

# Directory

## CONTENTS

Accommodations	276
Activities	277
Business Hours	277
Children	278
Climate Charts	278
Courses	279
Customs Regulations	279
Dangers & Annoyances	279
Embassies & Consulates	280
Festivals & Events	280
Food	281
Gay & Lesbian Travelers	281
Holidays	281
Insurance	281
Internet Access	282
Legal Matters	282
Maps	282
Money	283
Photography	283
Post	284
Shopping	284
Solo Travelers	284
Telephone	284
Time	285
Toilets	285
Tourist Information	285
Travelers with Disabilities	285
Visas & Documents	285
Volunteering	287
Women Travelers	287
Work	287

## ACCOMMODATIONS

Prices cited in this book for accommodations are high-season rates, and they include Panama's 10% tax on hotel rooms. Doubles have private bathrooms unless otherwise noted.

There is usually no shortage of places to stay in Panama, except during holidays or special events outside Panama City, when advance reservations may be necessary. More popular hostels and small hotels usually require reservations in high season.

In this book, accommodations are categorized as budget (where lodgings typically range from US\$7 per person to US\$35 for a double room), midrange (usually from about

## BOOK YOUR STAY ONLINE

For more accommodations reviews and recommendations by Lonely Planet authors, check out the online booking service at [www.lonelyplanet.com/hotels](http://www.lonelyplanet.com/hotels). You'll find the true, insider low-down on the best places to stay. Reviews are thorough and independent. Best of all, you can book online.

US\$36 to US\$90 for a double room) and top end (anything above US\$91).

## B&Bs

Though they're a recent phenomenon, bed-and-breakfasts are gaining popularity across the country. Rates at B&Bs range from mid-range to top end. You'll find them at major tourist destinations including Panama City, Boquete and Bocas del Toro. B&Bs offer personalized service, a comfortable room with private bathroom, and breakfast is included.

## Camping

Camping facilities are available in many of the national parks; typical fees are US\$5 per person per night. Camping isn't available in most towns.

## Homestays

Informal homestays are available throughout the country – the best place to inquire about this is through local tourist information centers. Travelers who are exploring Kuna Yala and the Darién can often find lodging in local villages by asking around. Many villagers would be happy to rent out a spare room (or set aside a hammock space) for US\$12 to US\$40 a night.

## Hostels

As Panama becomes more popular with backpackers, hostels are springing up across the country. At the time of writing, none were connected with international youth hostel federations, though facilities are mostly good.

## Hotels

Panama has no shortage of places to stay, although getting a hotel room during Carnaval,

Semana Santa (Holy Week) and other holiday times can be difficult in some places. Hotel accommodations can also be tight if there is a special event.

Some travelers prefer to make advance reservations everywhere; this is generally possible and is recommended in the better accommodations and in general in Bocas del Toro town on Isla Colón. Booking online is the most common way of reserving a room.

Before accepting a room, ask to see several. The same prices are often charged for rooms of widely differing quality. Even in the US\$10-a-night cheapies it's worth looking around. Naturally, hotels want you to rent their most expensive rooms; if you're on a tight budget, make a habit of asking if economical rooms are available. (Some Panamanian hotels have them but don't post their lowest prices.)

### Lodges

A handful of high-end lodges are scattered about the country. Although these places aren't cheap, they provide an excellent opportunity to be surrounded by nature with access to some spectacular hiking and wildlife-watching nearby.

### Resorts

All-inclusive resorts often include meals, activities, private beach access and all the amenities. These can be a good option for those

with children, as most resorts offer plenty of diversions for kids and adults.

### ACTIVITIES

Panama has scores of ways to spend a sun-drenched afternoon, from hiking through lush rainforest to snorkeling among coral reefs. Diving, surfing, bird-watching and fishing are just a few of Panama's star attractions. For a complete list of what the country offers, see p57.

### BUSINESS HOURS

Opening hours for travel agencies, tour operators and other businesses are normally 8am to noon and 1:30pm to 5pm weekdays, and from 8am to noon Saturday. Government offices, including post offices, are open 8am to 4pm weekdays and don't close for lunch. Most banks are open 8:30am to 1pm or 3pm weekdays; some have Saturday hours as well. Shops and pharmacies are generally open from around 9am or 10am until 6pm or 7pm Monday to Saturday.

Grocery stores keep longer hours, opening around 8am and closing around 8pm or 9pm. The El Rey chain stays open 24 hours.

Restaurants usually open for lunch from noon to 3pm and dinner from 6pm to 10pm. Those that offer breakfast open from 7am to 10am. On Sunday, many restaurants close. In Panama City and David, restaurants open later on Friday and Saturday nights,

### PRACTICALITIES

- Panamanians use the metric system for weights and measures, except that they pump gasoline by the *galón* (gallon) and occasionally use pounds and miles.
- Electrical current is 120 volts in Panama City and 110 volts, 60Hz elsewhere. Plugs are two-pronged, as in the US and Canada.
- Panama's most widely circulated daily newspaper is *La Prensa* ([www.prensa.com](http://www.prensa.com), in Spanish). Other major Spanish-language dailies include *La Estrella de Panamá*, *El Panamá América*, *El Universal* and *Crítica*.
- Informative about local issues that won't make the international headlines, the valuable *Panama News* ([www.thepanamanews.com](http://www.thepanamanews.com)) is published in English every two weeks and distributed free in Panama City.
- *The Visitor*, written in English and Spanish and targeting tourists, is a free publication.
- Panama has three commercial TV stations (channels two, four and 13) and two devoted to public broadcasting (five and 11).
- Popular radio stations in Panama (the signal's best in and near the capital) include 97.1 and 102.1 (salsa), 88.9 (Latin jazz), 88.1 (reggae), 94.5 (traditional Panamanian), 106.7 (Latin rock) and 98.9 (US rock).