

NORTH AMERICA · BEACHES · ISLANDS · WILDLIFE · HISTORY · HIKING



Panama

Panama links two oceans and two continents in a country you can drive across in about an hour. Watch container ships rise through the canal locks, wander the restored colonial lanes of Casco Viejo, then choose between the Guna islands of the Caribbean, the reefs of Bocas del Toro and the cloud-forest coffee farms of Boquete.

 Before you go, read the UK government's travel advice for Panama and entry requirements (visas, passport validity). Last updated by FCDO 9 October 2026.

 CAPITAL Panama City	 CURRENCY US dollar (USD) £1 ≈ US\$1.34	 LANGUAGE Spanish, English	 BEST TIME Jan–Mar
 DAILY BUDGET £45–£250 ££ Moderate	 PLUGS Type A, B 120V · adapter needed	 FLIGHT FROM LONDON 14h 30m via Amsterdam or Madrid ~£600–£1,100 return	 TIME ZONE UTC-5 standard time

Panama is an S-shaped isthmus where the Pacific and the Caribbean are rarely more than a few hours apart. Panama City is the hub: a glassy skyline, the UNESCO-listed old quarter of Casco Viejo and the canal's Miraflores Locks on its doorstep. From there most itineraries head north-east by 4x4 and boat to the Guna Yala islands, or west along the Pan-American Highway to the highlands of Boquete and on to the Caribbean archipelago of Bocas del Toro, close to the Costa Rican border. Ten days covers city, islands and mountains comfortably.

Panama uses the US dollar, has good main roads and fast internet, and feels more polished than its neighbours, though prices are higher than elsewhere in Central America. The capital has rooftop bars, ceviche counters and a patch of rainforest, Parque Natural Metropolitano, within its limits. Outside the capital the pace slows: Guna communities run their islands on their own terms, and life in Bocas revolves around boats. It suits travellers who want nature without hardship, and pairs easily with Costa Rica; many are surprised by how much wildlife lives within half an hour of the city.

Top 5 highlights



HISTORY

Panama Canal at Miraflores Locks

Watch ocean-going ships squeeze through the 1914 locks from the visitor centre's viewing terraces, with a museum explaining the canal's French failure and American completion. Partial transits by boat give a closer look.



ARCHITECTURE

Casco Viejo

Panama City's old quarter, founded in 1673 on a small peninsula, now restored with plazas, churches, rooftop bars and boutique hotels. Don't miss the golden altar of San José church and sunset from Plaza de Francia.

3

CULTURE

Guna Yala (San Blas Islands)

More than 300 palm-fringed islands off the Caribbean coast, governed by the Guna people. Stays are simple, in thatched huts with fresh fish for dinner, but the snorkelling, colourful mola textiles and quiet are unforgettable.

4

BEACH

Bocas del Toro

A Caribbean archipelago near Costa Rica with stilt-house hotels, coral reefs, starfish-dotted shallows and tiny red poison-dart frogs. Base yourself on Isla Colón and take water taxis to quieter islands such as Bastimentos.

5

ADVENTURE

Boquete and Volcán Barú

A cool highland town among coffee farms famous for Geisha beans. Hike the Quetzal Trail or the Lost Waterfalls, and climb Volcán Barú, Panama's highest point, overnight for sunrise views that can take in both oceans.

Biggest cities

LARGEST CITY

Panama City

≈ 2 million people

A skyscraper capital on the Pacific: stay in or near Casco Viejo, walk or cycle the Cinta Costera waterfront, eat at the Mercado de Mariscos and look for sloths in the Metropolitan Natural Park.

2ND LARGEST CITY

Colón

≈ 190,000 people

The canal's Caribbean terminus, with the Agua Clara visitor centre overlooking the newer locks and the road to Portobelo's Spanish forts; the city itself has little to detain visitors.

3RD LARGEST CITY

David

≈ 120,000 people

A hot, workaday provincial capital in Chiriquí and the transport hub of the west, with an airport and buses to Boquete, Volcán and the Costa Rican border at Paso Canoas.

Ranked by urban-area population where available. Figures are rounded estimates, and sources define city limits differently, so rankings of similar-sized cities can vary.

When to go to Panama

Best time: **Jan–Mar**.

Jan

Feb

Mar

Apr

May

Jun

Jul

Aug

Sep

Oct

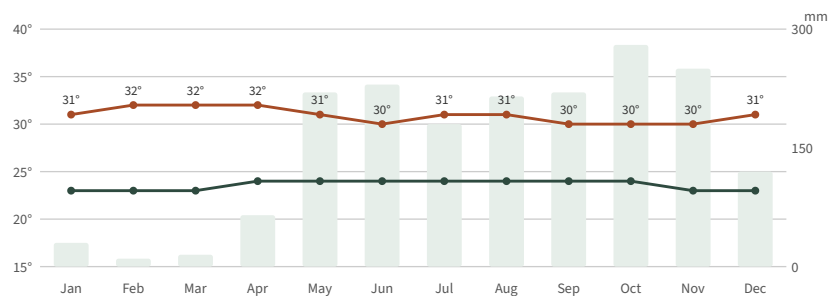
Nov

Dec

■ Best ■ Good ■ Mixed ■ Poor

Average climate in Panama City

— High °C — Low °C ■ Rain (mm)



Festivals & events

Feb–Mar

Carnaval

Four days of parades, water-hosing 'culecos' and rival carnival queens before Ash Wednesday, celebrated most famously in Las Tablas on the Azuero Peninsula; book accommodation well ahead.

May–Jun

Corpus Christi in La Villa de Los Santos

Masked dancers in elaborate devil costumes fill the streets of La Villa de Los Santos for several days, in a religious tradition dating back to colonial times.

Nov

Fiestas Patrias

November is Panama's month of national holidays, including separation from Colombia on 3 November and independence from Spain on 28 November, marked with marching bands and parades nationwide.

How much does Panama cost?

SHOESTRING

£45

per person / day

≈ US\$60.13

hostels, street food, buses

MID-RANGE

£110

per person / day

≈ US\$147

3-star hotels, restaurants, some taxis

COMFORTABLE

£250

per person / day

≈ US\$334

4-star+, guided trips, private transfers

Estimates per person per day, excluding flights. Prices vary by season and city.

Food to try

Sancocho

Panama's national soup: chicken simmered with ñame (yam), corn, onion and fragrant culantro, served with white rice and reputed to cure any hangover.

Ceviche de corvina

Sea bass 'cooked' in lime juice with onion, celery and chilli; order it by the cup at the Mercado de Mariscos in Panama City.

Hojaldras

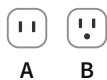
Puffy discs of fried dough, a breakfast staple, eaten with fried eggs, white cheese or a stew of shredded beef (ropa vieja).

Getting around

Panama City has a modern metro, including a branch to Tocumen airport, plus cheap Uber and inDrive rides. Long-distance buses leave the Albrook terminal for David, Boquete and the Costa Rican border. Air Panama flies from Albrook's domestic airport to Bocas del Toro and David. Guna Yala is reached by 4x4 to the port at Cartí and then by boat, usually booked as a package.

Practical information

PLUGS & VOLTAGE



120V — bring a UK-to-A/B adapter

EMERGENCY NUMBERS

Telephone: **911** (ambulance, fire, police)

You can also call specific emergency numbers.

Ambulance: **103**

Fire: **103**

Police: **104**

Panamanian Tourism Authority: Telephone: **+507 6330 2520**

Source: FCDO “Getting help”

DIALLING CODE

+507

TIME ZONE

UTC-5 (standard time)

TAP WATER

Generally safe to drink

DRIVING

On the right

TIPPING

Around 10% is customary in restaurants, but check the bill for a service charge first. Tip guides, boat captains and hotel porters a few dollars.

ETIQUETTE

Panamanians dress smartly in the city, so avoid beachwear away from the coast. In Guna Yala, pay the community fees and ask before photographing people, who may request a small payment.

MAIN AIRPORTS

Tocumen International Airport (PTY), Panama City

Visas & entry for Panama

Shown for a British passport.

No visa needed

You can visit Panama for up to 3 months without a visa if you arrive by land or air. There are different visa requirements for sea arrivals.

You cannot normally extend your stay, unless you apply to change your immigration status (for example, for business purposes or marriage) within the 3 months.

From the UK government's FCDO entry requirements for British passport holders — read the full page for passport validity, permits and exceptions.

Health & vaccinations



See a travel health nurse, GP or travel clinic **6–8 weeks before you go**. Make sure routine UK vaccinations (such as MMR and diphtheria-tetanus-polio) are up to date.

RECOMMENDED FOR MOST TRAVELLERS

Tetanus

Typhoid

SOMETIMES ADVISED — DEPENDS ON YOUR TRIP, ACTIVITIES AND HEALTH

- Chikungunya
- Dengue
- Rabies
- Tuberculosis
- Yellow fever

YELLOW FEVER CERTIFICATE

A yellow fever certificate is only required if you arrive from (or transit through) a country with yellow fever risk — not if you fly direct from the UK. There is a risk of yellow fever in parts of the country — vaccination may be advised.

MALARIA

Low risk of malaria

- There is a low risk of malaria east of the Canal Zone in Panama: awareness of risk and bite avoidance recommended.
- There is a very low risk of malaria west of the Canal Zone: awareness of risk and bite avoidance recommended.
- There is no risk of malaria in Panama City or the Canal Zone itself: bite avoidance recommended.

Source: TravelHealthPro (National Travel Health Network and Centre), checked 21 October 2026. This is a summary, not medical advice.

Public holidays in Panama

The next 12 months. Banks, offices and some sights may close, and transport and hotels get busy around these dates.

Tue 3 Nov 2026	Separation Day
Thu 5 Nov 2026	Colon Day
Tue 10 Nov 2026	Los Santos Uprising Day
Sat 28 Nov 2026	Independence Day
Tue 8 Dec 2026	Mother's Day
Sun 20 Dec 2026	National Mourning Day
Mon 21 Dec 2026	National Mourning Day (observed)
Fri 25 Dec 2026	Christmas Day
Fri 1 Jan 2027	New Year's Day
Sat 9 Jan 2027	Martyrs' Day
Tue 9 Feb 2027	Carnival Tuesday
Fri 26 Mar 2027	Good Friday
Sat 1 May 2027	Labour Day

National holidays only. Dates based on lunar calendars can move by a day or two depending on official announcements.

Useful phrases in Spanish

ENGLISH	SPANISH	SAY IT
Hello	Hola	OH-lah
Thank you	Gracias	GRAH-see-ahs
Please	Por favor	por fah-VOR
Excuse me	Disculpe	dees-KOOL-peh

ENGLISH**SPANISH****SAY IT**

How much is this?

¿Cuánto cuesta?*KWAN-toh KWES-tah*

Know before you go

Carry small US dollar bills: taxis, buses and many shops struggle to change, or simply refuse, \$50 and \$100 notes, especially on the islands.

In Guna Yala bring enough cash for transport, island entry fees and accommodation, as there are no ATMs and card payments are rarely possible.

Buy a rechargeable Metro card at any station in Panama City; it also works on the Metrobus network, whose buses do not accept cash fares.

Visa, health and safety rules change. Before you book or travel, check the FCDO travel advice (gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice) and TravelHealthPro (travelhealthpro.org.uk). Costs are estimates. © 2026 Pick My Trip.