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General Information

Important Phone Numbers

Panama Country Code	507
Fire Department	103
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Red Cross	228-2187
Collect Calls (Local & International)	101
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Directory Assistance	102
IPAT (Tourism Institute)	226-7000
Tocumen Airport	238-2700
Albrook (M. Gelabert) Airport	315-0241
Albrook Bus Terminal	303-3040

Currency Exchange

Panama's official currency, the Balboa, is available only in coins, not in paper bills. The value and size of Balboa coins are equal to those of US coins. Most products and services are priced in Balboas, however, one can read the price as though it were priced in US\$.

Credit Card Services

In the event that you need credit card assistance we have provided contact information for the four major credit card companies.

American Express

Banco Exterior
Balboa Avenue, 9th floor
Tel.: 225-5858
Toll Free: 001-800-111-0006

Diners Club International/Visa/Mastercard

Centro de Tarjetas del Banco General
Marbella
Tel.: 263-7922

Foreign Embassies & Consulates

Argentina	302-0003
Belgium	301-5200
Bolivia	214-6438
Brazil	263-5322
Canada	294-2500
China (Taiwan)	223-3424
Colombia	264-9513
Costa Rica	223-4059
Cuba	223-6250
Chile	294-8901
Dominican Republic	263-6324
Ecuador	264-2654
Egypt	263-5020
El Salvador	209-3270
France	211-6200
Germany	263-7733
Great Britain	269-0866
Guatemala	269-3406
Haiti	269-3443
Holland	264-7257
Honduras	264-2652
India	226-0012
Israel	208-4708
Italy	225-8948
Japan	263-6155

Korea	264-8293
Lybia	227-3342
Mexico	263-2436
Nicaragua	264-8225
Paraguay	215-0238
Peru	268-6809
Russia	264-1408
Spain	227-5122
Sweden	264-3748
Switzerland	279-1530
United States	207-7000
Uruguay	264-2838
Venezuela	269-1244
Vietnam	265-4207

Camera/Video - Service & Repair

Professional camera/video repair service is available at the following authorized repair service centers.

Nikon-Pentax-Vivitar

Telephoto Panama S.A.
Via Veneto
Tel.: 223-2608

Situated in front of the entrance to the El Panama Hotel on Via Veneto.

Canon-Olympus

Fotoser S.A.
Transistmica, Urb. Herbruger
Edif. El Paical, Planta Alta, Ofic. 3
Detras de Banismo
Tel.: 261-0436

Located just a few minutes from downtown Panama City.

International Calls

There is no need to dial direct and pay expensive long distance rates. Several private companies sell phone cards that offer steep discounts on international calls, as little as \$0.05 per minutes to North America and Europe. You can purchase them in many of the large chain stores, or from the small, Chinese owned and operated supermarkets. With these cards you can make calls from any public or private telephone. As well, you can make discounted international calls from most internet cafes.

Transportation

International Air Travel

A host of international air carriers service Panama's Tocumen International Airport, which is located approximately 30 minutes southeast of Panama City. Direct and connecting flights depart and arrive daily, flying to and from all major destinations.

Aerolineas Argentina	269-3815
Aerolinea Esect Caribbean	264-3318
AeroMexico	263-3033
AeroPerlas	315-7500

Air France	300-1440
Air Madrid	214-8680
Air Panama	316-9000
Alitalia	269-2161
American Airlines	269-6022
Avianca	264-3120
Colombian Airline	224-9124
Continental Airlines	265-0040
Copa Airlines	217-2672
Delta Airlines	214-8118
Grupo Taca	360-2098
Korean Air	315-0356
LanChile	264-7065
Lloyd Aero Boliviano	270-0071
Lufthansa	300-1410
Mexicana	264-9855
United Airlines	225-3087

Domestic Air Travel

Regularly scheduled daily departures provide travelers with quick and easy access to any one of Panama's tourist destinations including San Blas (Comarca Kuna Yala), Bocas del Toro, Las Perlas Islands (Contadora), David, Colon, and Darien.

All domestic flights originate from Marcos A. Gelebert (Albrook) Airport, located just minutes from downtown Panama City. The airport is spacious, comfortable, and air conditioned, with an eatery, coffee shop, and book store. As well, a limited number of car rental companies have offices inside, which may or may not have personal present.

Aeroperlas	315-7500
Air Panama	316-9000
Helipan Helicopters	315-0452
Helix Craft Helicopters	315-0079

In addition, there are several small, private carriers that offer charter flights upon request.

Getting to Marcos Gelebert (Albrook) Airport

The standard taxi fare from Panama City to this airport is between \$200 - \$3.00, depending on where you depart from.

Car Rental

All major international car rental companies are represented in Panama, in addition to a few individually owned outfits. Offices are dispersed throughout the city, at the airports, and inside some of the larger hotels.

- The minimum driving age is 25 years.
- Rented automobiles can't be driven out of Panama, i.e. Costa Rica.
- For an additional fee you can drop your vehicle in a different part of the country from where it was hired.
- Debit cards are normally not accepted, just credit cards.
- Some rental companies will accept insurance offered through credit cards, however this depends on the credit card being used and its limitations.

Allamo	236-5777
Arrendadora Economica	229-5257
Avis	800-2847
Barriga	269-0056
Budget	263-8777
Continental Car Rental	213-0177
Discovery Car Rental	223-4461
Dollar	270-0355
Executives Car Rental	392-0202
Express Car Rental	225-3200
Hertz	301-2611
National Car Rental	265-2222
Payless Car Rental	263-2000
Shellane's	265-3880
Super Economical	225-1433
Thrifty	800-2277

Taxi Service

Taxis throughout Panama are plentiful, and can be easily recognized by their numbered markings, however, they come in all size, shapes and colors. All fares are based on zones or areas, and not determined by meters - cab drivers are required to carry a copy of the zone chart with them at all times. Most fares within the metropolitan area average between B/.1.00-B/.1.50, and for each addition person there is a B/.0.25 surcharge. Trips from Panama City to Tocumen International Airport cost approx. B/.15.00 per person, with each additional person paying an additional B/.5.00. The standard hourly rate for taxi rental is B/.8.00, however, that can vary depending on the type of service you are requesting. We recommend you establish a price before hand.

Buses

Traveling by bus in Panama is efficient and affordable, with virtually every part of the country accessible. All buses in Panama City depart from the Albrook Bus Terminal (303-3040), which is located just outside downtown city - a short 5 minute taxi ride.

Getting to Albrook Bus Terminal

The standard taxi fare from Panama City to this airport is between \$1.25 - \$1.75, depending on where you depart from.

International

Two bus companies offer international bus service between Panama and Costa Rica - Panaline (tel. 314-6383) and Tica Bus (tel. 314-6385). The trip between Panama City and San Jose, Costa Rica takes approx. 16 hours, with one-way tickets approximately \$25.00.

David & Colon

Large, comfortable, air-conditioned buses service the cities of David and Colon.

Buses to David depart 24 hrs/day. Daytime trips normally take approx. 7 hours, however, the express buses that depart during the evening hours can normally complete the trip in as little as 6 hours.

Express and local buses to Colon depart regularly everyday (tel. 303-6379). Express buses depart Panama every 30 minutes between 4:55 a.m. - 9:00 p.m. and cost \$2.50 each way - the trip takes approximately 1.5 hours. Local buses depart between the hours of 3:30 a.m. - 11:00 p.m. and cost \$1.80 one way - the trip takes about 2 - 2.5 hours.

Interior

The medium sized, mini-buses that service the country's interior, i.e. Santiago, Chitré, Las Tablas, etc., are comfortable, normally air conditioned, and depart regularly throughout the day at set times.

Daily overnight bus service from Panama City to Bocas del Toro is also available. Buses depart Panama (tel. 303-6326) at 8:00 p.m., arriving Almirante at 6:00 a.m. (adults \$23.00 one-way) and Changuinola at 7:00 a.m. (adults \$24.00 one-way.)

Local

In and around Panama City most of the buses in service are the old, school bus style that lack air conditioning, however, some of the more heavily traveled routes do use more comfortable, air conditioned buses. Public buses, including those that go to Tocumen International Airport, cost \$0.25 - the air conditioned express buses to the airport cost \$0.75.

Railway

The Panama Canal Railway (tel. 317-6070), a 47.6-mile transcontinental railroad operating parallel to the Panama Canal, offers passenger service between Panama City and Colon Monday - Friday. The train departs Panama City from Corozal at 7:15 a.m. and returns from Colon at 5:15 p.m., with the trip lasting approximately one hour. Tickets cost \$22.00 one-way and \$44.00 round-trip.

Note: you can't reserve seats in the tourist car, which has a glass ceiling, however, if you arrive early you should be able to obtain tickets without too much difficulty - so arrive early.

Getting to Panama Canal Railway

The standard taxi fare from Panama City to Corozal is approx. \$5.00 one way.

Panama City

Arriving Panama City

(Note: All foreigners are required to purchase a \$5.00 tourist card upon entering Panama. Do not discard the card, as customs officials may or may not request it upon departure. It is required by law that all foreigners entering Panama have a exit or return ticket out of the country, however, you may or may not be required to present the ticket upon arrival.)

Panama City - via Tocumen Airport

Upon arriving Panama you must first proceed through immigration. There are not too many windows, so lines can get long if several flights arrive simultaneously. After clearing immigration you are permitted to gather your luggage and pass through customs. Generally speaking this procedure is rather quick and straightforward. The lines are divided into "articles to declare" and "nothing to declare". You may or

may not be required to open your suitcases.

Upon exiting the airport you will most likely be approached by taxi drivers offering their services. Taxi service at the airport is regulated, with the prices established by law. To downtown Panama City taxi's charge approximately \$15.00 per person, and an extra \$5.00 for each additional person. There are also small vans that carry between 3-7 passengers, and they charge about \$10.00 per person. Most taxis will use the old highway unless you agree to pay the tolls on the new highway, which cost \$1.50. The trip to Panama City takes approximately 20 minutes if you access the new highway, or 30 minutes using the old highway. Regardless, be sure to agree to the price before you depart.

There are no public buses that depart from the airport itself. For those who prefer to travel to Panama City by public bus, you can walk a short distance (5-8 minutes) from the termi-

nal to a nearby public bus stop - depart from the airport terminal and proceed to the main road, stay to your right. There is a large circular intersection that you will have to cross (just follow the walking path), and the bus stop is situated on the far right side of the intersection. Look for the buses that read "Corredor Sur/Tocumen Airport." Some buses are of the local, school bus type that have no air conditioning and travel along the old highway (this route tends to take longer due to heavy traffic, poorer road conditions, and more stops). There are also large, air conditioned, express buses that make the trip via the main highway (corredor norte), which reduces the travel time significantly to approximately 30-40 minutes. Without knowing the bus schedules you'll have no way of knowing which of the two is next to arrive, so if you are determined to ride on the express bus (recommended), you'll just have to wait until one passes by. Local buses cost \$0.25 and express buses \$0.75.

Attractions/Activities

Museums

Panama's diverse Indian Culture, and pivotal role in providing transoceanic passage between the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans, has led to the creation of numerous museums. For those visiting Panama, particularly in the historic area of Casco Viejo, these museums provide visitors with an interesting perspective of the country's past and its contributions. Below we have listed the frequented museums, along with a description, their location and phone number.

Panama Canal Museum

An outstanding exhibit of Panama's historic role as interoceanic route from pre-historic times to the building of the canal.

Location: Plaza Cathedral, San Felipe
(Casco Viejo)
Open: Tues.-Sun., 9:30 a.m. - 5:30 p.m.
Cost: Adult - \$2.00
Child - \$0.75
Tel.: 211-1649

Emerald Museum

Location: Plaza Cathedral, Casco Viejo
Open: Mon.-Sat., 9:00 a.m. - 6:00 p.m.
Cost: Free
Phone: 262-1664

Religious Colonial Art Museum

This museum dates back to the early 1700's. It's structure is a treasure unto itself, as it is located in one of the old chapels of the Church and Convent of Santo Domingo. View a collection of religious paintings, silver religious pieces and the golden altar.

Location: Casco Viejo,
between Ave. A y Calle 3
Open: Tues.-Sat., 9:00 a.m. - 5:00 p.m.
Cost: Adult - \$1.00
Child - \$0.25
Groups (5 or more) - \$5.00
Phone: 228-2897

Panamanian History Museum

This museum offers visitors a detailed collection of objects dealing with Panamanian history. The collection spans from colonial times up to the Torrijos-Carter treaty of 1977.

Location: Municipal Palace
Cathedral Plaza in Casco Viejo
Open: Mon.-Fri., 8:30 a.m. - 3:30 p.m.
Cost: Adult - \$1.00
Child - \$0.25
Phone: 228-6231

Museum of Natural Science

It exhibits geology, paleontology, mammals, reptiles and national flora and fauna.

Location: Cuba Avenue,
between 29th & 30th
Open: Mon.-Fri., 9:00 a.m. - 3:30 p.m.
Cost: Adult - \$1.00
Child - \$0.75
Groups (5 or more) - \$5.00
Phone: 225-0645

National Bank Museum

It houses a fine and valuable collection of coins and paper bills, metallic coins and other financial papers, dating back to the sixteenth century.

Location: Calle 34 y Ave. Cuba
Open: Monday-Friday
8:00 a.m. - 12:30 p.m.
1:30 p.m. - 4:00 p.m.
Cost: Free
Phone: 225-0640

Contemporary Art Museum

There are a permanent exhibitions displaying artwork using the different techniques of oil, frescoes, watercolor, pastels, tints and engravings.

Location: Calle San Blas, Ancon y Ave. de los Martires
Open: Tues.-Sun., 9:00 a.m. - 5:00 p.m.
Cost: Adult - \$1.00
Child - \$0.50
Phone: 262-3380

Miraflores Locks

Situated just 10-15 minutes north of Panama City, Miraflores Locks is the Canal's southernmost set of locks. A visitors center, complete with museum, restaurant/bar, souvenir shop, and auditorium, resides just opposite the locks' control tower, providing visitors with close-up views of the locks and vessels during transit. Visitors have the option of viewing the Canal from the upper floor, an open balcony offering scenic views of Miraflores & Pedro Miguel Locks, Miraflores Lake, Centenary Bridge, and surrounding area or, the second level, which has comfortable, shaded seats.

The visitors center is open between 9:00 a.m.-5:00 p.m., and the price of admission for foreigners is \$8.00 p/p, which includes a short video/movie presentation and pass into the museum. The restaurant/bar is open much later and offers visitors wonderful views of the Canal during evening hours. Pamphlets and other printed material about the Canal are available upon entering the visitors center.

Note: most northbound traffic in the Panama Canal arrives Miraflores Locks very early in the morning, with most vessels clearing the locks before it opens to the public. Southbound vessels do not begin arriving until midday, or later. So, if you want to be sure that you see vessels inside the locks during your visit to Miraflores, we recommend you arrive between 2:00 p.m.-5:00 p.m. (Between 10:00 a.m. - 2:00 p.m. Miraflores Locks experiences little if any vessel traffic.)

Getting to Miraflores Locks

(Note: All visitors, if arriving by taxi or rental car, must park in the lower parking lot and use the elevator or stairs to ascend/descend to the visitors center. After you cross the bridge stay to your left - follow the signs.)

via Taxi - Taxi's charge approx. \$6.00 - \$8.00 one-way from Panama City, however, since the hourly rate for taxi rental is about \$8.00 it might make more sense to hire a taxi to take you there and wait. It all depends on how much time you intend to spend at the locks.

via Public Bus - buses to Miraflores Locks depart from the "SACA" bus terminal in Calidonia, which is near the very end of Via España. Either of the buses that read "Summit Gardens" or "Paraiso" pass by Miraflores Locks, and the trip lasts approx. 20-25 minutes. The large, air-conditioned buses cost \$0.50, while the older, school buses cost just \$0.35. Make sure to notify the driver when boarding that you would like to be dropped off at the entrance to Miraflores Locks. From the main road you'll need to walk about 5-10 minutes to the Visitors Center entrance. You can return on any bus that passes by the main entrance - most return to the same "SACA" terminal, but you should ask just to be sure.

Ancon Hill

Rising approximately 654 feet, Ancon Hill towers over Panama City and offers visitors unparalleled views of the surrounding area including Casco Viejo, Panama City, Panama Bay, Panama Canal Administration Building, Albrook Airport, and the southern most portion of the Panama Canal (Miraflores Locks, Pedro Miguel Locks, the Causeway).

Ancon Hill has two different look-out areas, each providing a different view of the surrounding area. As you reach the top, you'll see a rather short, steep, paved incline to the right. Follow this for views of Casco Viejo, Panama City, Panama Bay, and everything else that resides south of Ancon Hill. For views of Miraflores Locks, Panama Canal Administration Building, and everything north of Ancon Hill, turn left when you reach the top and walk to the lookout area near the parking lot.

Getting to Ancon Hill

Ancon Hill is open to visitors between 8:00 - 5:00 daily. There is no charge for entry nor an established time limit. A public access road, which begins just behind the Panama Canal Administration Building and passes through a residential housing community along the way, leads to the rim of Ancon Hill (just follow the signs to Ancon). Upon your ascent, near its base, you'll need to check in with the park station. Due to the fact that the road is narrow and only permits one-way traffic you might be forced to wait for a descending vehicle to clear before receiving authorization to go ahead. Park officials are in constant communication with each other to assure that you have clear passage in either direction.

For those who prefer to walk there is a staircase that begins from behind Mi Pueblito (see page) that leads to the same road mentioned above - it exits just below the park station where you'll need to check in. As you enter into Mi Pueblito off the main road continue straight. The road bends to the left as it goes forward. The staircase is located on the right side, just before reaching the park station.

Panama Viejo

Panama Viejo, or Old Panama in English, is situated just northeast of downtown Panama City. The city was founded by Pedrarias Davila in August of 1519, and is the oldest Spanish settlement on the Pacific. At one time a thriving city, Panama la Vieja benefited from the Portobelo trade fairs and most notably from Spain's great bullion lifeline (shipments were said to pass through Panama while en route from Peru's silver mines to Europe). Quickly, the city became a major center for merchants and landowners, with a population that presumably reached 10,000 by the mid-17th century.

Destroyed in 1671 during Sir Henry Morgan's invasion, the city was never rebuilt. Declared a Historic Site in 1976, the ruins or Old Panama

enjoy government protection, and have been administered by the foundation Patronato Panama La Vieja since 1995.

Many of the structures have descriptive text in Spanish and English to assist tourists.

Museum

The Panama Viejo Museum, situated just east of the ruins, is open to the public between 9:00 a.m. - 5:00 p.m. weekdays, and costs \$2.00 p/p to enter. The ticket you receive will permit you to see the ruins nearby. Conversely, if you visit the ruins first your entrance fee of \$2.00 includes admission to the museum. The museum is rather small but has several nice artifacts, paintings, and photos of the area that makes up Old Panama. Guides are provided at no additional cost, with English and Spanish spoken. Audio tapes in Italian, French, Portuguese and other languages are also available.

Shopping

To the right side of the Cathedral you'll find souvenir shops selling a wide assortment of artifacts. This is one of the better locations for purchasing handicrafts in Panama City.

Getting to Panama Viejo

By Taxi - from downtown Panama City taxi service should cost approx. \$1.50 - \$1.75.

By Public Bus - small, mini-buses that read "Panama Viejo" travel along Balboa Ave throughout the day. Just get on any of these buses and get off at the ruins.

Statue of Balboa

Situated along Balboa Avenue, the Vasco Núñez de Balboa Park is a historical monument, paying tribute to the Spanish adventurer and first European to glimpse the Pacific Ocean, in 1513. Holding the Spanish flag in his left hand and a sword with his right, the Vasco Núñez de Balboa statue overlooks Panama Bay, and is surrounded by benches and a variety of well manicured plants and flowers.

The statue was sculpted by Miguel Blan and Mariano Benlliure and later donated by King Alfonso XIII of Spain. With representatives of some 15 Latin American countries present, President Belisario Porras inaugurated the monument on September 29, 1924.

The park is popular with locals and foreigners alike. From the park you can get some nice photos of Punta Paitilla to the left, and Casco Viejo to the right. Vendors selling souvenirs are also present.

Getting to the Statue of Balboa

By Taxi - a taxi to "Estatua de Balboa" from anywhere in Panama City shouldn't cost any more than \$1.50.

Summit Gardens

Located just 20 minutes outside of Panama City, Summit Gardens provides visitors with a opportunity to view many of the animal species found in Panama, as well as others found in the Central & South American region. While the name would lend you to believe that Botanical Gardens exist, they really don't. The facility has a small portion allocated for plants and orchids, however, the majority of the grounds are dedicated for animals and recreation. Jaguars, scarlet macaws, tapirs, monkeys, and numerous other animal species are all represented here, dispersed throughout the park. Encompassing nearly 700 hectares, signs point to areas of interest, often connected by narrow, well maintained trails. Bathroom facilities and soft drinks are available.

Summit Gardens (tel. 232-4854) also has an impressive exhibit/museum of the beautiful Harpy Eagle, with interesting facts and photos of these magnificent birds of prey. Harpie Eagles, Panama's national bird, are on display just out back, which can be observed throughout the day.

The entrance fee for adults is \$1.00, and they are open 7 days a week from 9:00 a.m. - 5:00 p.m. Trail maps are provided at the park entrance when you enter. The Harpy Eagle Exhibit is open from 9:00 a.m. - 4:30 p.m.

Getting to Summit Gardens

By Car or Taxi - take the same road that leads you past Albrook Airport, Miraflores Locks, and Fort Clayton. Continue past the Centenary Bridge, until you reach an intersection and entrance to Soberania National Park (can't miss it, same road to Gamboa Resort). Make a left turn and continue along for a few minutes until you reach the park entrance on the right side.

By Public Bus - buses to Summit Gardens depart from the "SACA" bus terminal in Calidonia, which is near the very end of Via España. You can take either of the buses that read "Summit Gardens" or "Gamboa". The bus for Summit leaves twice hourly and costs \$0.55, and takes between 20-25 minutes. Normally, the bus will stop in front of the park, however, you might want to mention something to the driver beforehand. There is a bus stop directly in front of the Gardens on the opposite side for when you want to return to Panama City.

MiPueblito

Situated just on the outskirts of Panama City, MiPueblito is a unique representation of Panama's culture and history. The complex is comprised of three distinct villages: typical Panamanian, Antillean, and Indian (Kuna, Embera, etc.)

As you enter the complex, on the right side, you'll find the main entrance to the typical Panamanian village. Here you'll find several small gift shops, restaurants, a pollera muse-

um, barber shop, in addition to chairs, benches and tables.

The Antillean and Indian villages lie on the opposite side of the complex, or to the left side as you enter Mi Pueblito. It's a short walk. The Antillean village is first, and has several small souvenir stores, eateries, a church and open courtyard. Just behind this village is the Indian village, which is set deeper in the wooded area of the complex. Here, numerous traditional style huts have been built to help illustrate the Indian way of life in Panama.

For those who don't have the time to visit Panama's interior, where the country's history and culture is most prevalent, Mi Pueblito might be an attractive and convenient alternative.

Mi Pueblito costs \$1.00 to enter and is open from between 9:00 a.m. - 9:00 p.m. Tuesday - Sunday. Depending on the day, weather and number of tourists, they do at times remain open after 9:00 p.m.

Getting to MiPueblito

By Taxi - from anywhere in Panama City the cost should not be any greater than \$1.50 - \$1.75.

Metropolitan Natural Park

The Metropolitan Natural Park (tel. 232-5552), encompassing approx. 265 hectares, is situated just outside downtown Panama City and serves as a wonderful retreat for those interested in escaping from the neighboring city. It is the only park in Latin America with a natural forest located within a metropolitan capital.

The park has three main trails, all of which are well maintained and easy to find. The longest and most popular trail, the "Sendero Cienegueta", starts just up the road from the administration office. After a comfortable five minute walk along the main road you'll find a sign pointing to the start of the trail. The first portion of the trail passes through forest, lined with vegetation and a series of hills, and later breaks out onto a dirt road/trail called "Titi Monkey Road", which leads both left and right. In order to reach the "Look Out", stay left and continue up the road. There are two levels from which to view the surroundings, with the highest point requiring a short climb up a stair case. From its peak the remaining portion of the park can be seen, as well as Panama City, Panama Bay, and a portion of the Panama Canal. After retracing the same path for a short distance, this dirt road continues down and around until it meets the principal road where the trail begins. To complete the entire trail one should allocate approx. 1-2 hours.

The "Sendero Momotides" begins just across the street from the administrative office. It is a short, oval, and relatively flat trail, that can be completed in about one hour.

The "Sendero Los Caobos" starts from behind the administrative office and similar to that of "Sendero Memotides", however, it is longer and more hilly.

The Metropolitan Natural Park office is open from 6:00 a.m.-5:00 p.m. Material is available in both English and Spanish, as are more complete maps that cost \$1.50 each. It costs \$2.00 p/p to enter the park. Bilingual guides can be provided, however, they must be requested well in advance - \$15.00 for 5 people or less, or \$3 p/p if more than five.

Note: The Metropolitan Natural Park, while containing a healthy supply of plant and animal species, should not be viewed as a prime location to view wildlife. While monkeys, iguanas, deer, and numerous bird species have all been reported, they are not commonly sighted.

Getting to Metropolitan Natural Park

By Taxi - the park entrance is situated along Juan Pablo II Avenue. From anywhere in Panama City the cost should not be any greater than \$1.50 - \$2.00.

Amador (Flamenco Island - Causeway)

The Amador Causeway, once the home of a US Army base, has quickly become one of Panama's most popular tourist destinations. Connecting the three small islands of Noas, Perico, and Flamenco with the mainland, the Causeway offers visitors wonderful views of Panama City, the Bridge of the Americas, and commercial vessels as they commence or complete their transit through the Panama Canal. The area has enormous tourist potential, with several large projects having already been completed and many more planned for the future.

The northernmost portion of Amador is home to the Balboa Yacht Club, which, in addition to having a cozy bar/restaurant, has a long pier and fleet of private yachts anchored along the Canal. The walking path that begins here and extends all the way to Flamenco Island, is tiled with red brick and lined with benches, colorful trees and flowers. Open and well maintained, the path is popular with locals and foreigners alike, often full of pedestrians, rollerbladers, walkers, skate boarders, and runners - particularly on weekends. Just behind the Yacht Club there is ample space for parking, at no cost.

Heading south along the Causeway, there are several restaurants situated along the main road, on the right side. Here you can also rent bicycles and horse carriages.

If you continue along the main road, which is narrow and runs parallel to the walking path, the first island you reach is Noas Island, which is home to the Smithsonian's Naos Laboratories. Just to the left of the Laboratory, set back

off the main road, you'll find the Marine Exhibition Center, also known as Punta Culebra (tel. 212-8793). Here you'll find numerous exhibits and points of interest. The Center is open to the public Tuesday - Friday from 1:00 p.m. - 5:00 p.m. and Saturday - Sunday from 10:00 a.m. - 6:00 p.m., and admission costs \$1.00 adults, \$1.00 seniors, and \$0.50 children under 12 years of age.

Also on Noas Island are a few stores, restaurants, and souvenir shop. As well, the launch to Taboga Island departs from Noas Island - turn left just before reaching the entrance to Punta Culebra.

As you head further south along the Causeway you'll reach Perico Island, which sits off to the left side, facing the Bay of Panama. Recently, a large commercial center was constructed here, complete with bars, restaurants, art galleries, and more. Ample parking is available behind the complex. Other projects are underway.

Continue along and you'll reach Flamenco Island, the largest of the three islands. Upon entering, on the right side you'll find a large shopping complex, complete with numerous restaurants, bars, and stores. To the left, there's a large marina and commercial complex, which houses other souvenir/tourist shops and businesses.

Quickly becoming one of Panama City's most popular tourist destinations, the Causeway is a must see for anyone visiting Panama. With gentle breezes that sweep along the Causeway, spectacular scenery and fine dining, the Causeway has something for everybody, regardless of your age or budget.

Note: On weekends, when most locals visit, both vehicle and pedestrian traffic along the Causeway can be overwhelming.

Getting to Flamenco Island - Causeway

By Taxi - from anywhere in Panama City the cost should not be any greater than \$3.00 - \$3.50 one way.

Taboga Island

Relatively clean and quiet, Taboga Island contains a network of well maintained cement paths, many of which are lined with colorful orchids, most evident on the main path which runs parallel along the beach front. Small eateries and grocery stores line the main path, where you can purchase soft drinks and a variety of food dishes. The roads are narrow, and were not designed to accommodate automobiles; there are no vehicles on the island.

Aside from the network of trails that crisscross along the water's edge and up into the hillside, there are two trails of importance on the island for hikers.

The primary trail, known as "Cerro de las Tres Cruces", takes you all the way to the top of Taboga Island where you'll find an observation area offering panoramic views of Taboga Island, the neighboring islands, and on a clear day Panama City, El Amador and the Bridge of the Americas. As well, you'll see numerous species of sea birds gliding and resting along the southern side of the island where the Taboga Island Wildlife Refuge is located. The hike to the top can last approximately 1 - 1.5 hour(s) depending on your physical condition and interest in the local flora and fauna. Virtually the entire trail, most of which is wide and well maintained, is uphill aside for some small sections that flatten out momentarily. There is very little if any canopy cover along the trail and depending on the time of year you make the journey the vegetation can be somewhat sparse. The southern portion of the island is much more sparse than the northern part, all of which is clearly visible from the observation area. Blue Morpho butterflies, small lizards and a host of different bird species can all be observed while hiking up the trail.

The second trail "Cerro de la Cruz", which is also part of the Refuge, is a much shorter trail and leads to the southern section of the island. It is much narrower than the Cerro de las Tres Cruces trail and has unfortunately become the chosen area on the island to dispose of garbage. The trail itself is lined with tons of trash ranging from ovens, refrigerators, stoves, bicycles, etc. It surprising that a trail within the boundaries of a Wildlife Refuge could be utilized for such purposes. Unless you want to witness the garbage for yourself it makes more sense to hike this trail.

Both trails begin just a short 10-15 hike from town where the cement trail ends and the dirt road begins. Just follow the main trail out of town until they fork. Turn right for the "Cerro de las Tres Cruces" trail and left for the "Cerro de la Cruz" trail.

Some of the island's interesting attractions are the Church of San Pedro, Museum, and altar honoring the Christ of Buga, which contains a small garden exhibiting a profusion of colorful flowers. On the back side of the island lies the Taboga Island Wildlife Reserve, which various species of sea birds use as a refuge for their reproduction during the months of December-July.

Kayaking, swimming, snorkeling and scuba diving can be enjoyed. Some boats can be rented for those interested in viewing the island from a distance.

Getting to Taboga Island

By Taxi - ferry services to Taboga Island depart from the northern side of Noas Island, the second of the three islands that make up Amador Causeway. It is known as "La Playita de Amador" (314-1730 / 264-6096), and the pier is located just before the entrance to

the Smithsonian Institute's facility, on the left side. The cost is \$11.00 round-trip (\$6.00 one way) per adult and \$7.00 for children under 12 years. The times are as follow:

Departures

Monday - 8:30, 3:30
Tuesday - 8:30
Wed. - 8:30, 3:00
Thur. - 8:30
Friday - 8:30, 3:00
Sat. - Sunday - 8:00, 10:30, 4:00

Return

Monday - 9:30, 4:30
Tuesday - 4:30
Wed. - 9:30, 4:30
Thur. - 4:30
Friday - 9:30, 4:30
Sat. - Sunday - 9:00, 3:00, 5:00

Isla Barro Colorado

The Smithsonian Institute offers daily tours to Isla Barro Colorado, which is the largest forested island in the Panama Canal Waterway and home of the Smithsonian biological station. The trip includes round-trip boat transportation (45 minute ride each way), a buffet lunch and guided tour. Trips departs from Gamboa at 7:15 a.m. weekdays and 8:00 a.m. weekends, and depart the island at 3:40 weekdays and 2:30 weekends. The tour/walk lasts approx. 2.5 - 3 hours, and includes explanations about what you see during your hike.

The trip to Isla Barro Colorado costs \$70.00 for foreign visitors and \$40.00 for foreign students. Cash and credit cards are accepted for payments. For further information we recommend you contact the Smithsonian Institute at (tel. 212-8951). Or, you can also visit their web site at <http://www.stri.org/>, where you can obtain additional information about the trip to the Isla Barro Colorado.

It is recommended you bring the following: t-shirt or light, long sleeved shirt, long pants, hat, passport or student ID, ticket issued by STRI, socks or walking shoes, bottle of water, and rain jacket. Optional: pencil, notebook, binoculars, camera, change of clothing, insect repellent, masking tape to tape socks over pants.

Casco Viejo

With it's picturesque buildings, expansive balconies, wide streets comprised of red bricks, churches, ruins and museums, the historic community of Casco Viejo has become one of Panama's most popular tourist destinations. Once the commercial center for the Americas, Casco Viejo has since lost its economic importance with the expansion of Panama City, however, the area is currently experiencing a renovation, with much money being spent restoring many of the old, Spanish style architectural buildings.

Among the many meaningful structures you'll find the Metropolitan Cathedral, Municipal Palace, Church of San Francisco, National Theatre, Hotel Colonial, French Park, French Embassy, ruins of the "Convento de Santo Domingo" and "Arco Chato", in addition to numerous governmental buildings and residential houses with beautifully maintained exteriors.

Getting to Casco Viejo

via Taxi - a taxi ride to Casco Viejo from anywhere in downtown Panama City shouldn't cost anymore than \$1.50.

Shopping

Casco Viejo has a few souvenir shops located near the French Embassy, along "Calle Primera San Felipe". As well, there are street vendors that seem to congregate just in front of the French Embassy, by "Las Bovédas", and they sell paintings, shirts, etc.

Book Stores

There are four bookstores in Panama City that might be of interest to travelers. (1) For those seeking material on sciences or biological subjects we recommend you visit the Smithsonian Institute's bookstore in Ancon, which is open from 10:00 a.m. - 4:30 p.m. Monday - Friday. They have the best selection for this type of material. (2) Exedra Books, located at the intersection of Vía Brasil/Vía España, is Panama's largest single bookstore and has a wide assortment of titles covering a wide range of subjects. As well, they have magazines. (3) Libreria "Argosy", located on Vía Argentina just off the corner of Vía España (Blockbuster Video), normally stocks a wide assortment of travel guides and English speaking books. It is quite small, but they do have titles that you won't find elsewhere in Panama. (4) The only bookstore chain in Panama is "El Hombre de la Mancha", and they have between 8-10 different stores. Similar in style to Exedra Books only much smaller, they have stores in the Caesar's Park Hotel, Albrook Airport, and on the Causeway.

Shopping (Souvenirs) in Panama City

There are several stores in and around Panama City where you can purchase tourist related items. (1) on Vía Veneto you can visit the T-shirt Shop, which sells T-shirts for \$3.00 each. As well, they have blankets and other tourist items. (2) on Vía España, alongside the "El Rey Supermarket" you can visit the Gran Morrison department store, as they have a large selection of souvenirs. (3) you can visit the "YMCA" building, which is situated just outside of downtown Panama City, towards the Causeway. Here, there are numerous vendors inside selling a wide variety of hand-crafts. This is probably the largest selection of tourist items in Panama City.

El Valle de Antón

Just an hour and a half from Panama City, El Valle de Antón a wonderful place for a weekend getaway or day tour. A fertile volcanic valley filled with bright flowers, square trees and golden frogs, El Valle de Antón has numerous places to visit and things to do.

Tourism Office in Valle del Antón

Panama's Tourism Institute (IPAT) has an office in El Valle del Antón (tel. 983-6474). It is a small booth situated just in front of the public market, on the corner. They should have maps of the local area and major tourist attractions, providing the office is open. Hours are as follows:

Monday & Wednesday closed
Other Days 7:30 a.m. - 3:30 p.m.

Getting to/from El Valle de Antón

By Bus - small, comfortable mini-buses depart daily from the Albrook Bus Terminal (tel. 314-6862) between the hours of 6:30 a.m. - 6:30/7:00 p.m. The trip lasts approx. 2 - 2.5 hours and costs \$3:50 p/p, one-way. Buses returning to Panama City (El Valle Bus Terminal - tel. 983-6446) depart daily from 3:45 a.m. until 3:45 p.m. (During holidays and special events these hours might be extended to accommodate increased traffic). For those who wish to remain in El Valle after 3:00 p.m. and still return to Panama City, you can take a local bus, which operate as late as 6:30/7:00 p.m., from El Valle to the Pan-American Highway, where you can then catch another bus en route to Panama City. This is not difficult at all, as there is bus stop present and all buses returning to Panama City from the interior must pass.

By Car - most of the trip is along the Pan-American highway, with the last 28 km (17.4 miles) heading into the mountain region - there is a sign on the highway pointing towards El Valle de Antón, the turn off is just after a gas station.

Attractions/Activities

Sunday Market

A major draw to El Valle is the market held every Sunday morning in a market hall on the main road. Apart from vegetables, fruit, plants and flowers, you can buy handicrafts such as wooden bowls, paintings on wood, hammocks, molas, baskets and ceramics. Prices are usually negotiable.

Waterfall "El Macho"

The "El Macho" Waterfall stands 70 meters

(210 ft.) tall, and is located just minutes from town. Open everyday from 8:00 a.m. - 5:00 p.m., visitors can choose between two relatively short trails - the longer trail costs \$3.50, and the shorter trail only \$2.00. During the rainy season the waterfall is quite impressive, with a large pool forming at its base. (Visitors are not permitted to swim in the pool.)

Getting to "El Macho"

From town, just continue along the main road until you reach the fork, where you'll turn right. Continue on this road until you reach the waterfall, which is off to the left side. There are several signs to guide you so you should have no problem finding your way. From the center of town the trip shouldn't take anymore than 20-25 minutes if you are walking. For those who prefer not to walk, you can, for \$0.25, take a small mini-bus that departs regularly from the central market.

El Nispero Plant Nursery & Zoo

Open daily from 7:00 a.m. - 5:00 p.m., the "El Nispero Plant Nursery & Zoo" is much more of a nursery than zoo. Visitors will appreciate its very well maintained trail system and extensive array of tropical plants, which include the country's national flower - the "Espíritu Santo".

The Zoo is also the best place in El Valle to observe the famous golden frogs, and numerous local species of animals and birds in small cages. A recently constructed frog exhibit is situated mid way through the trail, which contains 10-15 small displays, including the famous "golden frogs". As well, several other indigenous frogs from the area and throughout Panama are present. It's very well presented and offers visitors a wonderful opportunity to see these fascinating reptiles up close. There is no additional fee to enter into the exhibit.

Getting to "El Nispero"

From the principal road, make a right where it points to the police station. Pass the police station and continue straight until you reach the fire station on the right side, then make a right. Continue on this road, which soon turns to the left and eventually leads to the Zoo's entrance on the left side. Adults pay \$2.00, and children between 3-12 years pay \$1.00.

Contact: Tel. 983-6142, with Spanish the only language spoken.

Orchid Nursery

For those who love orchids/flowers we recommend you visit the Orchid Nursery just

off the main road. Managed by the Association of Orchid Producers from El Valle and Cabuya, this facility concentrates on conserving endangered native orchids and promoting ecotourism and environmental education. Here you'll find a wide assortment of different orchids, in particular endemic species like orchid "El Espíritu Santo", which happens to be the National Flower. The facility is open from 8:00 a.m. - 5:00 p.m. daily and costs \$2.00 for adults, \$1.00 for students, and \$0.75 for children under 15 years of age.

Getting to "Orchid Nursery"

As you're entering into El Valle, just after passing the Texaco station and crossing the first bridge, you'll see black signs pointing to the Nursery. Turn left here and continue straight along this road, the nursery is at the very end of the road. Tel. 983-6472.

Square Trees (Arboles Cuadrados)

These particular trees have a trunk that is square at its base, and which gradually becomes round as it ascends, taking on the look of a normal tree. There aren't that many trees to see, perhaps a half dozen or so, but it is worth a quick look if time permits. The unmarked trail begins from behind the Hotel Campestre, just behind and to the right of a small building. In the event that you can't find the trail, just ask someone at the hotel and they will gladly assist you. It shouldn't take any more than 5-10 minutes to reach the trees.

Cerro Gaital Natural Monument

Just north of El Valle de Antón and forming part of the volcano's rim is Cerro Gaital, a vibrant cloud forest offering outstanding views and terrific birding opportunities.

To reach Cerro Gaital you will need to take a public bus or walk to "La Mesa", an area located just north of El Valle, further up the road that passes in front of the waterfall "El Macho". There are public buses (look for small mini-buses that have "La Mesa" written on them) that can take you to and from "La Mesa" for about \$0.50 each way, or you can walk there along the paved/gravel road, which from town could take anywhere from 2 - 2 1/2 hours depending on your condition. It is mostly uphill and you'll pass numerous poultry farms along the way. Whether you travel by bus or walk you will need to reach the farm called "Alemi Toledo" - the bus will drop you off right in front of the farm. From here, turn right at the intersection and walk a short distance along the gravel road until you reach the park entrance, which is managed by ANAM.

Note - beyond the "El Macho" waterfall there are no stores, so bring what you need, i.e. water, etc.

From the park entrance your hike begins with a mild uphill climb on a flat, grassy surface. After a short walk, you'll turn left at the sign and proceed up the stairs to the trail's starting point. The trail, known as "Sendero Convento" is a simple loop that measures 1.5 miles (2.48 km) in length and consists of three small resting areas and a lookout (El Mirador). The trail is mostly uphill, enclosed (meaning no open views) and very well maintained, with three resting areas, each consisting of a small cleared area. Most will probably not need much more than 30 minutes to reach the lookout, this in spite of the fact that the trail sign reads 2 hours. Upon reaching the lookout you'll find a relatively stable wooden platform on which to stand, offering terrific views of El Valle and the Pacific Ocean, weather permitting. You can return via the same portion of the trail or select the other section to complete the loop, either way it's all downhill to the trail entrance. While 2 hours are trail sign indicates 2 hours to complete the hike you will probably not need much more than 30 minutes to reach the lookout. If you're a plant/fern lover it will take longer.

Cerro Gaital is often covered in clouds, and during certain months of the year you can expect heavy winds and rain, so it might be a good idea to take a wind breaker, rain gear or sweater. In addition, the weather is very unpredictable and changes quickly, so don't be fooled by how it looks from the town of El Valle. Best to prepare for the unexpected!

Cerro Gaital is open Monday - Saturday and costs \$5.00 for foreigners.

Petroglyphs (Piedras Pintadas)

A 20-25 minute walk from town, the Petroglyphs (Piedras Pintadas) are located at the base of the trail that leads to The Sleeping Indian "La India Dormida" (see below). The inscriptions are not overly impressive, but worth a visit if you have not seen anything like it before. All of the writings can be found on one large vertical rock face. There is no mention as to what they signify.

Getting to the Petroglyphs

Continue on the main road through town, passing the church on the left side. You'll soon cross over a short bridge as the road bends to the right. Shortly thereafter, there's an intersection with a bus station on the right side. Turn left here and walk straight to the first corner, where you make a right turn - there is a sign here pointing to the "piedras pintadas". You'll cross a small bridge, then continue straight until you reach the entrance on the left side. The cost to enter is just \$0.25 and they're open from 7:00 a.m. - 6:00 p.m. every day. At the entrance there are a few vendors

selling tourist items and bathroom facilities. The path to the petroglyphs is cemented, so it's a very easy walk, just a few minutes from the entrance.

The Sleeping Indian (La India Dormida)

The Sleeping Indian is a chain of hills whose formation resembles the shape of a sleeping indian, and like Cerro Gaital, help form part of the volcano's rim. Situated on the western most portion of the rim and clearly visible from town, the Sleeping Indian acquired her name based on a local legend.

The hike to the top takes approx. 30-45 minutes depending on your physical condition. The trail, which is further along the same trail that leads to the Petroglyphs, is mostly uphill and comprised primarily of dirt, clay and stones.

Just minutes after passing the petroglyphs you'll reach the first of two waterfalls, "Chorro El Escondido", which is situated just off the trail to the left. The waterfall is not very high or strong, but there's a nice pool where you can swim and it's positioned inside a protected cove. Once back on the trail and shortly after resuming your climb you'll cross over the river on a cement bridge, leaving the river off to your right. Just a bit further ahead you reach the second, larger waterfall known as "Chorro El Enamorado", which has two distinct sections. Unfortunately, there is no pool in which to swim. From here, continue along the trail until you reach a large rock residing along the trail itself, on its right side. Just moments after passing this rock you'll need to turn left up a relatively steep incline - there is a sign the points to "La India Dormida" up high on a tree trunk on the left side of the trail - look for it. (The same trail you are on continues straight ahead, so make sure you turn left at the appropriate spot, otherwise you'll find yourself further up the mountain way away from where you need to be.) This portion of the trail is a bit steeper and soon you'll be walking uphill along a barbed wire fence with wooden posts, off to your left - this is a private farm. At the top, turn left and stay on the trail as it hugs the farm, this will lead you directly to the Sleeping Indian. There are sections with hand railings and wooden steps, so you'll know for sure you're heading in the right direction. Note - shortly after turning left at the top of the barbed wire fence there is a break in the trail that leads downhill and to the right, which you can also take if you like. If you decide to take this route, walk down the trail until you reach the intersection, turn left and follow this trail to the Sleeping Indian. Regardless of which route you take, the trail comes up on the backside of the hill, which has very low cut grass and is very open.

Once you reach the top there are a series of trails that connect the hills, as well as large rocks where you can rest. You'll have terrific

views of the town of El Valle, Pacific Ocean, and surrounding valley's. As with Cerro Gaital, the wind and rain can be quite strong, so wear appropriate clothing.

The trail is open 7 days a week and costs \$1.25 for foreigners. Upon request, guides can be hired for approx. \$15.00.

Pozos Termales (Hot Water Springs)

Located just off the main road, the hot springs consist of 5 small pools and is open to the public from 8:00 a.m. - 12:00 p.m. and 1:00 p.m. - 5:00 p.m. weekdays, and from 8:00 a.m. - 5:00 p.m. weekends. Adults pay \$1.00 and children \$0.50. One of the springs contains therapeutic mud, while the other four are warm, hot springs.

Colon Province

Attractions/Activities

Portobelo Ruins

Scattered around Portobelo there are several different sets of ruins, some in surprisingly good condition, complete with cannons, stone walls, etc. The first set resides along the main road, on the left side, just as you entering into the town or Portobelo. Opposite these, on the hill to the right side, are more ruins. A second set of ruins can be found in the middle of the village itself. The customs house has recently been restored and contains exhibitions on the area's history. Across the bay are three different forts straddling the hillside, with the two upper sections offering terrific views of the bay and town of Portobelo. There is stone trail that leads from the lowest fort, which resides along the water's edge, to the middle fort, which is rather close and can be seen from the lower section. It's an easy, short walk. To visit the third and highest fort, you'll have to hike along a wide, steep trail. The upper fort has no views of the lower sections, but has stunning views of Portobelo and surrounding areas. To get there you must hire a water taxi. There is a water taxi service, which departs from just after the roadside ruins. They charge \$2.00 per person for 3+ passengers, or \$5.00 per person, round-trip. They offer guides, however, you can visit the ruins at your leisure, in which case they'll pick you up when you are ready to return.

Note: the grass inside and around the ruins across the bay can be very soft and wet.

Getting to Portobelo Ruins

By Bus from Panama - take the bus to Colon (see transportation) and ask to get off at the "Supermercado Rey", which is situated on the main road just 15 minutes before reaching the city of Colon. It is a very large intersection and major bus stop, so the bus will normally stop here anyway to drop off and pick up passengers. Near the corner where the store's exit is located, you can catch a bus to Portobelo, which passes by every 30 minutes. The trip costs \$1.00 p/p each way and lasts approximately 1 hour.

By Bus from Colon - public buses, which cost \$1.50 p/p one-way, depart the bus terminal regularly en route to Portobelo.

San Lorenzo Ruins

Perched high on a cliff overlooking the mouth of the Chagres River, the ruins at San Lorenzo were declared a World Heritage Site by UNESCO in 1981. In addition to cannons and stone walls, there are numerous interior caverns to explore, as well as spectacular coastal views.

Getting to Fort San Lorenzo from Colon

By Bus - There are no public buses to San Lorenzo.

By Taxi - taxis charge approx. \$60.00 - \$70.00 for a round-trip visit to San Lorenzo from Colon, which should include ample time to view the ruins (make sure you agree to the price before departing, which is a set price determined by the tourism institute). The road, until you reach the entrance to Fort Sherman, is paved and in terrific condition. Shortly thereafter, the pavement gives way to dirt and gravel, which at times is poorly maintained.

If you are on a budget or like to walk, you can take a taxi for \$10.00 - \$15.00 one-way to the entrance of Fort Sherman, and then walk the rest of the way to the ruins. That walk takes approx. 1.5 hours each way. Make sure to bring an ample supply of water.

Gatun Locks

Gatun Locks is open daily from 8:00 a.m. - 4:30 p.m., and there is no charge for admission. There is a large, comfortable viewing area for visitors situated just in front of the control tower, which you'll need to climb some stairs to reach. Depending on the number of visitors present the Canal normally provides bilingual speakers to narrate. There is no souvenir shop or food and beverages, however, a water fountain and bathroom facilities are present.

Gatun Locks provides the best opportunities to view the Canal in operation, since both southbound and northbound vessels can be seen throughout the day. As well, all three sets of locks are present, which allows visitors to follow the vessels as they travel between Gatun Lake and Caribbean Sea.

Getting to Gatun Locks from Colon

Gatun Locks is located about 10-15 minutes from Colon City. While it's a relatively direct route, there are few signs and it's easy to get lost if you don't know the way.

By Taxi - taxis charge \$5.00 one-way from Colon City to Gatun Locks. Returning by taxi is more difficult since you'll have to wait for a random taxi to arrive, or if one is dropping of tourists.

By Bus - there are not buses that will take you directly to the entrance of Gatun Locks, but you can take one that comes close. Take the

bus for "4", and it will drop you off right down the road from the entrance, a short 2-3 minute walk. If you want to return to Colon by bus just walk down the road to where you were dropped off and wait for one passing by.

Isla Grande

Isla Grande, just 2 - 2.5 hours by car from Panama City, currently serves as weekend destination for urban Panamanians and tourists. While the beaches are not as spectacular as those found in Bocas del Toro or San Blas, the verdant green mountains, crystal clear waters, and Caribbean style atmosphere are inviting and still relatively undiscovered. The island's couple of hundred inhabitants make a living from fishing and growing coconuts, in addition to servicing the hundreds of visitors that have come to enjoy the island's natural beauty. There are no roads on the island, in fact, most of the island is not accessible. Rather, the town itself is spread along the island's beach front, which on foot can be covered in less than 15-20 minutes. A well defined path stretches from the public beach on the far left to the far right side. Numerous small eateries, bars, markets and street vendors line the town's walkway. For those seeking accommodations, there are many fairly basic but comfortable cabins that reside just off the main path.

It's possible to hire boatmen for snorkeling, diving or sightseeing trips to other islands nearby. Overall, Isla Grande is a peaceful place to spend a couple of days swimming, snorkeling, swinging in a hammock, eating seafood, drinking coconut milk, and enjoying the tropical climate.

Getting to Isla Grande

By Bus - from Portobelo you have to take another bus to La Guaira, where you catch the water shuttle to Isla Grande. Several buses depart Portobelo heading towards Isla Grande, but you MUST take the bus that reads La Guaira, as this is the ONLY bus that will arrive at the coastal area - all other buses head inland before reaching La Guaira. The bus ride from Portobelo to La Guaira costs \$1.00 and takes approximately 30 minutes. It is important to note that buses from Portobelo to La Guaira, and visa versa, don't have a set schedule, but normally pass on an hourly basis. When returning from La Guaira to Portobelo, the last bus is said to depart at 4:00 p.m. Normally, there are no taxis in La Guaira for hire. From Portobelo the last bus to Colon departs at approx. 5:00 p.m. - 6:00 p.m. If you intend to return to Panama City, then get off at

the “Supermercado Rey” on the corner, cross the street, and get on a bus to Panama City.

By Car - you can leave your car at the launch area for as long as you are on Isla Grande, they charge \$2.00 p/day. The cars are guarded and safe.

Once you reach La Guaria the water shuttles are clearly visible. There are large boats and canoes arriving and departing constantly, just find one that has space. The water conditions are mostly calm, and the trip across the waterway takes just minutes. The fair to Isla Grande is normally \$1.00 - \$1.50, depending on where you get dropped off on island. Normally, the launches drop you off in the center of town (the island is so small that no matter where you get dropped off you can walk to where you want to go).

Chiriqui Province

Getting to David

From Panama City / Bocas del Toro

Regularly scheduled flights to David from Panama City and Bocas del Toro depart daily. As well, there is daily bus service connecting Panama City and David (see transportation, page 4). Currently, Air Panama offers service between San Jose, Costa Rica and David, Panama.

Airlines (David branches)

Aeroperlas: 721-1195
Air Panama: 721-0841

From the David airport you can take a taxi to the center of David for about \$2.00 one-way, or take a public bus. The public buses do not enter the airport, so you will have to walk about 5-10 minutes in order to depart from the airport first. From the airport exit, continue straight ahead two blocks. There, on the right side, on the other side of the road, you will see a bus stop. All buses passing this stop continue on to David.

Tourism Office in Boquete

Just before you descend into the town of Boquete, on top of the ridge, lies the Boquete tourism office (tel.: 720-4060). Not really sure why they put it there, but it's the place to visit if you want local maps and other information about Boquete. Hours are as follows:

Tues./Wed. 8:30 a.m. - 4:30 p.m.
Mon./Thurs./Fri. 8:30 a.m. - 6:00 p.m.
Sat./Sun. 9:00 a.m. - 6:00 p.m.

Getting to Boquete

By Bus from David - Buses depart from the main bus terminal in David every 25 minutes between the hours of 6:00 a.m. - 9:00 p.m., and cost \$1.20 p/p one-way. Signs at the terminal should make it easy for you to find the correct bus. Most often the buses to Boquete will be the large, school bus style type, however, they do at times use smaller mini-buses as well. The bus stop in Boquete is situated just in front of the town park, which is centrally located and within walking distance to just about everything. (If you wish to be dropped off at the tourism office you'll have to notify the driver, but keep in mind that from there you'll have to walk into town, and that's quite a distance particularly if you have luggage) Buses returning from Boquete depart between 5:00 a.m. - 6:30 p.m.

Attractions/Activities

Baru Volcano

At 14,500 feet, Baru Volcano is Panama's highest point. The trip to the top of this vol-

cano is an adventure for the fit and reckless only, as the road to the top is anything but a road; it is steep, muddy and relentless. The portion of the road that departs Boquete is paved, or mostly so, and then changes to a dirt, rocky road at the entrance to the park. There is no fee to enter the park, and camping is permitted in designated areas, with no limit on the amount of time you spend in the park. Temperatures at the top are very cool, particularly during the dry season months (December - March) when the cool temperatures are accompanied by high winds. Sweaters, jackets, and long pants are highly suggested, in not mandatory. If you plan to spend the night you would be foolish not to bring cold weather gear - people have died on Baru because they weren't properly prepared. Some trails exist on the top, leading to either side of the crater. Other trails to smaller craters also exist, however, it is recommended that you make any attempt with the assistance of a guide.

Getting to Baru Volcano

There are three options for those interested in getting to the top: (1) Walking - the hike will last approx. 5-6 hours, and that's providing you are in very good condition. During the rainy season the trip may take longer due to wet, muddy road conditions. (2) Car Rental - you can rent a truck in Boquete to take you there, but there is no guarantee that you will ever arrive, as they often have to turn back. It is said that these trips can cost as much as \$150.00 for the day, assuming you can find somebody willing to rent you a vehicle for the trip. (3) Quadra Tracks - this is the quickest and most economical way to reach the summit, as these smaller, off-road vehicles can maneuver around the deep pits and holes that litter the road.

Cascada San Ramon

Approximately 50 meters (150 ft.) high, and in two different parts, the San Ramon waterfall is located just outside the town of Boquete, and sits just off to the right side of the Caldera River. During the rainy season it's quite impressive and well worth the short trip.

Getting to Cascada San Ramon

Walking - continue north, along the principal road that passes through Boquete - you will see the church on the right side as you exit town. At the first intersection make a left and follow the sign for Bajo Lino/Bajo Alto. When you reach the next intersection make another left, there will be a sign pointing to Los Naranjos. At the next intersection, where you will see a bus stop, make a right and follow the sign for Bajo Mano. Shortly thereafter, you will cross a large, steel bridge. Continue on this road and

when you reach the next intersection make a left - you will see a sign pointing to the waterfall, which is just further up the road off to the right side. The walk should take about 1 hour, perhaps a bit longer. The scenery is beautiful and well worth the time spent walking.

Taxi - for those who prefer not to walk, you can hire a taxi for about \$1.50-\$2.00 one-way. The ride should last about 10-15 minutes.

Botanical Gardens

Just north of Boquete lies a privately funded botanical garden, which is set around a private home. The trails are very well maintained, and crisscross throughout the front and backyard, offering terrific photographic opportunities. Virtually all of the local plant species are represented here, neatly arranged for pleasant viewing. The gardens are free to enter and open between 9:00 a.m. - 4:00 p.m. Well worth a visit.

Getting to Botanical Gardens

Walking - continue north on the same road that passes through the center of town. The walk should take about 20-30 minutes.

Rafting / Kayaking

Due to its mountainous topography and abundance of rainfall, Chiriqui's western most province offers visitors class III and IV commercial whitewater rafting and kayaking.

Several different companies in Boquete offer a variety of whitewater excursions modeled to fit the seasons and your level of experience. All trips depart from the town of Boquete, with transportation to and from river sites provided.

There are two major rivers, the Chiriquí Viejo River and Chiriqui River.

Los Quetzales Trail

The Los Quetzales trail unites the two communities of Boquete and Cerro Punta, and is one of Panama's most popular hikes. Cerro Punta resides on the western slope of Baru Volcano, whereas Boquete is situated on the volcano's eastern side. The trail cuts through some of the province's most pristine, protected forest, offering spectacular views of the surrounding valley. On both ends of the trail there is a National Park's office, where you'll be asked to sign in and pay \$3.00 per person to enter. The overwhelming majority of those who complete the hike depart from Cerro Punta and not Boquete.

Departing from Cerro Punta

The road leading from Cerro Punta to the ranger station begins as a paved road and later turns into a dirt/gravel road. The paved section gradually climbs as it passes through private agricultural farms, whereas the dirt/gravel portion is steep and winding. There are few signs along the main road pointing to the Los Quetzales trail entrance, just one that is situated right at the entrance point. In spite of this, the trail should be easy to find, as locals should have no problem pointing you in the right direction. There are no public buses that service the Los Quetzales trail, rather you'll either have to walk or take a taxi to the ranger station. The walk from the trails entrance to the ranger station could take anywhere from 1.5 - 2 hours. There are taxis for hire that can take you to where the paved road ends, leaving to walk the remainder. As well, there are some 4x4 taxis that can take you right to the ranger station. For those who prefer to conserve their energy for the trail the latter might be your best option.

The hike begins with a relatively flat section as it heads to the lookout ledge (mirador), which is approximately 35-50 minutes from the ranger station - just prior to reaching the mirador trail there is a short, relatively steep section. The trail to the mirador breaks off the principal trail on the left side, and proceeds for a very short distance before reaching its end. Here you'll find a stable, wooden platform, from which you'll enjoy spectacular views looking east towards Boquete.

From here you'll have to retract back to the principal trail before continuing. From this point the trail generally heads lower, with some steep sections along the way. Most of the steep sections have secure, wooden staircases with handrails to assist you. After approximately 40-50 minutes of walking you'll come across what appears to be a camp ground. It's a rather large open area with open views to both sides, with benches and tables. It's a good spot for a break.

The trail continues to descend, offering some stunning views of the valley below. There are some very steep sections along the way, cutting through the dense jungle and rock face. In the steeper sections you'll once again find wooden staircases with handrails. As well, to ensure proper footing, round wooden steps have been placed along the trail's path. At some point, as the trail nears Boquete, the trail runs into the Caldera River, which will run alongside the trail right to its very end. Depending on your physical condition and interest in the local flora and fauna, it might take anywhere from 2.5 - 4 hours to descend from the lookout to the park headquarters in Boquete. The trail departs the forest and continues for approximately 30-50 minutes along a dirt road, which handles vehicle traffic. This road descends and ascends as it winds through several privately owned farms.

Upon departing the National Park Headquarters you'll have to walk to the principal road that services the town of Boquete, which should take approximately 50-70 minutes. Since the park headquarters has no telephone service, it's virtually impossible to arrange for transportation from the park itself. Once you reach the primary road, turn left and continue walking (At the point where the trail reaches primary road there is no public bus service available. However, if you walk along the main road for about 15-20 minutes, you'll reach a point where bus service begins, and from that point it will cost about \$1.00 to return to Boquete.) You could also get lucky and hire a taxi that happens to be passing by.

Departing from Boquete

If you enter the park from Boquete you can hire a 4x4 taxi to take you to the park headquarters, thus eliminating this portion of the hike.

Note: If you wish to make the hike and hire a taxi to take you only to the trail entrance it's important that you take the proper trail. The trail sign that's situated along the roadside actually directs you to the wrong trail. Off the main road there are two trails that lead to the right. You HAVE to take the first trail and not the second. The correct trail will have a long, steel tube that runs along its left side, that will continue for some time until you reach a sign that reads "Proyecto de Riego". At that point stay left and continue walking. If you find yourself walking along the initial stages of the trail and don't see the metal tube you have selected the wrong trail.

Special Considerations

1) Warning: before leaning on the handrails we highly recommend you first grab it and test its sturdiness. Several of the handrails on the trail are weak and unable to support excessive weight. This is particularly true of the steep portion between the lookout and Boquete.

2) The trail itself is very well marked and one should have no difficulty staying on the trail. Several of the signs cite distances, which appear to be erroneous, so don't pay any attention to them.

3) An ample supply of water is highly recommended, particularly if you plan to hike your way to either of the park's two headquarters rather than take a taxi.

4) Throughout the trail there various resting stops, complete with tables and benches. We ask that you kindly take out all that you bring in. In spite of the fact that there are garbage bins in select areas, it's very difficult for the park system to retrieve any garbage that is left inside the park. Please bring out what you bring in!

Bocas del Toro

Unquestionably Panama's most popular tourist destination, Bocas del Toro has gradually made a transition from what was once a low budget, backpackers retreat to a more upscale, international tourist destination. While the overwhelming majority of its visitors are still low budget travelers visiting from nearby Costa Rica, the arrival of newly built hotels and upscale, residential developments has begun to attract a more demanding, international clientele. As well, Bocas has a rather stable expat community comprised primarily of North Americans and Europeans. With international flights now arriving from San Jose, Costa Rica, and many more large development projects currently planned, Bocas is expected to continue along the same path and find a home on the international tourist map.

Tourism Office in Bocas del Toro

Panama's Tourism Institute's (IPAT) office is located in the large building that resides on the water's edge, alongside the National Police office (tel. 757-9642). Their hours are as follows:

Monday - Friday 8:30 a.m. - 4:30 p.m.
Saturday - Sunday Closed

Getting to/from Bocas del Toro

By Air - both Aeroperlas and Air Panama offer daily service from Panama City to Bocas del Toro. As well, daily service to Bocas del Toro from David is also available. For those visiting from Costa Rica, Air Panama and Nature Air offer regularly scheduled flights from San Jose, Costa Rica to Bocas del Toro.

Airlines (Bocas Branches)

Aeroperlas	757-9341
Air Panama	757-9841
Nature Air (Bocas Air Adventure)	656-0460

By Bus - bus service between Panama City and Changuinola is available. Buses depart from the Albrook Bus Terminal at 8:00 p.m. and arrive Changuinola at 6:30 a.m. The trip costs \$23.00 p/p one-way.

Attractions/Activities

Hospital Point

Just off the main island of Isla Colon, resting on the northwest tip of Isla Solarte, Hospital Point was once the central medical center for the United Fruit Company, which established its headquarters in Bocas del Toro in 1899. Now under private ownership, the area is one of the areas most popular tourist spots, ideal for snorkeling and scuba diving.

The area's shallow, calm, clear waters are home to a variety of colorful marine life including moray eels, angelfish, parrot fish, sea urchins, sea stars, tube sponges, stinging coral, spiny lobsters, and others. The water is shallowest just off the point, to the left side facing the town of Bocas, and deepest off to the right side, where a steep wall exists and descends to form part of the deep ocean channel that lies just in front of the island.

Tours to Hospital Point depart daily from the docking area, as most tour operations normally include a stop at Hospital Point as part of a full day tour - normally the last part of the tour. For those who prefer to visit the point at their convenience, individual packages can also be arranged. For the more adventurous, kayaks can be rented by the hour, half day, or full day.

Coral Cay

Situated on the southeastern side of Bastimentos Island, about 30 minutes by water taxi from Bocas town, and surrounded by lush mangrove, Coral Cay is Bocas' most popular destination. Extended out over the calm, clear, tropical water, the highly recognizable thatch roof huts, connected by wooden piers built on sturdy stilts, makes for an ideal lunch setting.

Most day tours, particularly those visiting the nearby Zapatilla Cays, stop off for lunch at Coral Cay. Food orders are customarily placed 1-2 hours before lunch is actually served, providing ample time for visitors to snorkel, dive, and/or visit the nearby attractions. Upon your return, normally around 1:00 p.m., your meal is promptly served, complete with cold beer, soft drinks or tropical drinks. Fresh lobster, fish, turtle, and conch are just a sample of what you'll find at any of the restaurants at Coral Cay, delicately prepared by seasoned chefs with island herbs and spices.

Just in front of the restaurants visitors can snorkel or swim at their leisure, where common sighting include sizable populations of angel fish, sea cucumbers, hard coral, and numerous other alluring tropical fish. The mangroves that surround the restaurants are also home to several fish species, all part of a larger, more complex ecosystem. Upon request, short visits can be made to nearby snorkeling spots, each with something different to offer.

Most frequently visited for lunch, Coral Cay is a perfect resting spot to savor the mornings events, as well as look forward to the afternoon's activities. Ample shelter and gentle sea breezes make this place one of a kind, unlike

any other. Fresh seafood, friendly people, tropical setting. If you're in Bocas, you must visit Coral Cay.

Zapatilla Cay

From Bocas del Toro, an hour-and-a-half boat ride through the Bastimentos National Marine Park takes you to Zapatilla Cay, which is comprised of two small, distinct islands. Panama's Bastimentos Marine Park, established in 1988, conserves marine and coastal ecosystems, including wetlands, mangroves, coral reefs, white-sand beaches and more than 200 species of tropical fish. Sea birds are abundant and the water is usually calm and clear, particularly between the months of August - November.

Most of the tours visit the southeastern island. All of the beaches on the leeward side of the island are excellent for swimming and snorkeling, but the main attraction is the 45 minute nature trail that starts out as a wooden platform but soon winds its way through mangrove swamp and other habitats on a marginal trail. The trail exits on the other side of the island, and you can return along the leeward side, walking along the beach.

Panama's National Environmental Authority (ANAM) manages Zapatilla Cay. The ANAM center is on the southeastern island, and visitors must pay to disembark. Fees are \$10 per person for non-residents and \$2 for residents. Visitors are permitted to camp on the islands for \$5.00 per night.

Bird Island (Swan's Cay)

Situated just off the most northern part of Isla Colón (Colon Island) is Bird Island, otherwise known as Swan's Cay. This small islet and its satellites are the only known nesting site in the southwest Caribbean for the Red-billed Tropic bird. It is also one of only three nesting sites of the Brown Booby on Panama's Caribbean coast.

Tours to this island from Bocas town are normally full day tours, and include snorkeling and lunch, which is often enjoyed at one of the restaurants located at Drago Beach - Drago is just 15 minutes by boat from Bird Island and is situated on Colon Island's northern side. Tours to Bird Island also depart from Drago Beach, which is much closer. From here tours will be much cheaper and the boat ride much, shorter.

When visiting Swan Cay one CAN NOT disembark on the island, as it is a marine preserve.

Drago Beach

Bus or taxi service will get you there by land and take you right through the middle of the island. Public buses offer round-trip service between Boca del Drago and Bocas town for \$3.00 round-trip. The buses depart Boca del Drago on Monday, Wednesday and Friday during early morning hours, and return from Bocas town around midday. It is important to point out that the actual departure times vary considerably, and can not be guaranteed. Taxi's can be hired for \$25.00 round trip.

Mountain Bike Rental

Several hotels and private tour companies rent mountain bikes by the hour, half-day and full day. It's a terrific way to see the island, in particularly those parts that are difficult to access by car or bus. The ride to Bluff Beach takes approx. 45 minutes, and to Drago Beach about 1 hour and 20 minutes. The roads are relatively flat, clean and comprised of dirt/gravel - the road to Playa Drago has some hills but nothing substantial. The main road in Bocas town is paved, but it quickly turns to gravel/dirt once you depart.

Red Frog Beach

Red Frog Beach, which got its name thanks to the small, red poison dart frogs that inhabit the area just southeast of the beach, is situated on the northwestern side of Bastimentos Island and is part of the Bastimentos National Marine Park. Red Frog Beach is the Bocas' most accessible and frequently visited beach area, and is most commonly accessed by a short trail that originated on the island's south side (The island's southern side is lined with dense, lush mangroves and enjoys calmer water, partially due to the water's shallow depths.). You can access the beach by boat during certain months of the year, normally between August - October, when the seas are calm. During the other months the seas are too rough and don't permit beach access.

Red Frog Beach is just one of three beaches that stretch along Bastimentos northern coastline. The other beaches, both north and south, can be reached by hiking, however, they are not as accessible or popular with tourists. In order to reach the southern most beaches you will have to walk along the beach itself, or along a narrow trail that runs parallel and just off the beach - often the trail is not marked but you shouldn't have too much of a problem.

There are no trails that lead to the interior of the island, so expect to get wet.

Due to the fact that the trail is on private property it costs \$3.00 p/p to access Red Frog Beach, which is a public beach. Most day tours visit Red Frog Beach as part of their tour, often right before Hospital Point.

Scuba Diving

The scuba diving in and around Bocas can be enjoyed throughout the year, with most of the dive spots no more than a 20 minute boat ride from Bocas town. The water temperature is very tropical and constant, so full or even short wet suits are not required. Water visibility varies from one dive spot to another, and is always dependent on weather conditions. The months of September and October are traditionally the better months, due primarily to more suitable climatic conditions. During this period there is less rain and wind, allowing for clearer water conditions.

Some of the more popular dive sites include Hospital Point, Zapatilla Cays, and Tiger Rock. Both day and night dives are scheduled, with Hospital Point being a favorite for night dives.