

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 Tavelers

Transportation

1. Getting to Panama

Destination	Tocumen International Airport (PTY)	the Marcos A. Gelabert Airport (PAC, Albrook Airport)
Description	Most international flights go there	From Costa Rica
Airlines	Copa airlines, Continental, American, Delta, TACA	Air Panama

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 **sunglass** 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:

Where	Tips	Remarks
Restaurants	10%	check to see if it's included in the bil
Taxis	optional	round up a dollar or two, especially at night
Guides	US \$1 to \$2 per person for day tours, US\$10 for naturalist guides	

Business Hours

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

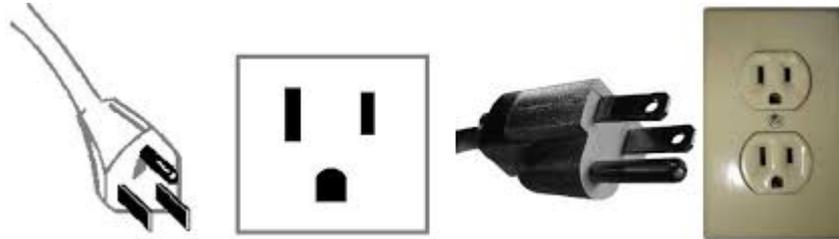
General service on Saturdays: 8 am to noon.

Shops open at 9 or 10am and close at 6 or 7pm;

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.



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)

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 Neighbourhood!



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]