

Bocas del Toro Province



Where primary rainforest meets banana plantation and Caribbean islands dot a shock of blue waters, Bocas del Toro Province promises all that is tropical. Located 32km from the Costa Rican border, the Archipiélago de Bocas del Toro consists of six densely forested islands, scores of uninhabited islets and Parque Nacional Marino Isla Bastimentos, Panama's oldest marine park. Naturally beautiful and half-tame, Bocas is Panama's principal tourist draw, the place for a hefty dose of sun and surf.

In addition to being the longtime roost of Chiquita Banana, the mainland is home to the Panamanian half of the binational Parque Internacional La Amistad. This Unesco World Heritage Site supports important megafauna such as the elusive jaguar, as well as Ngöbe-Buglé settlements where people still cling to their traditional ways of life. Deep in the forest live the last remaining Naso, one of the only tribes in the Americas to retain their traditional monarchy.

Most visitors come to the province in search of island paradise. Few are disappointed with the perfect Bocas cocktail of water fun and thatched luxury. But the secret has leaked, and there's no sign that development will slow down. The real-estate boom has brought bulldozers and bullying interests, making locals debate the merits of increased tourism when there is not enough infrastructure to support it. Those bent on a Caribbean getaway should get here soon, as unspoiled beauty rarely stays that way.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Strolling along the pristine beaches of **Isla Bastimentos** (p217) and enjoying the chill island vibe
- Extending a long day of play with a nocturnal nightlife tour in **Bocas del Toro town** (p213)
- **Surfing** (boxed text, p220) some of the sickest breaks you'll find in the Caribbean – just watch those shallow reefs!
- Exploring **Parque Internacional La Amistad** (p224), an awesome tropical wilderness where the Naso (Teribe) live under one of the world's last tribal monarchies
- Boating through the wetlands at **Humedal de San-San Pond Sak** (p223) to spot manatees and river otters



■ POPULATION: 115,793

■ AREA: 8,745 SQ KM

■ ELEVATION: SEA LEVEL TO 3300M

