

ABOUT PANAMA

- **Officially name:** Republic of Panama
- **Capital city:** Panama City
- **Area:** 75 420 km²
- **Population of Panama:** 4.10 million people
- **Official language:** Spanish

Various native languages exist such as Kuna and Ngobe-Bugle. Minority urban groups speak Italian, Panama, Greek, Cantonese Chinese and Hindi, among others, giving the capital of Panama City a heterogeneous character. No official census is kept about ethnic groups but unofficial estimates state the population to be around 14% black, 10% white and 6% Amerindian, with the majority belonging to 70% comprised by an interracial of the previously mentioned groups known as mestizo. 85% of the population is Catholic, as the National Constitution acknowledges. 15% is Protestant and small Jewish, Moslem and Hindu congregations co-exist.

- **Currency:** The official currency of Panama is the Balboa, named after Spanish explorer Vasco Núñez de Balboa, who discovered the Pacific Ocean in 1513. One Balboa is divided into 100 cents. Since 1904 one Balboa equals one US Dollar and since then, the US Dollar has legally circulated in Panama. In other words, in practice, the currency used day-to-day in Panama is the US dollar, which is also legal tender. For this reason, Panama is considered a dollarized country and was the second economy in the continent to become a dollarized economy. Currently there are Panamanian coins that have the same weight, size and composition of the coins used in the USA (1, 5, 10, 25 and 50 cents). Panama also has its own \$ 1 coin. For paper money, only the US Dollar is used (there are no paper Balboas).
- **Economy:** From the economic point of view, the Panama Canal plays an important role in the generation of services and jobs. Panama has the largest flag of ships in the world, services represent the largest foreign exchange earnings. Many people are also employed in the Colon Free Zone, as well as in the International Banking Center and in tourist activities. The most exported products are bananas, sugar, coffee and shrimp.
- **Panama Country Code:** +507
- **Internet TLD:** .pa
- **Emergency numbers in Panama:**
 - National police: Tel: 104,
 - Fire: Tel: 103,
 - Ambulance: Tel: 911

- **Electricity:** In Panama the power sockets are of type A and B. The standard voltage is 110 V and the standard frequency is 60 Hz.
- **Time Zone:** the time of Panama is the same as the official time of the East of the United States (GMT- 5)
- **Climate:** Panama has a tropical climate. Temperatures are uniformly high- -as is the relative humidity--and there is little seasonal variation. Diurnal ranges are low; on a typical dry-season day in the capital city, the early morning minimum may be 24°C and the afternoon maximum 29°C. The temperature seldom exceeds 32°C for more than a short time.
- **Driver's license:** visitors can drive up to 90 days with an outside license.
- **Clothing:** light clothing is recommended. Clothing for business is formal: a lightweight jacket is recommended for men and a suit or trouser set for women. A wide-brimmed hat and sunglasses are necessary if you go to the coast.
- **Shopping Centres: Usually** open from 10:00 a.m. until 8:00 p.m. from Mondays to Sundays. The restaurants open from 11:00 a.m. until 10:30 p.m.
- **Tips:** From 10% to 15% of the bill would be advisable.

VISA

ALL VISITORS require a VALID PASPORT (that doesn't expire in the next 3 months) and an ONWARD/RETURN TICKET.

Panama divides tourists into two groups – those that need a tourist visa, and those that only need a passport.

Citizens of the following countries only need a passport to enter Panama: Argentina, Australia, Austria, Belgium, Canada, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Great Britain, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Japan, Luxembourg, Mexico, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Slovakia, South Korea, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Singapore, Taiwan, and the United States. It is important to note, however, that this list can change. Check with your home embassy for the current requirements before traveling.

There are two types of visas for Panama, “stamped visas” and “authorized visas.”

The so-called “stamped visas” let some travelers enter Panama several times throughout the year. This type of visa is only available through a Panamanian embassy or consulate, and the Panamanian authorities decide the length of the stay, which is

usually 30 days per visit. Anyone who is eligible to visit Panama on a tourist card can apply for a stamped visa instead, although citizens of some countries are *required* to have a stamped visa. These countries include the Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Georgia, Peru, Russia, Ukraine, Vietnam, and Zimbabwe. As with other things in Panamanian officialdom, this list is subject to change.

Citizens of some countries are required to have an “authorized visa,” the most restrictive type of tourist visa. Like the stamped visa, this kind is only available through a Panamanian consulate or embassy. The officials will choose to either approve or decline the visa application, and will determine the length of stay. The majority of countries on this list are in the Middle East, Asia, Africa, or eastern Europe. These include Bangladesh, Cuba, Haiti, India, Pakistan, China, and South Africa, although the list is subject to change. The requirements can vary by consulate, so it’s a good idea to check with one before beginning the application process. It’s recommended to begin the application process at least a month before the start of travel.

ARRIVED TO PANAMA

Panama’s main international airport is the Tocumen International Airport (Aeropuerto Internacional de Tocumen), which is 25 kilometers (15 mi) east of Panama City. The airport recently underwent a multimillion-dollar expansion that has made it pleasant, modern and easy to navigate. It has good restaurants and a nice scattering of stores for shopping. Its airport code is PTY.

Upon arriving at Tocumen International Airport it is good to know the particular characteristics of it. Arriving passengers have access to a duty-free zone, some stores are open 24 hours a day. It is located on the upper level, very accessible to make purchases before continuing to immigration and customs at the lower level. The ATP (Tourism Authority of Panama) maintains an office in the customs area, open from 8 a.m. to 12 p.m.

There is a taxi stand in the departure area of the Airport once you pass through Customs. The 30-minute taxi ride from Tocumen Airport to Panama City can cost you around \$ 20. The official fare is \$ 10.00 per person if you share the taxi with four passengers, \$ 14.00 per person if you share it with two passengers and \$ 25.00 per private taxi.

There are buses but they do not pass near the terminal and the bus stop is a considerable distance away on foot. It is not advisable to take a bus.

GEOGRAPHY

Panama is located on the narrowest and lowest part of the Isthmus of Panama that links North America and South America. This S-shaped part of the isthmus is situated between 7° and 10° north latitude and 77° and 83° west longitude. Panama's two coastlines are referred to as the Caribbean (or Atlantic) and Pacific, rather than the north and south coasts to the east is Colombia and to the west Costa Rica.

The Caribbean coastline is marked by several good natural harbors. The numerous islands of the Archipiélago de Bocas del Toro, near the Costa Rican border, provide an

extensive natural roadstead and shield the banana port of Almirante. The over 350 San Blas Islands, near Colombia, are strung out for more than 160 kilometers along the sheltered Caribbean coastline.

The major port on the Pacific coastline is Balboa. The principal islands are those of the Archipiélago de las Perlas in the middle of the Gulf of Panama, the penal colony on the Isla de Coiba in the Golfo de Chiriquí, and the decorative island of Taboga, a tourist attraction that can be seen from Panama City. In all, there are some 1,000 islands off the Pacific coast. The highest point in the country is the Volcán Barú (formerly known as the Volcán de Chiriquí), which rises to almost 3,500 meters. The apex of a highland that includes the nation's richest soil, the Volcán Barú is still referred to as a volcano, although it has been inactive for millennia.

Flag of Panama: The flag of the Republic of Panama is a red, white and blue quartered flag (rectangle divided into four quarters). There are two white rectangles, one blue rectangle (in the lower hoist position) , and one red rectangle (diagonal from the blue rectangle), with a red and a blue star in the white quarters (blue in the top, hoist position). This flag's height is two-thirds the length. The white in the flag represents peace, the blue star stands for purity and honesty (and the Conservative party), and the red star symbolizes authority and law (and the Liberal party).