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Panama bursts with fragile diversity, from tropical rainforests to diverse marine ecosystems.

Panama Today

The waistline of the Americas, Panama has always been a crucial connection. The appearance of this land bridge three million years ago created a biological boom. Species moved, adapted and flourished through this one narrow isthmus. Like one great cocktail party, the event had no bedtime. Back then, it was plants, amphibians, primates, flowers and insects. Today's Panama has become a mix of ambitions, economic forces and peoples: among them Chinese immigrants, Latinos, North Americans and indigenous groups.

Best in Film

Hands of Stone (release 2013) The anticipated biopic of boxing legend Roberto Durán, with Robert Di Niro.

Quantum of Solace (2008) Agent 007 is out for revenge, with scenes in Casco Viejo.

The Tailor of Panama (2001) A reluctant spy lets loose.

Best in Print

Getting to Know the General (Graham Greene; 1984) A portrait of General Omar Torrijos by his longtime friend.

Empire of Blue Water (Stephen Talty; 2008) An intriguing pirate history and *NY Times* bestseller.

Panama (Carlos Ledson Miller; 2007) Explores the turmoil of the Noriega years with snapshots of history.

Confessions of an Economic Hitman (John Perkins; 2005) Explores the shadowy world of overseas business.

Best Dining Websites

www.buenprovechopanama.com
www.panamarestaurantreviews.com
www.panamarestaurantweek.com

The Expanding Canal

The fastest growing economy in Latin America for the last two years, Panama owes much of its prosperity to the Panama Canal. The 80km belt of locks links the Atlantic to the Pacific, and east with west. In the last century, the canal has cast the isthmus as the western hub of global commerce. Each year, more than four million containers travel it, their hulls filled with everything from bananas and grains to oil, lumber and shiny new cars. You may have never visited Panama, but it is quite likely that both the fruit in your juice and the accessories in your pocket once did.

One of the world's largest transportation projects, the Panama Canal's US\$5 billion dollar expansion is expected to double the current capacity and triple the traffic in the canal by digging deeper to accommodate bigger vessels and by adding a third lane. It already hauls in US\$2 billion yearly.

A financial boon for Panama, the expanded Panama Canal is expected to be completed on the heels of the canal's 100-year anniversary – slightly behind schedule. The canal is also expected to shift trade patterns, upsetting the prosperity of North American west coast ports.

Detractors fear that the project – along with the tab for a new US\$1.2 billion dollar Panama City subway system, a proposed beltway in Panama Bay, a new international airport and other projects – will shackle the country with serious debt. Or is the infrastructure upgrade a savvy investment? With the supersizing of merchant ships worldwide, the gamble bodes necessary if Panama is to remain a key shipping hub.

Sitting on Green Riches

Although the canal has defined Panama for the last century, it's what lies just beyond this engineering marvel that could define the next 100 years. A third of the