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PANAMA



PRE-FIELD BRIEFING PACKET

PANAMA

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ABOUT THIS PACKET

This packet has been created to serve as a resource for the PANAMA Medical Team.

This packet is information about the country and can be read at your leisure or on the airplane. The first section of this booklet is specific to the areas we will be working near (however, not the actual clinic locations) and contains information you may want to know before the trip.

The contents herein are not for distributional purposes and are intended for the use of the team and their families. Sources of the information all come from public record and documentation. You may access any of the information and more updates directly from the World Wide Web and other public sources.



BACKGROUND

Explored and settled by the Spanish in the 16th century, Panama broke with Spain in 1821 and joined a union of Colombia, Ecuador, and Venezuela - named the Republic of Gran Colombia. When the latter dissolved in 1830, Panama remained part of Colombia. With US backing, Panama seceded from Colombia in 1903 and promptly signed a treaty with the US allowing for the construction of a canal and US sovereignty over a strip of land on either side of the structure (the Panama Canal Zone). The Panama Canal was built by the US Army Corps of Engineers between 1904 and 1914. In 1977, an agreement was signed for the complete transfer of the Canal from the US to Panama by the end of the century. Certain portions of the Zone and increasing responsibility over the Canal were turned over in the subsequent decades. With US help, dictator Manuel NORIEGA was deposed in 1989. The entire Panama Canal, the area supporting the Canal, and remaining US military bases were transferred to Panama by the end of 1999. In October 2006, Panamanians approved an ambitious plan (estimated to cost \$5.3 billion) to expand the Canal. The project, which began in 2007 and could double the Canal's capacity, is expected to be completed in 2016

<https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/resources/the-world-factbook/geos/pm.html>



EXTENDING YOUR STAY?

While visitors to Panama may come for the Panama Canal, they stay for everything else. Known as the “Crossroads of the Americas,” Panama is not only the geographical point where North America meets South America but also where the Pacific and Atlantic Oceans meet in the country’s famed canal. The original meaning of the word “Panama” means “abundance of fish,” and fishing is just one of the many water sports and activities that visitors to Panama can enjoy. More highly developed than neighboring Central American countries, Panama enjoys a modern infrastructure, making travel through the tropical paradise easy and convenient. Here are the top tourist attractions in Panama that are well-worth visiting.



PANAMA CANAL

The Panama Canal stands as one of the world's greatest feats of engineering. Visitors can take either a partial or complete crossing of the canal. Crossings take four to eight hours. Many visitors choose to explore the canal by visiting the Miraflores Locks Museum. From the restaurant located at the top floor of the museum, visitors can watch transiting vessels in the canal below.



SANTA CATALINA

The international surfing community has tried to keep this idyllic spot a secret, but the word is out that Santa Catalina offers world-class surfing. Located on the Chiriquí Gulf, the town doesn't offer a lot in the way of amenities, but its beautiful beach surrounded by jungle forests makes it an ideal destination for those who wish to enjoy Panama's natural beauty.

BOCAS TOWN

The capital of the Bocas del Toro Province, Bocas del Toro is a favorite spot for scuba divers, and as the dives are shallow, it's particularly suited for particularly for beginners. An extensive coral reef features colorful varieties of tropical fish. Discovered by Christopher Columbus in 1502, the area remains one of the most popular tourist attractions in Panama. In Bocas del Toro, visitors routinely hike through the lush rainforest to enjoy empty stretches of beautiful shoreline.



COIBA

The waters of Panama are unmatched in their level of marine diversity, and nowhere is this more evident than in the Coiba National Marine Park. The island of Coiba is the largest island in the park, as well as the largest island in all of Central America. More than 800 species of marine life are present in the area. The park is known as one of the best places to enjoy snorkeling and scuba diving on the Pacific Coast.

**PANAMA VIEJO**

Panama Viejo (Old Panama) contains the remaining ruins of the first Spanish city on the Pacific coast of the Americas. Founded by Pedro Arias de Avila on 15 August 1519, the city was the starting point of the expeditions that conquered the Inca Empire in Peru. Most of the gold and silver that Spain took from the Incas passed through here. In 1671 the pirate Henry Morgan sacked the city with 1,400 men marching from the Caribbean coast across the jungle and today only the bits and pieces that Morgan left can be admired.

<http://www.touropia.com/tourist-attractions-in-Panama/>

PUBLIC HEALTH OVERVIEW

The Health system of Panama is based on the Constitution, which mandates the government to ensure the people's free access to comprehensive prevention, treatment, and rehabilitation services. At the helm of these functions are the Ministry of Health and the National Health Authority which are responsible for guiding the country's health sector. While the Ministry of Health is responsible for public health programs in the country, supervising hospitals and health care centers, and for monitoring outreach programs for communities, support is also provided by the Social Security Fund, the Ministry of Economy and Finance in financing the entire health sector, and the National Water and Sewerage System.

The health system is divided into 14 health regions where there is equal presence of the Ministry of Health and Social Security in the delivery of health care services, which are participated in by hospitals and other health care centers for a ratio of 11 physicians and 10 professional nurses for every 10,000 inhabitants.

To implement the policy of providing the people with universal access to health programs and improving the quality of health services especially to the economically disadvantaged population, the government proposes to extend the health coverage for the people, launch new initiatives like health caravans and the Social Protection System, and select households or families in extreme poverty level to benefit from multi-sectoral and inter-sectoral interventions. The Ministry is also assisted by the Gorgas Memorial Institute and the Health Technical Council in the implementation of the government's general health policy for the country, especially on scientific and technological research on health, and advisory services related to the granting of permit to individuals to practice medicine.

<http://www.studycountry.com/guide/PA-health.htm>

BASIC STATISTICS

Basic statistics

Indicators	Statistics	Year
Population (thousands)	3864	2013
Population aged under 15 (%)	28	2013
Population aged over 60 (%)	10	2013
Median age (years)	28	2013
Population living in urban areas (%)	66	2013
Total fertility rate (per woman)	2.5	2013
Number of live births (thousands)	75.2	2013
Number of deaths (thousands)	19.5	2013
Birth registration coverage (%)	>90	2013
Cause-of-death registration coverage (%)	90	2010-2012
Gross national income per capita (PPP int \$)	19290	2013
WHO region	Americas	2013
World Bank income classification	Upper middle	2013

Source:
Country statistics and global health estimates
by WHO and UN partners

For more information visit the Global Health Observatory
(<http://www.who.int/gho/en/>)

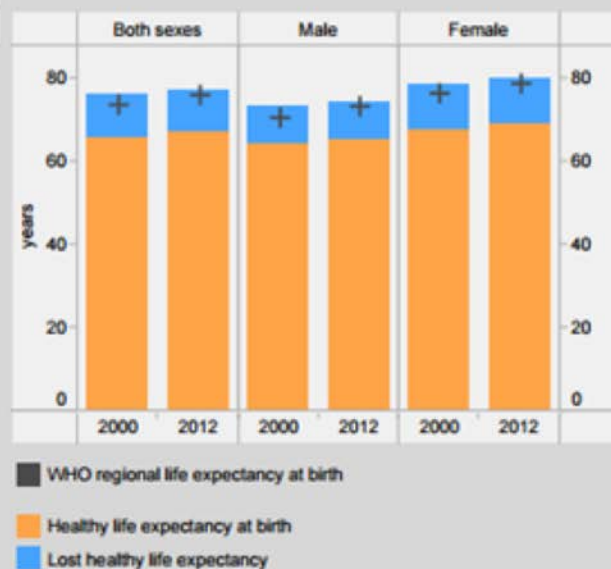
Last updated: January 2015

Life expectancy (years), 2012

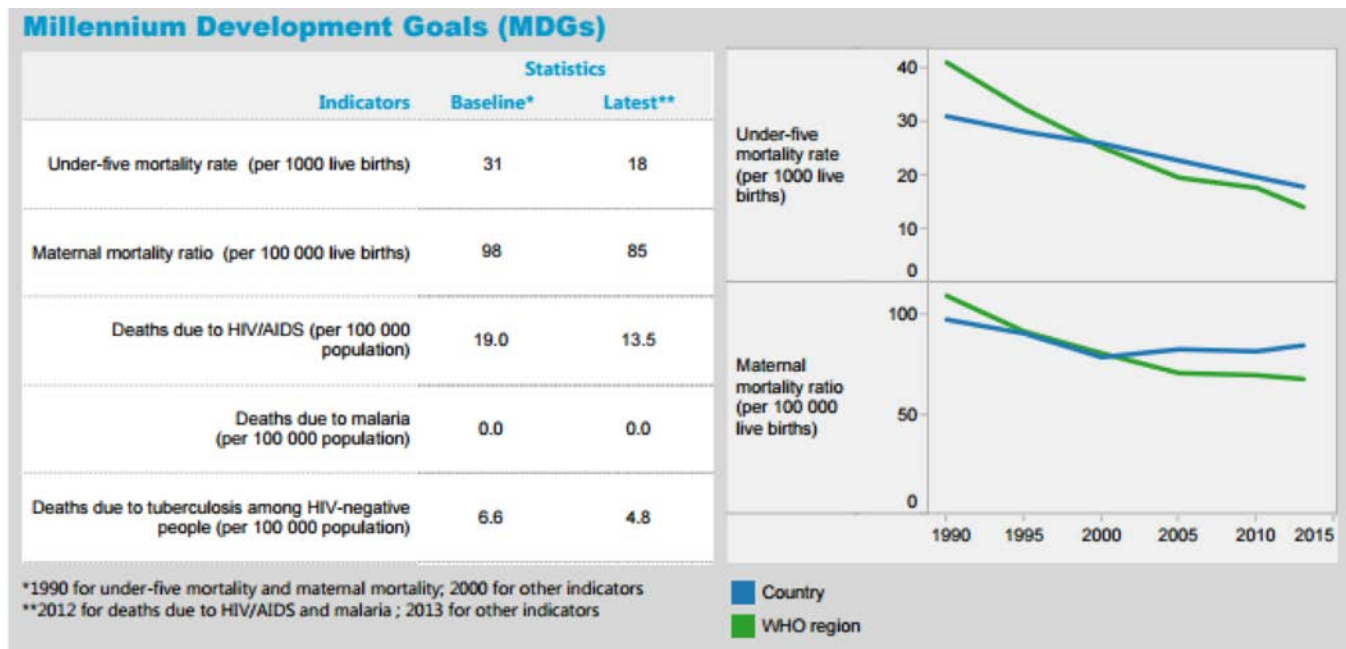
		Country	WHO region	World Bank income group
Life expectancy	At birth	77	76	74
	At age 60	23	22	20
Healthy life expectancy	At birth	67	67	66

Life expectancy at birth for both sexes increased by 1 year(s) over the period of 2000-2012; the WHO region average increased by 2 year(s) in the same period.

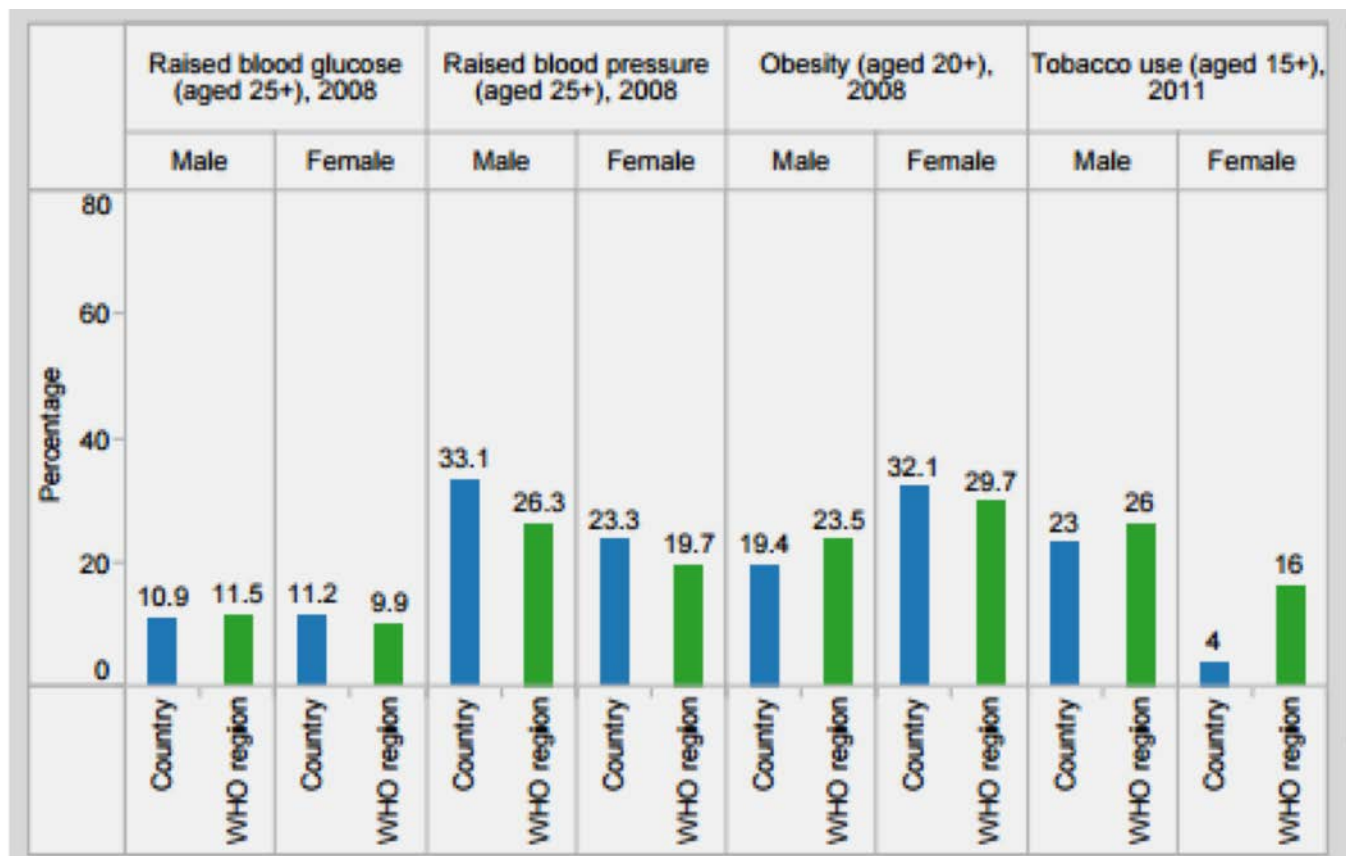
In 2012, healthy expectancy in both sexes was 10 year(s) lower than overall life expectancy at birth. This lost healthy life expectancy represents 10 equivalent year(s) of full health lost through years lived with morbidity and disability.



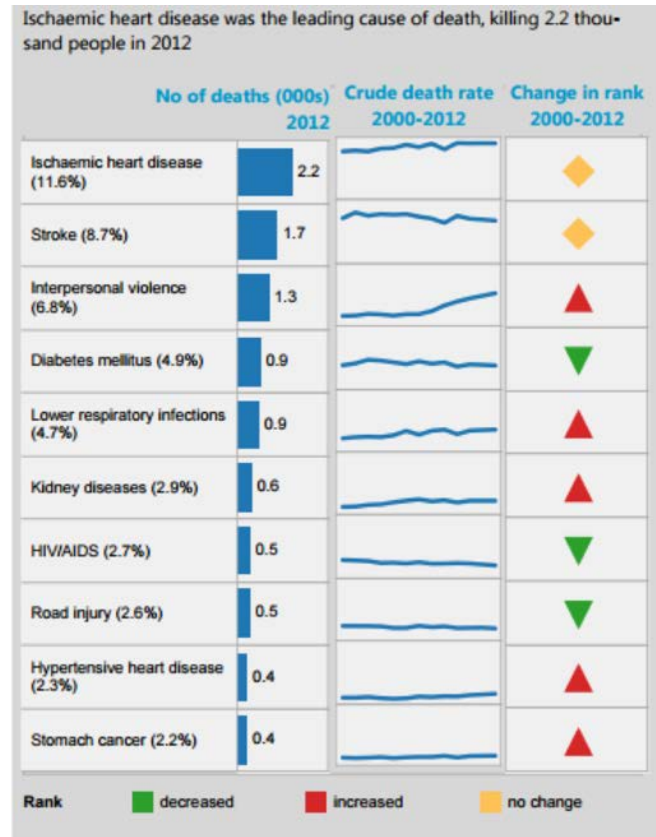
MILLENNIUM DEVELOPMENT GOALS



ADULT RISK FACTORS



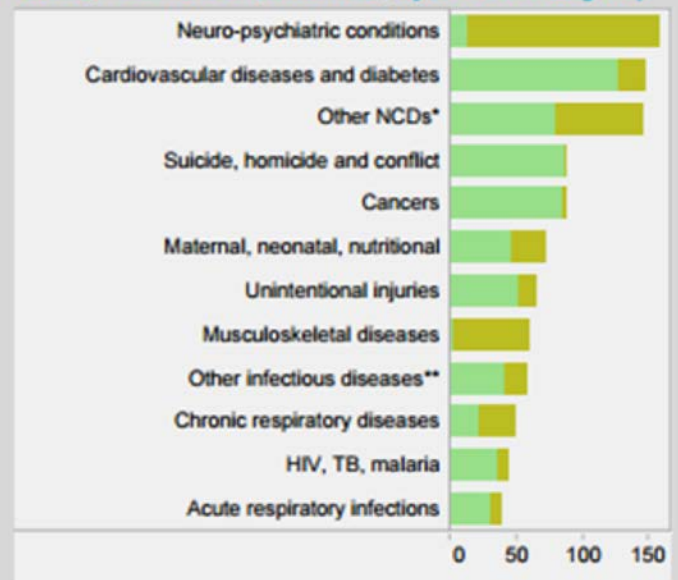
TOP 10 CAUSES OF DEATH



BURDEN OF DISEASE

Disability-adjusted life years (DALYs) are the sum of years of life lost due to premature mortality (YLL) and years of healthy life lost due to disability (YLD).

DALYs, YLL and YLD (thousands) by broad cause group



*Other noncommunicable diseases (NCDs) including non-malignant neoplasms; endocrine, blood and immune disorders; sense organ, digestive, genitourinary, and skin diseases; oral conditions; and congenital anomalies.

** Infectious diseases other than acute respiratory diseases, HIV, TB and malaria.

YLL YLD

OVERVIEW

Despite a number of setbacks, Panama's health care sector has seen significant advancement in recent years. The former administration of Ricardo Martinelli oversaw a period of significant infrastructure expansion, and the country is closer than ever to achieving universal coverage. Elected in May 2014, the current government of Juan Carlos Varela has stated its commitment to improving access and increasing efficiency in the sector, while at the same time maintaining the previous government's emphasis on expanding public infrastructure. The administration now faces the task of addressing the myriad of challenges that continue to affect the health care sector, in particular capacity and health personnel shortages, while leading the country through the transition to a prevention-focused health care model.

STRUCTURE

Panama's health care system is characterised by a large public sector, composed of the Ministry of Health (Ministerio de Salud, MINSA) and the Social Security Fund (Caja de Seguro Social, CSS), as well as a small but expanding private sector. Each operates separate coverage schemes and facilities.

CSS COVERAGE

The CSS is the largest, operating both as a health care provider and a pension fund administrator. The CSS's health coverage is financed by contributions from employees, who pay a percentage of their wages to the system, entitling them and their dependent family members to coverage. Employers are also required to pay the fund a monthly percentage, contributing to the employee's pension plan.

Foreigners working in Panama are entitled to coverage under CSS, provided they pay taxes. Tourists were previously entitled to free medical insurance for 30 days for accidents and unforeseeable illnesses, up to a maximum of \$7000. However, to curb rising costs, this was eliminated in June 2014.

Given Panama's relatively low unemployment rate - 4.8% in 2014 according to the National Institute of Statistics and Census - the reach of CSS within the country is extensive. In 2013 an estimated 3.47m people (of a population of roughly 3.9m) were covered by the CSS; of that total 1.6m were contributors, while the remaining 1.8m were dependents, according to figures by the Comptroller General. The figure represents a notable increase from 2.75m in 2009.

MINSA (MINISTERIO DE SALUD - MINISTRY OF HEALTH)

While MINSA services are not completely free, they remain the least expensive option available to low-income groups. MINSA has the most extensive network of health facilities across the country. In 2014 MINSA operated 830 health facilities, significantly more than CSS's 80 facilities. Together the two institutions provide care in 910 public facilities.

In addition to being an important service provider, MINSA is also the entity in charge of overseeing the national health system and as such, formulates policy and acts as the regulatory entity.

PRIVATE PROVIDERS

The private sector comprises four large hospitals - Hospital Nacional (HN), Centro Medico Paitilla, Hospital Punta Pacífica (HPP), and Clínica Hospital San Fernando (CHSF) - and a limited number of smaller health establishments, which provide services to the upper echelons of society, including a growing percentage of the population with health insurance, in exchange for direct payment.

URBAN VS. RURAL

Although the country has made significant advances towards achieving universal coverage - according to the PanAmerican Health Organization (PAHO), MINSA and CSS covered around 90% of the population in 2014 - access to health services remains inequitable, a fact readily visible in the marked discrepancy between health outcomes in urban and rural settings. According to MINSA, in 2014 there was a nine-year gap between the region with the highest life expectancy (Panama at 79 years) and the lowest (the indigenous reservation Comarca Ngobé Buglé at 70 years), bringing the country's overall life expectancy to 77 years (up from 75 in 2006).

Moreover, maternal mortality rates in Comarca Ngobé Buglé and Darién were, respectively, 4.2 and 1.5 times higher than the national average of 64.9 per 100,000 live births, according to MINSA's data for 2012. Likewise, under-five mortality rates in Bocas del Toro and the indigenous comarcas of Ngobé Buglé and Kuna Yala were 2.4, 1.9 and 1.6 times higher, respectively, than the national average of 19.9 deaths per 1000 live births in the same year.

LIMITED CAPACITY

This marked urban-rural divide is due mainly to limited capacity in rural settings. Health infrastructure, including availability of health workers, medicine and technological equipment, is concentrated in urban centres, leaving indigenous and rural populations with limited access to health services. In fact, in the indigenous comarcas MINSA is the only provider, offering a basic package of outpatient services. In the comarcas of Ngobé Buglé and Kuna Yala and the region Bocas del Toro the rate of beds per 1000 inhabitants was as low as 0.2, 1.1, and 1.6, respectively, in 2013, according to MINSA.

Urban rates are considerably higher, with Colón and Panama City recording 9.6 and 7.9 beds per 1000 inhabitants, respectively, that year. The same trend applies to doctors, with the Panama region registering 20.8 doctors per 10,000 inhabitants compared to the indigenous comarcas Ngobé Buglé and Kuna Yala, where that figure was 1.2 and 5.3, respectively. The country's average was 15.9 doctors per 10,000 inhabitants in 2012, according to MINSA.

Limited capacity is not restricted to rural areas. In urban centres, population growth and rising family incomes are two factors driving up demand for health services, and putting additional pressure on the care system, which is characterised by crowded facilities and long waiting periods for surgery.

PUBLIC EXPANSION

To address capacity shortages, the public sector is currently undergoing unprecedented expansion, as the government seeks to increase and renovate existing health infrastructure. During the Martinelli government, the country embarked on an ambitious infrastructure expansion plan, which included the construction of five regional hospitals, a medical city in the capital, and a network of smaller health care facilities and ambulatory services.

The most emblematic of the projects is CSS's medical city, known as Ciudad Hospitalaria, in Panama City, which broke ground in mid-2012. Spanning 31.9 ha and an initial price tag of \$587.5m, the complex will add some 1700 beds, more than 40 surgery rooms, 200 emergency room beds and offer 3500 parking spaces. Once operational, the project is expected to have the capacity to attend some 72,000 emergencies annually. Awarded to Spanish contractor FCC, construction of the first phase, which included emergency, hospitalisation and external consultation facilities, was scheduled to be completed by end-2014. However, construction has faced a series of delays, caused by heavy rains, strikes and technical difficulties. In late February 2015, the project was 30% complete and an estimated \$300m over budget, while the CSS and the FCC were reviewing the contract.

Francisco Javier Terrientes Mojica, the minister of health, told OBG that changes to the initial design were being contemplated to optimise the use of the complex. Ramiro De León, president of the board of directors at CSS, told local media the project is likely to reach completion after 2016. The facility, which was the previous government's third-most-expensive project, has come under some criticism. Concerns about the medical city's size and inaccessibility, as well as potential difficulties securing the human resources required to administer and operate the massive complex, have raised questions about the feasibility of the project.

REGIONAL EMPHASIS

To increase access to health services in rural areas, the previous administration also began the construction of five hospitals in the regions. Multinational contractor IBT Group is heading four of the projects, including the \$59.5m Anita Moreno Hospital in Los Santos, the \$110.5m Manuel Amador Guerrero Hospital in Colón, the \$36.5m Metetí General Hospital in the Darién region and the \$30.6m Bugaba Hospital, slated for Chiriquí.

Construction of all four hospitals had been suspended since April 30, 2014, following disagreements between IBT Group and MINSA. However, construction works resumed in January 2015. In early 2015 the Manuel Amador Guerrero, Metetí General Hospital, Bugaba Hospital and Anita Moreno Hospital were 36%, 60.5%, 69.3% and 45% complete, respectively.

Spanish construction firm FCC won the bid for the construction of the fifth hospital - the Luis "Chicho" Fabrega hospital - in the region of Veraguas, for an estimated \$121m. The hospital was inaugurated in 2014. Once completed, the five new hospitals will add nearly 1500 beds and benefit more than 658,000 users (approximately 17% of the population), according to MINSA. Aimed primarily at low-income patients, MINSA also tendered the construction of an additional 10 new primary health care centres, representing an investment of \$102m.

SPENDING

The heavy spending initiated with the previous government is likely to continue through Varela's term, though with some moderation. The 2015 budget allocates nearly \$2bn to MINSA (an increase from \$1.84bn in 2014), of which \$590.5m is earmarked for investment. The current government, which assumed power in July 2014, has stated its commitment to seeing health infrastructure projects reach completion, while normalizing contracts inherited from the previous government, which allegedly lacked transparency. The tender for the new children's hospital in Panama City, for example, was suspended after anomalies in the evaluation process were found in February 2014. As of April 2015 specifications for the new tender were being prepared, according to MINSA. The tender for the new National Cancer Institute, which MINSA awarded to international Spanish civil engineering group ACCIONA in May 2014 at a value of \$172.7m was also cancelled in December that year, after a series of anomalies were detected. The 33,350-sqmetre 280-bed hospital is slated for the Clayton district, 11 km from Panama City, and will also function as a teaching hospital. Tenders are published through an online platform and are administered by the General Office of Public Contracts.

PRIVATE SECTOR

More than a decade of stable economic growth has seen demand for private health services increase significantly, as more individuals with disposable income, including a rising number of foreigners, seek faster and better care than the public system currently offers. According to the World Health Organisation (WHO), private expenditure represented 31.4% of total health spending in 2012, with the majority of that total (79%) being out-of-pocket expenditure (down from 85.1% in 2010). Private prepaid plans accounted for the remaining 21%. While this last figure remains low, insurance penetration rates are rising steadily, with the Comptroller General reporting that sales of health policies jumped 12.6% to \$145.4m in the first nine months of 2014.

According to Edgardo Fernández, medical director of CHSF, the country's first private facility operating since 1949, a law which entitles the country's retirees to a 20-25% discount on medical services has also contributed

to the rise in demand for private sector services. “Retirees make up a large percentage of the patients seen in private hospitals,” Fernández told OBG. Another noteworthy group is expectant mothers. “There is high demand for maternity services given the public sector’s inability to meet demand in this area,” Fernández added.

PRIVATE EXPANSION

Mirroring the expansion of the public system, most private hospitals are undergoing expansion to meet rising demand. The HN was no exception, unveiling in March 2013 a \$22m-upgrade which included the addition of 14 private rooms, eight suites, seven intermediate intensive-care unit beds, an 18-bed emergency department with a trauma bay and an ambulatory surgery centre. In November 2013 the HN also inaugurated its new Centro Internacional de Radiocirugía y Radioterapia Oncológica, a cancer centre that offers services such as radiation therapy, brachytherapy and radiosurgery.

Likewise, the HPP, the newest of the four largest private hospitals which opened in 2006, is carrying out a \$16m expansion project which will see the addition of two floors of hospital space and four floors of parking spaces. The project, which began in late 2012, is expected to be completed by 2016.

PRIMARY CARE

A recent addition to the private market is MiniMed, Panama’s first medical franchise specializing in primary care. Having opened its first facility in 2011, MiniMed has expanded quickly and now has seven walk-in primary care facilities across the country. Though the sites do not operate 24 hours, they diversify options and help decongest emergency rooms in general hospitals. However, trends for the private sector point towards an increase in specialized centers rather than more primary care facilities.

SKILL SHORTAGE

With the completion of a number of infrastructure projects over the coming years, the most significant challenge now is making new facilities operational, given the country’s skill shortage. “The lack of professionals in the sector has reached a critical stage,” Fernández told OBG. “It’s not just doctors that we need, the shortage affects nurses, radiology technicians, lab personnel and pharmacists.”

MINSa estimates the country faces a shortage of some 190 general practitioners, 700 nurses and another 700 medical technicians. Gynecology, cardiology, anesthesiology and neurology are some of the areas most affected by the shortfall in staffing levels, contributing to long waiting periods for patients in need of medical services in these areas.

According to MINSa figures, in 2013 the country’s density of physicians per 1000 inhabitants stood at 1.57, up only slightly from 1.46 in 2010. The ratio of nurses was lower at 1.34 per 1000 inhabitants, having increased only marginally from 1.27 in 2010.

The lack of an adequate pool of professionals is not an issue limited to the health sector, but rather a trend that affects multiple areas of the economy, and reflects the larger capacity limits of the Panamanian education system. The current government remains committed to increasing human resources for the sector, a feat that will necessarily entail expanding the capacity of the country’s medical faculties.

Efforts are being made to increase the number of available spaces in the faculty of medicine of the University of Panama, the country’s most prestigious institution. In February 2015 the government and the university announced an expansion of the program which will see the addition of 100 places. Even so, at less than 300 students, enrollment is limited considering the annual demand. According to UP, the faculty receives some 2000 applications every year.

HELP FROM ABROAD

Given how pressing the shortage has become, in September 2013 the Panamanian Parliament approved a temporary measure to allow MINSA and CSS to hire foreign doctors and other medical personnel. However, there has been substantial opposition from labour groups, in particular the medical union, Comisión Médica Negociadora Nacional, which initiated a 30-day strike soon after the measure passed. Furthermore, there has been only limited success in attracting foreign professionals. “Most vacancies for foreign professionals are in remote and rural areas and there are simply no incentives for foreigners to relocate there,” Fernández told OBG.

INTEGRATION

Another significant challenge and an objective of the current government is increasing efficiency in the public sector. Carlos Rosales, regional adviser for the PanAmerican Health Organisation, told OBG, “The government’s goal is to transform the system, strengthening MINSA’s role as the regulator of health practices, with a view to ultimately making access to services more egalitarian.” To this end, the current government initiated in March 2015 a national debate with public health organisations, workers and civil society groups on the topic of integration of the public health system. One of the aims is optimising the use of MINSA and CSS facilities, which will prevent duplication and wasting resources.

Elisa de Lewis, executive vice-president and general manager of CHSF, told OBG, “A list of 12,500 pending surgeries in the public health care system should be an incentive for the government to include mechanisms that enhance efficiency of processes and improve patient care.” Technology may offer solutions, as has been seen in some of Panama’s neighbours. Javier Contreras, former CEO of HPP, told OBG, “The model in Chile is certainly one that Panama could learn from. It comprises an integrated assistance network that is showing very positive results with relatively low investments. They are integrating all levels of health care provision electronically to avoid redundancies and inefficiencies.”

The CSS and MINSA already display a certain degree of integration, with CSS patients able to receive treatment at MINSA facilities. In late 2012 the CSS-administered regional hospital for the district of 24 de Diciembre became the first fully integrated facility, providing uninsured MINSA patients from the eastern part of the Panama region with care closer to home.

In recent years, the degree of integration between the public and private sectors has also grown. Given its limited capacity, the public sector has increasingly relied on contracting services to the private sector in cases where it is overstretched or unable to provide specialist treatments. Furthermore, both MINSA and CSS routinely publish service and equipment tenders on the online platform www.Panamacompra.com, inviting private sector bids.

FOCUS ON PREVENTION

The savings from enhanced efficiency are expected to aid the country in the transition to a preventive health care model, another goal of the current government. “The idea is that with increased efficiency more resources can be allocated to preventive measures to curb the rise in lifestyle-related preventable diseases,” Rosales told OBG. The transition towards a preventive model is particularly important in the context of Panama’s health profile. With an aging population, the prevalence of chronic-degenerative diseases is on the rise. According to WHO, chronic non-communicable diseases, in particular cardiovascular diseases, cancer and diabetes, are the main cause of death in Panama. Nevertheless, communicable diseases such as dengue, remain prevalent, primarily among rural populations. In 2013, 3538 cases of dengue were reported, according to MINSA.

In January 2015 the Varela government launched the country's first national preventive health survey. The initiative will offer free health examinations to persons aged 40 and older in an effort to proactively map out health trends and contribute to the improvement of health outcomes in the country.

Contreras believes that a successful transition to a preventive model would need to be accompanied by a change in the insurance sector's approach. "Currently insurance companies do not cover costs for preventive treatments, which discourages patients from undergoing preventive monitoring. To transition to a prevention-focused health care model, a reform in the insurance sector is needed as well as an increase in efforts to raise awareness," he told OBG.

MEDICAL TOURISM

Though some of the attributes of Panama's health industry, in particular its geostrategic location in Central America, air connectivity and relatively inexpensive procedures, would, in theory, make it an attractive destination for medical tourism, this segment has yet to take off. Growth prospects for the medical industry have been significantly hampered by the high occupancy rates in the country's health facilities, which, according to Fernández, remain one of the main challenges to the development of medical tourism in Panama. "With the small number of arrivals so far being limited to mostly aesthetic and orthopedic procedures, it has yet to become a really profitable business to attract further private sector attention," he told OBG.

Compared to established medical tourism markets in the region such as Mexico or Brazil, Panama's medical tourism industry remains nascent. According to the National Secretariat for Science, Technology and Innovation estimates, Panama accounts for 1% of the global medical tourism foreign exchange. However, the country is in the process of establishing a foundation for the industry. In 2012 a draft bill was presented to the National Assembly aimed at not only regulating the medical tourism industry but also making it more competitive. Among others things the draft bill declares medical tourism a national interest, and proposes the establishment of a medical free zone with financial incentives and a certification process for service providers. Within the private sector, the idea is also gaining some traction. In March 2013 the country hosted its first international medical tourism and global health conference, Panasalud 2013. The event brought together more than 150 doctors, dentists, hospitals and clinics, and provided professionals with a platform to share knowledge and market experience.

Once the industry does take off, the private sector should be in a good position to capitalize on it. The level of internationalization of Panama's private hospitals is generally healthy. HPP and CHSF are both accredited by the Joint Commission International. HPP, which also boasts an affiliation with Johns Hopkins, has a department dedicated exclusively to the design of packages for medical tourists.

Additionally, recent large-scale investments by private hospitals are being geared to the medical tourism industry. HN's recent \$25m renovation for example, included a "hotel section" with a courtyard and a number of private suites, a robot-operated pharmacy and new operating theatres. Centro Médico Paitilla is also converting former hospital wards to private rooms connected to a shopping mall via skyway links.

PHARMACEUTICALS SECTOR

Though relatively small, the Panamanian pharmaceuticals industry continues to register healthy growth, with International Marketing Services, a vendor of health care data, recording annual sales of more than \$307m from August 2013 to August 2014, up from nearly \$293m the same period the previous year. Brand-name pharmaceuticals accounted for the largest share of sales, at nearly \$285m. Even so, with generics anywhere between 40% and 60% less expensive than brand-name pharmaceuticals, the generics market is also growing. Sales of generics grew from \$19.3m to more than \$22.3m in the same period and the increase in the price of pharmaceuticals products is likely to continue to boost the sale of generics.

Meanwhile, the Comptroller General reported a 5.5% rise in the consumer price index for medical and pharmaceuticals products during the period from September 2013 to September 2014.

EXPORT PLATFORM

The Panamanian market relies almost entirely (90%) on imported products. According to the General Comptroller, pharmaceuticals imports reached nearly \$393m in 2013. More than half of these (around 60%) are delivered to CSS's medicine programs. A small national industry accounts for another 8% of the local market, according to the National Pharmaceutical Association and comprises Panamanian-owned companies producing locally, including Medipan, Rigar, Lafsa, Prieto, San Rafael and Palm. Facing a series of challenges, including higher costs for importing raw materials, lack of skilled labour and delays in the registration process, local pharmaceuticals companies find themselves at a disadvantage when competing with international firms with a presence in the country which import their own products manufactured elsewhere.

Though some 300 international pharmaceuticals firms are present in Panama, including big names such as Novartis, Pfizer and Bayer, this segment represents only 2% of the local market. That is because rather than targeting the domestic market, international labs largely use Panama as an exporting platform and distribution centre for the region. The country's connectivity, logistics and fiscal regime are attractive factors for international labs, most of which import to the Colón Free Zone, packaging and re-conditioning products which are then re-exported to the region with value added. In fact, multinational pharmaceuticals in the Colón Free Zone account for most of the country's pharmaceuticals exports (\$19m in 2013).

R&D

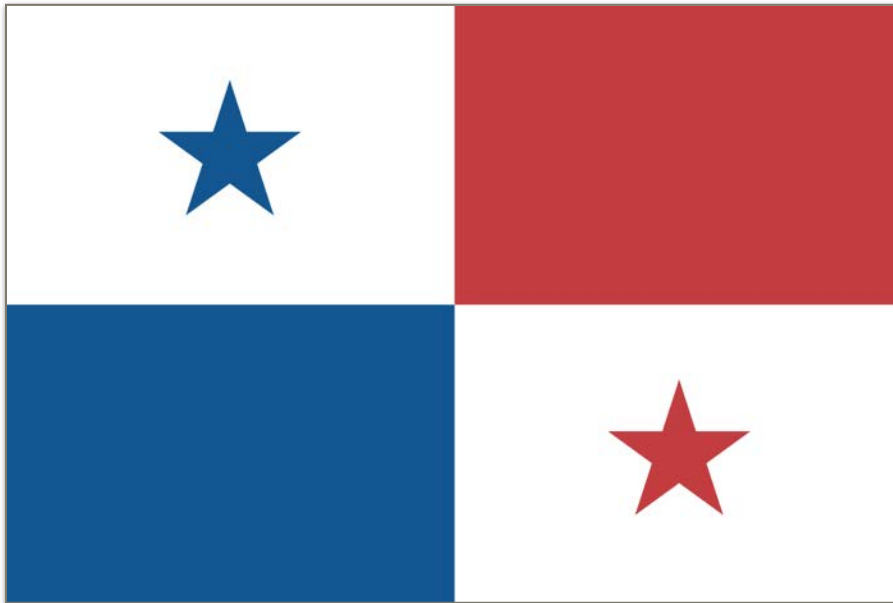
With a legal framework designed to attract foreigners, including clear regulations regarding stem cell research and national ethical committees, Panama remains a welcoming place for research and development (R&D). Jordi Fernández Capo, Roche Diagnostics' general manager for Central America and the Caribbean told OBG, "The Ciudad Hospitalaria project will place Panama at the forefront of medical innovation in the region," adding that "Panama has the tools and expertise to expand its investment into R&D."

OUTLOOK

As efforts to reach universal coverage continue, closing the gap in access and quality of services in urban and rural areas will become key to establishing a more egalitarian system. The recent rise in sector infrastructure is an encouraging step on to improving access, reducing waiting lists and improving health outcomes. However, the severe skill shortage remains an obstacle to the sector's development, and one that will require a multi-faceted approach.

<http://www.oxfordbusinessgroup.com/overview/towards-universal-coverage-improving-access-further-integration-health-care-system>

NATIONAL FLAG



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). This flag was adopted on December 20, 1903, and was designed by Panama's revolutionary leader and first President, Manuel Amador Guerrero.

<http://www.enchantedlearning.com/northamerica/Panama/flag/>

COUNTRY OVERVIEW



OVERVIEW

Panama, officially called the Republic of Panama, is a country in Central America situated between North and South America. It is bordered by Costa Rica to the west, Colombia to the southeast, the Caribbean to the north and the Pacific Ocean to the south. The capital and largest city is Panama City, whose metropolitan area is home to nearly half of the country's 3.9 million people.

The total area of Panama is slightly smaller than South Carolina. It occupies a strategic location on the eastern end of the isthmus, forming a land bridge connecting North and South America. Panama controls the Panama Canal, linking the North Atlantic Ocean via the Caribbean Sea with the North Pacific Ocean.

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Panama>

<https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/pm.html>

BRIEF HISTORY OF PANAMA

Lost Panama

The coastlines and rainforests of Panama have been inhabited by humans for at least 10,000 years, and it's estimated that several dozen indigenous groups including the Kuna, the Ngöbe-Buglé, the Emberá, the Wounaan and the Naso were living on the isthmus prior to the Spanish arrival. However, the historical tragedy of Panama is that despite its rich cultural history, there are virtually no physical remains of these great civilizations.

Unlike the massive pyramid complexes found throughout Latin America, the ancient towns and cities of Panama vanished in the jungles, never to be seen by the eyes of the modern world. However, tales of lost cities still survive in the oral histories of Panama's indigenous communities, and there is hope amongst Panamanian archaeologists that a great discovery lies in waiting. Considering that much of Panama consists of inaccessible mountains and rainforests, perhaps these dreams aren't so fanciful.

What is known about pre-Columbian Panama is that early inhabitants were part of an extensive trading zone that extended as far south as Peru and as far north as Mexico. Archaeologists have uncovered exquisite gold ornaments and unusual life-size stone statues of human figures as well as distinctive types of pottery and metates (stone platforms that were used for grinding corn).

Panama's first peoples also lived beside both oceans, and fished in mangrove swamps, estuaries and coral reefs. Given the tremendous impact that fishing has had on the lives of Isthmians, it seems only fitting that the country's name is derived from an indigenous word meaning 'abundance of fish.'

New World Order

In 1501 the discovery of Panama by Spanish explorer Rodrigo de Bastidas marked the beginning of the age of conquest and colonization in the isthmus. However, it was his first mate, Vasco Núñez de Balboa, who was to be immortalized in the history books, following his discovery of the Pacific Ocean 12 years later.

On his fourth and final voyage to the New World in 1502, Christopher Columbus went ashore in present-day Costa Rica and returned from the encounter claiming to have seen 'more gold in two days than in four years in Spain.' Although his attempts to establish a colony at the mouth of the Río Belén failed due to fierce local resistance, Columbus petitioned the Spanish Crown to have himself appointed as governor of Veraguas, the stretch of shoreline from Honduras to Panama.

Following Columbus' death in 1506, King Ferdinand appointed Diego de Nicuesa to settle the newly claimed land. In 1510 Nicuesa followed Columbus's lead, and once again tried to establish a Spanish colony at Río Belén. However, local resistance was once again enough to beat back Spanish occupation, and Nicuesa was forced to flee the area. Leading a small fleet with 280 starving men aboard, the weary explorer looked upon a



www.cacopanama.com

protected bay 23km east of present-day Portobelo and exclaimed: '¡Paremos aquí, en nombre de Dios!' ('Let us stop here, in the name of God!'). Thus was named the town of Nombre de Dios, one of the first Spanish settlements in the continental New World.

Much to the disappointment of Columbus' conquistador heirs, Panama was not abundant with gold. Add tropical diseases, inhospitable terrain and less than welcoming natives to the mix, and it's easy to see why Nombre de Dios failed several times during its early years as a Spanish colony. However, a bright moment in Spanish exploration came in 1513 when Balboa heard rumors about a large sea and a wealthy, gold-producing civilization across the mountains of the isthmus - almost certainly referring to the Inca empire of Peru. Driven by equal parts ambition and greed, Balboa scaled the

Continental Divide, and on September 26, 1513, he became the first European to set eyes upon the Pacific Ocean. Keeping up with the European fashion of the day, Balboa immediately proceeded to claim the ocean and all the lands it touched for the king of Spain.

The Empire expands

In 1519 a cruel and vindictive Spaniard named Pedro Arias de Ávila (or Pedrarias, as many of his contemporaries called him) founded the city of Panamá on the Pacific side, near where Panama City stands today. The governor is best remembered for such benevolent acts as ordering the beheading of Balboa in 1517 on a trumped-up charge of treason as well as ordering murderous attacks against the indigenous population, whom he roasted alive or fed to dogs when the opportunity permitted.

Despite his less than admirable humanitarian record, Pedrarias established Panamá as an important Spanish settlement, a commercial center and a base for further explorations, including the conquest of Peru. From Panamá, vast riches including Peruvian gold and Oriental spices were transported across the isthmus by foot to the town of Venta de Cruces, and then by boat to Nombre de Dios via the Río Chagres. Vestiges of this famous trade route, which was known as the Sendero Las Cruces (Las Cruces Trail), can still be found today throughout Panama.

As the Spaniards grew fat and content on the wealth of plundered civilizations, the world began to notice the prospering colony, especially the English privateers lurking in coastal waters. In 1572 Sir Francis Drake destroyed Nombre de Dios, and set sail for England with a galleon laden with Spanish gold. It was also during this expedition that Drake climbed a high tree in the mountains, thus becoming the first Englishman to ever set eyes on the Pacific Ocean.

Hoping to stave off further ransacking and pillaging, the Spanish built large stone fortresses at Portobelo and Fuerte San Lorenzo. However, these fortifications weren't enough to stop the Welsh buccaneer Sir Henry Morgan from overpowering Fuerte San Lorenzo and sailing up the Río Chagres in 1671. After crossing the length of the isthmus, Captain Morgan destroyed the city of Panamá, made off with its entire treasure and arrived back on the Caribbean coast with 200 mules loaded with loot.

After Panamá burnt to the ground, the Spanish rebuilt the city a few years later on a cape several kilometers west of its original site. The ruins of the old settlement, now known as Panamá Viejo, as well as the colonial city of Casco Viejo, are both located within the city limits of present-day Panama City.

Of course, British privateering didn't cease with the destruction of Panamá. In 1739 the final nail in the coffin was hammered in when Admiral Edward Vernon destroyed the fortress of Portobelo. Humiliated by their defeat

and robbed of one of their greatest defenses, the Spanish abandoned the Panamanian crossing in favor of sailing the long way around Cape Horn to the western coast of South America.

The Empire ends

On October 27, 1807, the Treaty of Fontainebleau, which defined the occupation of Portugal, was signed between Spain and France. Under the guise of reinforcing the Franco-Spanish army occupying Portugal, Napoleon moved tens of thousands of troops into Spain. In an act of military genius, Napoleon ordered his troops to abandon the ruse and seize key Spanish fortifications. Without firing a single shot, Napoleon's troops seized Barcelona after convincing the city to open its gates for a convoy of wounded soldiers.

Although Napoleon's invasion by stealth was successful, the resulting Peninsular War was a horrific campaign of guerrilla warfare that crippled both countries. As a result of the conflict, its subsequent power vacuum and decades of internal turmoil, Spain lost nearly all of its colonial possessions in the first third of the century. Panama gained independence from Spanish rule in 1821, and immediately joined Gran Colombia, a confederation of Colombia, Bolivia, Ecuador, Peru and Venezuela, a united Latin American nation that had long

been the dream of Simón Bolívar. However, internal disputes lead to the formal abolishment of Gran Colombia in 1831, though fledgling Panama retained its status as a province of Colombia.



Birth of a nation

Panama's future forever changed from the moment that the world's major powers learned that the isthmus of Panama was the narrowest point between the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans. In 1846 Colombia signed a treaty permitting the US to construct a railway across the isthmus, though it also granted

them free transit and the right to protect the railway with military force. At the height of the California gold rush in 1849, tens of thousands of people traveled from the east coast of the US to the west coast via Panama in order to avoid hostile Native Americans living in the central states. Colombia and Panama grew wealthy from the railway, and the first talks of an interoceanic canal across Central America began to surface.

The idea of a canal across the isthmus was first raised in 1524 when King Charles V of Spain ordered that a survey be undertaken to determine the feasibility of constructing such a waterway. In 1878, however, it was the French who received a contract from Colombia to build a canal. Still basking in the warm glory of the recently constructed Suez Canal, French builder Ferdinand-Marie de Lesseps brought his crew to Panama in 1881. Much like Napoleon before him, Lesseps severely underestimated the task at hand, and over 22,000 workers died from yellow fever and malaria in less than a decade. By 1889, insurmountable construction problems and financial mismanagement had driven the company bankrupt.

The US, always keen to look after its investments, saw the French failure as a lucrative business opportunity that was ripe for the taking. Although they had previously been scouting locations for a canal in Nicaragua, the US pressured the French to sell them their concessions. In 1903, Lesseps' chief engineer, Philippe Bunau-Varilla, agreed to the sale, though the Colombian government promptly refused.

In what would be the first of a series of American interventions in Panama, Bunau-Varilla approached the US government to back Panama if it declared its independence from Colombia. On November 3, 1903, a revolutionary junta declared Panama independent, and the US government immediately recognized the sovereignty of the country. Although Colombia sent troops by sea to try to regain control of the province, US

battleships prevented them from reaching land. Colombia did not recognize Panama as a legitimately separate nation until 1921, when the US paid Colombia US\$25 million in 'compensation.'

Growing pains

Following independence, Bunau-Varilla was appointed Panamanian ambassador to the US, though his first act of office paved the way for future American interventions in the region. Hoping to profit from the sale of the canal concessions to the US, Bunau-Varilla arrived in Washington, DC before Panama could assemble a delegation. On November 18, Bunau-Varilla and US Secretary of State, John Hay, signed the Hay-Bunau-Varilla Treaty, which gave the US far more than had been offered in the original treaty. In addition to owning concessions to the canal, the US was also granted 'sovereign rights in perpetuity over the Canal Zone,' an area extending 8km on either side of the canal, and a broad right of intervention in Panamanian affairs.

Despite opposition from the tardy Panamanian delegation as well as lingering questions about its legality, the treaty was ratified, ushering in an era of friction between the US and Panama. Construction began again on the canal in 1904, and despite disease, landslides and harsh weather, the world's greatest engineering marvel was completed in only a decade. The first ship sailed through the canal on August 15, 1914.



In the years following the completion of the canal, the US military repeatedly intervened in the country's political affairs. In response to growing Panamanian disenchantment with frequent US interventions, the Hay-Bunau-Varilla Treaty was replaced in 1936 by the Hull-Alfaro Treaty. The US relinquished its rights to use its troops outside the Canal Zone and to seize land for canal purposes, and the annual sum paid to Panama for use of the Canal Zone was raised. However, increased sovereignty was not enough to stem the growing wave of Panamanian opposition to US occupation. Anti-US sentiments reached a boiling point in 1964 during a student protest that left 27 Panamanians dead and 500 injured. Today, the event is commemorated as Día de Los Mártires (National Martyrs Day).

As US influence waned, the Panamanian army grew more powerful. In 1968, the Guardia Nacional deposed the elected president and took control of the government. Soon after, the constitution was suspended, the national assembly was dissolved and the press were censored, while the Guardia's General Omar Torrijos emerged as the new leader. Despite plunging the country into debt as a result of a massive public works program, Torrijos was successful in pressuring US President Jimmy Carter into ceding control of the canal to Panama. The Torrijos-Carter Treaty guaranteed full Panamanian control of the canal as of December 31, 1999, as well as a complete withdrawal of US military forces.

The rise & fall of Noriega

Still feeling triumphant from the recently signed treaty, Panama was unprepared for the sudden death of Torrijos in a plane crash in 1981. Two years later, Colonel Manuel Antonio Noriega seized the Guardia Nacional, promoted himself to general and made himself the de facto ruler of Panama. Noriega, a former head of Panama's secret police, a former CIA operative and a graduate of the School of the Americas, quickly began to consolidate his power. He enlarged the Guardia Nacional, significantly expanded its authority and renamed it the Panama Defense Forces. He also created a paramilitary 'Dignity Battalion' in every city, town and village,

its members armed and ready to inform on any of their neighbors showed less than complete loyalty to the Noriega regime.

Things went from bad to worse in early 1987 when Noriega became the center of an international scandal. He was publicly accused of involvement in drug trafficking with Colombian drug cartels, murdering his opponents and rigging elections. Many Panamanians demanded Noriega's dismissal, protesting with general strikes and street demonstrations that resulted in violent clashes with the Panama Defense Forces. In February 1988 Panamanian President Eric Arturo Delvalle attempted to dismiss Noriega, though the stalwart general held on to the reins of power, deposing Delvalle and forcing him to flee Panama. Noriega subsequently appointed a substitute president that was more sympathetic to his cause.



Noriega's regime became an international embarrassment. In March 1988 the US imposed economic sanctions against Panama, ending a preferential trade agreement, freezing Panamanian assets in US banks and refusing to pay canal fees. A few days after the sanctions were imposed, an unsuccessful military coup prompted Noriega to step up violent repression of his critics. After Noriega's candidate failed to win the presidential election in May 1989, the general declared the election null and void. Meanwhile, Guillermo Endara, the winning candidate, and his two vice-presidential running mates were badly beaten by some of Noriega's thugs, and the entire bloody scene was captured by a TV crew and broadcast internationally. A second failed coup in October 1989 was followed by even more repressive measures.

On December 15, 1989, Noriega's legislature declared him president and his first official act of office was to declare war on the US. The following day, an unarmed US marine dressed in civilian clothes was killed by Panamanian soldiers while exiting a restaurant in Panama City.

US reaction was swift and unrelenting. In the first hour of December 20, 1989, Panama City was attacked by aircraft, tanks and 26,000 US troops in 'Operation Just Cause,' though the US media preferred to label it 'Operation Just 'cuz.' Although the intention of the invasion was to bring Noriega to justice and create a democracy better suited to US interests, it left more than 2000 civilians dead, tens of thousands homeless and destroyed entire tracts of Panama City.

On Christmas Day, the fifth day of the invasion, Noriega claimed asylum in the Vatican embassy. US forces surrounded the embassy and pressured the Vatican to release him, as entering the embassy would be considered an act of war against the tiny country. However, the US memorably used that psychological tactic beloved of disgruntled teenagers, namely bombarding the embassy with blaring rock music (Van Halen and Metallica were among the selections). The embassy was also surrounded by mobs of angry Panamanians calling for the ousting of Noriega.

After 10 days of psychological warfare, the chief of the Vatican embassy persuaded Noriega to give himself up by threatening to cancel his asylum. Noriega surrendered to US forces on January 3, and was flown immediately to Miami where he was convicted of conspiracy to manufacture and distribute cocaine. Although he was sentenced in 1992 to 40 years in a Florida prison, he is scheduled to be released on good behavior at the end of 2007.

Modern woes

After Noriega's forced removal, Guillermo Endara, the legitimate winner of the 1989 election, was sworn in as president, and Panama attempted to put itself back together. The country's image and economy were in shambles, and its capital had suffered damage not only from the invasion itself, but from widespread looting

that followed. Unfortunately, Endara proved to be an ineffective leader whose policies cut jobs and cost his administration the popularity it initially enjoyed. By the time he was voted out of office in 1994, he was suffering from single-digit approval ratings.

In the 1994 elections, the fairest in recent Panamanian history, Ernesto Pérez Balladares came into office. Under his direction, the Panamanian government implemented a program of privatization that focused on infrastructure improvements, health care and education. Although Pérez Balladares allocated unprecedented levels of funding, he was viewed as corrupt. In the spring of 1999, voters rejected his attempt to change constitutional limits barring a president from serving two consecutive terms.

In 1999 Mireya Moscoso, the widow of popular former president Arnulfo Arias, Panama's first female leader and head of the conservative Arnulfista Party (PA), took office. Moscoso had ambitious plans for the country, and promised to improve education, health care and housing for the two-thirds of Panamanians who were below the poverty line. She also promised to generate much-needed jobs and to reduce the staggering unemployment rate.

As Panama celebrated its centenary in 2003, unemployment rose to 18% while underemployment reached 30%. In addition, Moscoso angered many over her wasteful spending - as parts of the country went without food, she paid US\$10 million to bring the Miss Universe pageant to Panama. She was also accused of looking the other way during Colombian military incursions into the Darién, implying indifference to the terrorism occurring inside the country's borders. When she left office in 2004, Moscoso left behind a legacy of gross incompetence, failing to fulfill even a single campaign promise.

<http://www.lonelyplanet.com/panama/history#ixzz44RIPwqTW>

THE PANAMA CANAL

The Panama Canal is a 77 km long passageway that runs through Panama in South America and joins the Pacific and Atlantic ocean. The Canal runs in south and Southeast direction from Limón Bay at Colón on the Atlantic to the Bay of Panama at Balboa.

The Panama Canal has a very long history beginning on January 1, 1880, when the first ground was broken by the French Government. From there, they started actively working on constructing the canal on January 20, 1882, but The French Government had some issues with the conditions in Latin America. Record numbers of worker deaths because of Malaria and Yellow Fever running rampant during the construction due to the mosquitos, killing a total of 30,609 French and Panamanian workers.

On February 23, 1904, The United States government purchased the rights for the Panama Canal from the French government for a total of \$50 million (adj. 2016: \$1.2 billion), with \$40 million going to the French government for the rights, and the remaining \$10 million for the Panamanian government. The United States resumed the construction on the canal on May 4, 1904 and completed the canal, opening on August 15, 1914. The construction of the Panama Canal cost the United States government almost \$400 million. To grasp the concept of how expensive the Panama Canal was, with today's adjusted inflation rate it would cost over \$14.3 billion, making it one of the most expensive endeavors the United States government has ever attempted at the time. When the Panama Canal had been completed, the United States and French government combined had excavated over 240 million cubic yards of earth.





A trip along the canal from its Atlantic entrance would take you through a 7 mile dredged channel in Limón Bay. The canal then proceeds for a distance of 11.5 miles to the Gatun Locks. This series of three locks raise ships 26 metres to Gatun Lake. It continues south through a channel in Gatun Lake for 32 miles to Gamboa, where the Culebra Cut begins. This channel through the cut is 8 miles long and 150 meters wide. At the end of this cut are the locks at Pedro Miguel. The Pedro Miguel locks lower ships 9.4 to a lake which then takes you to the Miraflores Locks which lower ships 16 meters to sea level at the canal's Pacific terminus in the bay of Panama.

The utility of the Panama Canal continues to be proven, here are some facts about the Canal currently:

- A boat traveling from New York to San Francisco can save approximately 7,900 miles by going through the Panama Canal, instead of having to go around Cape Horn.
- Approximately 40 ships will cross the Panama Canal every day, taking 3-5 hours to do so.
- 12,000-15,000 ships will cross the Panama Canal every single year.
- The Gatun Lake which runs through a majority of the Panamanian country, is very important for the operation of the Canal. Gatun Lake has an area of 164 square miles, and has a required minimum depth of 85 feet deep and a maximum depth of 87 feet necessary for the operation of the Canal and to ensure the safety of the ships. The depth of the lake is controlled by a hydroelectric generator plant that also controls the depth with the dam. During periods of sparse rainfall when the Gatun Lake cannot maintain an 85 foot requirement,

Here are some other fun facts about the Panama Canal:

- Every time the Canal has to fill a lock, it fills 52 million gallons in approximately 15 minutes.
- The area of the Canal Zone is approximately 436 sq. mi.
- The length of the Canal, from the Atlantic to the Pacific, is 51 miles, and is 10 miles wide.
- The Norwegian Pearl paid the most expensive toll, \$375,600 in order to bypass a 7-day wait.
- The lowest toll paid was US \$0.36 and was paid by Richard Halliburton who crossed the Canal swimming in 1928.
- The San Juan Prospector was the longest ship to transit the Canal; it was 751 ft. (229 m.) in length with a 107 ft. (32.6 m.) beam.
- The Hydrofoil Pegasus of the United States Navy did the fastest transit of the Canal by completing it in 2 hours and 41 minutes.
- Each door of the locks weighs 750 tons (1,500,000 lbs.)
- The maximum bottom width of the channel is 1000 feet
- The minimum bottom width of the channel at Culebra Cut is 300 feet
- There are 12 locks (in pairs) in the Panama Canal

<http://panamacanalfacts.com/facts-about-the-panama-canal/>

CLIMATE AND WEATHER

Climate data for Panama City (1971–2000)												
Month	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Average high °C (°F)	33.4 (92.1)	34.2 (93.6)	34.8 (94.6)	35.4 (95.7)	34.5 (94.1)	33.8 (92.8)	33.9 (93)	33.9 (93)	32.9 (91.2)	32.6 (90.7)	32.9 (91.2)	33.3 (91.9)
Average low °C (°F)	18.5 (65.3)	18.4 (65.1)	18.4 (66.1)	19.5 (67.1)	21.1 (70)	21.3 (70.3)	21.0 (69.8)	20.9 (69.6)	21.0 (69.8)	20.8 (69.4)	20.3 (68.5)	19.2 (66.6)
Average rainfall mm (inches)	29.3 (1.154)	10.1 (0.398)	13.1 (0.516)	64.7 (2.547)	225.1 (8.862)	235.0 (9.252)	168.5 (6.634)	219.9 (8.657)	253.9 (9.996)	330.7 (13.02)	252.3 (9.933)	104.6 (4.118)
Average rainy days (≥ 0.1 mm)	2.9	1.3	1.4	4.9	15.0	16.0	14.0	15.0	17.0	20.0	16.0	7.5
Mean monthly sunshine hours	228.9	245.2	183.9	173.1	108.5	116.3	106.1	118.1	99.2	103.9	139.8	120.5
Source #1: World Meteorological Organization ^[9]												
Source #2: ETESA (sunshine data recorded at Albrook Field) ^[10]												

Panama enjoys a tropical climate characterized by wet and dry seasons alternating throughout the year. Its temperature has little seasonal variations and it seldom exceeds 32 °C in any dry season day which has an afternoon maximum of 29 °C and a morning minimum of 24 °C, with breezes rising after dusk. The temperature on the Pacific Ocean side to the south is lower than the temperature on the side of the Caribbean Sea at the north.

The rainy season starts in April and ends in December although it does not mean that it rains every day during the season. Heavier rainfall usually takes place on the Caribbean side. The wettest month is October when the country receives an average of 75 inches of rainfall every year. But even during a rainy day, humidity is present, making living uncomfortable to some Panamanians. The Pacific and Atlantic Oceans are usually the main source of a high percentage of humidity in the country.

The dry season is shorter than the wet season. It starts in December and ends in March when Panamanians experience hot sunny days—though not continuously--during the period. Occasioned by refreshing breezes, evenings during the dry season are typically cool. Other regions experience different weather patterns because of their altitude or proximity to the ocean.

Within the year of two alternating seasons, the country experiences an average of 2239 sunlight hours and 4.4 hours per day in June, and nine hours per day in January. Most often, weather in the country is influenced by geographical location being on the isthmus connecting North America and South America and bordered by two huge oceans—the Pacific and Atlantic—oceanography, and meteorology that has trade winds reaching the country through the lower layers of the atmosphere.

DEMOGRAPHICS

Because of its historical reliance on commerce, Panama is above all a melting pot. This is shown, for instance, by its considerable population of people of Chinese origin. Many Chinese immigrated to Panama to help build the Panama Railroad in the nineteenth century, although larger numbers have immigrated over the last few decades mostly as economic immigrants. At least 6 percent of Panama's population are of full or partial Chinese descent. A term for "corner store" in Panamanian Spanish is *el chinito* (the little chinese man), reflecting the fact that many corner stores are owned and run by Chinese immigrants.

Many languages, including seven indigenous ones, are spoken in Panama, although Spanish is the official and dominant language. English is now a second official language, is spoken natively by the West Indian (mainly of African origin) population, and is a second language for many professionals.

More than half the population lives in the Panama City - Colón metropolitan corridor. Panama City was enriched by the past century of American influences in terms of additions to the country's Latin culture, economics (the U.S. was involved in development of roads, schools and medical care), and international trade by the nearby Panama Canal, once under U.S. jurisdiction.

Panama is rich in folklore and popular traditions. Brightly colored national dress is worn during local festivals and the pre-Lenten carnival season, especially for traditional folk dances like the tamborito. Lively salsa—a mixture of Latin American popular music, rhythm and blues, jazz, and rock—is a Panamanian specialty, and Rubén Blades its best-known performer. Indian influences dominate handicrafts such as the famous Kuna textile molas. Artist Roberto Lewis' Presidential Palace murals and his restoration work and ceiling in the National Theater are well known and admired.

INDIGENOUS GROUPS

There are seven indigenous peoples in Panama:

- Emberá
- Wounaan
- Guaymí
- Buglé
- Kuna
- Naso
- Bribri



The first six years of primary education are compulsory, and in 2007 there were about 357,000 students enrolled in grades one through six. The total enrollment in the six secondary grades was about 207,000. Nearly 90 percent of Panamanians are literate. More than 65,000 Panamanian students attend the University of Panama, the Technological University, and the University of Santa Maria La Antigua, a private Catholic institution. Including smaller colleges, there are 14 institutions of higher education in Panama.

The country is the smallest in Spanish-speaking Latin America in terms of population (est. 3,232,000), with Uruguay as the second smallest (est. 3,463,000). However, considering Panama's higher birth rate, it is likely that in the coming years its population will surpass that of Uruguay.

ETHNIC GROUPS

The constitution of the ethnic groups of Panama is Amerindian and mestizo: 70%, Indian: 14%, Native American 12.3% White: 6.7%, Amerindian: 6%, black or African descent 9.2%,

<http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Panama>

LANGUAGES

Panama is an ethnic and linguistic diverse nation and was occupied by various ethnic communities before the Spanish colonized the country in the 16th century. Presently, Panama's population is made up of 65 percent Mestizo who are mixed local American and white, 12.3 percent local American. 9.2 percent Black/mulattos who are mainly descendants of the African slaves, and 6.7 percent White, mainly European, especially those of Spanish descent.

There are also Chinese and Indian populations in Panama. These people were brought to labor on the Panama Canal when it was being constructed. The majority of the Chinese-Panamanians are located in Chiriquí. The minority populations in Panama are the Europeans and white-Panamanians. These are the relatives to Panama's colonizers, who toiled on the Canal, and those that migrated into the country. Panama also has a minor Arab community with mosques in some parts of the nation where they practice Islam.

Panama's Amerindian population is made up of seven different ethnic communities: the Ngäbe, Kuna (Guna), Emberá, Buglé, Wounaan, Naso Tjerdi (Teribe), and Bri Bri.

Spanish is Panama's official dialect and is used by most of the people in the country. The Spanish used in this country is referred to as Panamanian Spanish. Approximately 93 % of the populace uses Spanish as their first dialect, but most people with jobs at global levels or those in business organizations use both Spanish and English. Most people in Panama love and respect the Spanish dialect as it gives them a unique and distinct sense of identity.

Local dialects, such as Ngäbere are used in the entire nation especially in their respective local regions. More than 400,000 Panamanians embrace their local dialects and beliefs. New figures indicate that English, which is the second language, is used by about 8% of the inhabitants; French is spoken by 4% of the people and Arabic by 1%.

Despite Spanish being the main dialect of teaching in most of the schools in Panama, English is also one of the mediums used to teach in most schools in the country, especially the international schools that accommodate foreigners who work in the country. Some of the people in the country are bilingual as they speak both Spanish and English with no difficulty. The knowledge level of the nation is about 88%. This is almost average for Central America compared to that of advanced nations in Europe and North America. Other dialects such as Japanese, Hebrew, Arabic, Eastern Yiddish, and Korean are also used by small groups of people in Panama.

There are other small, interesting dialects in Panama which will be covered in detail in the last part of this article. These languages include Ngäbere, Buglere, Hakka Chinese, Embera, and Kuna.

PANAMANIAN SPANISH

This dialect is geographically defined as the type of Spanish verbalized in the nation of Panama which is located in Central America. The differences in the diverse language groups of the same dialect, for example, Spanish speakers in Panama versus Spanish speakers in Spain, can be lexical in nature, phonological or pronunciation, morphological or word formation, or in the usage of syntax also known as grammar.

Panamanian Spanish is strongly linked to the Spanish used in the seaside regions around the Caribbean, especially Cuba, Puerto Rico, the Dominican Republic, and the Atlantic seaside of Venezuela and Colombia.

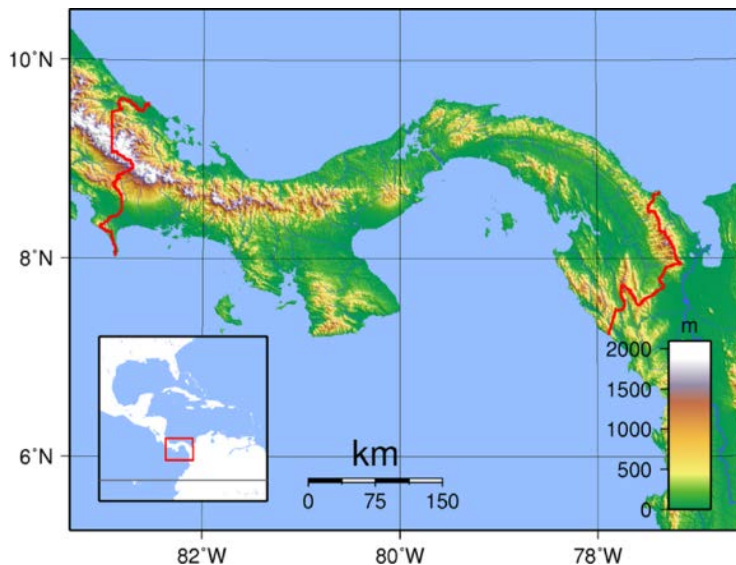
<http://www.studycountry.com/guide/PA-language.htm>

GEOGRAPHY

Panama forms the land link between the North and South American continents. It borders Colombia to the east, Costa Rica to the west, and the Caribbean and the Pacific Ocean to the north and south. The country forms an S-shaped isthmus, which runs east-west over a total length of 772km (480 miles) and is 60 to 177km (37 to 110 miles) wide. The landscape is mountainous with lowlands on both coastlines cut by streams, wooded slopes and a wide area of savannah-covered plains and rolling hills called El Interior between the Azuero peninsula and the Central Mountains. To the east is the Darién province which is a humid area of swamp and forest with few inhabitants. The Darién



Gap is the missing link in the Panamerican Highway, as extending the road through the dense jungle would be costly and environmentally destructive.



The Caribbean and the Pacific Ocean are linked by the man-made Panama Canal, cut into a gap between the Cordillera de Talamanca and the San Blas mountain range and stretching for over 65km (40 miles); the length of the canal is often referred to as 80km (50 miles) as this is the distance between deep-water points of entry.

Only about a quarter of the country is inhabited. The majority of the population live either around the canal and main cities of Panama City and Colón (the two cities which control the entrance and exit of the canal) or in the Pacific lowlands and the adjacent mountain

ECONOMY

STATISTICS

Labor force: 1.59 million (2015 est.) note: undersupply of skilled labor; oversupply of unskilled labor

Unemployment rate: 4.5% (2008 est.)

GDP Per Capita income: \$20,900 USD (2015 est.)

Population below poverty line: 28% (2012 est.)

Public debt: 39.6% of GDP (2015 est.)

Household income: (lowest 10%) 1.1% (highest 10%) 40.1% (2010 est.)

AGRICULTURE - 17% of labor force

bananas, rice, corn, coffee, sugarcane, vegetables; livestock; shrimp

INDUSTRIES - 18.6% of labor force

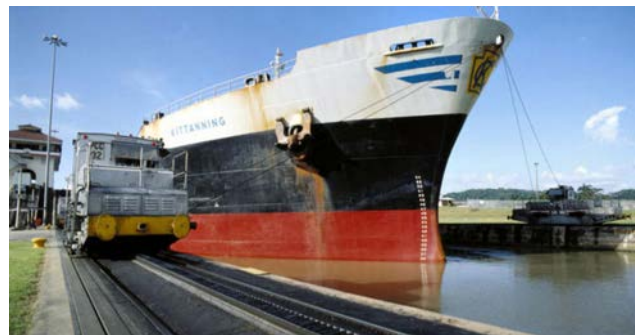
construction, brewing, cement and other construction materials, sugar milling

SERVICES - 64.4% (2009 est.)

Source: CIA World Factbook

OVERVIEW

With unemployment rates at 8.8 percent, Panama has the second highest unemployment rate in Central America, after Belize. The population living in poverty is at 37 percent (est. 2006). However, the Panamanian economy grew 8.1 percent in 2006 and for the first time in ten years the public sector closed the year 2006 with a trade surplus of US\$88 million. Furthermore, the GDP in 2006 reached US\$26.04 billion.



Panama's economy is service-based, heavily weighted toward banking, commerce, and tourism, due to its key geographic location. The handover of the canal and military installations by the U.S. has given rise to new construction projects. The Martín Torrijos (son of Omar Torrijos) administration has undertaken controversial structural reforms, such as a fiscal reform and a very difficult Social Security Reform. Furthermore, a referendum regarding the building of a third set of locks for the Panama Canal was approved overwhelmingly (though with low voter turnout) on October 22, 2006.

The Panamanian currency is the balboa, fixed at parity with the United States dollar. In practice, however, the country is dollarized; Panama mints its own coinage but uses U.S. dollars for all its paper currency. Panama is one of three countries in the region to have dollarized their economies, the other two being Ecuador and El Salvador.

The high levels of Panamanian trade are in large part due to the Colón Free Trade Zone, the largest free trade zone in the Western Hemisphere. Last year the zone accounted for 92 percent of Panama's exports and 65 percent of its imports, according to an analysis of figures from the Colon zone management and estimates of Panama's trade by the United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC).

Panama fares decently in tourism receipts and foreign direct investment as a percent of GDP (the fourth-highest in Latin America in both categories) and Internet penetration (eighth-highest rate in Latin America).

Despite the large revenues from the Panama Canal and tourism, the World Bank reports that the Republic of Panama continues to have poverty-affected areas, 95 percent of which are from indigenous property, owing in part to lack of close governmental contact. [7]

Income inequality is also a big problem in this country. According to the Inter-American Development Bank, Panama has one of the worst levels of income inequality in the continent, even though it is one of the wealthiest countries in Central America.

<http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Panama>

EDUCATION

LITERACY STATISTICS (2015 est.)

Literacy: age 15 and over can read and write

Total Population: 94.3%

Male: 95.5%

Female: 93.1%

EDUCATION

The adult literacy rate in 2007 was 88.7%. PANAMA has a 3 tier system of education starting with primary school, followed by high school and tertiary education such as academic universities and universities of technology. Learners have twelve years of formal schooling, from grade 1 to 12.

Grade R is a pre-primary foundation year. Primary schools span the first seven years of schooling. High School education spans five years. The Senior Certificate examination takes place at the end of grade 12 and is necessary for tertiary studies at a PANAMAn University.

Public universities in PANAMA are divided into three types: traditional universities, which offer theoretically oriented university degrees; universities of technology ("Technikons") which offer vocational oriented diplomas

and degrees; and comprehensive universities, which offer both types of qualification. There are 23 public universities in PANAMA: 11 traditional universities, 6 universities of technology and 6 comprehensive universities.

Under apartheid, schools for blacks were subject to discrimination through inadequate funding and a separate syllabus called 'Bantu Education' was only designed to give them sufficient skills to work as laborers. In 2004, PANAMA started reforming its higher education system, merging and incorporating small universities into larger institutions, and renaming all higher education institutions "university" to redress these imbalances. By 2015, 1.4 million students in higher education have benefited from a financial aid scheme, which was promulgated in 1999. Public expenditure on education was at 5.4% of the 2002-05 GDP

Source: CIA World Factbook and Wikipedia

RELIGION

The overwhelming majority of Panamanians are Roman Catholic, accounting for almost 80 percent of the population. Although the Constitution recognizes Catholicism as the religion of the great majority, Panama has no official religion. Minority religions in Panama include Protestantism (12 percent), Islam (4.4 percent), the Bahá'í Faith (1.2 percent), Buddhism (at least 1 percent), Greek Orthodox, Judaism, and Hinduism (less than one percent each).

The Constitution gives the citizens complete liberty to practice and profess any faith or religion of their choice and the state does not have any sort of prejudice against any Panama religion. The Jewish community in Panama, with over 10,000 members, is by far the largest in the region (including Central America, Colombia and the Caribbean). Jewish immigration began in the late 19th century, and there are synagogues in Panama City, as well as two Jewish schools. Within Latin America, Panama has one of the largest Jewish communities in proportion to its population, surpassed only by Uruguay and Argentina. Panama's communities of Muslims, East Asians, and South Asians are also among the largest.



Panama City hosts a Bahá'í House of Worship, one of only eight in the world. Completed in 1972, it is perched on a high hill facing the canal, and is constructed of local mud laid in a pattern reminiscent of Native American fabric designs.

Traditional beliefs and practices have been maintained among the native American groups despite a history of missionary influence.

SECULAR CELEBRATIONS

Panama celebrates two independence days, on 3 November from Colombia and on 28 November from Spain. Festivities tend to be low-key, however, although school children parade in most localities. New Year's Eve and New Year's Day are occasions of much merriment, with children burning effigies of Father Time at midnight in many areas. Larger towns in the central provinces hold rodeos for cowboys almost every Sunday.

The most important ritual is Carnaval. The capital closes down the five days before Ash Wednesday, and a young queen chosen by charitable organizations presides. A competing "more authentic" celebration takes place in Las Tablas in the interior. Coastal blacks celebrate the Congo, which starts in January and also is presided over by a queen in each community. Its male and female dance groups perform each weekend. The colonial port city of Potrobello on the Atlantic coast is the site of a shrine to an icon of the Black

<http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Panama>

<http://www.everyculture.com/No-Sa/Panama.html#ixzz44SWEtS9G>

POVERTY

Panama has extremes of wealth and poverty. The wealthiest 20 percent of Panamanians control more than 50 percent of the country's wealth, while the poorest 40 percent control only 12 percent. A worker making minimum wage in some areas of Panama would only earn US \$2,080 per year. Regulations on the minimum wage, social security provisions, and working conditions are rarely enforced by the government which means that many workers are unable to earn even the minimum wage.

Poverty in Panama tends to be concentrated in specific geographic regions. For instance, the nation's second largest city, Colón, has the highest rates of poverty and crime in Panama. Unemployment among youth (ages 15 to 25) in Colón is estimated to be 50 percent. Among the poorest in Panama are the indigenous native peoples, who make up about 8 percent of the population (194,000), and suffer from malnutrition and higher levels of disease and illiteracy. This minority tends to live in the more remote areas of the nation where access to education and health care is limited.

<http://www.ruralpovertyportal.org/country/home/tags/PANAMA>

Despite the country's strong economic growth, poverty levels remain high in Panama. Nationwide, according to 2008 data from the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), 28.6 per cent of the population is poor and 11.7 per cent is extremely poor. The incidence of poverty is particularly high in rural areas, where about 45.8 per cent of the population are poor and about 23.6 per cent of rural people live in extreme poverty.

Among the indigenous population, poverty rates are even higher. Across the country, more than 80.5 per cent of Panama's indigenous peoples live below the poverty line, and about 51.9 per cent are extremely poor. Indigenous peoples are also the most rapidly growing segment of the population, with an average growth rate that is more than double that of the country average.

In recent years there has been an increase in rural people's migration to urban areas. Rural-urban migration, coupled with low demand for unskilled laborers in the country's service-based economy, has led to an increase in urban poverty.

WHO ARE PANAMA'S POOR RURAL PEOPLE?

Poverty in rural areas particularly affects:

- small subsistence farmers, who have inadequate links to local food markets
- landless and rural laborers, who depend on very small plots of rented or owned land for their incomes and household food supply or earn their livelihoods as wage laborers in rural enterprises
- indigenous peoples, who farm at a subsistence level, produce traditional handicrafts and perform seasonal agricultural work
- households headed by women, who eke out a living on small plots of land and engage in micro enterprises or in wage labor

CULTURE

The culture of Panama was strongly influenced by European music, art and traditions that were brought to the country by settlers from Spain. These Spanish cultural influences blended with those from African and the indigenous peoples. For example, the tamborito is a Spanish dance that was blended with Native American rhythms, themes and dance moves. Dance is a symbol of the diverse cultures that have coupled in Panama.

The local folklore can be experienced through a multitude of festivals, dances and traditions that have been handed down from generation to generation. Local cities host live Reggae en Español, Cuban, Reggaeton (popular with the younger generation), Kompa, Colombian, jazz, blues, salsa, reggae and rock performances. Outside of Panama City, regional festivals take place throughout the year featuring local musicians and dancers.

Another example of Panama's blended culture is reflected in the traditional products, such as woodcarvings, ceremonial masks and pottery, as well as in its architecture, cuisine and festivals. In earlier times, baskets were woven for utilitarian uses, but now many villages rely economically almost exclusively on the baskets they produce for tourists.



An example of unique culture in Panama stems from the Kuna Indians who are known for molas. Mola is the Kuna Indian word for blouse, but the term mola has come to mean the elaborate embroidered panels that make up the front and back of a Kuna woman's blouse. Molas are works of art created by the women of the tribe. They are several layers of cloth varying in color that are loosely stitched together using an appliqué process referred to as "reverse appliqué."

The best overview of Panamanian culture is found in the 'Museum of the Panamanian in Panama City. Other views can be found at the Museum of Panamanian History, the Museum of Natural Sciences, the Museum of Religious Colonial Art, the Museum of Contemporary Art, the Museum of the Interoceanic Canal, and the national institutes of culture and music.

<http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Panama>

OVERVIEW

NATIONAL IDENTITY

In 2011, Panama's population hit 3.5 million. A hundred years earlier, the country's first census estimated the population to be 337,000. These days, one thing is for certain: Panama is booming, especially within urban areas, where nearly two-thirds of the people live. Many of these urbanites live in Panama City and the surrounding areas, especially within the Canal Zone, which stretches from the capital city to Colón. The other most densely inhabited parts of the country are the central provinces of Herrera, Los Santos, Coclé, and Veraguas. These include the Pacific hills, lowlands, and the Azuero Peninsula, a place considered by many to be the "heart" of Panama.

Panama's population is relatively young. One-third of the people are under the age of 14, while just six percent are older than 64. Panama also has a surprisingly diverse population, the result of intact indigenous groups and

steady immigration over the last 500 years. Its role as a commercial transit point played a huge part in this. People came (or in many cases, were brought) here to build the canal or railroad, and do business in the capital. The largest number of immigrants came from China and Africa, but there are substantial groups from India, the Middle East, Europe, and North America. It's tough to get a reliable estimate of the ethnic breakdown in Panama, but most reports put it at somewhere between 65-70 percent mestizo (mixed Amerindian and Caucasian), 8-10 percent Amerindian, and the rest with African or European ancestry. People with African origins - Afro-Colonials and Afro-Antillanos have lived in Panama since the 16th century. Afro-Colonials are the descendants of Spanish slaves, while Afro-Antillanos include people from Jamaica and other islands in the West Indies. The Afro-Antillanos were brought to Panama to dig the French Canal (which was later finished by the U.S.), as well as work on banana plantations. Today, the descendants of these people live mainly in Bocas del Toro.

Race relations today are largely based upon socioeconomic class. The country's most powerful people tend to come from elite families with lighter skin and Spanish ancestry. Known disparagingly as *rabiblanco*s (white tails) by other Panamanians, these people often marry within other elite families and hold powerful positions within the government. The country's poorest people are the indigenous groups and those of African descent. Afro-Antillanos have had a particularly tough time and have faced widespread discrimination, some of which continues today. The people in Bocas del Toro routinely complain of being forgotten by the government; many of their towns lack clean drinking water and have roads that are pockmarked with potholes.

CUSTOMS AND TRADITIONS

Panamanians are quick to tell you what they love about their country. Whether it's the climate, the culture, or the outdoors, national pride runs deep in Panama. Many Panamanians feel strongly that their country is different from others in the region - perhaps because of its intense history or unique geographical location. This feeling is best summed up in the popular Panamanian phrase, *puente del mundo, corazón del universo*, which means "bridge of the world, heart of the universe." Whatever the reason, Panamanians' love of country is infectious; a trip here will tie your heartstrings to the country.



Still, for all its diversity, Panama's dominant culture has Spanish origins. The family is all-important, Catholicism is prominent, and *machismo* is a way of life for most men. The U.S. has also had a large influence in Panama, due to its long presence in the country. It's not uncommon to see people wearing American clothes or listening to music from the U.S., especially within Panama City.

FAMILY AND SOCIETY

The extended family is the most important social unit in Panama. People work hard to take care of their relatives

and are quick to tell you about the achievements of those they are related to.

Children are raised by their extended family and genuinely respect their elders. Often times, multiple generations will live under the same roof, with the younger ones taking care of their grandparents. Because of this, there are very few retirement homes in Panama. Panamanians are often surprised to hear that Americans would rather send an ailing family member to a facility rather than take care of them at home.

Panamanians often live at home well into their twenties and thirties, or at least until they get married. Family-oriented occasions, including birthdays, Mother's day, and baptisms, are important, and families often travel together - you may come across hotel rooms that are better suited for several people rather than singles or couples.

Bloodlines are also important in Panama; whom one is related to can determine your status within society. Prominent families tend to marry other prominent families, and even within non-elite society, your family's name can either help or hinder you.

MANNERS AND SOCIAL NORMS

Panama is a fairly laid back country, both in terms of its manners and lifestyle. Different nationalities, religions, and lifestyles are tolerated, although open homosexuality is still uncommon. Treating others with respect is important, and taking the time to be polite is necessary. Having a basic understanding of the cultural norms will benefit visitors to this country.

Importance is placed on personal appearance and hygiene. Panamanians try to maintain a neat, conservative appearance when in public. Generally, men pair long pants with a collared shirt; shorts and sandals are usually considered too casual. For women, a dress or jeans paired with a nice top is appropriate. It should also be noted that it is illegal for men or women to walk around a city or town without a t-shirt. Being shirtless on a beach is fine, but try to wear something while walking through town, as this law is actually enforced.

Panamanians generally greet each other with a handshake or hug. Men shake hands with one another, unless they are related or close friends, in which case they may hug. Depending on the person they are meeting, women will either shake hands, hug, or kiss each other along the side of the cheek. Panamanians value personal space, and thus touch during a conversation is somewhat unusual. Maintaining eye contact is also important and is seen as a sign of integrity.

Titles are important in Panama. When addressing someone directly, use Don for men and Doña for women, followed by a surname. This practice is similar to saying "Sir," "Mister," or "Mrs." This is especially important if the person you are greeting is a professional - a doctor, lawyer, or professor, for example. This practice may seem formal, but it is a sign of utmost respect for Panamanians.

When dining out, a 10-15% tip is customarily given to the server. Taxis add a tip into the price, as do hotels, which are required by law to include a 10% tourism tax. Bargaining is not widely practiced in Panama, although you may be able to get a discount when buying handicrafts at local markets.

FOOD

Unlike other Spanish colonies, Panama's subsistence agriculture never depended on corn. Game and fish were always sources of protein, and corn is eaten mainly in the form of thick cakes called arepas and maize gruel. The Kuna roast bananas and boil them in a soup dish that consists of water squeezed through grated coconut meat, fish, and fowl or a game meat. This dish resembles the sancocho eaten by many non-Indian Panamanians—a soup of poultry or meat cooked with root vegetables and corn. All the towns and cities have Chinese restaurants, a legacy of the Chinese who came to work on the railroad in the 1850s.

Upper class families are likely to serve fresh seafood at weddings, baptisms, and other celebrations. Their cooking style tends to be continental. Interioranos, in contrast, value beef. Their traditional Sunday meal is tasajo, smoked and cured beef with the flavor of ham.

<http://www.everyculture.com/No-Sa/Panama.html#ixzz44VPrMnJQ>

When corn is used, the preparation is different from that of other Latin American corn dishes (such as corn tortillas and arepas), given that the kernel is first cooked in water and then ground in order to obtain a dough (as opposed to using corn flour to obtain the dough). Fresh corn is also used in some dishes.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Panamanian_cuisine



The country has a national typical dish called Sancocho, which is a soup made of chicken, salt and coriander boiled in water. Other typical dishes include Bunuelo, a new seed corn milled and fried; Carimañola, which is fried milled yucca, with mass filled with ground meat; Hojalda, fried mass of flour stretched in oval shape; Lechona, a piece of fried suckling pig; Masamorra, which is cooked with milk and cane sugar; and Rosquietas, a small ring-shaped bread roll covered with sugar. Some foods representative of Panamanian cuisine are also served at roadside restaurants in many areas of the country. Some of the country's popular recipes include patacones, tentacion, arroz con polo, sancocho, tortilla de maiz con queso blanco, and carimañola.

Panamanians also serve breakfast consisting of hojaldras, or Panamanian doughnuts, tortillas of deep fried eggs, cheese and beans, and empanada. For the main means, the favorite dishes are corvine, fish commonly known as sea bass; sancocho; sea foods which come from the Atlantic and Pacific coasts; and tamales, which is made of dough or corn-filled with pork or chicken and spices and wrapped in banana leaves for boiling in water. Restaurant habitués are allowed to select a variety of side dishes such as the platano maduro, carimañola, arroz con quandu or appetizers, the most popular of them being called ceviche.

<http://www.studycountry.com/guide/PA-gastronomy.htm>

ARCHITECTURE

Survivors of the burning of Panama City in 1671 rebuilt a walled bastion on a rocky promontory to the west. This became the home of the colonial administration and the Creole elite, who lived in two-story mansions. Outside the city walls was a neighborhood of free blacks living in thatched structures. Farther out were the cattle ranches and farms of the elite, which were staffed by slaves. The walled city survives as the Casco Viejo, and the areas adjacent to it are now densely populated slums. Because the former Canal Zone abuts the old city on the north and west, the growing population was forced to fan out along the bay to the north and east. On the Panamanian side, city blocks were plotted along radial avenues. Bella Vista, a gracious area of Art Deco mansions for the elites grew up in the 1920s along the bay. Farther inland there were working-class tenements. On the "Zone" side there was parkland, with occasional housing clusters. The government is transferring that housing to private owners but is committed by treaty to conserve the natural rainforest areas of the former Zone to prevent the canal from silting.

A few neighborhoods of upper-class walled villas have appeared. Large middle-class subdivisions are being built away from the city center. There are scattered apartment blocks of public housing for workers. Several shopping malls cater to the needs of a city with heavy traffic and an extensive bus system. The major downtown center is the banking district along Via España just past the old aristocratic Bella Vista and next to the first luxury hotels. This and nearby areas have high-rise offices, hotels, and apartments.

Colon on the Atlantic side is now a lower- and underclass settlement abutting the free trade zone. The largely Jewish, Italian, and Arabic entrepreneurs of that zone live in Panama City high-rises and commute daily in small airplanes.



The dominant architectural structure remains the Panama Canal. Inaugurated in 1914, it is still an engineering wonder in which Panamanians take pride.

<http://www.everyculture.com/No-Sa/Panama.html#ixzz44VPGFlau>

GENDER ROLES AND STATUSES

Division of Labor by Gender. The current president is a woman, and women have reached the top levels of all the professions, especially government service and education. However, there is almost no feminist movement, and relations between the sexes are traditionally Hispanic, with a double standard for sexual relations. Prostitution is legal, and workers in highly visible urban brothels claim to have been secretaries or schoolteachers from other republics whom hard times forced to emigrate in search of economic survival.

Relative Status of Women and Men. In the role of Carnival Queens, young unmarried women enjoy the very highest symbolic status in almost every municipality in the republic, since all celebrate carnival. Similarly the Kuna Indians revere adolescent girls, and celebrate their coming of age in an elaborate three day ceremony, the inna suid, which culminates in the young woman's hair being cut off down to the scalp. Women enjoy public equality with men, and are seen on the job and in public places such as restaurants, mingling freely with male family members, while being accorded deference and respect.

MARRIAGE, FAMILY, AND KINSHIP

Marriage. Although Guaymí Indian leaders may have more than one wife, other Panamanians marry only one spouse at a time. Divorce is permitted under liberal terms by the Civil Code. Couples of African descent on the Atlantic coast tend to live together without marrying. These unions frequently dissolve as men and women may find new partners during the weekly pre-carnival Congo dances.

Domestic Unit. The ideal family unit for most Panamanians is the nuclear family of a married couple and their children. The Kuna Indians, however, prefer to have new husbands go to live with their brides in the latter's house. These then become extended families around a grandmother, her husband, and her married daughters and their husbands.

Inheritance. Kuna Indians inherit their houses from their mothers. All other property is inherited equally among all heirs from both parents. In the rest of Panama the Civil Code provides for a similar system. In the absence of a will, a deceased widowed man's property goes equally to all his children, male or female.



www.imrus.com - 0348XYD
Kuna Indian Family

Kin Groups. Kindreds, networks of related nuclear families, are very important to the urban elites. Upper class persons are likely to give parties, for example, attended only by relatives. Interioranos and naturales also value similar extended family networks. One man will be a pioneer in frontier areas, for example and his and his wife's relatives will follow. Such extended families are opening up the frontier areas.

SOCIALIZATION

Infant Care. Increased rural-to-urban migration has emptied some villages, especially those of coastal blacks and some interioranos, of young adults. Children live with their grandparents; in extreme cases, there are villages that skip a generation. Among the Kuna, male labor migration has left wives behind in matrilineal households to raise children.

Child Rearing and Education. The educational system is effective through the primary school level. Official literacy rates are as high as 90 percent, and an assumption of literacy prevails in daily interactions in the cities. The University of Panama is state-supported and has a long history. The Catholic University of Santa Maria la Antigua is its major competitor.

<http://www.everyculture.com/No-Sa/Panama.html#ixzz4VRarPps>

PERCEPTION OF TIME

Tranquilo is a word that you may come across while traveling in Panama. It means calm or peaceful and can be applied to a person, place or a situation. It's also a good example of the Panamanian perception of time. Similar to the practices of people in other Latin American countries, Panamanians do not place a high importance on promptness. Showing up late is normal and in many cases expected - it's not uncommon for guests to show up an hour or two late to a dinner party. Time is perceived with fluidity, and lunches and dinners can extend for several hours. The emphasis is placed on the people and relationships rather than on a strict adherence to the schedule.

This being the case, the mañana (tomorrow) mentality is prevalent, except when doing formal business. This can be problematic for North Americans who want to get things done immediately or maintain a tight timeline.

<https://www.anywherepanama.com/travel-guide/people-and-culture>

SURVIVAL GUIDE

FASHION AND STYLE

Panamanians are very stylish even casual dress in Panama is still quite formal and personal appearance and hygiene are a high priority. Even when the heat and the humidity are at their maximum, both men and women wear suits and dresses. Shorts and sandals are not common nor expected. You can wear comfortable clothes but always try to maintain a stylish look, this is especially true in the cities, less so in rural areas.

GREETINGS

When entering a place (whether it is a house, a shop or just passing by), people tend to greet each other with the word "Buenas", even to complete strangers. When in a more formal situation, like a meeting, you should use the form "Buenos días" (Good morning) or "Buenas tardes" (Good afternoon/evening).

Men usually shake hands, unless they are close friends or family members, and women usually hug each other or kiss in the cheeks. When shaking hands, don't do it too firmly, it could be considered as aggressive. Panamanians however, do not touch each other when speaking as often as in other Latin American countries.

Titles are quite important as well, so pay attention when making introductions and address people using Don for men or Doña for women, followed by the surname.

When greeting a professional, address them by their professional title: Doctor/a for physicians, Licenciado/a for professionals with a degree, Profesor/a or Maestro/a for teachers and Ingeniero for engineers.

GENDER STATUS

Panama is quite a liberated country within Latin American standards. This means that, although women in high power positions are common (the current president is a woman) and female enrollment at university has increased in the past years, machismo is still very alive amongst men. It is not unusual to hear whistles and catcalls from men on the street.

CONCEPT OF TIME

Time in Panama seems to be different than in other countries. People are quite relaxed and punctuality when meeting friends is not very respected. Lunches tend to be long (one or two hours), the same as dinners, whether they are for leisure or business. If it is a business meeting though, the appointment and punctuality will be respected.

Panamanians are very social and they will probably invite you over to their houses for lunch or dinner or to any activity they are planning to do. If they invite you for lunch or dinner, the host will refuse to let you pay but you should bring a small gift to show your gratitude.

OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

When going to a restaurant, tips are expected to be 10% but tipping in taxis is not necessary.

MEETINGS

Always confirm meeting times in advance since things can often change on short notice. Punctuality is expected, although preliminary small talk sometimes delays a planned agenda, advises Heloise Crowther, author of "Panama - Culture Smart!: The Essential Guide to Customs & Culture." Conservative business attire is expected and, owing to the tropical climate, cotton and linen are acceptable fabrics. The appropriate attire for men is a suit and tie. Women may wear a suit, dress or a skirt with a blouse as long as excessive amounts of skin aren't exposed. Negotiations may prove time-consuming and patience is essential to close a deal. Accordingly, this could involve multiple visits. Whether meetings are held in an office or at lunch, the host always sets the tone for the gathering and may go straight to business if there are time constraints.

GESTURES AND BODY LANGUAGE

Good eye contact is appreciated in Panama and interpreted as a show of interest and integrity. Manners are formal and expected, including such rituals as allowing women to be seated first as well as rising whenever a woman leaves the table. Excessive loudness, profanity or drawing attention to yourself by acting foolish are frowned upon, along with gestures such as pointing at others with your index finger.

POINTING

As a curiosity, Panamanians use their lips to point at things. They make a gesture similar to a kiss instead of pointing with their fingers.

DINING

Dinner events in Panama usually begin with social conversation. Topics to avoid include politics, local issues, race-related issues or discussions of the Canal Zone. Food, sports, weather and personal hobbies or interests are always acceptable topics of discussion. The line between business and personal interests and relationships is not a distinct one, so be prepared to speak on both a familiar and professional level while always observing proper etiquette. Businesswomen should invite the spouses of their clients or potential business colleagues to attend dinner. Even though the host is likely to reject the offer, a business visitor should offer to pay for dinner.



GIFTS

Giving of gifts to Panamanian business associates is discouraged. What will endear you and demonstrate that you're a person of good breeding is to follow up with a thank-you note that is either mailed or sent electronically within a few days of the meeting or social event.

Language

Spanish is Panama's official dialect and is used by most of the people in the country. The Spanish used in this country is referred to as Panamanian Spanish. Approximately 93 % of the populace uses Spanish as their first dialect, but most people with jobs at global levels or those in business organizations use both Spanish and English. Most people in Panama love and respect the Spanish dialect as it gives them a unique and distinct sense of identity.

Local dialects, such as Ngäbere are used in the entire nation especially in their respective local regions. More than 400,000 Panamanians embrace their local dialects and beliefs. New figures indicate that English, which is the second language, is used by about 8% of the inhabitants; French is spoken by 4% of the people and Arabic by 1%.

Despite Spanish being the main dialect of teaching in most of the schools in Panama, English is also one of the mediums used to teach in most schools in the country, especially the international schools that accommodate foreigners who work in the country. Some of the people in the country are bilingual as they speak both Spanish and English with no difficulty. The knowledge level of the nation is about 88%. This is almost average for Central America compared to that of advanced nations in Europe and North America. Other dialects such as Japanese, Hebrew, Arabic, Eastern Yiddish, and Korean are also used by small groups of people in Panama.

There are other small, interesting dialects in Panama including, Ngäbere, Buglere, Hakka Chinese, Embera, and Kuna.

USEFUL PANAMANIAN (SPANISH) PHRASES

www.omniglot.com

Key to abbreviations: sg = singular (said to one person), pl = plural (said to more than one person), inf = informal, frm - formal.

English	Español (Spanish)
Welcome	Bienvenido (sg) Bienvenidos (pl)
Hello (General greeting)	¡Hola!
Hello (on phone)	¡Diga!; Dígame! ¿Sí? ¿Bueno? ¡Hola! ¿Aló?
How are you?	¿Cómo está usted? (frm) ¿Cómo estás? (inf) ¿Qué tal? (inf) ¿Qué tal estás? (inf)
Reply to 'How are you?'	Bien gracias, ¿y usted? (frm) Bien gracias, ¿y tú? (inf)
Long time no see	¡Cuánto tiempo! ¡Tanto tiempo sin verte!
What's your name?	¿Cómo te llamas? (inf) ¿Cómo se llama Usted? (frm)
My name is ...	Mi nombre es ... Me llamo ...
Where are you from?	¿De dónde eres? (inf) ¿De dónde es usted? (frm)
I'm from ...	Soy de ...
Pleased to meet you	Mucho gusto Encantado/a
Good morning (Morning greeting)	Buenos días
Good afternoon (Afternoon greeting)	Buenas tardes
Good evening (Evening greeting)	Buenas tardes Buenas noches
Good night	Buenas noches
Goodbye (Parting phrases)	Adiós Hasta Luego Hasta la vista Hasta mañana
Good luck	¡Buena suerte!
Cheers! (Toasts used when drinking)	¡Salud!
Have a nice day	¡Que pase un buen día!

SAFETY

Traveling to a foreign country such as Panama can offer the experience of a lifetime. However, in the midst of all this excitement you must also be cognizant of your surroundings and take certain precautions to ensure your safety. Like many of the countries in Africa and around the world, Panama has certain neighborhoods you might be wise to avoid, and the country is currently experiencing a higher than average crime rate due to an increase in gang activity in certain regions of the country.

To help you safely enjoy all that Panama has to offer, below we have outlined a few travel safety tips you may want to keep in mind while visiting the country.

TRAVEL IN GROUPS

As the old saying goes, “there is safety in numbers.” Truer words have never been spoken. As you make your way through beautiful Panama, en route to the various sites and attractions you’ve mapped out on your itinerary, always try to travel with at least one other person (even more if you can). Research shows that criminals are less likely to approach you when they feel outnumbered.

MAKE COPIES OF ALL YOUR IMPORTANT DOCUMENTS

Documents can easily be misplaced or even stolen in the hustle and bustle of foreign travel, creating a nightmarish situation you just don’t need. This is why you should make copies of all your important papers. This includes copies of your passport, visa, driver’s license, social security card and medical insurance card. Travel experts suggest you keep one copy of these documents on your person at all times, and at least one other copy locked in the hotel safe.

BEWARE OF THE NIGHT

Sightseeing is an activity that should be limited to the daylight hours, as unsavory types tend to be hard at work during the nighttime, often preying on unsuspecting tourists. Enjoy your hotel during the nighttime hours, and if you must go out, try to stay in the immediate area.

WATCH THE STRAYS

Panama has many stray dogs and cats roaming the streets, many of which are feral and quite dangerous. Even if the animal looks friendly, resist the temptation to pet him/her, as many of these strays are infected with diseases, including rabies.

GET VACCINATED

Although only people who have traveled to certain regions of the world are legally required to be vaccinated (for yellow fever) prior to entering Panama, you may want to be on the safe side and receive certain vaccinations anyway. Check with your doctor regarding the vaccinations that would be appropriate when traveling to Panama and don’t let a serious illness of some type ruin your long-awaited getaway.

FOOD

Milk is pasteurized and dairy products are safe for consumption. Local meat, poultry, seafood, fruit and vegetables are generally considered safe to eat. In Panama City, many of the restaurants are of an exceptionally high standard and their hygiene standards match; however, if you are eating at one of the seafront restaurants where there are many excellent seafood places, try to pick one which looks busy and popular to ensure that the fish is very fresh.

When buying street food and snacks in more rural areas of Panama, take the usual precautions: don't buy meat unless you can see it being cooked right in front of you. If you find yourself buying snacks out of a bus window, avoid anything with meat in it and try to go for fruit that you can peel.

COMMUNICABLE DISEASE

While a Yellow Fever vaccination is not required for Panama, there have been instances of the disease in the Darién province, the San Blas islands and the east of Panama, so if you plan on visiting any of these areas it is as well to be up to date with the vaccine. Vaccinations against tuberculosis and hepatitis B are also sometimes recommended.

Malaria and dengue fever are also fairly common to some regions of Panama, so taking precautions against mosquito bites by using DEET and covering arms and legs in the evenings is wise.

An estimated 0.9% of the population of Panama live with HIV; travelers should take the usual precautions against infection.

CURRENCY



Balboa (PAB; symbol B/.) = 100 centésimos. There is no Panamanian paper currency; coins exist in denominations of B/.10 and 1, and 50, 25, 10, 5 and 1 centésimos. US currency was adopted in 1904 and exists alongside the Balboa coinage: B/.1 = US\$1.

US Dollar (US\$) = 100 cents. Notes are in denominations of US\$100, 50, 20, 10, 5, 2 and 1. Coins are in denominations of US\$1, and 50, 25, 10, 5 and 1 cents.

Credit cards:

MasterCard and Visa are the most commonly used, but American Express and Diners Club are also accepted. While you will be able to use credit cards in higher end hotels and restaurants, anywhere smaller or more local will not have the facilities, and it is wise to always have some cash to tide you over. Many of the islands, including Isla de Coiba and Isla Contadora, have no banks and no cash machines, so carrying cash is essential.

ATM:

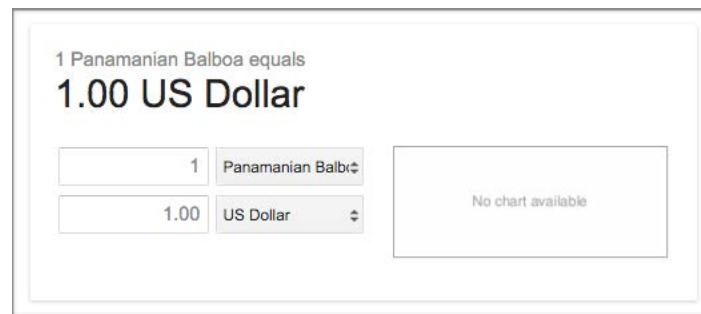
ATM machines can be found throughout the country, especially in the cities. ATMs are found in or next to banks, or in the streets marked by the red sistema clave sign. Banks usually charge a fee to draw out funds in Panama, but it still usually works out better than changing money. You can usually only draw up to US\$500 in cash at any one time, but this amount varies between banks. ATMs can run out of cash, so try and always have some on you, in case you are unable to withdraw any immediately.

Travelers cheques:

You can still cash traveler's cheques at some banks, especially the larger ones in the cities, but not everywhere, and you can spend them almost nowhere. This being the case, they are not really a recommended form of currency to rely on. If you must carry traveller's cheques, they should certainly be in US dollars as they won't be accepted in any other form; American Express traveller's cheques are best. You will also be charged a fee to change traveller's cheques, usually about 1% of the transaction price.

Banking hours:

Mon-Fri 0800-1500, Sat 0830-1200.


CURRENT CONVERSION RATE OF 31 MARCH, 2016

<http://themoneyconverter.com/USD/PAB.aspx>

IMR RECOMMENDATIONS ON PERSONAL FUNDS

- Please bring the amount that you are comfortable spending on gifts or small personal articles, including snacks.
- To determine if the currency of the country you are visiting is traded in the United States, please visit www.travelex.com. Travelex has offices in all major airports and cities and you may change money before the trip for a small fee.
 - Trading in the United States is the easiest way for you to trade money.
- If the currency is not traded in the United States, you will usually be able to trade in the airport upon arrival or the team leader will arrange to change money for the team once during the trip. We do not guarantee that you will be able to change money in small towns or during clinic.
- You must bring currency newer than 2006 and in perfect condition - no tears, folds, old bills.
- New bills are preferred by the international banks, as are denominations larger than \$20. The best rate is obtained trading \$100 bills.
- If you are joining us from another country, please check the trading rules of your home currency.
- Credit cards may not be accepted outside of major cities, hotels, and large restaurants.
- IMR does not pay for alcohol. If you intend to purchase alcohol, you are required to obtain and pay with a separate bill. Please have local currency for these transactions.

TIME IN PANAMA

 Time zone EST (Eastern Standard Time) UTC/GMT -5 hours	 No DST No Daylight Saving Time in 2016	 Difference 1 hour behind New York
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EMBASSY INFORMATION

EMBASSY LOCATIONS

U. S. Embassy Panama

American Embassy Panama
Building 783, Demetrio Basilio Lakas Avenue
Clayton, Panama
Tel: (507) 317-5000
Fax: (507) 317-5568
Email: panamaweb@state.gov

The Embassy of Panama in the U.S.

2862 McGill Terrace NW,
Washington, DC 20008
USA +1 (202) 483-1407

NOTE: For your safety, this information is also available on the back of your IMR badge.

WEBSITES

The following websites provide information on the country you are visiting. IMR highly recommends and encourages you to view these sites prior to departure. They are frequently updated and are a tremendous resource:

- ❖ Embassy of the United States for PANAMA: <http://panama.usembassy.gov/contact.html>
- ❖ State Department Travel Warnings: <https://travel.state.gov/content/passports/en/country/panama.html>
- ❖ CIA publication: <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/pm.html>
- ❖ Travel Health online: <http://www.tripprep.com/>
- ❖ World Health Organization: <http://www.who.int/>
- ❖ Center for Disease Control: <http://www.cdc.gov/travel/>
- ❖ CDC Travel Medicine for PANAMA: <http://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel/destinations/traveler/none/panama>
- ❖ CNN Weather Report: <http://www.cnn.com/WEATHER>
- ❖ Official PANAMA Tourism Site: <http://www.visitpanama.com/>
- ❖ UNICEF Statistics: http://www.unicef.org/infobycountry/panama_statistics.html
- ❖ Lonely Planet: <https://www.lonelyplanet.com/panama>
- ❖ Wikipedia: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Panama>
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