are ramping up development and many people are now discovering that they can have much more for much less in places like Vanuatu, the Cook Islands and Fiji in the South Pacific; Cabo San Lucas in Mexico; and Costa Rica, Panama and Honduras in Central America, to name just a few. Many international destinations offer incentive to seniors, such as discounts for entertainment, public transportation and even for utilities! Plus, in most of these countries wages and costs of living are quite low – that means you can hire a housekeeper, landscaper, painter, technician or personal chef for the same low wage – and they are happy to have the work, so you'll find an excellent level of service.

As a personal case study, let's take a look at Vicki's own experiences in this regard. She purchased a vacation home in the South Pacific islands of Vanuatu. Her home is a gated, contemporary, 3 bedroom home set on 1.5 tropical acres. From here, she enjoys dramatic cliff side views of the Pacific Ocean and inspiring sunsets. The property includes a 2 bedroom caretaker's cottage, lush gardens and an infinity-edged pool. To get an idea of the costs of living as they relate to quality of life, here are some examples: Vicki employs a gardener/handyman and a cook/housekeeper for US\$200 each per month. Fruits and vegetables are locally grown and picked fresh for sale at an open-air market. Papaya costs US\$1. For \$2, Vicki can purchase 20 small onions and for 30 cents, she can get a perfectly ripe avocado. All other groceries can be purchased from a nearby supermarket that rivals any of the major U.S. chains. Long stemmed, tropical flower bouquets that would cost over US\$100 in the United States can be bought in Vanuatu for just \$3! Plus, all the conveniences of modern life are available in Vanuatu, including in-home internet access! As you can see, there are advantages to internationally living – and a high quality of life is available outside the United States.

Prefer to stay closer to home? There is always Florida, Southern California, Arizona, Nevada, and New Mexico which offer value for retirees along with temperate year-round weather and innumerable amenities. Even uncharacteristic places like suburban New York, Boston, Philadelphia, Washington D.C., and Chicago are gaining favor with retirees who want to be close to the action, but not necessarily surrounded by it all the time. Smaller towns outside of Atlanta, Seattle, Dallas and San Francisco also offer perhaps surprisingly good value for retirees, while keeping them close to conveniences.

The Vicki Wong Team has experienced real estate agents worldwide. Contact us today to start discovering the world of perfect retirement locales!

4. **Activities** – what do you want to do with your retirement years? Golf, boating, fishing, hiking, biking, bird-watching...or perhaps you love to shop, dine and have access to the finest cultural and entertainment venues. The Vicki Wong Team is here to tell you, that you can have it all! It simply a matter of deciding how you want to spend your time. If you're not sure where the best place is to pursue all of your favorite interests and hobbies, contact us now! Our team has the specific area knowledge to find your dream retirement spot.
  
5. **Proximity to life's necessities** – being away from it all is great, but some may feel more comfortable living close to excellent medical facilities and major transportation hubs. If travel is part of your plans for retirement, you'll want to be near an airport or have a hometown that is accessible to state and nationwide thoroughfares. Plus many retirees choose to continue working in some capacity through their golden years and being near a metro area may be pivotal for finding employment.

**Here are some useful web links to help you get started on finding your dream retirement home:**

**Great Destinations**

**International Living**

**Tax-Free Havens**

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**Daily Consumer News and Advice**