



Panama



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Plan Your Trip

Itineraries



Essential Panama

For a taste of tropical Panama, start with the hyper-charged capital. Explore the city and see colonial ruins and landmarks such as the famous Panama Canal while getting a dose of rainforest adventure. Top it off with a chilled Caribbean getaway.

Imbibe the rush of **Panama City**. In Panamá Viejo, admire Spain's first Pacific settlement, laid waste in a massive pirate raid. Pedal along the coastal beltway Cinta Costera to historic Casco Viejo,

with hip plaza restaurants, rooftop bars, galleries and 18th-century cathedrals.

Take a day trip to **Miraflores Locks** to watch mammoth ships make their way through the canal. Visit nearby rainforest in the wildlife-rich **Parque Nacional Soberanía**, a favorite of birdwatchers. Or kayak on **Lago Gatún** alongside howler monkeys and sunbathing crocodiles.

From Panama City, fly to **Bocas del Toro Town** for four days of Caribbean relaxation and snorkeling among colorful coral reefs. Explore Isla Colón by cruiser



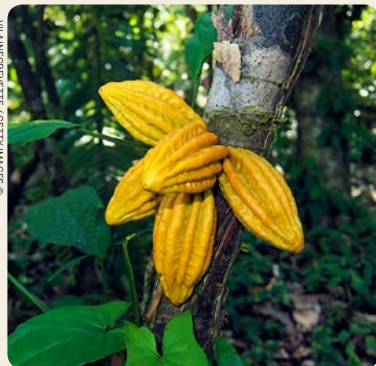


bike and go on a pub crawl in quirky Bocas Town.

Boat out to the idyllic thatched resorts at **Isla Bastimentos**, take a chocolate tour on the **Bocas del Toro mainland** or visit indigenous groups on other islands through a community-tourism initiative.

Fly back to the capital for a last call in the city's sleek bars and clubs.

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Above: Panamá Viejo (p51)
Right: Cacao pods, Bocas del Toro Province (p181)



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WEEKS

Pacific Coast & Highlands

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**. Then head west along the Interamericana, where you can stop for a leisurely seafood lunch and explore the string of beaches along the Pacific coast. Overnight at **Mamallena Ec lodge** in the cool, sculpted foothills. The next stop is **El Valle**, a mountain retreat surrounded by lush cloud forests and green peaks. Return to the Interamericana, visiting Coclé's roadside attractions, then detour for **Santa Fé**, a tiny highland town amid sparkling rivers and gorgeous waterfalls. On your way out, browse the gorgeous **Iglesia de San Francisco de la Montaña** outside Santa Fé.

For surf time, backtrack to the Interamericana and detour to **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, 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. Go hiking or rafting or take a canopy tour and fill up on mountain-grown coffee. Birdwatchers can stalk the resplendent quetzal. Choose from one of the fine-dining options and sleep soundly in clean mountain air.

If you have your own wheels, take the paved road to **Volcán**, a very scenic shortcut. Those without wheels can 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.

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



Top: Hawksbill turtle, Parque Nacional Coiba (p147)

Bottom: Ceviche

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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, and on to the Afro-Caribbean heartland and the furthest reaches of **Guna Yala** (and possibly even Colombia).

Start in the capital of **Panama City**. From there, take a ride in the luxury train along the historical 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 **Agua Clara Visitors Center**. 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 Cañas**.

When you're ready, return to the capital and take a 4WD or flight to **Guna Yala**, a string of hundreds of pristine islands ruled by Guna. Thatched huts on dozens of islands run the gamut, from bare bones to creature comforts, 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 the **Cayos Holandeses** and meeting locals on the tiny community islands. If you are heading on to South America – and bent on adventure – consider a three- to four-day sailing or boat trip to Colombia.

Otherwise, end your trip by returning to Panama City, where you can check out the world-class BioMuseo and have a night out in Casco Viejo.

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Top: BioMuseo (p52), Panama City
Bottom: Fortifications near Portobelo (p219)



Off the Beaten Track: Panama

BOCAS DEL TORO MAINLAND

Tour a chocolate farm, search for endangered manatees or travel by dugout canoe to little-known Naso villages. Alternatively trek through the rugged but beautiful Parque Internacional La Amistad. (p206)

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. (p138)



ISLA GOBERNADORA

Sun, surf and art are the draws of this out-of-the-way Pacific island with community art projects inspired by resident installation artists. (p142)

PARQUE NACIONAL COIBA

With extraordinary marine wildlife, Panama's newest Unesco World Heritage Site was once its most infamous island prison. Far flung and pristine, this sparsely visited park offers excellent diving and wildlife watching. (p147)

SUNSET COAST

Experience remote beaches, great surfing and community turtle tours on the Sunset Coast: the western side of Península de Azuero facing the Golfo de Montijo and the Pacific Ocean. (p150)

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. (p250)



PLAYA MUERTO

On the seldom visited Pacific coast of Darién Province, with pounding waves and empty beaches, this non-tourist destination has a vibrant Emberá community and offers the chance to spot the elusive harpy eagle. (p254)

ISLA CAÑAS

Hop into a *lancha* that will ferry you through the mangrove to the island that time forgot and where olive ridley sea turtles nest in droves from July to November. (p133)

Behind the Scenes

SEND US YOUR FEEDBACK

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OUR READERS

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Cover photograph: three-toed sloth mother and young, Isla Barro Colorado, Christian Ziegler/Getty ©

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Carolyn McCarthy

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- Castle/Palace
- Christian
- Confucian
- Hindu
- Islamic
- Jain
- Jewish
- Monument
- Museum/Gallery/Historic Building
- Ruin
- Shinto
- Sikh
- Taoist
- Winery/Vineyard
- Zoo/Wildlife Sanctuary
- Other Sight

Activities, Courses & Tours

- Bodysurfing
- Diving
- Canoeing/Kayaking
- Course/Tour
- Sento Hot Baths/Onsen
- Skiing
- Snorkeling
- Surfing
- Swimming/Pool
- Walking
- Windsurfing
- Other Activity

Sleeping

- Sleeping
- Camping
- Hut/Shelter

Eating

- Eating

Drinking & Nightlife

- Drinking & Nightlife
- Cafe

Entertainment

- Entertainment

Shopping

- Shopping

Information

- Bank
- Embassy/Consulate
- Hospital/Medical
- Internet
- Police
- Post Office
- Telephone
- Toilet
- Tourist Information
- Other Information

Geographic

- Beach
- Gate
- Hut/Shelter
- Lighthouse
- Lookout
- Mountain/Volcano
- Oasis
- Park
- Pass
- Picnic Area
- Waterfall

Population

- Capital (National)
- Capital (State/Province)
- City/Large Town
- Town/Village

Transport

- Airport
- Border crossing
- Bus
- Cable car/Funicular
- Cycling
- Ferry
- Metro station
- Monorail
- Parking
- Petrol station
- Subway/Subte station
- Taxi
- Train station/Railway
- Tram
- Underground station
- Other Transport

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- Freeway
- Primary
- Secondary
- Tertiary
- Lane
- Unsealed road
- Road under construction
- Plaza/Mall
- Steps
- Tunnel
- Pedestrian overpass
- Walking Tour
- Walking Tour detour
- Path/Walking Trail

Boundaries

- International
- State/Province
- Disputed
- Regional/Suburb
- Marine Park
- Cliff
- Wall

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- River, Creek
- Intermittent River
- Canal
- Water
- Dry/Salt/Intermittent Lake
- Reef

Areas

- Airport/Runway
- Beach/Desert
- Cemetery (Christian)
- Cemetery (Other)
- Glacier
- Mudflat
- Park/Forest
- Sight (Building)
- Sportsground
- Swamp/Mangrove

Note: Not all symbols displayed above appear on the maps in this book



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 Franklin, London, Melbourne, Oakland, Dublin, Beijing and Delhi, 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



Regis St Louis

Regis grew up in a small town in the American Midwest – the kind of place that fuels big dreams of travel – and he developed an early fascination with foreign dialects and world cultures. He spent his formative years learning Russian and a handful of Romance languages, which served him well on journeys across much of the globe. Regis has contributed to more than 50 Lonely Planet titles, covering destinations across six continents. His travels have taken him from the mountains of Kamchatka to remote island villages in Melanesia, and to many grand urban landscapes. When not on the road, he lives in New Orleans. Follow him on www.instagram.com/regisstlouis.



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