



Colón Province

POP 242,000 / AREA 4890 SQ KM / ELEV SEA LEVEL TO 979M

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Best Surf Spots

- ➔ Isla Grande (p224)
- ➔ Isla Mamei (p224)
- ➔ Playa Grande (p211)
- ➔ Turtles Beach (p224)
- ➔ V-Land Beach (p224)

Best Places to Sleep

- ➔ La Morada de La Bruja (p221)
- ➔ El Otro Lado (p221)
- ➔ Sister Moon Eco Lodge (p225)
- ➔ Casa Congo (p221)
- ➔ Macondo (p225)

Why Go?

With an edgy reputation more true crime than travel, Colón rarely makes travel wish lists, but there is more to this Caribbean province than its downtrodden capital. Think pristine beaches and lowland rainforests, colonial splendors and modern engineering marvels. Portobelo, with its growing music and art scene, shows the best of vibrant Congo culture, while the luxury train between Panama City and Colón remains one of the greatest rail journeys in the Americas.

The region's incredible history encompasses the earliest European explorers. Black roots also run deep, and Colón was the birthplace of today's ultra-popular *punta* music (better known abroad as reggaetón).

During the colonial era, these coastal cities ranked among the world's richest; their gold and silver stores enticed pirates from English privateer Sir Francis Drake to Admiral Edward Vernon. Today the fallen fortresses and cannons embedded in the coral reefs recall the fallen Spanish empire.

When to Go

- ➔ **Dec–Apr** The dry season is a great time for snorkeling or diving for Caribbean treasure, as visibility is at its best. It's high season for lodging and beaches fill up.
- ➔ **Oct** Pilgrims from all over Panama set out walking weeks ahead to attend the Black Christ Festival, an enormous event with masses and street celebrations held in October in Portobelo.
- ➔ **May–Jul** The summer months of May through July are a relatively good time to visit, with some rain showers and off-season prices.

Colón Province Highlights

1 Panama Railroad

(p214) Riding through lush vistas in a 1st-class luxury car heading from Panama City to Colón along this historical railway.

2 Portobelo (p218)

Exploring hallowed colonial ruins or finding festival frenzy in Portobelo, once the Caribbean's greatest port.

3 Fuerte San Lorenzo

(p217) Living out your *Pirates of the Caribbean* fantasy at this historic Spanish fort that once stood guard over the Caribbean.

4 Isla Grande (p224)

Soaking up the natural beauty and laid-back vibe on a picture-perfect gem of a Caribbean island.

5 Caribbean Sea (p219)

Finding sharks, cargo ships and military planes while scuba diving the Caribbean Sea around Portobelo.

