



Panama



THIS EDITION WRITTEN AND RESEARCHED BY

Carolyn McCarthy

PLAN YOUR TRIP

Welcome to Panama	4
Panama Map	6
Panama's Top 15	8
Need to Know	16
First Time Panama	18
If You Like	20
Month by Month	22
Itineraries	24
Panama Outdoors	32
Regions at a Glance . . .	36

ON THE ROAD

PANAMA CITY 40

History	42
Sights	42
Activities	52
Courses	52
Festivals & Events	53
Sleeping	53
Eating	59
Drinking & Nightlife	63
Entertainment	66
Shopping	67

PANAMÁ PROVINCE 72

Panama Canal	73
Canal Zone	77
Pacific Islands	80
Isla Taboga	81
Archipiélago de Las Perlas	83
Pacific Coast	87
La Chorrera	87
Capira	87
Parque Nacional y Reserva Biológica Altos de Campana	88
Punta Chame	89
Pacific Coast Beaches . . .	89

Northeast Panamá Province 91

Área Silvestre de Narganá	91
Lago Bayano	91

COCLÉ PROVINCE . . 92

El Valle	94
Santa Clara	100
Farallón (Playa Blanca) . .	101
Penonomé	102
La Pintada	105
Reserva Privada Távida . .	106

Parque Nacional Omar Torrijos (El Copé) & La Rica	107
Parque Arqueológico del Caño	109

PENÍNSULA DE AZUERO 110

Chitré	111
Interior Azuero	118
Villa de Los Santos	119
Playas Monagre & El Rompío	121
Guararé	122
La Enea	123
Las Tablas	123
Pedasí	125
Azuero Coastline	129
Macaracas	133

VERAGUAS PROVINCE 134

Santiago	136
San Francisco	137
Santa Fé	137
Las Palmas	141
Santa Catalina	141
Parque Nacional Coiba . .	145
Parque Nacional Cerro Hoya	151

CHIRIQUÍ PROVINCE 152

Lowlands	153
David	153
Playa Barqueta	158
Golfo de Chiriquí	159
Playa Las Lajas	160
Highlands	163
Boquete	163



HARPY EAGLE P244



TRADITIONAL POLLERA
P269

Contents

UNDERSTAND

Parque Nacional Volcán Barú.....	172
Volcán.....	174
Santa Clara.....	175
Paso Ancho.....	175
Bambito.....	175
Cerro Punta.....	176
Guadalupe.....	176
Parque Internacional La Amistad (Las Nubes).....	177

BOCAS DEL TORO PROVINCE.....178

Archipiélago de Bocas del Toro	179
Isla Colón.....	179
Bocas del Toro	183
Isla Carenero.....	193
Isla Solarte & Around ..	194
Isla San Cristóbal.....	194
Isla Bastimentos	195
Mainland	199
Almirante.....	199
Changuinola	200
Humedal de San-San	
Pond Sak	201
Parque Internacional La Amistad (Wekso).....	201
Las Delicias.....	203
Bosque Protector de Palo Seco.....	204

COLÓN PROVINCE 206

Colón	208
Around Colón	209
South of Colón	210
Parque Nacional San Lorenzo	210
Portobelo.....	213
Around Portobelo.....	218
Isla Grande	219

COMARCA DE KUNA YALA 221

The Kuna	223
Cartí, El Porvenir & Around	228
East Lemons	230
Río Sidra & Nearby Islands	231
Corazón de Jesús & Nearby Islands	232
Playón Chico & Nearby Islands	233
Achutupu & Nearby Islands	234
Beyond Achutupu.....	234

DARIÉN PROVINCE 235

The Road to Yaviza ...	238
Metetí.....	240
Yaviza	241
Interior Darién	242
La Palma	242
Reserva Natural Punta Patiño	243
Mogué	243
Río Sambú.....	244
Sambú	244
Parque Nacional Darién 245	
El Real	245
Rancho Frio	246

Panama Today.....	248
History	250
The Panamanian Way of Life.....	259
Music	266
Arts.....	268
Land & Wildlife	272

SURVIVAL GUIDE

Directory A–Z	282
Transportation	293
Language	299
Glossary.....	304
Index.....	308
Map Legend.....	319

SPECIAL FEATURES

Itineraries	24
Off the Beaten Track... 30	
Panama Outdoors	32



On the Road



Panama





0

0

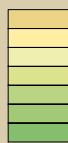
100 km

50 miles

80°00'W

79°00'W

78°00'W

ELEVATION

10°00'N

9°00'N

8°00'N

7°00'N

Parque Nacional Soberanía

World-famous
bird-watching spot (p78)

Panama Canal

The world's greatest
shortcut (p73)

Archipiélago de San Blas

Perfect powder-white islets
in Kuna territory (p221)

Panama City

Central America's most
cosmopolitan capital (p40)

Isla Taboga

Popular city escape (p81)

Parque Nacional Darién

Panama's wildest and most
infamous frontier (p245)

PACIFIC
OCEAN

80°00'W

79°00'W

78°00'W

COLOMBIA



OUR STORY

A beat-up old car, a few dollars in the pocket and a sense of adventure. In 1972 that's all Tony and Maureen Wheeler needed for the trip of a lifetime – across Europe and Asia overland to Australia. It took several months, and at the end – broke but inspired – they sat at their kitchen table writing and stapling together their first travel guide, *Across Asia on the Cheap*. Within a week they'd sold 1500 copies. Lonely Planet was born.

Today, Lonely Planet has offices in Melbourne, London and Oakland, with more than 600 staff and writers. We share Tony's belief that 'a great guidebook should do three things: inform, educate and amuse'.

OUR WRITERS



Carolyn McCarthy

Coordinating Author Author of more than 20 travel guides, Carolyn McCarthy has been traveling the Americas and chronicling her experiences since 1998. For her third visit to Panama she sailed the Caribbean, sat out a riot in Panama City, became the subject of a Kuna congress meeting and managed to kayak the canal without one crocodile encounter. She also drank the water. This is her second time writing the Panama guide. Her work has also appeared in *National Geographic*, *Boston Globe*, *Outside*, *Patagon Journal* and other publications.

Read more about Carolyn at:
lonelyplanet.com/members/carolynmcc

Published by Lonely Planet Publications Pty Ltd

ABN 36 005 607 983

6th edition – Sept 2013

ISBN 978 1 74220 012 5

© Lonely Planet 2013 Photographs © as indicated 2013

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Printed in China

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be copied, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form by any means, electronic, mechanical, recording or otherwise, except brief extracts for the purpose of review, and no part of this publication may be sold or hired, without the written permission of the publisher. Lonely Planet and the Lonely Planet logo are trademarks of Lonely Planet and are registered in the US Patent and Trademark Office and in other countries. Lonely Planet does not allow its name or logo to be appropriated by commercial establishments, such as retailers, restaurants or hotels. Please let us know of any misuses: lonelyplanet.com/ip.

Although the authors and Lonely Planet have taken all reasonable care in preparing this book, we make no warranty about the accuracy or completeness of its content and, to the maximum extent permitted, disclaim all liability arising from its use.

Plan Your Trip

Itineraries


**1
WEEK**

Essential Panama

For a taste of tropical Panama, this trip takes you to the hyper-charged capital. Explore the city and see colonial ruins and landmarks like the famous Panama Canal while getting a dose of rainforest adventure. Take the grand finale of a chill Caribbean getaway.

Start by imbibing the rush of **Panama City**, the country's vibrant capital. Make a visit to Panamá Viejo to admire the grandiose ruins of Spain's first Pacific settlement, destroyed in a massive pirate raid. Walk or pedal along Cinta Costera, downtown's

coastal green space, to the *ceviche* (seafood) stands at the Mercado de Mariscos. Continue to the historic neighborhood of Casco Viejo, with hip plaza restaurants and rooftop bars amid crumbling ruins, galleries and 18th-century churches. Take in the scene strolling the romantic Paseo las Bóvedas.

Take a day trip to nearby **Miraflores Locks**, where observation decks put you front and center with mammoth ships as they shimmy through the canal. Follow with a rainforest visit nearby. Options include checking out the wildlife-rich **Parque Nacional Soberanía**, a favorite





Casco Viejo (p45), Panama City

of avid birders. Climb a canopy tower to search for toucans, capuchin monkeys and sloths or paddle a kayak on Lago Gatún alongside howler monkeys and sunbathing crocodiles.

From Panama City, fly to **Bocas del Toro** for four days of chill Caribbean vibes. Hire a water taxi to snorkel the clear waters filled with tropical fish and colorful coral reefs. Explore Isla Colón riding a cruiser bike out to Playa Bluff or Starfish Beach. Work up an appetite riding the waves and spend your evening wining and dining on the waterfront in quirky Bocas Town.

Split your time between this laid-back hub and a more remote setting such as **Isla Bastimentos**, with thatched resorts and jungle lodges, for a true island getaway. If you want to really get under the skin of the culture, take a chocolate tour on the Bocas del Toro **mainland** or visit indigenous groups on other islands with a community tourism initiative.

Fly back to the capital for another shot of urban decadence in the city's many open-air restaurants, sleek bars and salsa clubs.



2
WEEKS

Pacific Coast & Highlands

PLAN YOUR TRIP ITINERARIES

Whether you're traveling on buses or with your own wheels, hit the Interamericana for a route that alternates between scenic beaches and highland cloud forests.

Spend your first few days exploring **Panama City**, taking tips from the previous itinerary. Then head west along the Interamericana, where you can stop for a leisurely seafood lunch and pass the hours playing in the waves at one of the string of beaches along the Pacific coast. The next stop is **El Valle**, a mountain retreat surrounded by lush cloud forests and green peaks. Return to the Interamericana, taking a quick stop at one of Coclé's roadside attractions, then take the turnoff for **Santa Fé**, a tiny highland town amid sparkling rivers and gorgeous waterfalls.

For surf time, backtrack to the Interamericana and detour to the surf village of **Santa Catalina**. Soak up the laid-back vibe at thatched restaurants and join the local surfing kids nailing the waves on the town beach. Another very good reason to stop here is to connect to **Parque Nacional Coiba**, a far-flung yet pristine island in a vast marine park. Snorkeling, diving and hiking are all top-notch; although there's minimal infrastructure, it's worth staying a few days.

Head via David to the popular highland retreat of **Boquete** in Chiriquí. Enjoy the great hiking, go rafting, take a canopy tour and fill up on mountain-grown coffee. Birders can stalk the resplendent quetzal. Choose from among fine dining options and sleep sound in clean mountain air.

If you have your own wheels, take the new **Orange Blossom Road to Volcán**, a very scenic shortcut. Otherwise grab a bus via David to **Cerro Punta**. Retreat to a charming rainforest cabin before hitting the trail to hike the **Sendero Los Quetzales**, a stunning trail through wildlife-rich cloud forest. If traveling by bus, you can loop back to Boquete on this hike. If adventure *still* calls, from Cerro Punta you can access the trails of **Parque Internacional La Amistad**. Take a guide – the Panamanian side of this international park is virtually undeveloped and largely unexplored.

If you need to save time, you can fly back to Panama City from David.

GREG NEMUNJON/GETTY IMAGES ©



ALFREDO MANQUEZ/GETTY IMAGES ©



Top: Highlands, Coclé Province (p92)
Bottom: David (p153), Chiriquí Province

12
DAYS

Bicoastal Explorer

If you're itching to get off the beaten path, this seafarer route will bring you to the less touristed **Península de Azuero** on the Pacific coast, the Afro-Caribbean heartland and the furthest reaches of Kuna Yala (and possibly even Colombia).

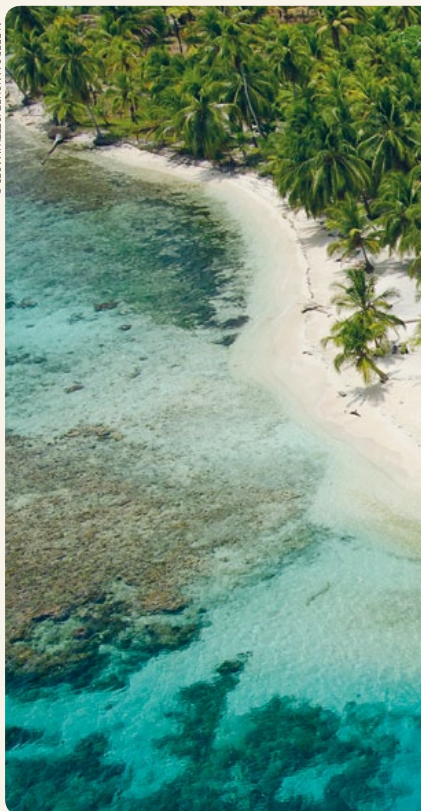
Start in the capital of **Panama City**. From there, take a ride in the luxury train along the historic Panama Railroad through the Canal Zone to **Colón** to admire the Unesco World Heritage Site of **Fuerte San Lorenzo**. While in the area, check out the Panama Canal expansion at the nearby **Gatun Locks**. Using **Portobelo** as your base, explore 16th-century Spanish forts, boat out to deserted island beaches, scuba dive or attend a festival.

Return to Panama City to travel to the **Península de Azuero** by bus. From time to time traditional festivals take over the streets of these tiny colonial towns. If your visit coincides, join the revelers! Otherwise, check out workshops where regional artisans craft Panama hats, lace dresses and colorful *diablo* (devil) masks. Make your base **Pedasí** for leisurely trips to the beach and a friendly village atmosphere. Move on to the more remote **Playa Venao** to enjoy a pretty half-moon bay, meet other travelers and ride some waves without the crowds. If turtles are hatching, it's worth making the pilgrimage to **Isla de Cañas**.

When you're ready, return to the capital and take a 4WD or flight to **Kuna Yala**, a string of hundreds of pristine islands ruled by the Kuna. Thatched huts on dozens of islands run the gamut from bare-bones to creature comfort, with meals and excursions always included. Snorkel and swim to your heart's content, or charter a sailboat for the grand tour. Highlights include snorkeling the reefs and wrecks of **Cayos Holandeses** and meeting the locals on the tiny community island of **Isla Tigre**.

At the end of your trip, return to Panama City via **Burbayar Lodge**, in a stunning mountain setting on the edge of the Kuna mainland, with great hiking and wildlife-watching. If you are heading on to South America – and bent on adventure – consider a three- to four-day sailing or boat trip to Colombia.

ALFREDO MANQUEZ/GETTY IMAGES ©



TIER UND NATURETOGRAPHIE/UNO C. SPAIN/GETTY IMAGES ©



Top: Kuna Yala (p221)
Bottom: Scarlet macaw



Off the Beaten Track: Panama

BOCAS DEL TORO MAINLAND

Tour a chocolate farm, search for endangered manatees or navigate in a dugout canoe to little-known Naso villages. Or trek through the rugged but beautiful Parque Internacional La Amistad. (p199)

SANTA FÉ

A highland gem, this cowboy town is all about mountain panoramas. Go tubing in the cool river, hike to lush waterfalls and swimming holes, or jump in the saddle to explore. (p137)



ISLA GOBERNADORA

Sun, surf and art are the draw of this out-of-the-way Pacific island with community art projects inspired by resident installation artists. (p147)

PARQUE NACIONAL COIBA

With extraordinary marine wildlife, Panama's newest Unesco World Heritage Site was once its most infamous island prison. Far-flung yet pristine, this little-visited park offers excellent diving and wildlife-watching. (p145)

WESTERN AZUERO PENINSULA

With deserted beaches, seasonal visits from hatching turtles and alternative access to Parque Nacional Coiba, this little-known area including Mariato and Palmilla is worth checking out. Get there by bus from Santiago. (p148)

PUNTA CHAME

So close to the capital but off-overlooked, this rugged peninsula with rolling hills and mangroves is a nice wilderness beach retreat – with the added kick of high adrenaline options like kitesurfing. (p89)

SAMBÚ

This jungle hub makes a good base for adventures further afield. Guides take visitors up the Río Sambú and its tributaries to Emberá and Wounaan villages or in search of harpy eagles and petroglyphs. (p244)



PARQUE NACIONAL DARIÉN

Call it the ultimate adventure. A visit to Central America's most biodiverse park requires authorization and an experienced guide, but no self-respecting adventurer can forgo the jungles of the Darién. (p245)

© Lonely Planet Publications Pty Ltd. To make it easier for you to use, access to this chapter is not digitally restricted. In return, we think it's fair to ask you to use it for personal, non-commercial purposes only. In other words, please don't upload this chapter to a peer-to-peer site, mass email it to everyone you know, or resell it. See the terms and conditions on our site for a longer way of saying the above - 'Do the right thing with our content.'