



# Panama

Panama is renowned for its landmark canal. It also boasts wonderful national parks, unique indigenous communities, untouched islands, amazing volcanic craters, tropical rainforest, enchanting cloud forest and abundant wildlife, including over 900 bird species. Tourism is in its infancy, offering an authentic experience for more adventurous travellers. Also combines well with Costa Rica for an extended stay.

## At a glance

- Home to the Panama Canal, the famous, awe – inspiring feat of engineering often described as the 8th Wonder of the World
- Lake Gatun, part of the Panama Canal and the largest man-made lake in the world
- One of the most biologically diverse areas in the world, including more than 900 bird species
- Many different, beautiful landscapes: cloudforest, rainforest, tropical islands and beaches
- Culturally diverse, with distinct local ethnic communities and many different nationalities represented - historically descendents of the many canal workers and more recently due to the economic boom
- The best time to visit is during the dry season, from November to April. However Panama can be visited year round. Short downpours can occur most days on the Caribbean side even in the dry season
- The average temperature is between 25°-30°C and the humidity is nearly always high in the lowlands

## → Getting there

A number of airlines operate from London Heathrow to Panama City - either via Europe (via Amsterdam with KLM or via Madrid with Iberia) or via the United States (via Newark or Houston with Continental Airlines, or via Miami with British Airways / American Airlines). Regional departures may be available upon request.

Prices from **£2,874** per person for a 14 night itinerary.

See pages 91-92 for suggested itineraries and prices.

## Combinations

Panama can also be combined with trips to **Costa Rica** and/or **Guatemala** in Central America, and South American countries including **Peru** and **Ecuador**.

Please see pages 22–29 for our country combination itineraries including 'Sight and Sounds of Central America' combining Panama and Costa Rica, and 'The Grand Tour of Central America'.





## Panama City

Panama City is unique, located on the shores of the Pacific Coast and only a stone's throw away from some of Central America's richest rainforests. It is a vibrant, cosmopolitan city, combining old Spain with modern America; from the 16th century ruins of Panama La Viejo, to the 17th century Spanish colonial churches of Casco Antiguo, to the 'Manhattan-like' skyscrapers of downtown Panama.

The city was first founded in 1519 by Spanish governor Pedro Arias de Avila. It became the gateway for the Spanish conquest, through which all the treasures of the Inca Empire passed on their way to Europe. However, as a result, it became an area under constant attack and in 1671 Welshman Henry Morgan ransacked the city, leaving nothing but the stone remains of Panama Viejo. A few years later, the city was re-established five miles away at San Felipe, also known as Casco Antiguo. Until recently

this area had fallen into neglect, although today, the buildings are gradually being restored to their former glory. It is now a charming district with cobblestone streets, plazas, churches and convents, home to the Bishop's Palace, cathedral and Governor's House. Panama City can easily be used as a base from which to visit not only the city but also surrounding areas, including the nearby rainforests and the historical sights of Colón Province.



### The DeVille Hotel

Financial District, Panama City **BB**

This exclusive boutique hotel, offers a high level of comfort, luxury and personalised service.

All 33 air-conditioned rooms are spacious and well-equipped, each with a sitting area and spacious marble bathroom with walk-in shower. Slippers, bathrobes, cable TV, coffee-making facilities and minibar are provided. The room types include 2-bedroomed suites, ideal for families.

Buffet breakfast is served in the breakfast room close to the lobby and offers a tasty range of cereals, breads, fruit and hot dishes. The independent restaurant, at the time of publication is due to re-open shortly, and there are several restaurants within walking distance.



### Los Cuatro Tulipanes Boutique Apartments

Casco Antiguo, Panama City **AO**

Fully-furnished boutique apartments in Casco Antiguo, Los Cuatro Tulipanes are located in the heart of the most historical and interesting part of Panama City.

Beautifully restored with features of Casco Antiguo buildings including 17th century 'calicante' walls, the air-conditioned apartments are located in various small residential buildings within the colonial district of Casco Antiguo.

These finely decorated, one, two or three bedroom spacious apartments, are all different, so can be chosen to meet your needs. Breakfast baskets can also be provided on request.



### The Canal House

Casco Antiguo, Panama City **BB**

An elegant, restored, turn-of-the-century mansion, set in the heart of the historic district, this is a unique boutique hotel in Panama City. This property suits those seeking privacy, space, comfort and 24-hour personalised service.

There are three rooms: Gatun Suite (a two roomed suite), Miraflores Suite (with a mezzanine) and the smaller Pedro Miguel Suite. For families, or groups up to ten, the entire house may be let. The house also has a library and a communal dining / sitting room.



## The Panama Canal

The Panama Canal has dominated Panama's recent history. Finally completed in 1914, this celebrated feat of engineering has changed the pattern of shipping forever and given Panama a new international significance and identity.

This narrow part of the isthmus between the Pacific and the Atlantic was originally used by the Spanish conquistadors to transport Peruvian gold to the Caribbean Sea and so the Atlantic Ocean by mule, rather than taking the treacherous and lengthy journey around Cape Horn. In the late 19th Century the French first made an ill-fated attempt to construct the canal but were defeated mainly due to diseases such as malaria and yellow fever. The Americans eventually successfully completed it in 1914, and controlled both the canal and vast tracts of land either side until 1977, when the Torrijos – Carter Treaties paved the way for the transition of control to Panama in 1999.

Approximately 80 kilometers long, the canal uses a system of locks to raise ships from sea level to the artificial Lake Gatun (26m above sea level), cutting through the rocky hills of the Continental Divide. The water used in the locks comes from the River Chagres that feeds Lake Gatun. Visitors can experience the canal by boat by taking either a partial transit (half day) or a full transit (a full day tour taking in the whole canal) which take place on set days each month. The Visitors' Centre at Miraflores Lock also offers both a good insight into the construction of the canal, and a wonderful view of the huge container ships passing through the Miraflores Lock.

### Useful Notes

#### Did you know?

- Over 14,000 vessels use the canal each year.
- The cruise ship, the Crown Princess, paid the highest toll ever to transit the canal at over £76,000.
- A ship travelling from New York to San Francisco saves 7,872 miles - and a lot of time - using the Panama Canal instead of sailing around the tip of South America.

- Each time a vessel transits the canal, 202,000 m<sup>3</sup> of water is passed from Lake Gatun into the ocean.

#### Suggested Excursions:

- Emberá Indian village tour - Chagres National Park
- Panama Canal visitor centre – Miraflores Lock
- Barro Colorado Island - a living tropical laboratory
- Spanish forts of Portobelo and/or San Lorenzo

## National Parks of Panama City Province

The Panama Canal relies on local heavy rainfall and there are many protected rainforests in the Panama City province, offering visitors ample opportunities for hiking and wildlife viewing. These include the Chagres National Park, home to the Emberá community, the Campana National Park and the vast tropical rainforest of the Soberanía National Park.

The Soberanía National Park boasts a spectacular variety of wildlife, with over 100 mammal species and 70 reptile species, in addition to top birding trails, including the famous Pipeline Road. The Rainforest Discovery Centre, is a perfect spot for birdwatchers. This new ecotourism and

environmental educational facility, adjacent to the Soberanía National Park, also offers forest trails for birding. There are numerous hiking trails, including sections of the original Las Cruces Trail, the former trading route once used by the Spanish.



Roof terrace at Canopy Tower

### Canopy Tower

Soberanía National Park **FB**

A birdwatcher's paradise, Canopy Tower is a unique ecolodge set in the heart of the Soberanía National Park, only a 30-minute drive from Panama City. Originally a US Air Force radar station, it was converted to an ecolodge in 1999. The roof-top viewing deck offers breathtaking 360° views over the canopy, the Panama Canal and city skyline in the distance. At night, the view is spectacular and from early in the morning the canopy is alive with birds.

The 12 bedrooms, situated on the first and second floors, are simple yet comfortable with large windows, ceiling fans and bathrooms (single rooms are basic and share a bathroom). There are two suites - the Blue Cotinga Suite with hammock and balcony and the Harpy Eagle Suite. Stays (minimum stay three nights) include a guided half day tour in the Soberanía National Park.



### Gamboa Rainforest Resort

Gamboa **BB**

Gamboa Rainforest Resort offers a wonderful alternative to staying in Panama City, just 45 minutes away. Located in the heart of the Soberanía National Park and by the magnificent Chagres River, it is also well located for taking either the partial transit or the full excursion on the nearby Panama Canal, and for exploring the local area. Each of the 90 air conditioned rooms has a private balcony with views over the gardens to the river, and to the dense forest beyond. Families can also stay in the historic villas behind the main building.

The hotel has three restaurants, including Los Lagartos by the hotel marina. There are also 2 bars: Monkey Bar in the spacious hotel atrium overlooking the river; and La Cascada Snack Bar by the large swimming pool in the extensive gardens. Tours and activities can be pre-booked, or arranged through the hotel (payable locally).



## El Valle

Only two hours drive west of Panama City, El Valle is a picturesque mountain town, nestling within a vast, extinct volcanic crater, the second largest such crater in the world. Surrounded by steep mountainsides, jagged peaks and verdant countryside, filled with an abundance of colourful flowers and fruit trees, El Valle makes for spectacular scenery and a tranquil stay.

There is plenty to see and do whilst in El Valle, whether it be bird-watching (several hummingbird species), visiting the petroglyphs, white water rafting, relaxing on nearby sandy beaches, hiking in lush woodland or horse-riding. Relaxing in

a hammock is the way of life in El Valle and these are plentiful (and offer excellent value) in the local shops. The climate in El Valle is pleasant and much cooler than that in Panama City although, again, be prepared for showers at any time.



### Canopy Lodge

El Valle **BB**

Set in a verdant canyon about 3km above El Valle, this is the sister hotel to the Canopy Tower. Run by owners Raul Arias and his wife, this charming, small hotel is built next to a serene mountain stream and adjacent to the protected area of Cerro Gaital Natural Monument. It offers guided bird watching tours (payable locally) and allows the guests to spot an abundance of bird species even just in the extensive gardens. There is also a fresh water swimming pool in the grounds.

All eight ensuite rooms are spacious, light and airy, with stone floors, white-washed walls and large French windows with balcony overlooking the surrounding cloud forest. There are also 4 single en-suite rooms in the gardens. Enjoy freshly baked pastries at breakfast and delicious meals served in the restaurant. Includes a half-day guided tour in the area. Minimum 3-night stay.



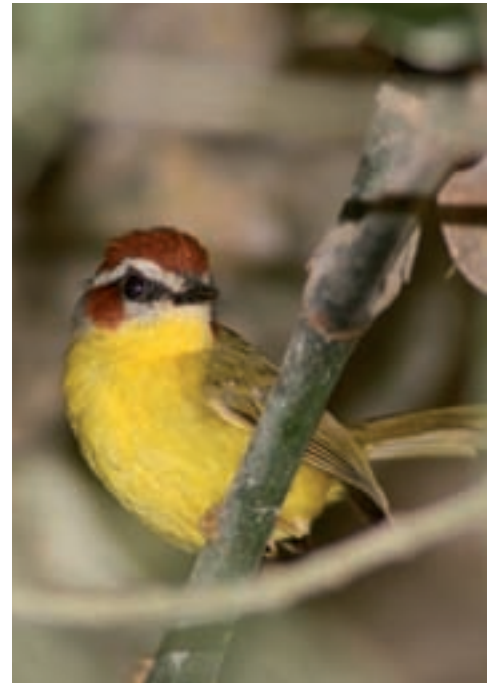
### Park Eden

El Valle **BB**

Set amidst two acres of lovely lush, green gardens, this is a truly beautiful and peaceful family owned getaway in the picturesque valley town of El Valle. There are eight spotlessly clean, characterful rooms, some in one and two-bedroomed apartments. Some rooms have air-conditioning and can be requested.

Within the luscious gardens of Park Eden alone over 80 species of birds have been spotted which shows the diversity of area.

The warm, generous hospitality of the hosts, Lionel and Monica Alemán Toledano, makes for a truly pleasurable and relaxed stay. Such is the hospitality here that many guests have been returning year after year becoming firm friends with Lionel and Monica.



### Useful Notes

#### Suggested Excursions:

- Chorro El Macho -100ft waterfall
- Walking
- Cycling

#### The Sleeping Indian Girl

This is the name given to one of the peaks surrounding the volcanic crater of El Valle. The silhouette of the mountain resembles a girl lying on her back gazing at the skies. According to legend, she is the symbol of true love!

#### The Sunday Handicraft Market of El Valle

The Indian arts and handicraft market is renowned, especially on Sundays, when the Indians - notably the Ngöbe Bugle, Emberá and Wounaan - arrive, bringing with them fresh vegetables, fruit, flowers and handicrafts.





## The Azuero Peninsula

This is a beautiful and remote region on the Pacific side of Panama, with pristine beaches and strong folkloric traditions. Although the Azuero Peninsula was one of the first regions of Panama to declare independence from Spain, this province takes great pride in its Spanish history and, as a result, celebrates festivals dating back to the time of the first settlers.

Pedasi, at the south-eastern tip of the peninsula, serves as an ideal base from which to explore some of its most beautiful beaches and also the nearby wildlife reserve of Isla Iguana. Isla Iguana, a 25-minute boat ride from Pedasi, is a protected island which attracts large numbers of birds including frigates, gulls and

oystercatchers and also offers excellent snorkelling and diving. The best time of the year for diving is between April and December. Humpback whales may also be spotted as they migrate from South America to the warmer waters of the tropics from July to September.



### Casa de Campo

Pedasi **BB**

In almost 2 acres of land on the outskirts of the relaxed village of Pedasi, this lovely boutique style hotel offers a unique and comfortable stay. The extensive communal areas are open plan and decorated in a pleasing mix of antique and contemporary styles. These include several sheltered open air sitting areas around the main house, in the gardens, and by the pool.

There are six rooms, two in the main house that can be combined as a family suite, and four contemporary rooms around the swimming pool. The contemporary rooms include a junior suite and a master suite. All are air conditioned. With its wonderfully personalised service this exceptional hotel is a great base for exploring all that the local area has to offer.



### Villa Marina

Playa Venado **BB**

Looking out to sea over 2 kilometres of privately-owned beach, Villa Marina offers a relaxing, off the beaten track beach stay. Built in a colonial style and set in 160 acres, this simple, friendly hotel offers an outdoor dining area, a cosy bar (also with some outside seating), an indoor communal sitting and dining area, a fresh water swimming pool and easy access to the beach.

The nine air-conditioned rooms are in three areas of the hotel: two in the main house, four around a small courtyard and four new rooms in the garden with a communal terrace and views to the sea.

For those wanting some activity there are many possible excursions. There are also several local restaurants within walking distance.



### Useful Notes

#### Suggested Excursions

- Historical & folkloric tours - learn about the regions traditional dances and costumes
- Isla Iguana - spectacular snorkelling and diving
- Beautiful beaches
- Cycling
- Surfing





## Boquete

### Chiriquí Province, The Highlands of Western Panama

A one hour flight from Panama City, and only 50 minutes drive from David airport, the picturesque mountain village of Boquete is one of the most beautiful, pristine regions of the country. It is situated on the edge of the cloud-forest, at approximately 1,000m, on the slopes of the extinct Baru Volcano, Panama's highest peak.

Boquete is wonderful for those seeking complete immersion in nature. It is perfect for walking or bird watching (the famous and resplendent Quetzal can be seen here throughout most of the year) and generally escaping the oppressive heat of the lowlands. Thanks to the altitude, it benefits from a comfortable climate all-year-round, with an average

temperature of 20°C, cooling off at night. Home to vast coffee plantations producing the country's finest coffee, Boquete's rich soil also produces citrus fruits, vegetables and an abundance of flowers which fill the region with colour. It takes great pride in its fine produce and every January the village hosts a renowned flower and coffee fair.



#### Finca Lérida

Boquete **BB**

Finca Lérida is one of Boquete's oldest and most traditional Coffee Estates. Located in the highlands of Boquete at an altitude of approximately 1600m above sea level, Finca Lérida is set within an 800 acre private nature reserve. Birds are in abundance including the resplendent Quetzal. Recently built, the lodge offers eleven spacious and pleasantly decorated double rooms, each with private bathroom, porch and stunning views of the valley and surrounding mountains.

Finca Lérida offers an in-depth coffee tour for those interested in learning more about coffee, including a visit to the original processing plant. After a day of birding, hiking, walking or just relaxing, enjoy excellent home-cooked meals in the Coffee House. John Collins and his wife Zoraida are both excellent hosts, making for a very enjoyable stay. Highly recommended.



#### Panamonte Inn & Spa

Boquete **BB**

Situated close to the fast flowing Rio Caldera on the outskirts of the small town of Boquete, this lovely colonial style hotel offers a wonderfully relaxing stay. From the mature gardens you can enjoy views to the foothills of Volcan Baru while enjoying a drink at the garden bar. Meals can be taken at leisure in the traditional á la carte restaurant or in the bar.

The 25 rooms are a mixture of the original standard rooms, and newer garden terrace rooms, junior suites and honeymoon suites. There are also rooms in a family apartment.

All the rooms feature telephones, hairdryers, air-conditioning, safes and satellite television.

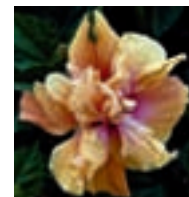
For a real treat the Panamonte Spa offers a range of massages and treatments.



#### Useful Notes

##### Suggested Excursions in Boquete

- Coffee tours
- Hiking - Baru National Park / La Amistad National Park
- Bird-watching
- Orchid farms



##### Chiriquí White Water Rafting – Grade III-V

Chiriquí offers some of the most stunning waterways and top rafting in Central America thanks to its climate and mountainous topography. Run the rapids whilst admiring the surrounding lush, verdant forests and spotting beautiful animals such as kingfishers, cormorants and iguanas. Suitable for all levels of ability, it makes for an enjoyable adventure and a memorable part of your holiday. It can be done all-year-round, although the rapids are faster from June to December. Please ensure that your holiday insurance covers this.



Underwater Photo © Graham Smith

## Isla Boca Brava

### Boca Brava Island, Chiriquí Archipelago

This virtually uninhabited island, a short boat ride from the mainland, lies on the edge of the Chiriquí Archipelago, a marine national park that extends over 14,740 hectares. The archipelago, in the Pacific Ocean, consists of over 100 islands, most of which are forested and home to an abundance of wildlife including monkeys, raccoons and ant-eaters. Turtles, whales and dolphins are amongst marine life found here.

Isla Boca Brava is a small island yet there is something for everybody whether it be simply relaxing on a palm-fringed, deserted beach or participating in an activity such as snorkelling, scuba diving, hiking or surfing. Nearby uninhabited islands such as Linarte, Saino and Las

Ventanas offer idyllic, clear waters. Isla Bolaños, 13 kilometers from Boca Brava, is another lovely, deserted island with two sandy beaches, lots of coconut palms and excellent snorkelling.



### Cala Mia

Isla Boca Brava **IB**

Located on the tip of the pristine island, Isla Boca Brava, Cala Mia is a boutique eco-resort surrounded by beautiful palm-lined beaches. Cala Mia consists of eleven one-bedroomed and two-bedroomed bungalow suites with either king-sized or twin beds. Each beautifully thatched suite has been tastefully and individually decorated with furniture and woodwork that has been specially designed and handcrafted by local artisans. All suites have an outside sitting area, hammock, ceiling fan and bathroom with shower and are located close to the ocean, some even with private access to the beach.

The bar and restaurant enjoy fine views of surrounding islands and bays, as well as the resort's private beach and pool. Use of sea kayaks, surf boards and snorkelling

equipment are all included in the price. There is also a spa and yoga exercise room on a small neighbouring island, accessible by a hanging bridge (payable locally).

Whilst offering comfort and luxury to its guests, Cala Mia also allows for complete immersion in nature, being surrounded by birds, monkeys, dolphins, turtles, etc. Entirely solar-powered, Cala Mia offers a 'green' and environmentally friendly environment. The hotel supports local indigenous communities, to which it donates 5% of its room rate, and also participates in various eco initiatives.

Highly recommendable for a luxurious Robinson Crusoe experience.



## The Archipelago of Bocas del Toro

### The Caribbean Coast

Bocas del Toro is a vast archipelago situated to the far north west of Panama on the Caribbean side. It has an average temperature of 27°C and rain is to be expected at all times of the year, although the months of February to April and September/October are the drier months.

Home to the indigenous community of the Ngöbe Bugle, this region quickly prospered in the early part of the 20th century with the banana industry. Today, the banana industry has been largely replaced by the tourism industry and, in some areas, real estate.

Bocas del Toro comprises a diverse range of landscapes, from lush jungles and dense rainforests, to mangrove islets and deserted white sand beaches. It consists of many small,

uninhabited islands and six large, forested islands, including Colón and Bastimentos. The Archipelago is home to Isla Bastimentos National Marine Park which is over 13,200 hectares and full of diverse marine life and a variety of ecosystems. Within recent years some areas of Bocas del Toro have seen a high level of development however, it is still possible to escape the crowds and find solitude on a scenic beach.



### Tranquilo Bay

Bastimentos Island **FB** 3 - 6 night packages

This family friendly, secluded lodge is set in over 100 verdant acres on the peaceful Bastimentos Island, with views overlooking the turquoise waters of the Caribbean. Its central location in the archipelago allows for easy exploration of many of the islands, beaches and reefs which are on offer and to participate in the many excursions from jungle hikes to bird watching and kayaking.

American owned and influenced, the lodge includes 6 cabanas, 4 with ocean view and 2 with jungle view. All spacious cabanas are ensuite and the terraces feature either chairs and/or hammocks to relax in. The main lodge is where all meals are served, and features a relaxing bar and library. Please note that there are a number of steps up to the main lodge. This lodge comes highly recommended.



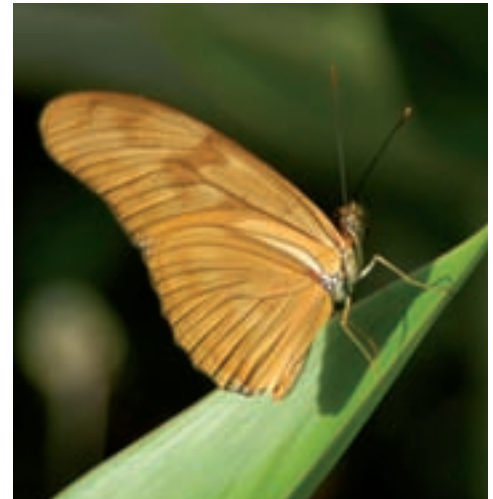


Colón Island is the most visited and developed of the islands - the only island, in fact, with paved roads. The hub of the region lies on this island at Bocas Town which has a laid-back, Caribbean atmosphere and rustic charm. It also has wide range of restaurants to choose from of an evening.

Colón Island is also home to the majority of dive operators, thanks to its proximity to favourite diving spots known for their colourful coral, sponges, tropical fish including angel fish and parrot fish, plus moray eels and nurse sharks. The quieter, less developed neighbouring island of Bastimentos offers a pleasant place in which to

relax and enjoy beautiful parts of this region. Accessible only by boat, Bastimentos is home to the national marine reserve and to some of the best beaches.

NB. Bocas del Toro is ideally suited to the independent traveller who is happy to accept the easy-going nature, rusticity and natural beauty of this region. It does not, however, have the services, infrastructure or luxuries offered by four or five star resorts. However the hotels we have chosen offer good service and comfortable accommodation.



### La Loma Jungle Lodge and Cacao Farm

Bastimentos Island **FB**

Set in 23 hectares on Bastimentos Island, this is a beautiful retreat only five minutes' boat-ride from white sandy beaches and the National Marine Reserve. This idyllic jungle lodge offers peaceful isolation from the bustle of Bocas Town and serves as a perfect setting for those wishing to escape everyday life, to participate in tropical farm life and get closer to the natural environment. Nestling in the verdant jungle, it has three individual, secluded 'ranchos' each with private bathroom (hot water and shower), king-sized bed and furniture crafted from local materials. Two of the three ranchos are accessed by a moderately steep 5-7 minute climb so guests need to be fairly fit. The lower one has electricity. The lodge actively supports the local Ngöbe Bugle community. Early booking advisable.



### Punta Caracol Aqua Lodge

Colón Island **HB**

This deluxe, family-run eco-lodge has 9 waterfront cabanas - 5 standard suites, 3 Luna suites and 1 master suite. Each has a king-sized bed on the upper floor with a beautiful view of the bay through a window in the palm roof, a private bathroom with shower on the ground floor and an outdoor platform from which a ladder leads directly into the crystal-clear water below. The Luna Suites have a larger terrace in addition to a hammock and hanging chair. The Master Suite has several terraces, a king-sized bed on the upper floor, four single beds and private bathroom on the lower floor and a hammock and hanging chair. A water taxi to Bocas Town costs approximately \$30 each way. Perfect for honeymooners or couples simply wishing to escape the noise and chaos of modern-day life.

#### Useful Notes

##### Suggested Excursions:

- Bastimentos Tour – snorkelling, dolphin spotting, etc.
- Beach tours
- Scuba diving
- Bird-watching tours
- Salt Creek (Ngöbe Bugle community)

##### Scuba Diving

Suitable for all levels of ability, scuba diving in Bocas del Toro offers a variety of exciting, beautiful dive sites including wrecks, volcanic rock formations, caves and walls. The majority of dive sites are no further than 30 minutes boat ride from Bocas Town. Please note that diving here is quite a 'rustic' dive experience - in terms of the level of comfort, facilities, amenities and equipment provided - and is a very different type of diving experience when compared to that offered in other Caribbean resorts. Please call our office for further information.

##### The Wekso Project, La Amistad National Park

Set in the tropical forest of the Talamanca Mountain Range, this ecotourism project gives a glimpse of the unique way of life of the Naso Indians. Home to the Harpy Eagle, the Quetzal and the Giant Anteater, this tour also allows for some excellent birding - this forest is at the convergence point for 75% of all migratory birds in the Western Hemisphere.





## The Archipelago of San Blas - Kuna Yala

The San Blas archipelago is an unspoiled paradise consisting of nearly 400 beautiful, palm-fringed islands, of which only 51 are inhabited. Extending 200 miles along the Caribbean coast, from Colón Province to the Colombian border, it has a population of approximately 50,000 Kuna Indians.

The Kuna - a fiercely independent, indigenous community - has resisted change to its culture ever since the Spanish invasion over 500 years ago. Today this is an autonomous province with its own laws, language, customs and culture, governed by the Kuna General Congress. Each of the 49 communities is led by a political and spiritual leader who, with his counsellors, makes political decisions and manages social affairs. The Kuna women take great pride in their appearance, decorating themselves with gold nose rings and bands of beads on their arms and legs and wearing clothes decorated with colourful, individually-designed applique, known as molas.

Today, the Kuna still live and work in much the same way as they did in pre-Columbian times, relying heavily on plantains, coconuts and fish both for their diet and main source of income. Naturally tourism, albeit very controlled, is starting to play an increasingly significant role, giving

visitors a fascinating and unique cultural experience. Daily excursions include snorkelling, visits to local communities, river trips and jungle walks. Note that scuba diving is prohibited and that you will be charged for taking photographs of the Kuna Indians (\$1 per photograph).

Accommodation in San Blas is basic yet comfortable. The lodges are generally small - a handful of wooden, thatched cabins each simply furnished with bed, bathroom and porch with hammock. Electricity is available for a few hours each evening but it is recommended to take a torch. Cabins are cooled by sea breezes. Meals are served at set times of the day often signalled by the sound of a conch shell. Fresh fish is the main ingredient and there is no choice - just a set meal. The region is reached by early morning daily flight from Panama City. The flight is on a small plane and takes about 50-70 minutes (depending on the number of islands on which the plane touches down en route).



### Akwadup Lodge

Achutupo Island  (drinks not included)

Positioned a short 15 minute boat journey from Achutupo village, Akwadup Lodge has a remote and peaceful setting on a small island. There are 7 rustic cabañas, all on stilts which overlook the ocean and idyllic palm trees with a board walk connecting them to the mainland. The cabañas are ensuite (with shower) and feature double or twin beds with mosquito net, a fan and a balcony with hammocks to relax in and watch the sunset.



Activities include snorkelling and Kuna community village tours. Fishing can be booked and paid for locally.

The rustic and simple setting of the lodge adds to the adventure. For those wanting a better understanding of the Kuna culture and a peaceful relaxing stay, this lodge is recommended for a stay of 2 or more nights.





## Suggested Itineraries

Please find below a selection of suggested itineraries which can be adjusted to suit individual requirements. These itineraries are aimed at individual travellers (based on 2 sharing), not group departures. For group quotations or single supplements, please contact us.

Accommodation is on a bed and breakfast basis (unless stated otherwise) based on 2 persons sharing a standard room. All pre-booked excursions include an English speaking guide. Some transfers and excursions are operated by lodges/hotels and thus on a shared small group basis. Other transfers and excursions are on a

private basis unless stated otherwise. There is a strict luggage restriction of 12kg / 27lb per person on most internal flights. Excess luggage may either remain with our agent in Panama City or can be couriered to your destination if on the mainland. It may also be possible to take excess luggage on the flight -

approximately \$1 per extra lb but this is at the airline's discretion.

Please see page 92 for prices. Prices include international flights from London Heathrow with Iberia (via Madrid).

### Off the Beaten Track

14 NIGHTS

This itinerary is ideal for those wishing to experience the real Panama.

- Panama City (Casco Antiguo) 3 nights AO
- San Blas Archipelago 3 nights FB (excursions included, drinks not included)
- Isla Boca Brava 3 nights HB
- Bocas del Toro 4 nights FB (snorkelling & kayaking equipment included)
- Panama City 1 night BB

**Day 1** Met at airport. Private transfer to Casco Antiguo. Overnight in Los Cuatro Tulipanes AO. (Breakfast hamper provided for first morning)

**Day 2** Half day privately guided city tour including Casco Antiguo and the Panama Canal visitors centre at Miraflores Lock. Overnight in Los Cuatro Tulipanes AO

**Day 3** Private guided full day tour to Gatun Lake & hiking in Sobernia National Park. Includes lunch. Overnight Los Cuatro Tulipanes AO

**Day 4** Private transfer to domestic airport. Flight to Achutupo. (NB Luggage allowance of 11kg. Excess luggage can be left in Panama City). Transfer to Akwadup Lodge by small boat. Overnight Akwadup Lodge FB including excursions (drinks not included)

**Day 5** Local excursions with Akwadup Lodge

**Day 6** Local excursions with Akwadup Lodge

**Day 7** Transfer to airstrip by small boat. Flight to Panama City. Connecting flight to David (NB Luggage allowance 13.5kg. Excess luggage can be left in Panama City). Speedboat transfer to Boca Brava. Overnight Cala Mia HB

**Day 8** Full day group excursion to Gamez and Bolanos Islands including an opportunity to snorkel and lunch. Overnight Cala Mia HB

**Day 9** Day at leisure. Overnight Cala Mia HB.

**Day 10** Group transfer by small boat to Boca Brava. Private transfer to Almirante. Transfer by small boat to La Loma Jungle Lodge FB (including snorkelling and kayaking equipment)

**Day 11** Day at leisure. La Loma Jungle Lodge FB

**Day 12** Day at leisure. La Loma Jungle Lodge FB

**Day 13** Day at leisure. La Loma Jungle Lodge FB

**Day 14** Transfer by small boat to Bocas del Toro. Flight to Panama City (NB Luggage allowance of 13.5kg). Private transfer to Panama City. Overnight Deville Hotel BB

**Day 15** Private transfer to airport

### Discover Panama - Fly Drive

14 NIGHTS

A great itinerary for those who wish to see the highlights of Panama. Fly drive (private transfer option available on request).

- Gamboa 3 nights BB
- El Valle 2 nights BB
- Pedasi 3 nights BB
- Boquete 2 nights BB
- Boca Brava 3 nights BB
- Panama City 1 nights BB

**Day 1** Met at airport. Private transfer to Gamboa. Overnight Gamboa Resort BB

**Day 2** Half day privately guided city tour including Casco Antiguo and the Panama Canal visitors centre at Miraflores Lock. Overnight Gamboa Resort BB

**Day 3** Full day privately guided tour to Viejo Panama, Portobello & San Lorenzo including Panama Canal Train (Monday to Friday only). Includes lunch. Overnight Gamboa Resort BB

**Day 4** Collect hire car (Toyota Yaris or similar, with CDW & insurance) & self drive to El Valle. Overnight Eden Park BB

**Day 5** Day at leisure to explore El Valle. Overnight Eden Park BB

**Day 6** Self drive to Pedasi. Overnight Villa Marina BB

**Day 7** Day at leisure to explore local area and islands, and enjoy beach. Overnight Villa Marina BB

**Day 8** Day at leisure to explore local area and islands, and enjoy beach. Overnight Villa Marina BB

**Day 9** Self drive to Boquete (approx 7 hours). Overnight Finca Lerida BB

**Day 10** Half day group guided nature walk in cloud forest. Includes lunch. Overnight Finca Lerida BB

**Day 11** Self drive to David to drop off car. Speedboat transfer to Isla Boca Brava. Overnight Cala Mia BB

**Day 12** Group full day excursion to Gamez island. Includes opportunity to snorkel and lunch. Overnight Cala Mia BB

**Day 13** Day at leisure to relax or explore islands. Excursions available (payable locally). Overnight Cala Mia BB

**Day 14** Transfer to Boca Chica on mainland by small boat. Private transfer to David airport. Fly to Panama City. (NB Due to 13.5 kg luggage allowance on this flight you may wish to courier excess luggage to Panama City from David). Private transfer to city. Overnight Deville Hotel BB.

**Day 15** Private transfer to the airport.

### Panama In Comfort

15 NIGHTS

This itinerary takes in the highlights of Panama while staying at some of Panama's best boutique hotels.

- Panama City – Casco Antiguo 3 nights BB
- El Valle 3 nights FB (including 2 daily excursions)
- Azuero Peninsula 3 nights BB
- Boquete 2 nights BB
- Bocas del Toro 3 nights FB (including drinks and a daily excursion)
- Panama City 1 night BB

**Day 1** Met at airport. Private transfer to Casco Antiguo. Overnight in Canal House, Gatun Suite BB

**Day 2** Half day privately guided city tour including Casco Antiguo and the Panama Canal visitors centre at Miraflores Lock.

Overnight in Canal House BB

**Day 3** Full day privately guided tour to Viejo Panama, Portobello & San Lorenzo including Panama Canal Train (Mondays to Fridays only). Includes lunch. Overnight in Canal House BB

**Day 4** Private transfer to El Valle. Overnight in Canopy Lodge FB including excursions

**Day 5** Excursions with Canopy Lodge

**Day 6** Excursions with Canopy Lodge

**Day 7** Private transfer to Pedasi option to take lunch en route (payable locally). Overnight Casa del Campo, junior suite BB

**Day 8** Group guided excursion to Isla Iguana. Casa del Campo BB

**Day 9** Day at leisure. Excursions available (payable locally). Casa del Campo BB

**Day 10** Private transfer to Boquete (approx 7 hours) visiting San Francisco church en

route. Overnight Panamonte Inn, garden terrace room BB

**Day 11** Half day private guided nature walk. Panamonte Inn BB. (Send excess luggage back to Panama City so only carrying 13.5kg)

**Day 12** Private transfer to La Escapada. Transfer to Tranquilo Bay by small boat. Overnight Tranquilo Bay FB with a daily excursion

**Day 13** Excursion with Tranquilo Bay

**Day 14** Excursion with Tranquilo Bay

**Day 15** Transfer to airport by small boat and taxi. Fly to Panama City (NB Luggage allowance 13.5kg). Private Transfer to Deville Hotel. Reunited with excess luggage Overnight Deville Hotel BB

**Day 16** Private transfer to airport



## Panama Suggested Itinerary Prices and General Information

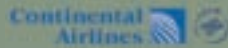


### Flight Details

We offer a choice of services to Panama. Some of the airlines offer departures from regional airports at no extra cost. As an independent operator, we are not tied to any particular carrier and we are more than happy to give our honest opinion (from personal experience) of their respective services. We always endeavour to offer the carrier offering the best value for money at any given time of year.

These details are correct at the time of going to press. However, all timings and routings are subject to change and will be confirmed at the time of booking. UK airport departure tax has been included in all prices. Supplements for Business Class are available on request.

**D** = Departure time      **A** = Arrival time



Daily		Daily	
<b>D</b> Heathrow	12.05	<b>D</b> Panama City	09.55
<b>A</b> Newark	15.15	<b>A</b> Newark	16.11
<b>D</b> Newark	17.25	<b>D</b> Newark	18.40
<b>A</b> Panama City	21.39	<b>A</b> Heathrow	06.45*

\*following day  
Economy seat pitch Heathrow/Newark: 31"



Wed, Fri, Sat, Sun		Wed, Fri, Sat, Sun	
<b>D</b> Heathrow	06.20	<b>D</b> Panama City	21.15
<b>A</b> Madrid	09.40	<b>A</b> Madrid	13.00*
<b>D</b> Madrid	12.25	<b>D</b> Madrid	15.25
<b>A</b> Panama City	17.15	<b>A</b> Heathrow	16.45

\*following day  
Economy seat pitch: 32". Also indirect routes via San Jose (Costa Rica)



Tue, Wed, Thu, Fri, Sun		Tue, Wed, Thu, Fri, Sun	
<b>D</b> Heathrow	08.40	<b>D</b> Panama City	20.50
<b>A</b> Amsterdam	11.05	<b>A</b> Amsterdam	14.05*
<b>D</b> Amsterdam	13.45	<b>D</b> Amsterdam	15.45
<b>A</b> Panama City	17.45	<b>A</b> Heathrow	16.10

\*following day  
Economy seat pitch: 31"



Daily		Daily	
<b>D</b> Heathrow	09.40	<b>D</b> Panama City	12.50
<b>A</b> Miami	13.50	<b>A</b> Miami	16.55
<b>D</b> Miami	18.35	<b>D</b> Miami	20.45
<b>A</b> Panama City	20.35	<b>A</b> Heathrow	10.00*

\*following day  
Economy seat pitch: 31"

### Prices for suggested itineraries

Holiday prices are in £'s per person for duration stated based on two persons sharing a twin/double room.

PLEASE NOTE AT THE TIME OF GOING TO PRESS FINALISED AIRLINE AND GROUND PRICES WERE NOT AVAILABLE. THEREFORE, THE PRICES BELOW ARE A GUIDELINE ONLY. PLEASE CONTACT US FOR AN EXACT QUOTE. DURING EASTER AND CHRISTMAS/NEW YEAR PERIODS SPECIAL SEASONAL RATES AND MINIMUM NUMBER OF NIGHTS MAY APPLY.

Departure date determines price

See suggested itineraries for full details. See page 91.

See pages 22-29 for itineraries combining Panama with other countries.

Departure Dates

01/01/11 - 05/01/11  
01/07/11 - 01/09/11

Departure Dates

06/01/11 - 30/04/11  
01/11/11 - 18/12/11

Departure Dates

01/05/11 - 30/06/11  
02/09/11 - 31/10/11

Departure Dates

19/12/11 - 31/12/11

ITINERARY	Number of Nights	Guideline price	Guideline price	Guideline price	Guideline price
<b>Discover Panama</b> - Gamboa, El Valle, Pedasi, Boquete, Isla Boca Brava, Panama City	14 nights	£3,102	£2,985	£2,874	£3,435
<b>Off The Beaten Track</b> - Panama City, San Blas Archipelago, Isla Boca Brava, Bocas del Toro	14 nights	£3,638	£3,615	£3,514	£3,937
<b>Panama in Comfort</b> - Panama City, El Valle, Azuero Peninsula, Boquete, Bocas del Toro	15 nights	£4,663	£4,594	£4,383	£5,177

#### Price includes

- Economy scheduled flights from London Heathrow with Iberia (via Madrid) including UK airport departure tax and fuel surcharges
- Accommodation, internal flights, transfers, excursions and meals as outlined in the various itineraries

#### Not included

- Personal Travel Insurance (see page 246)
- International airport departure tax
- Airport taxes for internal flights
- Park entrance fees (where not specified on the itinerary)
- Supplement for other airlines and airports
- Tips

#### NOTES

Single supplements are available on request

#### IMPORTANT NOTE

Payment by credit or charge card will incur a 2% processing charge. This charge may rise if the credit card companies increase their charges.

### Approximate Driving Times / Approximate Distances

	Hrs	Km
Azuero Peninsula (Pedasi) – Boquete	7 hours	415km
Azuero Peninsula (Pedasi) – El Valle	5 hours	385km
Boquete – Almirante harbour	3.5 hours	340km
Boquete – Chiriqui Archipelago (Boca Chica)	2 + 30 mins boat	56km
Boquete – David	45 mins	35km
Boquete – Paso Canoas (border with Costa Rica)	1.45 hours	140km
Chiriqui Archipelago (Boca Chica) – Azuero Peninsula (Pedasi)	6.5 + 30 mins boat	380km
Chiriqui Archipelago (Boca Chica) – David Airport	1.5 + 30 mins boat	115km
Chitre – Santiago	2 hours	80km

### Approximate Flying Times

	Hrs	Km
El Valle – Boquete	7 hours	450km
Panama City – Boquete	7 hours	521km
Panama City – Colon	1 hour	80km
Panama City – El Valle	2.5 hours	140km
Panama City – Portobelo:	2 hours	95km
Panama City – San Lorenzo:	2 hours	130km
Panama City – Azuero Peninsula (Pedasi):	5 hours	380km
Santiago – Boquete	4.5	320km

Panama City – Achutupo (San Blas)	45mins
Panama City – Bocas del Toro	1 hour
Panama City – Pedasi Azuero Peninsula	35mins
Panama City – David	1 hour
David – Bocas del Toro	35mins
David – San Jose	1 hour

# Panama - A Few Guidelines

## IMPORTANT NOTE

Panama is a fascinating country filled with a variety of stunning landscapes, steeped in rich cultural traditions and home to an abundance of wildlife. However, due to the dominance of the Panama Canal and past political instability, it can be said that tourism is in its infancy, offering a wonderfully real experience for adventurous travellers.

## Currency

The US dollar is the official currency in Panama although it is still often referred to as the Balboa (PAB). The Balboa has exactly the same value as the US dollar (approximately \$1.50 to the £1 at the time of publication) and the two are completely interchangeable. However there are no Balboa banknotes only coins. Please note that in San Blas and some other remote locations there are no ATMs and it is not always possible to pay by credit card.

## Visas

UK passport holders do not require visas to visit Panama for stays up to 90 days. Please ensure you have at least 6 months to run on your passport from the time of arrival into Panama. Please also take a couple of photocopies of the main page of your passport with you.

UK passport holders are permitted to enter the United States (including when in transit) without a visa under the Visa Waiver programme for 90 days or less from their arrival date (see ESTA information below).

A machine-readable passport will be required in order to travel visa free. A machine readable passport can generally be identified by the presence of two typeface lines and numbers (with chevrons ») printed at the bottom of the page displaying your photo and personal details. If you are in any doubt as to whether or not your passport is a machine-readable passport, you should check with the UK Passport office.

## Electronic System for Travel Authorisation (ESTA)

The USA government has enforced changes to its visa-waiver programme meaning travellers (including transit passengers) will be required to apply for authorisation to travel under the scheme before arriving at the airport. The changes, which came into effect in January 2009 will affect all passport holders from the 34 countries currently participating in the visa-waiver scheme, including UK passport holders. Further details will be supplied at the time of booking.

## Biometric passports

There is a requirement by the US authorities that passports issued on or after October 26 2006 must be biometric.

Your current passport will remain valid until its expiry date. Machine-readable passports with a digital image will continue to meet the criteria of the Visa Waiver Programme (VWP) and most British Citizens will not require a US visa.

## Language

Spanish is the official language. However there are 14 local languages and dialects. English is not widely spoken outside Panama City and a basic grasp of Spanish will be beneficial. However communication with Panamanians is not normally difficult as they will often go out of their way to help.

## Vaccinations / Health

Always check with your doctor / practice nurse as to the latest health requirements no later than four weeks before departure. Yellow Fever Vaccination certificates may be required if entering Panama from a country with a known outbreak. Typhoid, Tetanus, Hepatitis A, Diphtheria and Polio vaccinations are generally advised, as well as a course of anti-malaria tablets if appropriate. A Yellow Fever Vaccination may also be recommended for visiting areas such as San Blas.

Be careful to reduce mosquito bites by using good skin repellent and wearing long sleeve shirts and trousers to cover otherwise exposed part of your body. In places such as San Blas and Bocas del Toro it is advisable to wear a hat and strong sun block as the sun is very intensive and many journeys are made in open-top boats.

The heat and humidity of the tropics makes you sweat profusely and can also make you feel lethargic. To avoid cramps and heat exhaustion it is important to maintain a high fluid intake. Although it is claimed that water in Panama is potable, we recommend you use bottled water (even for brushing your teeth) with a seal that has not been broken.

## Food & Drink

Panamanian cuisine reflects its ethnic diversity, comprising of a mixture of Latin American staple foods, such as rice and beans, combined with West Indian flavours and European, Chinese and Indian influences. Panama's national dish is Sancocho, a spicy chicken and vegetable stew. Pasties (empanadas) and deep-fried yucca stuffed with chicken or beef (carimanolas), are delicious and often sold on the roadside. Fish is in abundance, and rice and plantains are served with most dishes. The average cost of a three course meal is approximately \$25 per person excluding drinks, although dining in more upmarket restaurants can cost anything up to \$50+ per person. Panamanian restaurants, across the country, serve good inexpensive set meals (comida corriente) for only \$3 to \$4 per person. Excellent local lagers include Balboa or Panama. Expect to pay about \$1 for a beer. Exotic fruit juices are plentiful in addition to delicious fresh coconut juice.

## Accommodation

Wherever possible, we have sought to include the more characterful, charming, locally-owned properties in Panama. However, it should be noted that the country has a limited supply of good hotels / lodges. They are mostly simple properties offering basic facilities and a service which can, at times, be slow and indifferent. This is not due to a lack of friendliness, but rather a reflection of a reserved nature and lack of training.

Please note that, away from Panama city and nearby beaches, Panama is not a suitable country to choose if you are looking for mostly luxurious accommodation. There is no official class or star system for accommodation, but the properties featured by us are of an acceptable European level. Where more basic accommodation is used, this is pointed out in the individual property descriptions.

## Weather / When to go

Panama has a tropical climate which varies according to altitude, location and season. With the exception of the highlands, it has an average year-round temperature of 30°C and a high level of humidity (average 80%). The best time to visit Panama is during the dry season from December to April, although short heavy downpours are always to be expected on the Caribbean side during this time.

The **Panama Province** enjoys hot sunny days, clear blue skies and little (if any) rain during the dry season. The **Azuero Peninsula** has a hot and dry climate during the dry season with an average temperature of 27°C. El Valle boasts a year-round, spring-like climate with an average temperature of 18°C, plenty of sunshine and frequent but light showers.

Similarly **Boquete**, set in the Cordillera Central mountain range (at approximately 1000m above sea level), enjoys a very comfortable, humidity-free climate year round. The average temperature is 18°C and nights are cool. The climate in the **Chiriquí Archipelago** is mostly sunny with temperatures from 24-31°C during the dry season. Between April and mid December, expect afternoon showers. The climate on the **Caribbean Coast**, including Bocas del Toro, Colón and San Blas, is more inconsistent and there is not such a clear distinction between the dry and wet seasons. The dry season fluctuates between several days of sustained sunshine with several days of rain. February, March, September and October are the drier months in this region.

## Time

Panama is five hours behind Greenwich Mean Time.

## Internal Flights

Travelling around Panama requires considerable patience as internal flights can be a bit chaotic and delayed. There are often no terminal screens indicating flight departures so it is important to listen carefully to announcements and to keep asking airport staff if your flight is ready to depart!

Panama has two internal airlines, Aeroperlas (TACA) and Air Panama, which operate from Panama's domestic airport, Aeropuerto Marcos A. Gelabert, in the Albrook area of Panama City. The planes are generally small, propeller aircraft seating between 12 - 40 passengers (depending on the route) and seats are not allocated. Soft rucksacks/bags are preferred to hard suitcases as these can be easily manipulated into small plane holds. There is a strict luggage allowance of only 11kg / 25lb per person for hold luggage on all flights except those to and from David & Bocas del Toro from Panama City – the luggage allowance for these flights is 13.5kg / 30lbs. The carry on allowance is 2kg / 5lbs. You may also be asked to state your body weight at check-in! Charges may apply should you exceed your luggage allowance of approximately \$1per extra lb, however excess luggage is only carried at the discretion of the airline. It is also possible to leave excess luggage with our ground agent in Panama City or to have it couriered to mainland destinations such as Panama City, Boquete, and David. However please note we can not accept liability for the contents of the suitcase. We suggest that you use a padlock if you have any concerns.

## Driving / Car Hire

Self-drive is recommended in the western regions of Panama as it allows greater flexibility to visit the surrounding areas of El Valle, the Azuero Peninsula and Boquete. The main roads are in good condition and some of the best we have seen in Central America. The roads are generally asphalted and potholes are few and far between. Signage is generally poor but you will be provided with full directions from our ground agent upon collection of the vehicle. There are occasional tolls on the Pan-American Highway (approximately \$1/vehicle). There is relatively little traffic once outside the cities of Panama City and Colón. Note that driving in Panama City centre is not advisable as it is heavily congested. Elsewhere, driving is generally civilized although do watch out for the brightly coloured, 'Red Devil' buses (Los Diablos Rojos), which have a reputation for driving erratically and at high speed. Fuel is relatively inexpensive at approximately \$3.10/gallon.

We generally recommend a Group C vehicle, Toyota Yaris or similar. We have selected Sixt Rent-a-Car as our supplier in Panama. Vehicles may be picked up in one place and dropped off at another. Drop off charges in the event of returning your vehicle to a different point from which it was collected are included in the cost of your holiday.

A UK driving licence (international is preferred), passport and credit card are required when collecting the vehicle along with a security deposit. Check the car over carefully and note all dents and scratches before accepting the car. If the car is returned with dents or scratches, or other damage that was not previously noted, you may be charged or your deposit may not be refunded.

The general policy (unless advised otherwise) is to receive the car with a full tank of fuel and to therefore return it full on drop off. If you forget, your credit card will be charged automatically.

Unlimited mileage, roadside breakdown assistance, local taxes and Collision Damage Waiver are included in the car hire rates. Minimum age for renting a vehicle is 23 but there is no maximum age. The CDW covers you for damage of your vehicle and any third parties arising from 'normal' use of the car. The vehicle must be returned to the office on time otherwise extra charges will apply (payable locally). Reconfirm the drop off time and place of return at the time of collecting your vehicle. There is an extra charge for a second driver of between \$3-\$5 per day (payable locally).

As in the UK, never leave valuables in the car such as cameras and handbags and don't leave suitcases on show as they may attract thieves. In the event of getting a ticket for speeding or other infringements, do not offer money to the highway patrol officer. All tickets must be paid when you return the car. If the car is towed away, you will have to go the highway patrol office and a pay a fee to get your car back.

Please note that we do not recommend you drive at night on the Pan-American Highway.