

The International Buyer's Guide

The complete step-by-step playbook for buying Fort Lauderdale real estate as a non-U.S. resident — banking, financing, FIRPTA, taxes, and the purchase process.

What's inside

- **Section 1.** Why Fort Lauderdale is the easiest U.S. market for international buyers
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An honest disclaimer up front

This guide explains the process clearly, but the U.S. tax and legal rules around foreign ownership are nuanced and country-specific. Before closing, every international buyer should consult a U.S. tax attorney or CPA familiar with their home country's tax treaty with the United States. Jim and Olga can refer you to qualified professionals.

1. Why Fort Lauderdale is the easiest U.S. market

Fort Lauderdale has been a top U.S. destination for international real estate buyers for decades — particularly for buyers from Canada, the U.K., Brazil, Argentina, Colombia, Mexico, Venezuela, France, Italy, and Germany. There are six structural reasons why the buying process is easier here than in most U.S. cities.

Direct international flight access.

Fort Lauderdale-Hollywood International (FLL) and Miami International (MIA) connect to over 150 international destinations. London, Paris, São Paulo, Toronto, Mexico City, Bogotá, and Buenos Aires are all direct flights.

English-speaking professional infrastructure.

Real estate agents, attorneys, accountants, mortgage lenders, and inspectors are accustomed to working with international buyers. Many speak Spanish, Portuguese, French, or Italian.

No state income tax.

Florida has no state-level income tax. For international buyers using the property as a rental or eventual U.S. residence, this is a meaningful tax advantage over markets like New York, California, or New Jersey.

Strong rental and resale market.

Fort Lauderdale's combination of tourism, business travel, and migration sustains year-round demand. International buyers using their property as an investment typically achieve 4%–7% gross rental yield.

Established foreign national mortgage market.

Jim and other Florida-based lenders have lending programs specifically for non-U.S. residents — no U.S. credit history required, asset-based qualification.

Strong title and escrow protections.

Florida is a title-insurance state with mature escrow infrastructure. Funds are held by a neutral title company until closing — international buyers do not wire money directly to a seller.

2. The purchase process for non-residents

The Florida purchase process is the same for international and U.S. buyers, with three key additions: documentation, banking setup, and FIRPTA awareness. Here's the complete sequence.

Phase 1 — Pre-purchase setup (4–8 weeks before offer)

- 1 **Apply for an ITIN** (Individual Taxpayer Identification Number) if you don't already have an SSN. ITIN takes 6–10 weeks. You can buy without one, but you'll need it for rental income or future sale.
- 2 **Open a U.S. bank account** for the down payment, closing funds, and ongoing expenses (HOA, insurance, taxes). Section 3 covers options.
- 3 **Get pre-approved by Jim** if financing. All-cash buyers skip this step but should still verify proof-of-funds requirements with their wire bank.
- 4 **Engage a U.S. tax attorney or CPA** familiar with your home country's tax treaty (if buying via LLC, trust, or other structure).

Phase 2 — Search and offer (1–6 weeks)

- 1 **Identify shortlist with Olga** via video tours, photos, neighborhood reports.
- 2 **Visit in person for 3–5 days** to tour finalists (highly recommended; some buyers do close fully remotely with strong representation).
- 3 **Submit offer** using Florida-standard FAR/BAR contract.
- 4 **Wire earnest money** (typically 1.5–3% of purchase price) to title company escrow within 3 days of acceptance.

Phase 3 — Due diligence and close (30–45 days)

- 1 **Home inspection, 4-point inspection, wind mitigation, marine inspection** (if waterfront).
- 2 **Insurance binder quote** (homeowner + wind + flood if applicable).
- 3 **Title search and survey.**
- 4 **Loan underwriting and appraisal** (if financing).
- 5 **Final walkthrough.**
- 6 **Closing** — Florida allows mobile notary and Remote Online Notarization (RON), so you can sign from your home country.

Documents you'll need ready

Valid passport, second photo ID, proof of address in home country (utility bill or bank statement under 3 months old), source-of-funds documentation, and either an SSN, ITIN, or W-8BEN. Your lender or attorney will also typically request 2–3 months of foreign bank statements showing the down payment funds.

3. U.S. bank account setup

Opening a U.S. bank account as a non-resident has gotten more difficult over the past decade due to anti-money-laundering rules — but it's still very achievable, especially in Fort Lauderdale where banks are accustomed to international customers.

Banks that open accounts for non-residents

Bank	In-person required?	Notes
Bank of America	Yes (most cases)	Long-established international program. May require ITIN.
Chase	Yes	Strong international division. Requires U.S. address (your new property works).
HSBC	Often remote possible	Good for buyers from UK, Hong Kong, and Asia. Has Premier global program.
Citibank	Often remote possible	Citi Global Banking links foreign Citi accounts to U.S. accounts.
TD Bank	Yes (in-person)	Strong for Canadian buyers; cross-border accounts.
Local Florida banks (e.g. Amerant, City National)	Yes	Often more flexible than large nationals.

What you'll typically need

- Valid passport (and a second photo ID — driver's license from home country usually works)
- Proof of foreign address (utility bill or bank statement, under 3 months old)
- Initial deposit (varies; \$500–\$25,000 depending on bank and account type)
- Either an ITIN, SSN, or completed W-8BEN form
- Proof of source of funds (recent bank statements from your home country)
- Sometimes: proof of U.S. address (your title commitment or signed purchase contract)

The fastest path

If you're flying down to tour properties anyway, schedule the bank appointment for the same trip. Most U.S. banks open the account within 60–90 minutes if you walk in with the right documents. Olga and Jim can provide referrals to specific bankers at Bank of America, Chase, and Amerant who specialize in international clients.

4. Foreign national mortgages

Many international buyers assume they must pay all-cash for U.S. real estate. Most don't realize foreign national mortgage programs exist. Jim's lending team works with multiple foreign national lenders and can typically finance 60–70% of the purchase price for a qualified non-U.S. buyer.

Foreign national loan basics

Item	Typical foreign national loan
Maximum LTV (loan-to-value)	60%–75% (so 25%–40% down)
Loan amount range	\$200K–\$5M+ (jumbo available)
U.S. credit history required	No
Income verification	Foreign tax returns, employer letters, or bank statements (asset-based)
Reserves required	6–18 months of mortgage payments
Interest rate vs U.S. resident	Typically 0.75%–1.75% higher
Loan terms available	30-year fixed, 7-year ARM, 10-year ARM
Typical close time	30–45 days

Three loan paths Jim works with

- 1 **Standard foreign national.** No U.S. credit, asset-based or foreign-income qualification. Most common path. 30–35% down typical.
- 2 **Asset-utilization loan.** Qualifies you off your investable asset base (brokerage, savings, etc.) rather than income. Best for retirees, business owners, and high-net-worth buyers without traditional employment income.
- 3 **Foreign national jumbo.** For loans above \$1M. Stricter underwriting, typically 12+ months reserves, but pricing remains competitive.

Why financing often beats all-cash

Even buyers who could pay cash often choose financing because: (1) it preserves capital in your home country, (2) U.S. mortgage interest may be deductible against U.S. rental income, and (3) currency hedging — if your home currency strengthens against the dollar, you've effectively borrowed at a discount. Worth a 15-minute call with Jim before deciding.

5. FIRPTA — what every foreign buyer needs to know

FIRPTA stands for the Foreign Investment in Real Property Tax Act. It's a U.S. tax law that applies when a foreign person sells U.S. real estate. It does not apply when you buy. But every foreign buyer needs to understand it because it will apply when you eventually sell.

How FIRPTA works on a future sale

- 1 **The buyer of your property is required to withhold 15% of the gross sale price** and remit it to the IRS at closing. This is automatic — title companies handle it.
- 2 **This 15% is NOT your final tax.** It's a deposit against your eventual U.S. capital gains tax liability.
- 3 **You file a U.S. tax return for the year of sale.** Your actual tax owed is calculated based on your gain (sale price minus original purchase price minus improvements minus selling costs).
- 4 **If the 15% withholding exceeds your actual tax liability, you receive a refund** from the IRS — typically 6–18 months after filing.
- 5 **If your actual tax liability exceeds the 15% withholding, you owe the difference** with your tax return.

FIRPTA reduction strategies

- **Sale price under \$300,000 + buyer is using as primary residence:** No FIRPTA withholding required.
- **Sale price \$300K–\$1M + buyer uses as primary residence:** Withholding reduced to 10%.
- **IRS Withholding Certificate (Form 8288-B):** Apply BEFORE closing to reduce withholding to your actual estimated tax. Takes 60–90 days; plan ahead.
- **Hold via U.S. LLC structure:** Different withholding rules may apply. Consult a CPA.

What this means at purchase

FIRPTA is a future-sale issue, not a purchase issue. But two things to do at purchase make your future sale smoother: (1) keep all receipts for capital improvements (these increase your cost basis and reduce taxable gain), and (2) file a U.S. tax return every year you have rental income — establishing a tax history makes the FIRPTA Withholding Certificate process much easier when you eventually sell.

6. Ownership structures

Foreign buyers in the U.S. typically choose one of four ownership structures. The right choice depends on your home country, your plans for the property (personal use vs rental vs investment), your estate planning goals, and your liability profile. This is the section where you must consult a U.S. tax attorney before deciding.

The four most common structures

Structure	Best for	Key considerations
Personal name (individual ownership)	Personal use, primary or vacation home	Simplest. Subject to U.S. estate tax exposure above \$60K. FIRPTA standard.
U.S. LLC (single-member)	Rental properties, liability protection	Disregarded entity for tax. Liability protection. Estate tax exposure remains.
U.S. LLC owned by foreign corporation	Larger investments, estate planning	Removes U.S. estate tax exposure. More complex; corporate tax filings required.
Foreign or domestic trust	Estate planning, multi-generational holding	Most complex. Specialized tax attorney essential. Powerful for estate planning.

The U.S. estate tax issue most foreign buyers miss

Foreign nationals owning U.S. real estate in their personal name face U.S. estate tax on the property's value above \$60,000 if they die owning it. That's a 26%–40% tax. An LLC owned by a foreign corporation typically eliminates this exposure. For any purchase over \$500K, this conversation with a U.S. tax attorney is essential — and should happen before you close, not after.

7. Best neighborhoods for international buyers

International buyers typically prioritize four characteristics: turnkey condition, strong rental potential when they're not in residence, recognized neighborhood names with international resale appeal, and easy access to airports and English-speaking professional infrastructure. The neighborhoods below match those criteria.

For luxury waterfront and yacht owners

- **Las Olas Isles** — Recognizable internationally. Walking distance to Las Olas dining and shopping. Direct ocean access for yachts.
- **Harbor Beach** — Gated, ultra-private, beach + boating combination. Strong with European and Latin American buyers.
- **Sunrise Key** — Smallest and most exclusive gated waterfront community. Ultra-luxury.
- **Bay Colony** — Gated, family-friendly luxury, often chosen by Canadian and European buyers.

For beach-and-condo lifestyle (lock-and-leave)

- **Galt Mile** — Beach condo lifestyle, full-service buildings. Very popular with Canadian, European, and South American buyers. Strong rental demand.
- **Las Olas Riverhouse / downtown high-rises** — Walkable to dining, full amenities, central location.
- **Central Beach** — Walking distance to beach and Las Olas.

For investment / rental income focus

- **Flagler Village** — Strong urban rental demand, downtown adjacent.
- **Victoria Park** — Charming, walkable, strong year-round rental.
- **Galt Mile condos** — High occupancy seasonally, established rental market.

For families relocating long-term

- **Coral Ridge** — A-rated public schools, safe, walkable, family suburbia.
- **Imperial Point** — Quiet, family-oriented, easier price entry.
- **Bay Colony** — Gated, schools, family lifestyle.

8. International buyer worksheet

Fill in this worksheet and send it to Jim and Olga. With these answers, we can match you to the right loan structure, the right neighborhood, and the right professional advisors before you make your trip to Fort Lauderdale.

Buyer information

- Name(s): _____
- Country of residence: _____
- Country of citizenship (if different): _____
- Existing U.S. SSN or ITIN? Y / N
- Existing U.S. bank account? Y / N · Bank: _____

Property goals

- Primary use: vacation home / rental investment / future primary residence / other
- Annual personal use (weeks/year): _____
- Rental when not occupied? Y / N
- Target purchase price range: \$_____ to \$_____
- Target neighborhoods (if known): _____

Financing

- All-cash or financing? Cash / Financing
- If financing, target down payment percentage: _____%
- Available reserves (months of expected mortgage payments): _____
- Source of down payment funds (savings / sale of asset / business / inheritance): _____

Structure and tax planning

- Owning in personal name, LLC, corporation, or trust: _____
- Existing U.S. tax attorney or CPA? Y / N · Name: _____
- Estate planning goals (children inheriting U.S. property): _____

Logistics

- Target close date: _____

- Planning a Fort Lauderdale visit (dates): _____
 - Languages preferred for communication: _____
 - Best contact method (email / WhatsApp / phone): _____
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Your next step

Every successful Fort Lauderdale purchase starts with knowing your real buying power — not a quick online estimate, but a 15-minute conversation that factors in HOA fees, flood insurance, and Florida property taxes. That's how Jim Blackburn (Stairway Mortgage, NMLS #1072866) opens every buyer relationship before connecting you with Olga Blackburn (The Keyes Company) for the home search.

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Ready when you are

Call or text Jim at (954) 993-1625 to start your 15-minute pre-qualification. No credit pull required for the conversation.