

# Welcome to Panama

*From clear turquoise seas to the coffee farms and cloud forests of Chiriquí, Panama can be as chilled out or as thrilling as you wish.*

## Endless Summer

With a spate of deserted islands, chilled Caribbean vibes on one side and monster Pacific swells on the other, Panama sits poised to deliver the best of beach life. And a whole other world begins at the water's edge. Seize it by scuba diving with whale sharks in the Pacific, snorkeling the rainbow reefs of Bocas del Toro or setting sail in the indigenous territory of Guna Yala, where virgin isles sport nary a footprint. Meanwhile surfers will be psyched to have world-class breaks all to themselves. Hello, paradise.

## Cosmopolitan Panama

The dazzling blue coastline and shimmering skyscrapers say Miami, though many joke that you hear more English spoken in Panama. Panama City is culturally diverse and driven, rough-edged yet sophisticated. There's much that's new or improved. Central America's first subway is ready, the historic Casco district is renovated and a massive canal expansion nears completion. Take in the city's funky particulars. Pedal the coastal green space, explore the Casco or attend an avant-garde performance and you will realize this tropical capital isn't just about salsa: that's just the backbeat.

## The Great Outdoors

In Panama, nature is all about discovery. Explore the ruins of Spanish forts on the Caribbean coast or boat deep into indigenous territories in a dugout canoe. Wildlife is incidental: a resplendent quetzal on the highland trail, an unruly troupe of screeching howler monkeys outside your cabin or a breaching whale that turns your ferry ride into an adrenaline-filled event. Adventure tourism means zipping through rainforest canopies, swimming alongside sea turtles or trekking to sublime cloud-forest vistas. One small tropical country with two long coasts makes for a pretty big playground.

## Lost-World Adventure

You don't have to make it all the way to the Darién to get off the beaten path – though if you do, you've hit one of the most biodiverse spots on the planet. Go where the wild things are. Soak in the spray of towering waterfalls near highland Santa Fé. Visit one of Panama's seven indigenous groups through community tourism. Live out your castaway fantasies in the Guna Yala or idle on a wilderness beach in Península de Azuero. Howl back at the creatures sharing the canopy. Panama is as wild as you want it to be.



## Why I Love Panama

By Carolyn McCarthy, Writer

In a world where wilderness and native cultures are disappearing, Panama – against all odds – continues with its essence intact. Trekking through rainforests, watching Congo drumming and sailing between pristine tropical islands offer wonder and delight. The wild-life viewing is astounding both in expected places, like the waters of Isla de Coiba, and in patches of preserved forest just outside the capital. For me Panama is a confluence – an explosion of nature, cultures and beliefs in that messy, musical arrangement that's everyday life in Latin America. All that energy feeds you, and you see the world in new ways.

**For more about our writers, see p320**