**Panama Facts and Culture**

* [Food and Recipes:](http://www.countryreports.org/country/Panama/recipes.htm) Most Panamanians eat a great deal of corn, rice and beans. They also eat tortillas, which are flat breads made... [More](http://www.countryreports.org/country/Panama/recipes.htm)
* [Family:](http://www.countryreports.org/country/Panama/family.htm) Family Life is important to the Panamanians, especially those who live in rural areas.Â Many relatives may live together, or close... [More](http://www.countryreports.org/country/Panama/family.htm)
* [Fashion:](http://www.countryreports.org/country/Panama/fashion.htm) Many Panamanians wear the same style of clothes as North Americans. Kuna women make colorful fabrics called molas.... [More](http://www.countryreports.org/country/Panama/fashion.htm)
* [Visiting:](http://www.countryreports.org/country/Panama/visiting.htm) Sending (exchanging) gifts is common among friends in the interior, but gifts include items such as food or seedlings, not... [More](http://www.countryreports.org/country/Panama/visiting.htm)

**Panama Facts**

Panama stats

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Capital | Panama City |
| Government Type | constitutional democracy |
| Currency | PAB; USD |
| Population | 3,559,408 |
| Total Area | 29,120 Square Miles 75,420 Square Kilometers |
| Location | Central America, bordering both the Caribbean Sea and the North Pacific Ocean, between Colombia and Costa Rica |
| Language | Spanish (official), English 14% |

Map of Panama



**Panama Geography**

**Terrain and geography**

The contrast between life in Panama City and in the rest of the country is striking. The city itself has changed enormously in the last 10 years. A modern banking center, several huge new shopping centers, and scores of high-rise office and apartment buildings have re-shaped the skyline. But the history and tradition of the past can be found quickly in Casco Viejo (the old center) where the cathedral forms the center of what was once the "downtown" area. The ruins of Panama Viejo (Old Panama), once the object of attack from the pirates of the Caribbean, are a short distance from the modern city center.

The countryside, by contrast, continues to resemble in many ways what it was 10 years ago. Small towns and Indian villages, many nestled in mountain valleys, have seen some changes but everything is "low rise" and "laid back." Rural Panama is the heartland of Panamanian native cultural life, with the typical music and dances of yesteryear still popular today. Here is where city dwellers flock for relief on weekends and over holidays.  
  
Panama, the country — often-called "The Bridge between Two Worlds" — is a crossroads of world culture and international trade. Panama — the city — resembles much larger metropolitan centers in that it is a melting pot for nationality and culture. Panama, the people, is a cultural "Mezcla," (mix) or "Mosaico," (mosaic) of many races and cultures under the lively and energized daily rhythm of Latin society. Panama — the canal — functions in the lush, tropical green forests entirely with fresh water. Panama, the word, is a native term with the interchangeable meaning for "many fish," "many trees," or "many butterflies."

Wedged between North and South America, Panama appears pushed, squeezed, twisted, and stretched by the two continents dangling on either end. Panama’s snake-like "S" shape can disorient a new arrival. North and South "become" East and West. One imagines that in Panama City the sun rises in the West over the Pacific and sets in the East over the Atlantic. The Panama Canal lets ships, some 40 a day, sail West and East but they must go North and South to do so. South America lies to the East and to get to North America you head West — to where the sun rises.

The country largely avoids the Pacific rim’s earthquakes and its "ring of fire,"and escapes the Caribbean’s devastating tropical storms and hurricanes. Geography gives Panama one of the world’s most amazing collections of flora and fauna.

**Geography - note**

strategic location on eastern end of isthmus forming land bridge connecting North and South America; controls Panama Canal that links North Atlantic Ocean via Caribbean Sea with North Pacific Ocean

**Panama Geography**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Geographic Location | Central America |
| Total Area | 29,120 Square Miles 75,420 Square Kilometers |
| Land Area | 28,703 Square Miles 74,340 Square Kilometers |
| Water Area | 417 Square Miles 1,080 Square Kilometers |
| Land Boundaries | 345 Miles 555 Kilometers |
| Irrigated Land | 134 Square Miles 346 Square Kilometers |
| Border Countries | Colombia 225 km, Costa Rica 330 km |
| Coastline | 1,547 Miles 2,490 Kilometers |
| Geographic Coordinates | 9 00 N, 80 00 W |
| Terrain | interior mostly steep, rugged mountains and dissected, upland plains; coastal areas largely plains and rolling hills |
| Highest Point | 3,475 Meters |
| Highest Point Location | Volcan de Chiriqui 3,475 m |
| Lowest Point Location | Pacific Ocean 0 m |
| Natural Resources | copper, mahogany forests, shrimp, hydropower |

**Panama Weather and Climate**

**Climate and Weather**

tropical maritime; hot, humid, cloudy; prolonged rainy season (May to January), short dry season (January to May)

**Panama Environmental Issues**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Climate | tropical maritime; hot, humid, cloudy; prolonged rainy season (May to January), short dry season (January to May) |
| Terrain | interior mostly steep, rugged mountains and dissected, upland plains; coastal areas largely plains and rolling hills |
| Natural Resources | copper, mahogany forests, shrimp, hydropower |
| Natural Hazards | occasional severe storms and forest fires in the Darien area |
| Irrigated Land | 134 Square Miles 346 Square Kilometers |
| Environmental Issues | water pollution from agricultural runoff threatens fishery resources; deforestation of tropical rain forest; land degradation and soil erosion threatens siltation of Panama Canal; air pollution in urban areas; mining threatens natural resources |
| Environment - International Agreements | party to: Biodiversity, Climate Change, Climate Change-Kyoto Protocol, Desertification, Endangered Species, Environmental Modification, Hazardous Wastes, Law of the Sea, Marine Dumping, Ozone Layer Protection, Ship Pollution, Tropical Timber 83, Tropical Timber 94, Wetlands, Whaling   signed, but not ratified: Marine Life Conservation |

**Panama Population Details**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Population | 3,559,408 |
| Population Growth Rate | 1.38% |
| Urban Population | 75.3% |
| Population in Major Urban Areas | PANAMA CITY (capital) 1.426 million |
| Nationality Noun | Panamanian(s) |
| Nationality Adjective | Panamanian |
| Ethnic Groups | mestizo (mixed Amerindian and white) 70%, Amerindian and mixed (West Indian) 14%, white 10%, Amerindian 6% |
| Languages | Spanish (official), English 14% |
| Rate of Urbanization- annual rate of change | 2.23% |

**Panama Medical Information**

Panama City has some very good hospitals and clinics, but medical facilities outside of the capital are limited. Hospitals in Panama are either private hospitals or government-run public hospitals.  
  
Many foreign doctors and hospitals require payment in cash prior to providing service. Medical evacuation to the U.S. may cost well in excess of $50,000. In Panama, most hospitals accept credit cards for hospital charges, but not for doctors' fees.  
  
Except for antibiotics and narcotics, most medications are available without a prescription.  
  
The 911 call center also provides ambulance service. However, an ambulance may not always be available and, given difficulties with traffic jams and poor road conditions, there may be a significant delay in response. There are also private ambulance services available on a subscription basis.  
  
Panama is actively promoting medical tourism, and many companies are now offering vacation packages bundled with medical consultations for assisted reproduction technology treatments, dental procedures, and a wide range of plastic surgery. While there are advantages, like affordable costs, quality health care, and a chance to recuperate while vacationing, there are also risks.  
  
Individuals considering plastic surgery should always make sure that emergency medical facilities are available in or near the facility where the surgery will be performed. Some “boutique” plastic surgery operations offer luxurious facilities but are not hospitals and are therefore unable to deal with unforeseen emergencies.   
  
Dengue and Malaria: Prevention of mosquito bites is the best way to avoid these illnesses. Use of topical repellants and wearing long sleeves and pants are recommended in areas affected.  
  
Dengue fever outbreaks have been occurring annually in Panama in both urban and rural areas, this is a mosquito borne virus that can cause fever, severe headache and body aches, it can also cause severe disease with bleeding and even death. Dengue carrying mosquitoes are different than those carrying malaria and bite during the day and frequently live in homes and hotel rooms.   
  
Malaria, also mosquito borne, occurs in rural areas of Panama. Malaria in Panama is almost exclusively P. vivax (P. falciparum transmission is minimal and limited to areas east of the Canal Zone). Transmission occurs throughout the year.  
  
Malaria Chemoprophylaxis is recommended for all travelers: throughout the provinces and comarcas of Darién, Kuna Yala (including the San Blas Islands), Kuna de Madugandi, Kuna de Wargandi, and –Emberá.  
  
Protective measures: Evening and nighttime insect precautions are essential in areas with any level of malaria transmission. Atovaquone/proguanil (Malarone or generic), doxycycline, and mefloquine are protective east of the Canal Zone. For the exceptional case of a vulnerable traveler with underlying medical conditions and/or the potential for an especially adverse outcome from malaria, chloroquine and other antimalarials (atovaquone/proguanil, doxycycline, and mefloquine) are protective west of the Canal Zone. Drug choice should be discussed with your medical provider before travel.  
  
Traveler's Diarrhea: Moderate risk exists even in deluxe accommodations; high risk exists elsewhere. Food and beverage precautions are essential to reduce the likelihood of illness. Diarrhea risk can be minimized by avoiding fresh fruit and vegetables that cannot be peeled or are not cooked and served hot. Tap water is not safe to drink in many areas of Panama, and visitors should use bottled water. Traveling with antibiotics such as ciprofloxacin or levofloxacin and the antimotility agent loperamide in case of diarrhea should be considered.  
  
You can find detailed information on vaccinations and other health precautions on the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) website. For information about outbreaks of infectious diseases abroad, consult the World Health Organization (WHO) website, which contains additional health information for travelers, including detailed country-specific health information.  
  
Tuberculosis is significantly more common in Panama than in the US. Although no particular precautions are recommended those with extended stays (more than 3 months) or extensive contact with disadvantaged populations should discuss with their medical provider TB testing before and after their travel to Panama.

**Panama Health Information**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Health Expenditures (% of GDP) | 8.2% |
| Death Rate/1,000 population | 4.73 |
| Obesity- adult prevalence rate | 25.4% |
| Hospital Bed Density/1,000 population | 2.4 |
| Physicians Density/1,000 population | 1.5 |
| Infant Mortality Rate/1,000 population | 11.01 |
| Infant Mortality Rate- Female/1,000 population | 10.21 |
| Infant Mortality Rate- Male/1,000 population | 11.77 |
| Underweight - percent of children under five years | 3.9% |
| Total Fertility Rate | 2.4 |
| Contraceptive prevalance rate (female 15-49) | 52.2% |
| Maternal mortality rate per 100,000 live births | 92 |
| HIV Adult Prevalence Rate | 0.9% |
| HIV Aids Deaths | 600 |
| HIV Aids People Living With | 20,000 |
| Drinking Water Source: unimproved | 5.7% |
| Drinking Water Source - percent of rural population improved | 86.6% |
| Drinking Water Source - percent of urban population improved | 96.8% |
| Sanitation Facility Access: unimproved | 26.8% |
| Sanitation Facility Access - percent of urban population improved | 79.7% |
| Sanitation Facitlity Access - percent of rural population improved | 52.5% |
| Major Infectious Diseases - degree of risk | intermediate |
| Food or Waterborne Disease (s) | bacterial diarrhea |
| Vectorborne Disease (s) | dengue fever |

**Panama Crime**

**Crime Information**

Panama remains relatively safe when compared to other Central American countries, yet crime rates are still higher than one would encounter in most of the United States. Violent crime in Panama started to rise in 2007. However, new efforts by Panama’s National Police (PNP) to combat this trend appear to have made an impact. Starting in June 2010, the number of homicides in the country declined and continued a downward trend through 2012. Unfortunately, the rate of simple theft was up, with "Blackberry"-type smart phones being a particular target. The three provinces with the largest cities also had the highest overall crime rates: Panama, Colon, and Chiriqui. The entire city of Colon is a high crime area; travelers should use extreme caution anywhere in Colon.  
  
Police continue to conduct vehicle check points at key intersections in the city in an effort to raise their visibility and hamper criminals’ movements. The high crime areas in and around Panama City are El Chorrillo, San Miguel, Santa Ana, Cabo Verde, Curundu, Veracruz Beach, Santa Librada, Rio Abajo, San Miguelito, Panama Viejo, and the Madden Dam Overlook.  
  
Crimes are typical of those that plague metropolitan areas and include shootings, rapes, armed robberies, muggings, purse-snatchings, thefts from locked autos by breaking windows for entry, thefts of unsecured items, petty theft, and occasionally "express kidnappings" from ATM banking facilities, in which the victim is briefly kidnapped and robbed after withdrawing cash from an ATM. There has also been a recent spike in the number of credit card and ATM card fraud reports. Criminals are capturing credit and ATM card information to clone and create fraudulent cards. Kidnappings have been on the rise of late, including in Panama City. Many of the kidnappings appear related to drug or criminal activity.  
  
There has also been a recent increase of thefts from cars. We encourage travelers and residents to take all valuables out of their cars and place them in their trunks before they get to their destinations. Drivers should keep their windows up while the car is in motion or stopped in traffic, at traffic lights, or at their destinations to prevent items being stolen while driving.  
  
Taxis are a very helpful way to maneuver around Panama; however use caution when getting into a taxi. Check to see that the number on the side of the taxi matches the number of the license plate. Ensuring the car is a registered taxi with a number on the side is a quick way to help prevent any incidences. Regular taxis are yellow in color. Also, never get into a taxi which already has a passenger and instruct the driver not to pick up any additional fares while en route to your destination. Many hotels also have “tourist taxis” that are not yellow but only pick up passengers in front of well-known hotels.   
  
U.S. citizens are advised to never let a “helpful” stranger direct you to a particular taxi or taxi stand, and always negotiate the fare before getting in to ensure a fixed price.  
  
In regards to non-drug related crime, the use of weapons (handguns and knives) in the commission of street robberies is common; however, gratuitous violence is uncommon as long as the victim complies and hands over the property. In 2013, there was an increase in violence during theft. Home burglaries and, more worrying, home-invasion robberies do appear to be on the rise, especially in the more affluent neighborhoods. Panama City has a curfew for those younger than 18 years of age that is generally from 8:00 p.m. to 6:00 a.m. Sunday through Thursday and 11:00 p.m. to 6:00 a.m. Friday and Saturday. The times are subject to change depending on your location within Panama. If you are concerned about the exact time you may contact local police. This curfew applies to both Panamanian and foreign citizens. Under the law, students attending night classes must have a “carnet” or permit, issued by the school or, if employed, a Certificate of Employment. Minors who are picked up for a curfew violation are subject to detention at a police station until parents or legal guardians can arrange for them to be released into their custody. Parents or legal guardians may be fined up to U.S. $50 for the first violation.  
  
Panamanian customs authorities may enforce strict regulations concerning temporary importation into or export from Panama of items such as firearms and ammunition, cultural property, endangered wildlife species, narcotics, biological material, and food products. Contact the Embassy of Panama in Washington or one of Panama's Consulates in the United States for specific information regarding customs requirements.  
  
Don’t buy counterfeit and pirated goods, even if they are widely available. Not only are the bootlegs illegal in the United States, if you purchase them you may also be breaking local law.

**Panama Penalties for Crime**

**Criminal Penalties**

While you are traveling in Panama, you are subject to its laws even if you are a U.S. citizen. Foreign laws and legal systems can be vastly different than our own. In some places you may be taken in for questioning if you don’t have your passport with you.  
  
Driving under the influence can land you immediately in jail. These criminal penalties will vary from country to country. There are also some things that might be legal in the country you visit, but still illegal in the United States. For example, you can be prosecuted under U.S. law if you buy pirated goods.   
  
Engaging in sexual conduct with children or using or disseminating child pornography in a foreign country is a crime prosecutable in the United States, as is commercial sex with a person under the age of 18.  
  
If you break local laws in Panama, your U.S. passport won’t help you avoid arrest or prosecution, and the embassy cannot get you out of jail or prison. Keep in mind, if you are arrested you must be sentenced before you can be repatriated to the United States. It’s very important to know what’s legal and what’s not where you are going.   
  
Persons violating Panamanian laws, even unknowingly, may be expelled, arrested, or imprisoned. Penalties for possessing, using, or trafficking in illegal drugs in Panama are severe, and convicted offenders can expect long jail sentences and heavy fines.  
  
If you are arrested in Panama, authorities of Panama are required to alert the U.S. Embassy of your arrest. If you are concerned the Department of State may not be aware of your situation, you should request that the police notify the U.S. Embassy of your arrest.

**Panama Life Expectancy**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Life Expectancy At Birth | 78 Years |
| Life Expectancy At Birth- Female | 81 Years |
| Life Expectancy At Birth- Male | 75 Years |
| Median Age (female) | 28 Years |
| Median Age (male) | 27 Years |
| Median Age | 28 Years |

**Panama Language**

Spanish is the official language although many Panamanians in business and the professions speak English.

**Panama Literacy**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Predominant Language | Spanish (official), English 14% |
| Literacy Definition | age 15 and over can read and write |
| Literacy Female | 91.9% |
| Literacy Male | 93.2% |
| Literacy Total | 91.9% |

**Panama Education**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Education Expenditures - percent of GDP | 3.5% |
| Literacy - female | 91.9% |
| Literacy - male | 93.2% |
| Literacy - total population | 91.9% |
| Literacy Definition | age 15 and over can read and write |
| School Life Expectancy - female | 13 Years |
| School Life Expectancy - male | 12 Years |
| Total School Life Expectancy - (primary to tertiary) | 12 Years |

**Panama Age of Population**

Age 0-14: 27.7 %Age 15-24: 17.4 %Age 25-54: 40.0 %Age 55-64: 7.3 %Over 64: 7.6 %Highcharts.com

**Education Culture**

Children must go to school from ages 6 to 15. Many schools are public but some are run by the Catholic Church. In many rural areas there are not schools. Many children in rural areas have to help their families work on their farms. A student must go to school for 12 years in order to attend a university.  People in Panama care about education The government spends a lot of money to improve education. Elementary school is free. The school year last from April to December. Students learn reading, writing, math, history and art. A law says that children must complete the 6th grade. Some families pay for children to go to private middle and high school. Many students attend colleges in Panama City. Middle School and high school are called secondary education in Panama. Students study many subjects in the first three years. They learn math, science, art and history. The second part of secondary education also lasts about three years. Students study only one subject in the second part. They choose a subject that will help them get a job after they graduate. The education system in panama is separated into three levels: Primary school (six years) secondary school (six years) and university or higher education. The first six years of primary education are required for all children. A high percentage goes on to enroll in secondary school. Panama has one of the highest literacy rates in Central America.

**Panama Government**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Capital Name | Panama City |
| Country Name | Panama |
| Local - Long | Republica de Panama |
| Full Country Name | Republic of Panama |
| Local - Short | Panama |
| Government Type | constitutional democracy |
| Capital - geographic coordinate | 8 58 N, 79 32 W |
| National Holiday | Independence Day, 3 November (1903) |
| Constitution | 11 October 1972; revised several times |
| Legal System | civil law system; judicial review of legislative acts in the Supreme Court of Justice |
| Suffrage | 18 years of age; universal and compulsory |

**Panama Government and Politics**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Government Executive Branch | chief of state: President Ricardo MARTINELLI Berrocal (since 1 July 2009); Vice President Juan Carlos VARELA Rodriguez (since 1 July 2009); note - the president is both chief of state and head of government   head of government: President Ricardo MARTINELLI Berrocal (since 1 July 2009); Vice President Juan Carlos VARELA Rodriguez (since 1 July 2009)   cabinet: Cabinet appointed by the president   elections: president and vice president elected on the same ticket by popular vote for five-year terms (president not eligible for immediate reelection and must sit out two additional terms (10 years) before becoming eligible for reelection); election last held on 3 May 2009 (next to be held in May 2014)   election results: Juan Carlos VARELA elected president; percent of vote - Juan Carlos VARELA 39.1%, Jose Domingo ARIAS 31.4%, Juan Carlos NAVARRO 28.2%, other 1.3%; note - Juan Carlos VARELA is expected to take office 1 July 2014   note: the ruling government coalition - formerly comprised of CD (Democratic Change), Panamenista Party, MOLIRENA (Nationalist Republican Liberal Movement), and UP (Patriotic Union Party) - split in August 2011 when President MARTINELLI relieved Vice President VARELA from his position as Foreign Minister, prompting the Panamenistas to pull out of the coalition; UP has now merged with CD, and CD and the Panamenista Party will run separate candidates for the presidency in 2014 |
| Legislative Branch | unicameral National Assembly or Asamblea Nacional (71 seats; members elected by popular vote to serve five-year terms)  elections: last held on 3 May 2009 (next to be held in May 2014)  election results: percent of vote by party - NA; seats by party - PRD 26, Panamenista 22, CD 14, UP 4, MOLIRENA 2, PP 1, independents 2; note - changes in political affiliation now reflect the following seat distribution: as of 1 March 2012 - seats by party - CD 34, PRD 18, Panamenista 15, MOLIRENA 3, PP 1  note: legislators from outlying rural districts are chosen on a plurality basis while districts located in more populous towns and cities elect multiple legislators by means of a proportion-based formula |
| Judicial Branch | Supreme Court of Justice or Corte Suprema de Justicia (nine judges appointed for staggered 10-year terms); five superior courts; three courts of appeal |
| Regions or States | 9 provinces (provincias, singular - provincia) and 3 indigenous territories\* (comarcas); Bocas del Toro, Chiriqui, Cocle, Colon, Darien, Embera-Wounaan\*, Herrera, Kuna Yala\*, Los Santos, Ngobe-Bugle\*, Panama, Veraguas |
| Political Parties and Leaders | Democratic Change or CD [Ricardo MARTINELLI]; Democratic Revolutionary Party or PRD [Francisco SANCHEZ Cardenas]; Nationalist Republican Liberal Movement or MOLIRENA [Sergio GONZALEZ-Ruiz]; Panamenista Party [Juan Carlos VARELA Rodriguez] (formerly the Arnulfista Party); Patriotic Union Party or UP (combination of the Liberal National Party or PLN and the Solidarity Party or PS)[Anibal GALINDO]; Popular Party or PP [Milton HENRIQUEZ] (formerly Christian Democratic Party or PDC)  note: The Patriotic Union Party (UP) has now merged with Democratic Change (CD) |
| International Law Organization Participation | accepts compulsory ICJ jurisdiction with reservations; accepts ICCt jurisdiction |
| International Organization Participation | BCIE, CAN (observer), CELAC, CSN (observer), FAO, G-77, IADB, IAEA, IBRD, ICAO, ICC, ICRM, IDA, IFAD, IFC, IFRCS, ILO, IMF, IMO, IMSO, Interpol, IOC, IOM, IPU, ISO, ITSO, ITU, ITUC, LAES, LAIA, MIGA, NAM, OAS, OPANAL, OPCW, PCA, SICA, UN, UNASUR (observer), UNCTAD, UNESCO, UNIDO, Union Latina, UNWTO, UPU, WCO, WFTU, WHO, WIPO, WMO, WTO |
| Politicial Pressure Groups and Leaders | Chamber of Commerce; Concertacion Nacional (mechanism for government of Panama to formally dialogue with representatives of civil society); National Council of Organized Workers or CONATO; National Council of Private Enterprise or CONEP; National Union of Construction and Similar Workers (SUNTRACS); Panamanian Association of Business Executives or APEDE; Panamanian Industrialists Society or SIP; Workers Confederation of the Republic of Panama or CTRP |

**Panama Economy Data**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| GDP - Gross Domestic Product | $61,540,000,000 (USD) |
| GDP - official exchange rate | $40,620,000,000 (USD) |
| GDP - real growth rate | 7.5% |
| GDP Per Capita | $16,500.00 (USD) |
| GDP by Sector- agriculture | 3.7% |
| GDP by Sector- Industry | 17.9% |
| GDP by Sector- services | 78.4% |
| Population Below Poverty Line | 25.6% |
| Inflation Rate | 3.5% |
| Labor Force | 1,557,000 |
| Labor Force By Occupation- agriculture | 17% |
| Labor Force By Occupation- industry | 18.6% |
| Labor Force By Occupation- services | 64.4% |
| Unemployment Rate | 6.5% |
| Fiscal Year | calendar year |
| Annual Budget | $6,994,000,000 (USD) |
| Budget Surplus or Deficit - percent of GDP | -2.6% |
| Public Debt (% of GDP) | 73.2% |
| Taxes and other revenues - percent of GDP | 25.4% |
| Major Industries | construction, petroleum refining, brewing, cement and other construction materials, sugar milling |
| Industrial Growth Rate | -1% |
| Agriculture Products | bananas, rice, corn, coffee, sugarcane, vegetables; livestock; shrimp |
| Currency Code | balboa (PAB); US dollar (USD) |
| Child Labor - % of children ages 5-14 | 7% |
| Child Labor - # of children ages 5-14 | 59,294 |
| Child Labor - note | note: data represents children ages 5-17 |
| Commercial Bank Prime Lending Rate | 6.91% |

**Panama Economy**

**Economic Overview**

Panama's dollarised economy rests primarily on a well-developed services sector that accounts for three-fourths of GDP. Services include operating the Panama Canal, banking, the Colon Free Zone, insurance, container ports, flagship registry, and tourism. A slump in Colon Free Zone and agricultural exports, the global slowdown, and the withdrawal of US military forces held back economic growth in 2000-03. The government has been backing public works programs, tax reforms, new regional trade agreements, and development of tourism in order to stimulate growth. Unemployment remains at an unacceptably high level.

**Panama Exports**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Exports | $12,520,000,000 (USD) |
| Major Exports | bananas, shrimp, sugar, coffee, clothing |
| Top Export Partners | US 47.8%, Sweden 5.8%, Costa Rica 4.8%, Honduras 4.5% |
| Exports - note | includes the Colon Free Zone |

**Panama Imports**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Imports | $16,050,000,000 (USD) |
| Major Imports | capital goods, crude oil, foodstuffs, consumer goods, chemicals |
| Top Import Partners | US 34.4%, Colombia 5.9%, Japan 5.4%, Costa Rica 4.2%, Venezuela 4.2% |
| Imports - note | includes the Colon Free Zone |

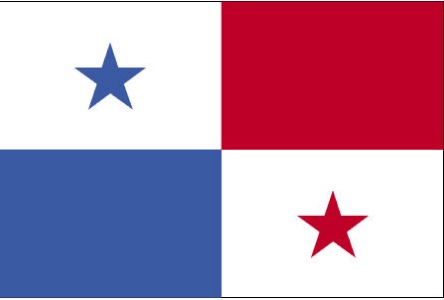
**Panama Flag**

The colors represent the politcal parties. Blue is for the Conservative and red for the Liberals. The white symbolizes the peace between them. The blue is also for the Pacific Ocean and the Caribbean. Red is also for the blood of those who lost their lives for their country. The blue star represents the civic virtues of purity and honesty. The red star is for authority and law.

**Panama Flag Description**

divided into four, equal rectangles; the top quadrants are white (hoist side) with a blue five-pointed star in the center and plain red; the bottom quadrants are plain blue (hoist side) and white with a red five-pointed star in the center

Panama flag



**Panama Interesting Facts**

* Birthday traditions include piñatas and large parties. The piñata is the most important item. They are usually made to resemble a character to correspond with a theme. It is filled with candy and confetti and is either hit with a stick or there are ribbons on it to pull. When the cake is served, the happy birthday song is often performed in two languages, Spanish and English. The cake is served with ice cream. The extended family is invited and sometimes up to 100 children are invited.
* Ferdinand de Lesseps, a Frenchman who built the Suez Canal, made an unsuccessful attempt to construct a canal linking the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans (1879-1889).
* The idea of building a canal on the isthmus to connect the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans dates back to the 1840s. France, Britain and the USA were all interested in a canal linking the oceans.

**History of Panama**

*Cuna Indian mola design of a Panamanian coin featuring Spanish explorer Vasco Núñez de Balboa*

THE HISTORY OF the Panamanian isthmus, since Spaniards first landed on its shores in 1501, is a tale of treasure, treasure seekers, and peoples exploited; of clashes among empires, nations, and cultures; of adventurers and builders; of magnificent dreams fulfilled and simple needs unmet. In the wake of Vasco Nuñez de Balboa’s torturous trek from the Atlantic to the Pacific in 1513, conquistadors seeking gold in Peru and beyond crossed the seas and recrossed with their treasures bound for Spain. The indigenous peoples who survived the diseases, massacres, and enslavement of the conquest ultimately fled into the forest or across to the San Blas Islands. Indian slaves were soon replaced by Africans.

A century before the English settled Massachusetts Bay, Panama was the crossroads and marketplace of the great Spanish Empire, the third richest colony of the New World. In the seventeenth century, however, the thriving colony fell prey to buccaneers of the growing English Empire, and Panama entered a period of decline and neglect that lasted until gold was discovered in California.

The geopolitical significance of Panama has been recognized since the early 1500s, when the Spanish monarchs considered digging a canal across the isthmus. United States interest, intensified in the 1850s by the California gold rush, resulted in the construction of a trans-isthmian railroad. In 1879 a French company under the direction of Ferdinand de Lesseps, builder of the Suez Canal, began constructing a canal in Panama. The project fell victim to disease, faulty design, and ultimately bankruptcy and was abandoned in 1889.

By the turn of the twentieth century, the United States had become convinced that a canal should be built to link the two oceans. In addition to the geographic advantages of the isthmus, President Theodore Roosevelt was attracted by the separatist tendencies of Panama, then a department of Colombia. When Panama rebelled against Colombia in 1903, Roosevelt deployed United States naval vessels to discourage the Colombian forces and proudly claimed the role of midwife at the birth of the Republic of Panama.

Since its completion in 1914, the Panama Canal has been Panama’s economic base, and the United States presence has been the republic’s major source of frustration. The provisions of the treaty concluded in 1903 between John Hay and Philippe BunauVarilla (the Hay-Bunau-Varilla Treaty) granted the Canal Zone "in perpetuity" to the United States and made Panama a virtual protectorate of the United States. Relations with the United States in general, and the status of the Canal Zone in particular, long remained the overriding concerns of the formulators of Panama’s foreign policy and strongly influenced domestic politics and international relations.

Despite the negotiation of treaty amendments in 1936 and 1955, limiting the freedom of the United States to intervene in Panama’s internal affairs, various problems between the two countries continued to generate resentment among Panamanians. Aside from the larger issue of jurisdiction over the zone--which split the country into two parts--Panamanians complained that they did not receive their fair share of the receipts from the canal, that commissaries in the zone had damaged their commercial interests, that Panamanian workers in the zone were discriminated against in economic and social matters, and that the large-scale presence of the United States military in the zone and in bases outside the zone cast a long shadow over national sovereignty.

After serious rioting in 1964 that indicated the intensity of nationalistic aspirations concerning the status of the canal, the United States agreed to enter into negotiations for a new treaty. Meanwhile, studies relating to the construction of a new canal were undertaken. In 1971 after a four-year interlude, negotiations were renewed. In 1977 two new treaties were signed, one providing for Panamanian assumption of control over the canal in the year 2000 and the other providing for a permanent joint guarantee of the canal’s neutrality.

The focal point of consensus in Panamanian political life, cutting across both social and partisan divides, has been nationalism. Nationalistic sentiments, directed primarily against the highly visible and dominant presence of the United States, have been catered to in varying degrees by all who have held positions of leadership or have sought popular support. Public demonstrations and riots, as occurred in 1927, 1947, 1959, and 1964, have been effective in influencing policy, especially in relation to the country’s stance vis-à-vis the United States. National leaders have alternately responded to and contributed to an explosive climate of public opinion. They have carefully kept popular resentment narrowly focused on the United States presence lest discontent turn on the Panamanian elite, generally referred to as the oligarchy.

Until the National Guard seized control in 1968, power had been wielded almost exclusively by a small number of aristocratic families. The middle class was constrained from challenging the system because most of its members depended on government jobs. Also, the slow pace of industrialization had limited the political role of urban labor. The lower classes lacked organization and leadership. They had been distracted from recognizing common problems by the ethnic antagonisms between those of Spanish or mestizo background and the more recent immigrants, Antillean blacks from Jamaica and other parts of the West Indies.

Brigadier General Omar Torrijos Herrera, who in 1969 as commander of the National Guard assumed the role of head of government, had some initial success in building a popular base for his government among small farmers and urban workers. His domestic program emphasized public works--especially the construction of roads, bridges, schools, and low-cost public housing--and an agrarian reform program. In addition, he encouraged the entry of foreign banks and firms as part of his effort to create jobs and increase incomes.

In negotiating new Panama Canal treaties, Torrijos, like other leaders before him, walked the tightrope of taking a strong stand on the issue to maintain popular support, while keeping popular frustrations within controllable limits and without appearing so militant as to alarm the United States. Successful in this endeavor, by the time the new treaties were signed in 1977, Torrijos had held power longer than any other leader in Panama’s history.

Nevertheless, by the late 1970s, clear signs appeared to show that Torrijos’s populist alliance was eroding. Observers attributed the decline in support to a variety of factors, including severe economic problems that led to backtracking on social programs, opposition among Panamanians to the 1977 Panama Canal treaties, and the very "democratization" process that Torrijos initiated to gain United States support for the canal treaties.

In October 1978, the 1972 Constitution had been reformed to allow the legalization of political parties, and exiled political leaders were permitted to return to Panama. Torrijos formally stepped down as head of government, and a civilian president was elected. Torrijos, however, clearly remained the dominant force in the political system. Torrijos’s shocking, sudden death in an airplane crash in July 1981 created a power vacuum in Panama. The newly erected democratic facade persisted, however, with a succession of civilian presidents controlled by the National Guard and its emergent leader, General Manuel Antonio Noriega Moreno, who (as of late 1987) had been in command since August 1983. Noriega successfully transformed the National Guard into the far larger Panama Defense Forces (Fuerzas de Defensa de Panamá--FDP), a formidable power base for his increasing political control.

**Panama History Timeline**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Panama Year in History | Panama Timeline |
| 1501 | **Rodrigo de Bastidas** Rodrigo de Bastidas, sailing westward from Venezuela, arrives in search of gold. |
| 1502 | **Christopher Columbus** Christopher Columbus establishes a short-lived settlement on the isthmus. |
| 1510 | **The Spanish establish Santa María la Antigua del Darien.** The Spanish establish Santa María la Antigua del Darien, the first mainland settlement in the Americas. |
| 1513 | **Vasco Nú nez de Balboa marches from the Atlantic to the Pacific.** Vasco Núnez de Balboa marches from the Atlantic to the Pacific, proving that crossing the isthmus is the shortest route between the oceans. |
| 1821 | **Independence** Panama declares independence from Spain. |
| 1846 | **Panama signs treaty with US allowing it to build a railway across the isthmus.** Panama signs treaty with US allowing it to build a railway across the isthmus. |
| 1855 | **Panamanian railroad** Panamanian workers completed a railroad across the isthmus. |
| 1880 | **France attempts to build a canal linking the Atlantic and Pacific oceans.** France attempts to build a canal linking the Atlantic and Pacific oceans, but fails due to financial difficulties and the death of more than 20,000 workers from tropical diseases. |
| 1903 | **Panama proclaims its independence from Columbia.** Panama splits from Colombia and becomes fully independent. US buys rights to build Panama Canal and is given control of the Canal Zone in perpetuity. |
| 1914 | **United States completes the existing 50 mile (83km) Panama Canal.** United States completes the existing 50 mile (83km) Panama Canal. |
| 1925 | **Cuna Indians rebelled against the government.** Cuna Indians rebelled against the government and declared themselves an independent state. Today they are politically autonomous. |
| 1977 | **President Jimmy Carter and General Torrijos sign the Panama Canal Treaties.** President Jimmy Carter and General Torrijos sign the Panama Canal Treaties. |
| 1984 | **The Panama Defense Force(PDF) wins most of the seats in the Legislative Assembly.** The Panama Defense Force(PDF) wins most of the seats in the Legislative Assembly with General Manuel Noriega at the head of the PDF. |
| 1989 | **United States President George Bush orders the U.S. military into Panama.** United States President George Bush orders the U.S. military into Panama.  Noriega surrenders on December 27. Panama’s Electoral Tribunal confirms the victory of Guillermo Endara in an earlier presidential election, the results of which had been declared invalid by Noriega. |
| 1990 | **The United States turns over control of the Panama Canal to Panama.** The United States turns over control of the Panama Canal to Panama. |
| 1999 | **Mireya Moscoso becomes Panama’s first woman president.** Mireya Moscoso becomes Panama’s first woman president. |
| 1999 | **Panama takes full control of the Panama Canal.** Panama takes full control of the Panama Canal, ending nearly a century of American jurisdiction over one of the world’s most strategic waterways. |
| 2006 | **Panama and the US agree on a free trade deal.** Panama and the US agree on a free trade deal. |
| 2007 | **Work to widen Panama Canal begins.** Work to widen Panama Canal begins. |
| 2008 | **A Russian warship sails through the Panama Canal for the first time since World War II.** A Russian warship sails through the Panama Canal for the first time since World War II. The canal was shut to the Soviet Union during the Cold War. |
| 2010 | **100th anniversary** Chinese freighter becomes the millionth vessel to cross the Panama Canal three years before its 100th anniversary. |
| 2012 | **Worker strike** Workers end a strike on a project to expand the Panama Canal after the consortium in charge agrees to increase the minimum wage. |

**Panama Holidays and Events**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Display Date | Title |
| November 3rd | **Independence Day- from Colombia** |
| November 11th | **Los Santos Uprising** |
| Novermber 28th | **Independence Day- from Spain** |
| December 25th | **Christmas** Christmas dinner consists of seafood, rice with beans, *arroz con pollo* (chicken with rice, saffron, and vegetables), *arroz con piña* (rice with pineapple) and *rom ponche* (rum punch)  Instead of writing letters to Santa Claus children address them to Baby Jesus care of St Peter in Heaven. Gifts are placed either under the Christmas tree or under the children's bed. |

**Panama Meals and Food**

Recipes from Panama

* [Arroz con Pollo (Chicken and Rice) - Main Dish](http://www.countryreports.org/country/Panama/recipe/arroz-con-pollo-chicken-and-rice.htm)
* [Ceviche De Garbanzos - Main Dish](http://www.countryreports.org/country/Panama/recipe/ceviche-de-garbanzos.htm)
* [Chicha de Arroz con Pina (Fresh Pineapple Drink) - Beverage](http://www.countryreports.org/country/Panama/recipe/chicha-de-arroz-con-pina-fresh-pineapple-drink.htm)
* [Hojaldres - Dessert](http://www.countryreports.org/country/Panama/recipe/hojaldres.htm)
* [Plantain Cereal - Main Dish](http://www.countryreports.org/country/Panama/recipe/plantain-cereal.htm)
* [Rice with Guandu - Main Dish](http://www.countryreports.org/country/Panama/recipe/rice-with-guandu.htm)
* [Sancocho (Chicken Soup) - Main Dish](http://www.countryreports.org/country/Panama/recipe/sancocho-chicken-soup.htm)
* [Tortilla de Maiz con Queso Blanco (Corn Tortilla with Farmer’s Cheese) - Main Dish](http://www.countryreports.org/country/Panama/recipe/tortilla-de-maiz-con-queso-blanco-corn-tortilla-with-farmers-cheese.htm)

**Panama Recipes and Diet**

Panama food and meal customs

**Diet**

Because Panama is an international crossroads, a variety of cuisines are available. French, Spanish and American food is available in all restaurants and hotels in Panama City. Native cooking is similar to Creole Cuisine, Hot and spicy. Dishes include ceviche (fish marinated in lime juice, onions and peppers) Patacones de platano (fried plantain) sancocho (Panamanian stew with chicken, meat and vegetables) tamales (seasoned pie wrapped in banana leaves or corn husks) and carimanolas and empanadas (turnovers filled with meat, chicken or cheese) Panamanians have arroz (ah-ROHS) or rice with most of their meals. The eat the rice either plain or add meat and vegetables to eat. They often eat both potatoes and rice at one meal. Panama has an abundance of fish and seafood. Most Panamanians meals also include corn tortillas. Yucca is a commonly served vegetable.   
  
Panamanians love to eat out. And Panama City residents have a wide variety of restaurants to choose from. In addition to restaurants a panadera sells take-out bread and rolls, a pastelera(pas-tell-ay-REE-ah) offers pastries and a cantina(kan-TEE-nah) is a drinking establishment. Panamanians tip there servers about 15% of the bill. Panamanins eat three hearty meals per day. El desayuno(day-sigh-noh) breakfast, el almuerzo(ahl-MWER-sho)Lunch and la cena(SAY-nah) dinner.

**Meals**

Most Panamanians eat a great deal of corn, rice and beans. They also eat tortillas, which are flat breads made from cornmeal. These are filled with meat, beans, and cheese. Black beans are popular in Panama. A popular Panamanian dish is "ceviche". This is made of raw fish or shellfish that has been soaked in lime or lemon juice, olive oil and hot spices. Panamanians like their food spicy. Tamales are made of corn dough. They are filled, wrapped in a banana leaf and steamed.   
Urban people eat traditional foods as well as a wider variety of international foods. People eat rice with almost every meal. Beans and corn are also common foods. Guacho (GWA-cho) is rice soup with beans. Bollo (BOH-yo) is a boiled corn dish. Tortillas (tor\_TEE-yas) also are popular. People make these flat breads from corn or wheat.  
Sancocho (sahn-KHO-cho) is Panama' national dish. People make this stew with spicy vegetables and chicken. Panamanians eat a lot of meat and seafood. Guisado (kwee-SA-doh) is a stew with meat and tomatoes. Panamanians sometimes add fish to soup. Panamanian families usually eat together, they have a big breakfast. The main meal with rice, meat and vegetables is in the middle of the day. Families often eat a small meal in the evening.  
  
The typical breakfast is thick deep-fried tortillas, with a white cheese, liver, garlic and onions and fresh rolls or bread. A typical lunch begins with soup followed by chick or steak. Served with a mixture of cooked rice and red kidney beans or pigeon peas. Salad is eaten with the main course. Dinner consists of meat covered with a spicy sauce, rice and a salad. Dessert is usually fruit. Occasionally they indulge in cake, pie or cheesecake. After dinner they enjoy a cup of coffee. The most popular Panamanian dessert is sopa borracha (SOH-pah-bohr-RAH-chah) which is pound cake topped with syrup, rum or brandy, cinnamon raisins and cloves.

Food in Panama

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**Panama Languages**

**Languages**

Spanish (official), English 14%

Spanish is the official language although many Panamanians in business and the professions speak English.

**Language Translations:**

**Greetings in Spanish**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Do you speak English? | Habla usted ingles? |
| Do you speak Spanish? | Habla usted espanol? |
| Excuse me | Dispenseme |
| Fine / Good | Bien |
| Good afternoon | Buenas tardes |
| Good evening | Buenas tardes |
| Good morning | Buenos diás |
| Good night | Buenas noches |
| Goodbye | Adios |
| Happy New Year! | ¡Felíz año nuevo! |
| Hello | ¡Hóla! |
| How are you? | Como esta usted? |
| I'm pleased to meet you | Encantado de conocerle |
| Merry Christmas | Feliz Navidad |
| Please | Por favor |
| See you later | Hasta luego |
| Thank you | Gracias |
| Welcome | Bienvenido |
| What is your name? | Como se llama? / Deme su nombre |
| Yes / No | Si / No |

**Days in Spanish**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Sunday | Domingo |
| Monday | Lunes |
| Tuesday | Martes |
| Wednesday | Miercoles |
| Thursday | Jueves |
| Friday | Viernes |
| Saturday | Sabado |

**Months in Spanish**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| January | Enero |
| February | Febrero |
| March | marzo |
| April | Abril |
| May | Mayo |
| June | Junio |
| July | Julio |
| August | Agosto |
| September | Septiembre |
| October | Octubre |
| November | Noviembre |
| December | Diciembre |

**Colors in Spanish**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Black | Negro |
| Blue | Azul |
| Green | Verde |
| Orange | Anaranjado |
| Pink | Rosado |
| Red | Rojo |
| White | Blanco |
| Yellow | Amarillo |

**Numbers in Spanish**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| One | Uno |
| Two | Dos |
| Three | Tres |
| Four | Cuatro |
| Five | Cinco |
| Six | Seis |
| Seven | Siete |
| Eight | Ocho |
| Nine | Nueve |
| Ten | Diez |
| Fifty | Cincuenta |
| one Hundred | Cien |
| One Thousand | mil |

**Panama Clothing and Fashion**

Many Panamanians wear the same style of clothes as North Americans. Kuna women make colorful fabrics called molas. Panamanians are fairly conservative and formal in their dress. Within the city businessmen often dress less formally. For instance men often wear a cotton shirt called a guayabera("gay-ah-BAY-rah") which is a loose-fitting short sleeved cotton shirt that is not tucked into the pants. In some professions, such as banking and law, men and women wear lightweight suits. Panamanians frown on wearing shorts in public, no matter how hot is is. Men many occasionally wear shorts, but society considers in inappropriate for women to wear shorts or pants in public.  
  
Although Panamanians grant leniency to tourist who wear shorts in the city and country side. They prefer that foreigners abide by their somewhat stringent dress close. Traditional clothing for women is the pollera (poh-YEH-rah) which is a long full dress of white cotton. Birghly colored embroidery adonrns the beautiful dress and the women wear it for national celebrations, carnivals and special occasions.  
The peineta(peh-ee-NEH-tah) is the headpiece that the women wear with the pollera. The peineta consists of veils or elaborate, large combs with dangling ornaments. The traditional clothing for men is the montuno (nohn-TOO-noh) The montuno is a white cotton embroidered shirt and short pants. Men often wear a straw hat called a pintado(pin-TAH-doh). This hat has a distinctive curled up brim and black patches on it. With this outfit men wear sandals.

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**Dating, Family and Children Panama**

**Family and Children**

Family Life is important to the Panamanians, especially those who live in rural areas.Â Many relatives may live together, or close to one another.Â They especially like to celebrate holidays together. Many of the family groups are breaking up as many Panamanians are moving to cities to look for work. In the cities wealthy people may live in apartments.Â Poor people may live nearby in poor sections. Panamanians are very loyal to their family and have historically viewed their family ties as a defense against an uncertain and hostile world.Â Often Panamanians are more loyal to their parents and siblings than to their spouses.Â In many Panamanian families, particularlyÂ those in rural areas, three generations live under one roof.Â Family members steadfastly come to each others aid if needed and support each other through life.  
  
The cunas live on the San Blas Islands or in the DariÃ©n Region.Â Men dominate Cuna society and the family.Â The most senior man in a hut is the head of the household.Â When a daughter marries, her husband may come to live with her family and the husband is subordinate to the father.Â The husband often tries to establish his own household after a few years. The women perform the household duties and sew for the family.Â In their spare time they make molas, often at night with the help of a kerosene lamp.  
  
The women inherit the land that they live on from their fathers.Â Thus parents hope for female children. Most girls begin group dating around age fourteen. Compared with girls of other Latin American countries, urban Panamanian girls experience a great degree of freedom. However, girls in the interior are often not allowed to date until much later and are subject to parental restrictions. Â  The majority ofÂ Panananian men and women choose their own spouses.Â Couples in middle and lower classes often decide to marry and have children together, but do not participate in a formal marriage ceremony until years later. Most Panamanians desire children and celebrate their birth.Â When a couple has a child they take great care in choosing godparents. Most Panamanians believe that the godparents play an integral role in the childâ€™s life.   
  
In rural society men and women have traditional roles.Â The men work outside the home farming and raising crops or animals while the women stay at home and care for the children.Â In most rural areas female education is a low priority for peasant families.

**Panama Gestures and Greetings**

**Greetings**

While speaking Panamanians often stop to give the listener a change to agree or disagree with what they are saying. Panamanians are polite people with considerate greeting and formalities in their everyday life. A business person always makes small talk with a colleague or client before discussing business. Panamanians are offended if anyone initiates a business conversation before spending time to learn about the other party on a personal level.  
  
Panamanians of either sex may greet each other by shaking hands. Women friends typically kiss each other on one cheek when greeting and departing. Men and women sometimes kiss each other on the cheek. Two men always shake hands. Panamanians are very gracious and polite. They frequently say Please (por favor), thank you (gracas) and your welcome (de nada). Before joining a group of people who are eating or conversing a newcomer will ask permission to join the group by saying con permisoÃ¢(kohn-pair-MEE-soh) the group responds by saying andele (AHN-day-lay) which means "go ahead". One of the major taboos is a discussion of personal possessions.  
  
Another conversation they do not like is the discussion of the building of the canal and the U.S. intervention. Generally the do not like to discuss local politics and race in a social setting. The favorite topics of conversation are family, common friends, hobbies, interests and sports. Shaking hands when meeting someone shows good manners, and can be done in two ways. Either the American Handshake or palm to palm with the thumb facing toward the person. When Panamanians want another person to approach them they will raise one of their hands with their palm facing the other person. Panamanians have two surnames after their first name. The first is the fathers name the second is the mothers. If a child is named Jaunita and the father name is Chaves and the mother is Sanchetz the child would be Junita Chaves Sanchetz.

**Visiting**

Sending (exchanging) gifts is common among friends in the interior, but gifts include items such as food or seedlings, not expensive items. The custom is a way of sharing one's good fortune with friends. It is not commonly practiced in the cities. Social gatherings in Panama have certain customs that guests follow. For instance, guests at large social gatherings introduce themselves to other guests and do not expect the host or hostess to introduce them.  
  
Guests at these parties do not arrive on time even if the party begins at 10 PM. Panamanians consider arriving two hours late to be acceptable. At a smaller party, however a guest should not arrive later than a half-hour. For all parties host or hostess' appreciate a small gift from each guest. A father always sits at the head of the table. If the family has a guest at a meal the guest of honor sits at the other end of the table. Good manners dictate that guest eat everything on their plate. They signal that they have finished a meal by placing their knife and fork vertically and parallel on their plate.

**Cultural Attributes**

Panamanians consider their family to be important, it is their support and their responsibility and the ultimate recipient of their loyalty. Along with loyalty to family members, Panamanians value their friendships. Nationalism is strong in Panama. The people of Panama want to solve their problems They look to the future with excitement. Ethnicity is an important social distinction in Panama, yet the Panamanian subcultures have merged to the point that individuals are often difficult to classify as belonging to a particular ethnic group.   
  
The Panamanian social system began in Spanish colonial times and has continued until today. Most citizens, even interior campesinos, are well-informed on topics relating to national and international politics. Panamanians are also aware of their association with the United States. Many resent the relationship as unequal. Panamanians appreciate their Spanish heritage and, to a lesser extent, their indigenous roots.  
  
Panama's social system has three main tiers: the elite, the middle class the lower class. Class structure divides citizens based on wealth, occupation, education, family background, culture, and race. Panamanians are an eclectic group of immigrants from many countries and they readily accept other groups, cultures, and combine them with their own. The Panamanian lifestyle demonstrates a Caribbean rather than South American influence.

**Panama Church and Religion**

Members of the Catholic faith were found throughout the country and at all levels of society. Evangelical Christians also were dispersed geographically and were becoming more prominent in society. The mainstream Protestant denominations, which included Southern Baptist Convention and other Baptist congregations, United Methodist, Methodist Church of the Caribbean and the Americas, and Lutheran, derived their membership from the Antillean black and the expatriate communities, both of which were concentrated in Panama and Colon Provinces. The Jewish community was concentrated largely in Panama City. Muslims lived primarily in Panama City and Colon, with smaller but growing concentrations in David and other provincial cities. The vast majority of Muslims were of Lebanese, Palestinian, or Indian descent.   
  
Several religious organizations had foreign religious workers in the country. The Mormon Church had the largest number. Lutherans, the Southern Baptist Convention, Seventh-day Adventists, and Episcopalians each had a much smaller number of missionaries; many were from other Latin American countries.   
  
The constitution provides for freedom of religion, provided that "Christian morality and public order" are respected, and the Government generally respected this right in practice. The Government at all levels sought to protect this right in full and did not tolerate its abuse, either by governmental or private actors.   
  
Catholicism enjoys certain state-sanctioned advantages over other faiths. The constitution recognizes Catholicism as "the religion of the majority" of citizens but it does not designate it as the official state religion.   
  
The Christian holy days of Good Friday and Christmas Day are national holidays.   
  
The constitution provides that religious associations have "juridical capacity" and are free to manage and administer their property within the limits prescribed by law, the same as other "juridical persons." The Ministry of Government and Justice grants "juridical personality" through a relatively simple and transparent process. Juridical personality allows a religious group to apply for all tax benefits available to nonprofit organizations.   
  
Most foreign religious workers are granted temporary three-month missionary worker visas. A one-year extension customarily is granted. Foreign missionaries who intend to remain longer than fifteen months must repeat the entire application process. Such additional extensions usually are granted. Catholic priests and nuns and Jewish rabbis are eligible for a special five-year visa.   
  
The constitution dictates that Catholicism be taught in public schools; however, parents have the right to exempt their children from religious instruction. The numerical predominance of Catholicism and the consideration given to it in the constitution generally have not prejudiced other religions

**Students Life in Panama**

**Education Culture**

Children must go to school from ages 6 to 15. Many schools are public but some are run by the Catholic Church. In many rural areas there are not schools. Many children in rural areas have to help their families work on their farms. A student must go to school for 12 years in order to attend a university.  People in Panama care about education The government spends a lot of money to improve education. Elementary school is free. The school year last from April to December. Students learn reading, writing, math, history and art. A law says that children must complete the 6th grade. Some families pay for children to go to private middle and high school. Many students attend colleges in Panama City. Middle School and high school are called secondary education in Panama. Students study many subjects in the first three years. They learn math, science, art and history. The second part of secondary education also lasts about three years. Students study only one subject in the second part. They choose a subject that will help them get a job after they graduate. The education system in panama is separated into three levels: Primary school (six years) secondary school (six years) and university or higher education. The first six years of primary education are required for all children. A high percentage goes on to enroll in secondary school. Panama has one of the highest literacy rates in Central America.

**Panama Sport and Recreation**

FutbÃ³l (Soccer) has become the national sport. Swimming and diving are also popular. Many people like to go deep sea fishing and snorkeling as well. Panamanians enjoy horse racing, volleyball, cycling, and hiking. People in panama also like baseball, softball and basketball. Panama has more than 940 species of birds, because of this bird watching is popular.

Because there is frequently nice weather in Panama, outdoor activities such as sailing are popular. Baseball is the most popular sport in Panama. Panamanians learned how to play baseball from Americans who worked on the canal. People like to snorkel and scuba dive. They also enjoy basketball, soccer, boxing, cycling and tennis. The mountains of Panama provide a haven for fitness enthusiasts.