Guide to the Amazing Panama!

What is the first thing that comes to your mind when you think about Panama? No doubt it is the Panama Canal. What else do you know about the seemingly far-away country? What are the attractions and taboos about it? Here are some fast facts and brief tips for you.

Fast Facts about Panama

- **Location:** Central America, bordered by Costa Rica and Colombia
- **Population:** 3,864,000
- **Area:** 75,517 square kilometers (29,157 square miles)
- **Capital:** Panama City
- **Language:** Spanish (Official, 93%)
- **Climate:** Tropical maritime
- **Religion:** Roman Catholic (75% to 85%), Christian
- **Currency:** Dollarized. And official currency Balboa fixed at a rate of 1:1 with US dollar
- **Time Zone:** 5 hours behind Greenwich Mean Time (GMT)

Brief Tips for Travelers

Transportation

1. **Getting to Panama**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Destination</strong></th>
<th><strong>Tocumen International Airport (PTY)</strong></th>
<th><strong>the Marcos A. Gelabert Airport (PAC, Albrook Airport)</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Description</strong></td>
<td>Most international flights go there</td>
<td>From Costa Rica</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Airlines</strong></td>
<td>Copa airlines, Continental, American, Delta, TACA</td>
<td>Air Panama</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2. **Getting around Panama**

- **By taxi** ⭐⭐⭐⭐⭐
  - The best way to get around: cheap, no stress of chaotic city driving.
  - Price: differs from the number of people.
  - Tips: No price on the taximeter, so you need to bargain before it starts.
    - Taxi booking-- RADIO TAXI ITALIA TEL: 270-0563
- **By bus** ⭐⭐⭐⭐
  - Frequent and relatively inexpensive
  - Price: about $2 to $4 per hour, depending on your destination
  - Tips: Panama City’s bus terminal is located adjacent to Albrook Airport.
    - If you are new here, the bus routes might be a little confusing for you.
- **By car** ⭐⭐⭐⭐⭐
  - Adhere to your own schedule, can make pit-stops
Price: about $20 per day

Tips: Speed limits about 60-80 km/hr on major roadways and slower on secondary roads. Car rental kiosks are at both the Tocumen and Albrook airports (name of rental agencies: Alamo, Budget, Dollar, Hertz, National, and Thrifty)

Car rental number ARRENDADORA ECONOMICA--TEL: 800-5257

By walk ✨✨✨✨
Usually not recommended except for the Casco Viejo neighborhood

Price: 0

Tips: most major tourist attractions aren't within walking distance from each other.

Climate and Dress

Tropical maritime climate: Consistent high temperature with daytime 30-33°C and night time around 21-23°C.

Rainy season: May to January, hot, humid, cloudy prolonged

Dry season: January to May, hot and dry

Because of the hot weather, you need to wear light cotton clothing and sunglasses protecting from the sun. But if you want to visit highlands which can be much chillier, you'd better carry a light sweater.

Money and Tipping

Dollarized.

Panamanian balboa: US dollar = 1 : 1 (balboa circulates in denominations of 5¢, 10¢, 25¢, and 50¢ coins. (U.S. coins are in circulation as well.)

Exchange money: Banco Nacional (branching in the airport and across the nation). Or convert your money into dollars before arriving at Panama.

Most businesses won't break US$50 and US$100 bills; you need to prepare for some small change. And Businesses that accept credit cards always accept Visa and MasterCard, and to a lesser extent American Express.

Tipping:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Where</th>
<th>Tips</th>
<th>Remarks</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Restaurants</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>check to see if it's included in the bill</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taxis</td>
<td>optional</td>
<td>round up a dollar or two, especially at night</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guides</td>
<td>US $1 to $2 per person for day tours, US$10 for naturalist guides</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Business Hours

General service on weekdays: 8 am to 1:30 pm and 3 to 5 pm on,

General service on Saturdays: 8 am to noon.

Shops open at 9 or 10 am and close at 6 or 7 pm;
shopping malls close around 8pm. Grocery stores are open 24 hours or 8am to 8pm.

**Electricity**

Electrical plugs are the same as in the U.S., as is Panama’s voltage, 110 AC.

![Electricity Plugs](image)

**Smoking**

All restaurants, bars, and dance clubs are non-smoking, so smokers will have to take it outside. Smoking isn't even allowed in outside dining areas or balconies.

**Food and Water**

It has a mix of African, Spanish, and Native American cuisine

Typical Panamanian ingredients are corn, rice, wheat flour, plantains, yuca (cassava), beef, chicken, pork, seafood, and a large variety of tropical fruits, vegetables and herbs

The water in most of Panama’s major cities and tourist destinations is safe to directly drink, except in Bocas del Toro.

**Telephones**

The cheapest way to phone is to use a prepaid phone card, available in kiosks, supermarkets, and pharmacies.

**To Call Panama from Outside the Country**

First dial the international access code – Then dial the country code (507) followed by the number.

**To Make International Calls from Within Panama**

First dial 00 and then the country code

**For Directory Assistance**

For a number within Panama, dial tel. 102. For assistance with finding an international number, dial tel. 106

**Emergency Number**
For police, dial tel. 104 or 316-0080

For fire, dial tel. 103

For an ambulance, dial Seguro Social at tel. 229-1133, or Cruz Roja at tel. 228-2187

**Lost & Found**

1. Tell all of your credit card companies the minute you discover your wallet has been lost or stolen

2. File a report at the nearest police precinct. Your Credit Card Company or insurer may require a police-report number or record of the loss.

3. Tel. of Credit card company
   - Visa Card: 800/847-2911 in the U.S 410/902-8022 from Panama
   - American Express: 800/111-0006 in the U.S 207-1100 in Panama
   - MasterCard: 800/307-7309 in the U.S 636/722-7111 in Panama

When all banks and American Express offices are closed, you can have money wired to you via Western Union (tel. 800/325-6000; [www.westernunion.com](http://www.westernunion.com))

**Etiquette**

Dress tends to be formal despite the tropical climate.

Men usually shake hands, unless they are close friends or family members, and women usually hug each other or kiss in the cheeks. When shaking hands, don’t do it too firmly, it could be considered as aggressive.

Punctuality is appreciated in business settings, but don’t be surprised if your Panamanian guest shows up 30 or 45 minutes late. Many Panamanians do not like to be bothered on Sunday, so reconsider if calling on this day.

In the San Blas Islands, Kuna Indians frequently request money to have their photo taken.

**Must-see Spots**

**The Panama Canal**—An engineering marvel & most significant waterways!

**Address:** cuts a channel across Panama from Colón (Atlantic) to Balboa (near Pacific)

**Getting there:** by boat, from Balboa in Panama City for 5hr tour through locks to
Miraflores Lake

Casco Viejo-- Latin America's most beautiful Spanish Colonial Neighborhood!

**Address:** the southwestern tip of Panama City, overlooks the Pacific entrance to the canal

**Getting there:** Taking a taxi is safe and rapid, a short 5-10 minutes from the business/hotel district.

Boquete -- the town of eternal spring!

**Address:** on the Caldera River, in western-most Chiriquí Province

**Getting there:** Panama City to David by Air and then to Boquete

Parque Nacional Coiba -- the Gulf of Chiriquí

**Address:** 30 miles off the Panamanian coast in the Gulf of Chiriquí.

**Getting there:** 1 hour long boat ride from Santa Catalina or 2 hours from Boca Chica or Mariato on the West Coast of the Azuero Peninsula

Parque Nacional Darién -- the largest protected jungle paradise in Panama

**Address:** about 325 kilometers from Panama City

**Getting there:** by air to El Real from Panama city or by car to Yaviza and then take a boat to El Real for adventure.
[the article is quoted from Wikipedia, lonelyplanet.com, frommers.com ]