

You know of its canal; have you heard the country actively entices retirees? Dream, read and take this Inside Scoop with your documents. It's packed with tips for decadent days and cool nights.

travel: delighting in the spirit of adventure • a vacation from home to explore places that are not your home • knowing life is different, knowing this is a joy of travel • enjoying the journey, not just the destination • a privilege best used with patience, humour and curiosity • fun • coming home with great tales •

Dreaming of Retiring ?

Panama welcomes retirees (as young as 18...). Communities such as Boquete are popular. You don't pay property tax on some new homes for 15 years, there's high-speed internet and the healthcare is top-notch. Panama is one of the most developed countries of Central America, safe and welcoming. www.visitpanama.com/about/retirement.

Your Counsellor

Our knowledge and experience help turn dreams into first-rate vacations. Ask your counsellor about any details, including:

- advance seats & upgrades
- booking excursions ahead, such as a canal tour
- documents needed if staying longer than 180 days.

LeGrow's Travel

Inside Scoop: PANAMA

Know before you go: travel isn't just your destination, it's also the journey

In Central America, with the ships of the world passing through its strategically important canal for 100 years (August 2014), the country is not just the site of that engineering wonder. Helpful tips for your trip:

- You must have a valid Canadian passport www.cic.gc.ca/english/passport/index.asp not expiring within 3 months, proof of your return flight and at least \$500 in cash or traveller's cheques and a credit card. Know that when you arrive, Panama can ask for *proof of access* to funds (a bank statement from the day of travel) and of funds on hand.
- Panama enjoys a tropical climate uniform year-round. Average temperatures are 80F/27C and the country gets rain.
- Electrical service is 110 volts/60 cycles. There is good telephone service and internet access is widely available. Contact your provider for cell phone use and be aware of roaming charges.
- The time is Eastern Standard all year.
- In health emergencies, Panama offers free 30-day healthcare—just show your passport at a medical centre (you must have arrived via Panama City's Tocumen Airport). We also recommend LeGrow's Travel cancellation/interruption insurance.
- Although the Panama Balboa is coins, the US dollar is used; change at banks and use ATMs. Major credit and debit cards are used; inform your bank and credit card companies of the dates you'll be away. The wide acceptance of US currency began in 1904 when construction of the canal began.

Above all, travel with a positive attitude—having patience and a spirit of adventure will carry you through any experience!

Pack Strategically

The world is overrun with black bags: put coloured tape or ribbon on your luggage to spot it quickly. Put your name outside and inside and remove old tags. While some areas are relaxed, some restaurants require less casual clothes and some residents dress for dinner. Most hotels provide hair dryers.

In your carry-on, pack valuables such as jewellery, over-the-counter and prescription drugs in original containers with a list, dosage and doctor's phone number. Pack most liquids/lotions/gels in checked bags (inside plastic bags)—due to carry-on restrictions, the maximum size container is 100ml(3.4oz). All must fit in 1 clear/resealable plastic bag of no more than 1 litre. You may take baby formula, food or milk if a child aged 2 and under (0-24 months) is travelling. Items regular travellers pack in carry-on: pen/notebook, hand wipes, munchies (no fruit, meat or veg). Also: laptops, cell phones, disposable razors, umbrellas, canes, nail clippers. You can't take on cork-screws and sports gear. Check www.catsa.gc.ca/home and your airline for restrictions.

What is There to do?

A lot! At 80kms wide at its narrowest section, this isthmus separates the Caribbean Sea and Atlantic Ocean from the Pacific Ocean, joining North and South America—a starring role for a country smaller than South Carolina. Don't be fooled by its small size—the country is packed with activities from Panama City that benefits from international travel dollars to exploring a hidden rainforest. With first class accommodations and dining, long stay options and locals well used to visitors, Panama is one of the best travel bargains.

Why is the Panama Canal so Important?

From the bananas at breakfast to cruise ships through the locks, the canal globalized trade. In 2011, trade between our countries was \$235.3 million (exports to Panama \$111.2 million, imports to Canada \$124.1 million, including those bananas). **Miraflores Visitor Center**—open 7 days a week—overlooks the canal with exhibitions, observation decks and a restaurant. It is definitely worth a tour by boat, land and/or helicopter, <http://visitcanaldepanama.com/en>. Ask your counsellor about tours; Colón's Observation Center, the Agua Clara, allows a view of the locks and interoceanic waterway, photo gallery and movie, set in a park with terraces, a lookout and nature trail. <http://visitcanaldepanama.com/en/centro-de-visitantes-de-agua-clara>.

LeGrow's Travel

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Your Airline

Sign up online for the airline(s) email/text flight notifications as your flight could be delayed. The Canadian Air Transport Security Authority (CATSA) says “*Travellers should arrive at the airport earlier than usual, exercise patience and contact their airline for further information on their flight(s).*” Airline staff are on duty some 3hrs prior: due to staffing and security, check-in closes 1hr before departure. If late, you’re not entitled to board (or a refund). Unless booked ahead, seats are first-come first-on. **Check-in and carry on baggage** check with your airline as size/weight restrictions vary. CATSA controls security risks; see “Can I bring it on the plane?” (credit card knives are illegal—besides being seized, police will be called)

www.catsa.gc.ca. New measures mean preparation and more time to go through security (get your boarding pass and bag of liquids out).

Entry & Departure: Canadians can enjoy a 180-day stay without a visa (register at <https://travel.gc.ca/travelling/registration>).



Get Packing Checklist and General Planning & Packing Tips at www.legrowstravel.ca/inside-scoops
 Your sense of adventure & humour!

Tips: Get situated to Panama City from a double-decker open-top bus, hop on and off as you wish, two routes: the Canal, Old Panama. www.visitpanama.com/en.html. This is the place to buy Panama hats. Originally from Ecuador, hats are lightweight, perfect for balmy weather—avoid buying those made in China. The official language is Spanish with English spoken widely. Take LeGrow’s Travel’s Inside Scoop: Spanish. Drive with your valid Canadian license for up to 90 days.



Websites and emails in blue are hyperlinked; just click!

Canadians: Emergency? The Embassy of Canada: Torres de las Americas, Tower A, Piso11, Punta Pacifica, Panama City, tel. (011 507) 294-2500, panam@international.gc.ca. Or contact Global Affairs 613-996-8885 (collect if needed) sos@international.gc.ca, www.canadainternational.gc.ca/panama/contact-contactez.aspx.

Travel Around for the Full Experience

Bocas del Toro, is an archipelago in the **Caribbean Sea** with gorgeous beaches, exotic marine species, coral reefs and turquoise waters. A resort is built over the water huts around the lagoon, with room configurations in lofts and suites on pylon-supported platforms, the boardwalk connecting a restaurant. Near **Costa Rica’s** border, a 1hr flight to **Isla Colón Airport** (from Tocumen or Albrook) or 10hr bus ride and 1/2hr taxi boat, the area joins nine islands. The island and **Bocas** (a party town) is picturesque and busy. Numerous bars, great restaurants and shops line the blocks around the central avenue and waterfront. Options (for a fee) include seeing **Bird Island** (from a boat), zip-lining **Red Frog Beach** (yes, named after the tiny frog you might spy, but won’t touch) and **Starfish Beach**. Or ride into the rainforest, go snorkelling in crystalline waters. **Tip:** unless assured drinking water is safe, stick with bottled water. www.bocasdeltoro.com

- **La Chorrera**, a city near the capital, has the 30m (100ft) high **El Chorro** waterfall.
- Visitors to 100+ agritourism farms can work the land, harvest and feed livestock.
- Hang out at the annual **International Film Festival** <http://iffpanama.org/en>, enjoy concerts, theatres, expositions, dancing, national festivals and museums.
- Available activities include ecotourism, whale and dolphin watching, bird watching, hiking, camping, cruises, diving, kayaking, golf, rafting and/or surfing (waves at **Venao Beach, Pedasí, Los Santos** province are known for terrific surfing).
- **Old Town** offers charming open-air cafés, restaurants and bars overlooking entertainment in the square. Stroll the **Esteban Huertas** walkway/**French Square** bordering the sea with a spectacular view of **Cerro Ancón, Bay of Panama** and modern city.
- If you’re a wanderer, stroll the coastal strip linking **Panama City** (founded in 1519) around the bay linking **Punta Paitilla** past **Casco Viejo** to **Amador**, without leaving the city. At the **Seafood Market** next to Old Town, some 70 vendors sell their fresh catches, ready-to-eat paella and *guacho de mariscos* (seafood risotto).
- The **Biomuseum** is at the entrance to the **Amador Causeway** with a biodiversity gallery, 14 screen projections, geological formations, animals and birds www.biomuseopanama.org.

Hungry? You’re in the Right Place

For breakfast try *carimañola*, a cassava fritter with ground meat and *hojaldre* fried bread with sausage in tomato sauce. Snacks include seafood *ceviche* (shrimp or fish marinated in lime juice) and *empanadas*, pastry filled with meat, chicken or cheese—the equivalent of a pizza slice. Also, corn fritters, *tamales* wrapped in corn husks and corn *almojábano*—fried bread and cheese, *patacones* are crunchy slices of fried plantains. Mains include red snapper with coconut rice and *sancocho* chicken stew with yam.

Ropa vieja (meaning *old clothes*) is a shredded beef stew. *Bienmesabe* is rice pudding. If your bill doesn’t show a “servicio” charge, tip 15% for service. Try their Italian version of gelato and Hawaii’s version of shave ice; *raspao*, a snow cone drizzled with syrups of grape, passionfruit or lemon, topped with milk and molasses. If someone offers Geisha coffee, ask the cost as one cup can top \$7 (\$13 a cup in New Zealand...).

Love Craft and Culture?

The craft centre by the old ruins is popular among locals and visitors, offering cultural works and handicrafts: bracelets by Guna Indians, hand-carved horse saddles, textiles (*molos*: traditional coloured cloth patterns) and pottery. This market helps locals by training and certifying artisans with proceeds to jailed inmates and families.

Amador’s Craft Center near Figali **Convention Center** has 40 stalls of beadwork, leather sandals, straw hats, colourful dresses and woven handbags. If buying wood items, ensure no worm holes: if so, they’ll be confiscated by border control in Canada. For goods coming home, know your limits and exemptions, www.cbsa-asfc.gc.ca/travel-voyage/bgb-rmf-eng.html.

Our 24/7 Emergency Service

We constantly survey airlines, local tour companies and hotels to ensure they meet our customer service standards, so don’t let a problem ruin your holiday. Nearly all issues can be handled quickly on site—first seek help from the venue’s local staff. Otherwise, call our Emergency Travel Service at **1-888-551-1181**. Deposits are non-refundable and non-transferrable. Schedule changes can occur and airlines and tour operators have the right to change flight and/or tour times, alter, combine services or substitute accommodations. Your counsellor will work with you to ensure you receive information as soon as possible and ensure satisfaction. See your brochure and ticket terms and conditions.

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