



Panama

507 / POP 3.7 MILLION

Includes ➔

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Best Places to Eat

- ➔ El Último Refugio (p671)
- ➔ Mercado de Mariscos (p635)
- ➔ Mare Bonita (p650)
- ➔ Boquete Fish House (p661)
- ➔ Coco Hill (p676)

Best Places to Sleep

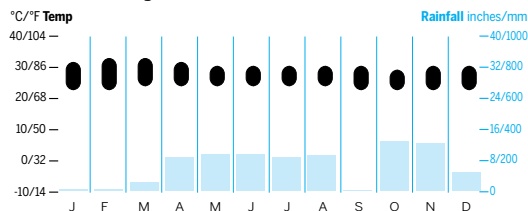
- ➔ Bambuda Lodge (p675)
- ➔ Magnolia Inn (p632)
- ➔ Hibiscus Garden (p652)
- ➔ Lost & Found Hostel (p664)
- ➔ Eco Venao (p651)

Why Go?

Consider Panama a place of discovery: explore the ruins of Spanish forts on the Caribbean coast or boat deep into indigenous territories in a dugout canoe. With a spate of deserted islands, chill Caribbean vibes on one side and monster Pacific waves on the other, Panama offers the best of all beach worlds. Panama City – culturally diverse, driven, rough-edged yet sophisticated – is among Latin America's most vibrant and outward-looking capitals, with English widely spoken. In the last century, the canal defined Panama, but it's what lies just beyond that may define this one. The canal expansion spells growth and even more glitz, but for now you can still pick an empty islet and play survivor for a day.

When to Go

Panama City



Dec–Apr High season on the Pacific coast is also the dry season. Best time to hike or dive.

Mid-Apr–early Dec Rainy season means low-season travel rates.

Aug–Oct Migrating humpback whales in the Pacific; shoulder season in Bocas.

AT A GLANCE

Currency US dollar (\$)

Language Spanish

Money ATMs widely available. Credit cards accepted in some areas.

Visas Generally not required for stays of 90 days.

Time GMT minus five hours

Area 74,340 sq km

Capital Panama City

Police ☎104

Exchange Rates

Australia	A\$1	US\$0.74
Canada	C\$1	US\$0.78
Euro zone	€1	US\$1.13
Japan	¥100	US\$0.94
New Zealand	NZ\$1	US\$0.70
UK	£1	US\$1.42

Set Your Budget

- ✦ Air-conditioned dorm bed: US\$13
- ✦ Dinner at a food cart or self-catering: US\$5; at a midrange restaurant: US\$12–18
- ✦ Four-hour bus ride: US\$10

Resources

- ✦ **Visit Panama** (www.visitpanama.com)
- ✦ **The Panama News** (www.thepanamanews.com)
- ✦ **Panama Info** (www.panamainfo.com)
- ✦ **Casco Viejo** (www.cascoviejo.org)

Connections

The principal crossing to Costa Rica is on the Interamericana at Paso Canoas. Guabito on the Caribbean side and Rfo Sereno in the highlands are less chaotic border posts. For more detailed information, see Survival Guide p705.

ITINERARIES

One Week

Charge the capital, seek out a rainforest adventure and end with a Caribbean getaway on this one-week itinerary. Start by imbibing the rush of Panama City. Visit Panamá Viejo, destroyed in a massive pirate raid. Pedal along Cinta Costera, the coastal beltway, to Casco Viejo, the cobblestone neighborhood with plaza cafes and rooftop bars. Day trip to nearby Miraflores Locks to witness mammoth ships squeezing through the canal. At nearby Parque Nacional Soberanía you can climb a canopy tower to search for toucans and sloths, or you can kayak Lago Gatún alongside howler monkeys and sunbathing crocodiles. Next, fly to Bocas del Toro for four days of chill Caribbean vibes. Snorkel the aquamarine waters with tropical fish and coral reefs, and explore Isla Colón by quad bike. Alternatively, escape to Isla Bastimentos, with thatched resorts and jungle lodges. For a dose of culture, take a chocolate tour on the mainland or visit indigenous groups on other islands with a community tourism initiative.

Two Weeks

Got a second week? Head over the continental divide to highland Boquete to explore coffee farms and cloud forests before hitting the great beaches of the Pacific coast and circling back to the capital.

Essential Food & Drink

- ✦ **Where to eat** Budget eateries like *cafeterías* (simple eateries), *panaderías* (bakeries), stands and market stalls sell a range of filling dishes and set meals from US\$3 to US\$6.
- ✦ **What to eat** Rice and beans are a staple in Panama and are usually served with *patacones* (fried plantains), a small cabbage salad and meat. Seafood is inexpensive and abundant, including *ceviche* (marinated raw fish) at fish markets. More adventurous palates shouldn't miss *pulpo al carbón* (grilled octopus). Fresh tropical juices and coconut water (known as *pipa*) are sold on the street. Don't miss regional specialties like *tortilla de maíz* (fried cornmeal cake), Caribbean coconut rice and bottled D'Elida's hot pepper sauce.