

Panama

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Location



The Republic of Panama is located in the center of the Western Hemisphere under the following coordinates: 7°12'07" and 9°38'46" North, 77°09'24" and 83°03'07" West. Its Borders are: to the North, the Caribbean Sea; to the East, the Republic of Colombia; to the South with the Pacific Ocean and to the West with the Republic of Costa Rica.

Panama is the link between Central America and South America, constituting an isthmus of 80 km. wide in its narrower section.

Official Name: Republic of Panama.

Capital: Panama City.

Nationality: Panamanian.

Area, Population and Density: 75,517 square Km; the total population is 2,839,177, 81 persons/square mi.

Age Distribution (%): 0-14 years 37.0%, 15-59 years 56.3%, 60+ years 6.7%

Political Division: 9 provinces and 5 indigenous communities.

Government: constitutional democracy, centralized Republic

Legal System: based on the civilian legal system, judicial revision of legislative acts in the Supreme Court. Accepting international tribunal jurisdiction, except in some instances.

Language: the official language is Spanish. However, many

Panamanians speak English.

Literacy Rate: 90%

Weather: Panamanian weather is tropical, and uniform throughout the year. The average temperature is 27 degrees C.

Religion: there is an absolute freedom of Religion in Panama. Most Panamanians are Roman Catholic. However, due to the diversity in the country, you can find all kinds of temples of worship throughout the country.

Time Zone: the time in Panama all year long is the same as the EST (GMT -5). We do not observe Daylight Savings Time.

Currency: the U. S. dollar. The Panamanian currencies are equivalent in size and value to those of the U. S. A.

Commerce: they are generally open from 9:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. from Monday to Saturday. Some open on Sundays.

Gratuities: from 10% to 15% of the bill, is the suggested amount.

Driving License: the visitors can drive up to 90 days with foreign license.

Electricity: 110 volts; 60 cycles.

Dress Code: light clothing is recommended. Dress attire for business is formal: we recommend a light suit for men and for women a light skirt or pants outfit. You should consider a straw hat and sunglasses if you are going to the beach.

How to get to Panama: the best way to get to Panama is through air travel. Copa Airlines, Continental Airlines, American Airlines, Delta Air Lines and Iberia have daily flights to Panama. If you are driving, you can get here through the Inter-American Highway that runs through Central America. If you are coming by sea, you can disembark in one of our many ports.

History

Due to its geographic location, Panama holds strategic importance. This situation was key to all the countries it belonged to throughout its history. Its shapely silhouette of just 80 miles long in its narrowest areas gives this land the ideal figure to unite two oceans. This fact

peaked Spain's interest since the sixteenth century, turning the country into a crossroad of the seas and an important commercial center for its empire.

Spain transported its riches in ships to the port of Portobelo in the province of Colon. From there, mules and kayaks carried the goods across the isthmus to Panama City for distribution to all its colonies in America.

This concentration of wealth attracted English pirates and mercenaries like Francis Drake, who struck Portobelo in 1596 and Henry Morgan, who burned down the original City of Panama in 1671. The original city was later moved to the Casco Antiguo in the current capital, turning the new city into the focal point for the development of the future republic.

Motivated by the independence of its neighboring countries, Panama declared its own independence from Spain in November of 1821. The decision came as no surprise as communications with Spain had deteriorated long before. However, the independence process was so peaceful that it was commemorated by Simon Bolivar, South America's independence leader.

After its separation from Spain, Panama, voluntarily joined the Great Colombia, Bolivar's dream. Colombia, Venezuela, Ecuador and Panama made up this new nation.

At first, this historic union event greatly benefited Panama, as it gave way to a new vision of Latin American leadership that promoted a great regional development. This moment in time also marked a milestone in the world as the United States were granted permission to build the first intercontinental railway.

However, the Panamanian desire to become a free and sovereign nation and the support of the United States lead Panama to total independence from Colombia on November 3, 1903.

The construction of the Panama Canal by the Americans began in 1904 and it was considered the eighth wonder of the world. The French were the first to engage in this gigantic project, but the climate, tropical diseases and bad management prevented them from finishing the job. The Americans took note the failed attempt and decided to continue with the construction of the Canal and the development of the Canal Zone. This period changed Panama forever, once again turning the country into bridge for the world and cradle of a wealthy economic society.

Today, Panama is one of the most developed countries in Central America, boasting one of the most stable economies and a rapid tourism growth in the Americas. It enjoys a young, new and healthy democracy. It is considered a safe, peaceful and prosperous nation.

Currently, Panama administrates the canal, which undergoes an expansion. This is a country in constant evolution, change and movement, featuring an international banking center, successful law firms, insurance agencies, call- centers, privileged malls, along with a beautiful cultural diversity, enviable ecological wealth and booming tourism.

Culture

Panama has always been a crossroads between cultures, thus earning us the nickname “melting pot”. With a population of almost 3 million people, 67% of it is made up of mestizos (Amerindian mixed with white) and mulattos (white mixed with black); 14% black; 10% white; and 6% Amerindian (indigenous or natives) and a 3% is made up of various ethnic backgrounds. This mix is particularly rich because of culture and traditions it helped establish, each one still respected by Panamanians and foreigners alike.

As a country that respects the right to worship or belief, our country’s population is comprised of an 85% Roman Catholic majority, which is why Christmas and Carnival, that colorful and hectic four-day festivity that precedes Lent, are extensively celebrated in Panama. The Evangelical Christians are next, representing 10 % of the population. The rest of the religious groups are divided into Judaism, Buddhism, Hinduism, the Christian Orthodox and other groups derived from protestant Christianity, such as Jehova’s Witnesses and the Seventh-day Adventists.

Panama’s seven indigenous groups settlements are scattered in semi-autonomous territories. The Ngöbe, Buglé, Naso-Teribe and Bri-bri are the most representative native group in the Western part of the country, in the provinces of Chiriquí, Bocas del Toro and Veraguas. Together, they comprise 70% of the country’s indigenous population. The Eastern side of the Panama is inhabited by the Emberá and Wounaan natives, in the Darien province, and by the Kunas, in the Kuna Yala Region.

Like their ancestors, the Emberá and Wounaan have lived in the tropical forests for centuries. They show an innate understanding and respect for nature, and their wood carving and weaving skills are exquisite. The Kunas, on the other hand, settled along the Caribbean coast and on the islands, and are known for having a stronghold on their traditions and for their molas, handcrafts made from appliqués set

on fabric.

The descendants of African immigrants settled in the Central Regions of Panama and in the Darien Province, where the rhythm of the Bullerengue and the Bunde still evoke the origin of their traditions. Initially, they were brought to the isthmus by the Spanish pioneers to work in the sugar cane plantations. A second migratory wave at the beginning of the 20th century gave way to the blacks from the Antilles to work in the construction of the Panama Canal. This second ethnic group was English speaking and settled in Panama City, Colon and Bocas del Toro. The mestizos and mulattos are the result of years of ethnic and cultural mixing, dispersed throughout Panama. Their folklore is expressed through its music and dances; regional and traditional foods such as arroz con pollo (rice chicken) and sancocho de gallina (chicken soup), while their festive disposition shines through in fairs and festivals, as in their well-known friendliness to foreigners.

Panama has always been and always will be a meeting point for all races and ethnicities. Today, the country is accessible to travelers from any part of the world, always making them feel at home, boasting its traditions and its constant desire to evolve as a culture.