

# HOSPITALITY GUIDE



Overall, Panama's climate is warm and humid year round, with wet and dry seasons. Wet season includes the months of May – December. Temperatures range from 21 – 34 degrees Celsius, with humidity levels around 80%. This holds true for Panama City. Plan to pack light, breathable clothing. Alternatively, the mountain areas of Panama deliver cooler weather.

Panama does not have a postal service, and does not use street addresses for mail or for identifying a business or home location. Panamanians use companies like Mailboxes, Etc, or other private sector mail servicers, to receive packages or mail. Thankfully, these days, we can use phone GPS to guide us to new locations.

The names of the old towns in Panama City can be confusing... Casco Viejo is also referred to Casco Antiguo. Alternatively, Panama Viejo is the site of the original Panama City, and is located on the other side of Panama Bay, on the eastern side of Panama City (see more about this archeological site below).

Coffee is a big deal! Panama is recognized around the world for amazing coffee, and it is grown primarily in Boquete and Volcan, which is on the west side of Panama. There are many family owned coffee farms that can be visited for tours and tastings. Panama is also known for producing Geisha (Gesha) coffee, which is rare and expensive. If you have never tried Geisha coffee, you should try a cup at one of the many coffee shops in Panama City.

The popular "Panama Hat" actually originated in Ecuador. There is very interesting information on the history and culture of this hat, also known as a 'jipijapa' or toquilla straw hat, to be found online. The hat was worn by workers building the Panama Canal, and the hat gained popularity when U.S. President, Theodore Roosevelt, was photographed wearing the hat at the site of the Panama Canal in 1906.



You will see colorful buses around Panama City, known as Diablo Rojos. These are retired United States school buses, who were formerly used in Panama as public transportation. They have since been replaced by modern city buses, but the Diablo Rojo buses are now privately owned, iconic fixtures around Panama. They are

painted with a variety of images and are known for their loud music and engines. You can often hear them late on weekends as party buses. Many times, they are painted with images of family members, historical figures, and patriotic Panama flags. They also are often highly customized, including impressive lighting and sound systems.

- The sun rises and sets over two different oceans in Panama.
- Panama City is the only capital city in the world that has a rainforest within the city limits (Metropolitan Park).
- Panama's currency is the U.S. dollar.
- Diverse climates. Panama's biodiversity has been said to be three times higher than the United States, Canada, and Europe combined. It is home to many tropical birds and other wildlife, like sloths and monkeys. Birding is very popular in Panama.
- Panama is home to the oldest operating railroad.
- Panama has two independence days.
- Panama is not affected by hurricanes.



## PANAMANIAN CULTURE

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Panama has a rich culture of people, food, fashion, sports, music, and history. *"Panama's national outfit is the Gala Pollera and the Montuno... These are hand made by artisans in Panama and many are passed down from generation to generation..."*. [\[link\]](#)

### Communication

It is a good idea to have WhatsApp. This is the way people communicate via voice and text in Panama. We also suggest you check Instagram as it is sometimes more up to date than Google on business hours, etc.

### Safety

Panama, in general, is considered safe. Common sense is key, and use the same caution that you would use anywhere in the world. Walking at night is generally safe, though you might use an uber as an added precaution when you are not familiar with different areas of the city. Violent crimes are rare. Protect your belongings as you would anywhere else. You are safe to drink the tap water in Panama City and in other, more developed, areas of Panama. In rural areas, bottled water would be a safer option.

## SITES / TOURS IN PANAMA CITY

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There are several experiences that can be scheduled on Airbnb, such as food, coffee, chocolate, dancing, history, boat excursions, as well as other online tourism sites.

### The Panama Canal

The Panama Canal is one of the seven Wonders of the World! We will visit the Canal Visitor Center on Wednesday, for those who sign up. There is an IMAX movie, included in the ticket price, which covers the history of the canal in a cinematic way. [\[website\]](#)

### Panama Canal Boat Tour

Another way to explore the Panama Canal. There are different tour operators that you can find online for this experience. This is just one [example](#).



## Ancon Hill

Ancon Hill is the highest point in Panama City. It was formerly a United States military base. This is the location of the iconic Panama flag, which flies over the city. You can “hike” (on concrete) up to the flag, and experience 360 views of the city and the canal along the way. You may also see some wildlife in the jungle that surrounds you on your walk to the top. You can find Airbnb experiences, if you prefer to use a guide, or you can take an uber and make the climb yourself. Tips: Dress for hot, humid weather, and sneakers are recommended. Take plenty of water, and a hat. You will find shade along the track.



## Cinta Costera

The Cinta Costera (Coastal Beltway) is a 7 km (4.3 miles) asphalt track that runs along the waterfront of Panama City. You can walk, or rent bikes or other things like skateboards / rollerblades, etc. [\[Example\]](#)

## Mercado De Marisco (Seafood Market)

This is located right off of the Cinta Costera, and close to Casco Viejo. This is where they bring in the fresh catch of the day. Along with the market itself, there are several outdoor restaurants, behind the market, that sell all kinds of ceviche, as well as other food. This is a great place to sample several different versions of ceviche.

## City Sightseeing Hop-On Hop-Off Bus Tour

Don't waste time planning your own route, just hop on to one of our bus tours and we'll take you to all of the fabulous attractions that Panama has to offer! [\[link\]](#)



## Escape Room Panama

Step into a world of thrilling real-life adventures at Escape Room Panama. Immerse yourself in meticulously decorated spaces, where you'll unlock your problem-solving skills to conquer puzzles and achieve your ultimate goal – escape within the time limit. Whether you're a teenager, adult, or senior, embark on an unforgettable entertainment experience at Panama's #1 rated entertainment center on TripAdvisor. [\[link\]](#)

# NATURE

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## Metropolitan National Park

[Metropolitan National Park](#) has 232 hectares. Hiking trails and other nature / conservation activities. Check the website to confirm hours. Here is the [trail map](#).

## Smithsonian Institute

[Punta Culebra Nature Center](#) is open limited hours and days, so check the website, or call to confirm.

## Monkey Island / Wildlife Boat Tour

There are many of these types of wildlife tours that you can find online. We recommend going in the morning, rather than the afternoon, so that the monkeys are hungry, and therefore more likely to come to the boat for you to feed them.

## Gamboia Sloth Sanctuary

The [Panamerican Conservation Association](#) (APPC) is Panama's leader in wildlife rescue, focusing on sloths in particular. The APPC rescues and cares for sick, injured and orphaned animals, providing long-term care to

those who need it. Through education, we promote environmental awareness and the importance of the community's role in protecting wildlife.

### **Gamboa Tree Trek**

The [Gamboa Tree Trek](#) is a zipline tour with 10 lines, 13 platforms. Located in the old Panama Canal zone, it rests on the corner where the Gatun Lake meets the Chagres River.

## **MUSEUMS**

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### **Interoceanic Canal Museum**

The [Interoceanic Canal Museum](#) in Casco Viejo is located in Casco Viejo and not only has extensive history of the canal but history of Panama. It is not located at the Panama Canal.

### **Biomuseo**

Explore [Biomuseo](#) to learn about Panama's unique impact on the world's biodiversity. Find galleries, interactive exhibits, and an outdoor Biodiversity Park.

### **Panama Viejo – Museum and Archeological Site**

This is the original Panama City, settled in the early 1500's. It is a UNESCO Cultural World Heritage Site. You can explore the ruins of many original buildings. This city was destroyed by the infamous pirate Captain Morgan in 1671. The city was later rebuilt in the location of Casco Viejo. [\[link\]](#)

## **HISTORIC CHURCHES**

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### **Saint Francis of Assisi Catholic Church**

The Saint Francis of Assisi church is located in Plaza Bolivar, next to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Panama and diagonal to the National Theater of Panama. Its opening hours are from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m. everyday. This is the highest point in Casco Viejo. [\[link\]](#)



### **Metropolitan Cathedral of Panama City**

Located in Independence Square, Casco Viejo The cathedral is a fine structure, occupying nearly the whole western side of the Plaza del Catedral; it is built in the old Spanish style, and has on its eastern facing two spires, and several statues, representing the Virgin Mary and the Apostles. It is rich in church ornaments; the decorations are tasteless, and the paintings, excepting the portraits of the Panamanian bishops, which possess some historical interest, without any value.

[\[link\]](#)

### **Iglesia San Jose** (Church of Saint Joseph) (Casco Viejo)

*"The Church of Saint Joseph in Panama City was constructed following the destruction of Panama Viejo in 1671 by Pirates under Captain Henry Morgan and the move by the Order of St. Augustine to the new location of Casco Viejo. The church was inaugurated in 1675.... the church is famous for the Golden Altar which is considered one of the greatest treasures of Panama. The altar is made of carved wood and is covered in gold leaf. Originally this was in a church in Panama Viejo, but when Morgan attacked the city the Jesuits painted the altar black to hide the gold. This deceived the pirates into thinking it was worthless so was not touched...."* [\[link\]](#)



### **Iglesia de la Merced** (Casco Viejo)

Av. Central Espana, Panama, Provincia de Panama, Panama.

This church was also transported from the original Panama Viejo, to its current location in Casco Viejo, after the attack of Henry Morgan in 1671. Franciscan monks transferred the building bricks until they ran out of funds, then they finished the building with wood. The first mass at this location occurred in 1673.

## **TRADITIONAL PANAMANIAN DINING**

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### **El Trapiche**

There are 5 locations, but the Bella Vista location has traditional pollera dancing on weekend nights. You can make reservations on the Open Table app. [\[link\]](#)

### **Fondas**

There are many "fondas" around Panama, and Panama City. Fondas have traditional Panamanian food at a very affordable prices. A meal generally consists of a salad, rice, beans, meat, vegetables, and bread. The food is presented "buffet-style" where you choose which meat, etc, that you want and they fill your plate with your selections. You also will generally be able to choose from an assortment of fresh juices.

### **Empanadas**

El Rey de la Empanada. This is one of the well-known empanada restaurants, with a large selection of flavors, but you will find empanadas served all over the city.

## **ROOFTOP DINING**

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Rooftop dining is a must experiences in Panama City, with many in the Casco Viejo neighborhood.

### **El Faro**

In El Faro life is tastier, good music, drinks, snacks and good vibes. Enjoy panoramic views of the bay and city lights at night. You can also enjoy our incredible restaurant on the 27th floor, with Mediterranean fusion cuisine and a view that will leave you speechless. The Old Town Lighthouse, the new home of Rum. [\[link\]](#)

### **Panaviera**

On the 66th floor of the Ocean Sun Casino of [JW Marriott Panama](#), Panaviera Sky Bar is the highest rooftop restaurant in Central America. This atmosphere has great food and a great view. This is a great place to view the city and waterfront at sunset. There may be a cover charge to enter, and some of the seating here may cost extra. [\[link\]](#)

### **Luna**

360-degree views of modern Panama City. Another great place to view the city at sunset. [\[link\]](#)

## **SHOPPING**

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### **Megapolis Outlets Panama**

Located next to Megapolis Hotel. There is shopping and dining in this area, including Hard Rock Café.

### **Albrook Mall** [\[link\]](#)

The Metro subway line ends here. This is also the main bus terminal for Panama, which is interesting to see. There are 700 stores, as well as many restaurants and walk up “mall food” eateries.

### **Multiplaza Mall** [\[link\]](#)

This is a large mall with many luxury stores, as well as several restaurants.

### **Souvenir Shopping**

You will find an abundance of souvenirs in Casco Viejo. There are also many craft vendors set up in outdoor spaces around Casco Viejo.

**If you can spend extra days in Panama, and we hope you do, consider visiting some lovely areas outside of Panama City. Here are some popular areas to visit.**

## **BEACH TOWNS**

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### **Guna Yala (San Blas)**

an indigenous area with 365 islands and perfect white beaches on the caribbean as well as rich culture. Contact Blanco 6143-7816 and say that LifeBridge sent you, he speaks English. He can set you up with any type of tour you want, from 1 day trip to multiple over nights. [\[pictures\]](#)

### **The “Pacific Riviera”**

The “Pacific Riviera” includes towns such as Nueva Gorgona, Coronado, San Carlos, and Rio Hato, located about an hour and a half west of Panama City (depending on traffic). You will find many lodging options, including hotels, apartments and homes, hostels, and resorts. Online searches will help you discover the best beaches for interests such as surfing, kitesurfing, snorkeling, diving, fishing, and horseback riding on the beach. [\[link\]](#)

### **Pedasi and Tonosi,**

These exotic towns are located in the southern province of Los Santos. This area is 6-7 hours from Panama City.

You can experience the migration of 2,000 humpback whales from July to October. Isla Iguana has the oldest and largest coral reef in the Gulf of Panama. Isla Canas Wildlife Refuge and La Marinera Reserve see the arrival of sea turtles, who nest at the beaches from July to November. According to [Tourismpanama.com](#),

"This is a fascinating phenomenon that only occurs on 14 beaches in the world, and two of them are in Tonosi." [\[link\]](#)

### **Bocas del Toro**

Bocas is a 45-minute flight from Panama City, and is located on the northwest / Caribbean coast of Panama. Bocas has three main islands: Isla Colon, Isla Carenero, and Isla Bastimentos. Isla Colon is the home of Bocas Town, which contains the small international airport, and is the most developed with lodging, stores, restaurants, tours, and activities. The Bocas del Toro area offers many great options for indigenous and Afro-Antillean cultural experiences, diving and snorkeling, hiking and waterfalls, surfing, beaches, and wildlife viewing and conservation. [\[link\]](#)

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## **MOUNTAIN AND VALLEY TOWNS**

### **Boquete**

Boquete is located in a valley of the mountains of Chirqui, in northwestern Panama. Boquete enjoys a cooler climate, with temperatures of 53 °F to 86 °F (12 °C to 30 °C). Boquete is a bustling little town that is extremely popular with expats. It has a surprising number of lovely and diverse restaurants. If you love coffee, Boquete boasts coffee farms, where you can learn more about cultivating, roasting, grinding, packaging, and tasting amazing coffee. The Boquete area offers many other interesting adventures such as climbing and rappelling, hiking, waterfalls, river rafting, and rural and agrarian tourism. [\[link\]](#)

### **El Valle de Anton / Anton Valley**

El Valle is located in the crater of an extinct volcano. It is near the beach towns of the Pacific Riviera. Temperatures here range from 10 to 25 degrees Celsius, and there is no better word to describe El Valle than "lush". There are many wonderful hikes, some of which are strenuous, but all of which are beautiful. Additionally, Chorro El Macho is a massive waterfall, or you can visit local hot springs Los Pozos Termales. There have been great efforts in this region to preserve the Panamanian Golden Frog, which is extinct in the wild, and has been threatened by a fungal pathogen over the last 40 years. There are many restaurants, and a local artisan and produce market in town as well. [\[link\]](#)

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## **EXPERIENCES OUTSIDE OF PANAMA CITY**

### **National Parks in Panama**

There are 13 national and marine parks, and one international park in Panama. [\[link\]](#)

### **Indigenous Communities**

There are seven indigenous communities in Panama, located all over the country. The seven native ethnic groups are Guna, [Naso Tjër Di](#), Ngäbe, Buglé, Bri bri, Emberá and Wounaan. Search online to find tours to learn more about the history and culture of these diverse communities. [\[link\]](#)

### **Fishing**

With world record fishing, more than 2,900 km (1,800 miles) of coastline and the perfect conditions to do it at any time of the year, Panamá is an unparalleled destination for sport fishing. Whether you prefer [deep sea fishing](#), inshore fishing, or are into freshwater fishing, Panama has what you are looking for. [\[link\]](#)

### **Birdwatching**

Panamá is home and a place of pilgrimage to more than 1,000 bird species. The tropical isthmus hosts diverse migratory and endemic birds due to its geographic location between North and South America and the [Pacific](#) and Atlantic oceans. [Panamá](#) is home to 10% of the world's known bird species and 107 endemic species and has more of a variety of birds than the United States and Canada combined. Panamá is also one of the five migratory bird corridors in the world. [\[link\]](#)



## Snorkeling & Diving in Panamá

Discover the magical and incredible Panamanian marine world while snorkeling and diving. Diverse marine wildlife and beautiful sights await you in the [Caribbean Sea](#) and the [Pacific Ocean](#). You don't have to choose between the coasts on your [vacation](#). If you so wish, you can dive or snorkel off the Caribbean and Pacific on the same day; each offers unique experiences not found in the other. With warm temperatures that rarely fall below 24C/75.2F and often reach 30C/86F. Here are the top snorkeling and diving spots in Panamá. *Ray Sanchez at Golden Frog Scuba* [\[link\]](#)

## PRIVATE TOUR GUIDES

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### **Panama Road Trips** - Miguel Ibarra

+507-6678-7855 | [www.panamaroadtrips.com](http://www.panamaroadtrips.com) | Instagram: @nature\_guide\_panama

Miguel is fluent in English and can help with excellent nature tours around Panama and Gamboa, including birding tours, or other city tours. He is originally from Bocas del Toro and also does tours to Bocas del Toro mainland.

### **Inside Panama Tours** - Miguel Samaniego

+507-6840-7706. He speaks English and can be reached via WhatsApp. He can provide Panama City tours, as well as tours to other towns in Panama, including transportation, with advanced scheduling. He has a fleet of vans and buses.