

Directory

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ACCOMMODATIONS

Prices cited in this book for accommodations are 2006 high-season rates, and they include Panama's 10% tax on hotel rooms.

There is usually no shortage of places to stay in Panama, except during holidays or special events outside Panama City, when advance reservations may be necessary.

In this book, accommodations are categorized as budget (where lodgings typically range from US\$5 per person to US\$30 for a

BOOK ACCOMMODATION ONLINE

For more accommodation reviews and recommendations by Lonely Planet authors, check out the online booking service at www.lonelyplanet.com. You'll find the true, insider lowdown on the best places to stay. Reviews are thorough and independent. Best of all, you can book online.

double room), midrange (usually from about US\$31 to US\$75 for a double room) and top end (anything above US\$75).

B&Bs

Almost unknown in Panama until the start of this millennium, the bed-and-breakfast phenomenon is gaining popularity across the country. Rates at B&Bs range from midrange to top end. You'll find them at major tourist destinations throughout the country including Panama City, Boquete and Bocas del Toro.

Camping

Camping facilities are available in many of the national parks; typical fees are US\$5 per person per night. Camping isn't available in most towns.

Homestays

Informal homestay opportunities are available throughout the country – the best place to inquire about this is through local tourist information centers. Travelers who are exploring Kuna Yala and the Darién can often find lodging in local villages by asking around. Many villagers would be happy to rent out a spare room (or set aside a hammock space) for US\$5 to US\$10 a night.

Hostels

As Panama becomes increasingly more popular among backpackers, youth hostels are beginning to pop up across the country. At the time of writing, none of them were connected with international youth hostel federations, though all of them seem to offer excellent facilities for backpackers.

PRACTICALITIES

- Panamanians use the metric system for weights and measures, except that they pump gasoline by the *galón* (gallon) and occasionally use pounds and miles.
- Electrical current is 120 volts in Panama City and 110 volts, 60Hz elsewhere. Plugs are two-pronged, the same as in the US and Canada.
- The most widely circulated daily newspaper in Panama is *La Prensa* (www.prensa.com in Spanish).
- *The Panama News* (www.thepanamanews.com) is published in English every two weeks and distributed free in Panama City.
- There are three commercial TV stations in Panama (channels two, four and 13) and two devoted to public broadcasting (five and 11). Most hotels (midrange and up) have cable TV with Spanish and English channels.
- Popular radio stations in Panama (the signal's best in and near the capital) include 97.1 and 102.1 (salsa), 88.9 (Latin jazz), 88.1 (reggae), 94.5 (traditional Panamanian), 106.7 (Latin rock) and 98.9 (US rock).

Hotels

Usually there is no shortage of places to stay in Panama, although getting a hotel room during Carnival, Semana Santa (Easter week) and other holiday times can be difficult in some places. Hotel accommodations can also be tight if there is a special event going on in a particular town.

Some travelers prefer to make advance reservations everywhere; this is generally possible and is recommended in the better places and in the increasingly popular Bocas del Toro town on Isla Colón. Booking through the internet is becoming the most common way of booking a room.

Before accepting a room, ask to see several. The same prices are often charged for rooms of widely differing quality. Even in the US\$10-a-night cheapies it's worth looking around. If you are shown a horrible airless box with just a bed and a bare light bulb, you can ask to see a better room without giving offense – you'll often be amazed at the results. Naturally, hotels want you to rent their most expensive rooms; if you're on a tight budget, make a habit of asking if economical rooms are available. (Some Panamanian hotels have them but don't post their lowest prices.)

Lodges

A handful of high-end lodges are scattered about the country. Although these places aren't cheap, they provide an excellent opportunity to be surrounded by nature

with access to some spectacular hiking and wildlife-watching nearby.

Rental Accommodations

You can arrange short- or long-term rental accommodations through **Haciendas Panama** (☎ 612 5577; www.haciendaspanama.com). This agency has lovely homes for rent in various locations throughout the country. Prices start at around US\$200 a night, and guest-houses can sleep from five to 14.

Resorts

Panama also has a growing number of all-inclusive resorts, which often include meals, activities, private beach access and all the amenities. These can be a good option for those with children, as most resorts offer plenty of diversions for kids and adults.

ACTIVITIES

Panama has scores of ways to spend a sun-drenched afternoon, from hiking through lush rainforests to snorkeling among coral reefs. The diving, surfing, bird-watching and fishing are just a few of Panama's star attractions. For a complete list of what the country offers, see p60.

BUSINESS HOURS

Opening hours for travel agents, tour operators and other businesses are normally 8am to noon and 1:30pm to 5pm weekdays, and from 8am to noon Saturday. Government

offices, including post offices, are open 8am to 4pm weekdays and don't close for lunch. Most banks are open 8:30am to 1pm or 3pm weekdays; some have Saturday hours as well. Shops and pharmacies are generally open from around 9am or 10am until 6pm or 7pm Monday to Saturday.

Grocery stores keep longer hours, opening around 8am and closing around 8pm or 9pm. A handful of grocery stores in Panama City stay open 24 hours.

Restaurants usually open for lunch from noon to 3pm and dinner from 6pm to 10pm. Those that offer breakfast open from 7am to 10am. On Sundays, many restaurants close. In Panama City and David, restaurants open later on Friday and Saturday nights, until about 11pm or midnight. Most bars are open from around noon to 10pm, later on Friday and Saturday nights (typically 2am). Nightclubs in Panama City open around 10pm or 11pm and close at 3am or 4am.

CHILDREN

Panamanians have a family-oriented culture, and will generally be very accommodating to travelers with children. The same can't be said of many businesses owned by expats, who state very clearly the age requirements of their guests.

High chairs in restaurants are a rarity in Panama, but safety seats in hired cars can be provided upon request. For diapers, creams and other supplies, the best places to stock up are in Panama City and David. Generally speaking, the supermarkets are excellent in Panama, and you can find just about any product you'd find in the US. However, fresh milk is rare and may not be pasteurized – packet UHT milk and powdered milk are more common.

Most of Panama is quite safe to travel with children, through places that present greater health risks include Bocas del Toro, where dengue fever is present, and the Darién Province, where malaria and yellow fever, though rare, still exist.

Among its rainforests, beaches and waterways, Panama has some fantastic sights for children. The Panama Canal is a favorite, and kids are likely to enjoy the interactive new museum at the Miraflores Visitors Center (p107). A cruise up the canal is another option, though the full-transit tour is not recommended, owing to its length. Many Panamanian families enjoy outings to Isla Taboga (p115), where there is both beach and fine walking opportunities, along with plenty of snacking spots – the boat ride out there is quite nice as well.

PREVENTING CHILD SEX TOURISM IN PANAMA

Tragically, the exploitation of local children by tourists is becoming more prevalent throughout Latin America, including Panama. Various socio-economic factors make children susceptible to sexual exploitation, and some tourists choose to take advantage of their vulnerable position.

Sexual exploitation has serious, lifelong effects on children. It is a crime and a violation of human rights.

Panama has laws against sexual exploitation of children. Many countries have enacted extra-territorial legislation that allows travelers to be charged as though the exploitation happened in their home country.

Responsible travelers can help stop child sex tourism by reporting it. It is important not to ignore suspicious behavior. Cybertipline is a website where sexual exploitation of children can be reported. The website can be found at www.cybertipline.com. You can also report the incident to local authorities and if you know the nationality of the perpetrator, report it to their embassy.

Travelers interested in learning more about how to fight against sexual exploitation of children can find more information on the ECPAT International website at www.ecpat.org.

Beyond Borders is the Canadian affiliate of ECPAT. It aims to advance the rights of children to be free from abuse and exploitation without regard to race, religion, gender or sexual orientation. Their website can be found at www.beyondborders.org.

ECPAT – USA (End Child Prostitution & Trafficking; in USA ☎ 1-718-935-9192; www.ecpatusa.org), based in New York, is part of a global network working on these issues with over 70 affiliate organizations around the world.

A number of tours, some low-intensity, can be an enjoyable way for you and your children to see Panama's lush environment. Tour outfits such as Ancon Expeditions (p89) will help make arrangements.

For more ideas about making the most of your family travels, get a hold of Lonely Planet's *Travel with Children*.

CLIMATE CHARTS

Panama's tourist season is during the dry season from mid-December to mid-April. This is true for the Pacific slope, but the Caribbean side can get rain throughout the year.

The weather can be hot and steamy in the lowlands during the rainy season, when the humidity makes the heat oppressive. But it won't rain nonstop – rain in Panama, as elsewhere in the tropics, tends to come in sudden short downpours that freshen the air, and are followed by sunshine. If you'll be doing any long, strenuous hiking, the dry season is the most comfortable time.

For more information, see p16.

COURSES

One of the best ways to appreciate a foreign country is to speak the local language – if you're feeling a little tongue-tied, consider enrolling in Spanish classes in either Panama City (p88), Boquete (p204) or Bocas del Toro (p225).

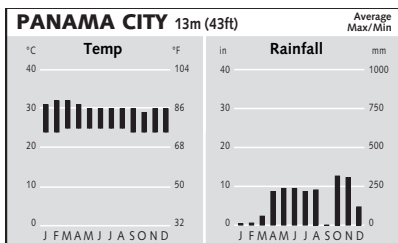
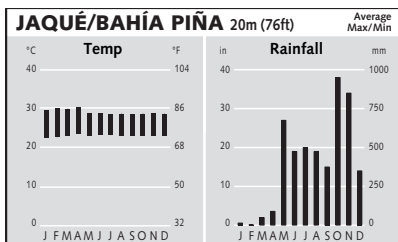
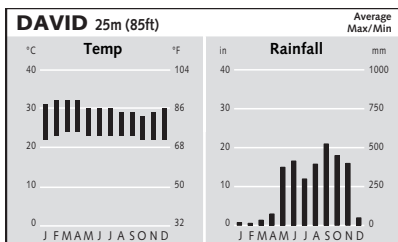
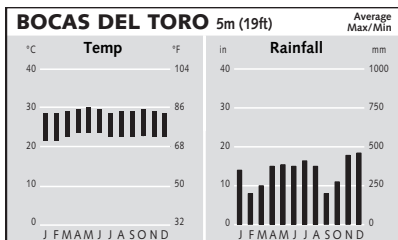
Those who want to go out dancing in some of the capital's nightclubs should learn the right moves: take a few salsa or merengue classes while in Panama City (see p88) for details.

CUSTOMS

You may bring up to 200 cigarettes and three bottles of liquor into Panama tax free. If you try to leave Panama with products made from endangered species – such as jaguar teeth, ocelot skins and turtle shell – you'll face a steep fine and jail time.

DANGERS & ANNOYANCES

Crime is a problem in certain parts of Panama City. The city's better districts, however, are safer than in many other capitals: witness the all-night restaurants and activity on the streets at night. On the other hand, it is not safe to walk around at night on the outskirts of Casco Viejo – be careful in the side streets of this district even in the daytime. In general,



stay where it's well lit and there are plenty of people around.

Colón has some upscale residential areas, but most of the city is a sad slum widely known for street crime. If you walk around, even in the middle of the day, well-meaning residents will inform you that you are in danger.

Parts of the Darién Province, which borders Colombia, are extremely dangerous. Not only is it easy to get hopelessly lost, but parts of the

province are used by guerillas from Colombia, the paramilitary chasing the guerillas, and narcotraffickers. Particularly treacherous is the area between Boca de Cupe and Colombia, which is the traditional path through the Darién Gap.

Plying the waters of the Archipiélago de San Blás are numerous Colombian boats that run back and forth between the Zona Libre in Colón and Cartagena, Colombia. It has been well documented that some of these boats carry cocaine on their northbound voyages. If you decide to ride on one of these slow cargo boats, be forewarned that your crew may be trafficking drugs.

Hiking Safety

You should be adequately prepared for hiking trips. Always carry plenty of water, even on short journeys, and always bring adequate clothing – jungles *do* get quite a bit colder at night, particularly at higher elevations.

Hikers have been known to get lost in rainforests, even seemingly user-friendly ones such as Parque Nacional Volcán Barú. A Panamanian hiker who entered that park in 1995 was never seen again, and it's assumed that he got lost, died of hypothermia and was fed upon by various creatures.

Never walk in unmarked rainforest; if there's no trail going in, you can assume that there won't be one when you decide to turn around and come back out. Always let someone know where you are going, in order to narrow the search area in the event of an emergency.

Police

Police corruption is not as big a problem in Panama as it is in some other Latin American countries. However, it's not unheard of for a Panamanian police officer to stop a motorist for no obvious reason, accuse him or her of violating a law, and levy a fine to be paid on the spot. If there are people around, making a big scene will sometimes fluster the officer into letting you go. Most of the time, however, you become an unwilling participant in a waiting game.

Your best option, unless you want to try to wait out the officer, is to negotiate the fine down. Failure to pay anything can result in your being led to jail with the officer insisting you really did break some law.

Swimming Safety

Sadly, in recent years there have been several deaths in Bocas del Toro Province and on other beaches around the country owing to strong currents. Tourist brochures do not mention the drownings that occur every year in Panamanian waters. Of these, about 80% are caused by rip currents. A rip current is a strong current that pulls the swimmer out to sea. It occurs when two currents that move parallel to the shore meet, causing the opposing waters to choose the path of least resistance, which is a path out to sea. It is most important to remember that rip currents will pull you *out* but not *under*.

If you find yourself caught in a rip current, stay calm and swim parallel to the shore to get out of it – rip currents dissipate quickly. When the current dissipates, swim back in at a 45° angle to the shore to avoid being caught by the current again. Do not try to swim directly back in, as you would be swimming against the rip current and would only exhaust yourself.

If you feel a rip current while you are wading, try to come back in sideways, thus offering less body surface to the current. If you cannot make headway, walk parallel to the beach so that you can get out of the rip current.

Thefts & Muggings

Tourist-oriented crime is uncommon in Panama, but it does happen. Be smart – avoid carrying all your money in one place and avoid entering areas that appear unsafe.

If you go out at night, leave your watch, jewelry and expensive clothing at the hotel. Take only the amount of money you think you'll need, and then a little extra tucked away in a shoe. If you look like you don't have anything of value on you, you're less likely to interest a mugger.

It is a good idea to carry an emergency packet somewhere separate from all your other valuables. It should contain a photocopy of the essential pages of your passport. On the back of the photocopy you should list important numbers, such as your traveler's checks' serial numbers, airline ticket numbers, and credit card and bank account numbers. Also, keep one high-denomination bill with this emergency stash.

If you are robbed, you should get a police report as soon as possible. This is a requirement for any insurance claims, although it is unlikely that the police will be able to

recover the property. If you don't speak Spanish and are having a hard time making a police report, your embassy can often advise and help.

Panama has a long history of business-related crimes, particularly with regard to real estate. If you want to sink money into any kind of Panamanian business, make sure you check it out *thoroughly*. As a general rule 'if a deal seems too good to be true, it probably is.'

EMBASSIES & CONSULATES

Panamanian Embassies & Consulates

Panama has embassies and consulates in the following countries:

Canada (☎ 613-236-7177; fax 613-236-5775; 130

Albert St, Suite 300, Ottawa, Ontario K1P 5G4)

Colombia (☎ 257-5067, fax 257-5068; Calle 92, No 7-70, Bogotá)

France (☎ 1-47-83-23-32, 1-45-66-42-44; fax 1-45-67-99-43; 145 Av de Suffren, 75015 Paris)

Germany (☎ 228-36-1036; fax 228-36-3558; Lutzowstrasse 1, 53173 Bonn)

Mexico (☎ 5-250-4229; fax 5-250-4045; Schiller 326, 8th fl, Colonia Chapultepec-Morales, CP 11570, Mexico DF)

UK (☎ 171-493-4646; fax 171-493-4499; 48 Park St, London W1Y 3PD)

USA (☎ 202-483-1407; fax 202-483-8413; 2862 McGill Tee NW, Washington, DC 20008)

Embassies & Consulates in Panama

More than 50 countries have embassies or consulates in Panama City. Their contact details can be found in the Panama white pages, listed under 'Embajada de' followed by the country name in Spanish. Many embassies appear in the yellow pages under 'Embajadas' or 'Consulados.' With the exception of the United States and France, most embassies are in the Marbella district of Panama City.

Ireland, Australia and New Zealand have no consulates or embassies in Panama.

Canada (Map p79; ☎ 264 9731; fax 263 8083; World Trade Center, Calle 53 Este, Marbella)

France (Map p80; ☎ 211 6200; Plaza de Francia, Las Bóvedas, Casco Viejo)

Germany (Map p79; ☎ 263 7733; World Trade Center, Calle 53 Este, Marbella)

The Netherlands (Map p79; ☎ 264 7257; Calle 50, Marbella)

UK (Map p79; ☎ 269 0866; Swiss Tower Calle 53 Este, Marbella)

USA (Map pp76-7; ☎ 207 7000; Avs Balboa & Calle 37 Este, La Exposición)

FESTIVALS & EVENTS

Panama has a range of colorful festivals that encompass everything from traditional folkloric fests to indigenous celebrations. For the lion's share of the country's revelry, head to the Peninsula de Azuero (see p151 and p163), where some of Panama's most famous events take place.

The following events are the country's better known celebrations:

February/March

Carnaval On the four days preceding Ash Wednesday, costumes, music, dancing and general merriment prevail in Panama City and on the Peninsula de Azuero.

March/April

Semana Santa On Holy Week (the week before Easter), the country hosts many special events, including a re-enactment of the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ. On Good Friday, religious processions are held across the country.

May/June

Corpus Christi Forty days after Easter, this religious holiday features colorful celebrations in Villa de Los Santos (p162). Masked and costumed dancers representing angels, devils, imps and other mythological figures enact dances, acrobatics and dramas.

October

Festival of the Black Christ On October 21, thousands of visitors come to honor the black Christ in Portobelo (p250).

FOOD

See the Food & Drink chapter (p43) to get an in-depth look at Panama's cuisine. For price listings in the Panama City Eating section, we signify budget restaurants as having main dishes costing US\$5 and under, midrange as costing US\$6 to US\$10 and top end as costing more than US\$10.

GAY & LESBIAN TRAVELERS

Other than the gay float during Carnaval in the capital, there are few open expressions of homosexuality in Panama. As in other Latin American countries, gay men and lesbians remain closeted or else suffer a great deal of discrimination.

Panama City has a few gay and lesbian clubs (not openly advertised, however). Outside Panama City, gay bars are hard to come by. In most instances, gays and lesbians just blend in with the straight crowd at the hipper

places and avoid cantinas and other conventional lairs of homophobia. There are several Panamanian websites for gays and lesbians that focus on Panama City, upcoming events and parties, new club openings and political issues about town. You'll need at least a little Spanish to maneuver through these sites:

- www.farraurbana.com
- www.rumbanight.com

HOLIDAYS

National holidays (*días feriados*) are taken seriously in Panama, and banks, public offices and many stores close. Public transportation tends to be tight on all holidays and the days immediately preceding or following them – book tickets ahead.

There is no bus service at all on the Thursday afternoon and Friday before Easter, and many businesses are closed for the entire *Semana Santa* (Holy Week, the week before Easter). From Thursday to Easter Sunday, all bars are closed and alcohol sales are prohibited. Beach hotels are usually booked several weeks in advance for the *Semana Santa*, though a limited choice of rooms is often available.

The week between Christmas and New Year's, along with the first week of the year, tend to be unofficial holidays. In addition, various towns have celebrations for their own particular days throughout the year. These other holidays and special events are not official holidays, and businesses remain open.

All the official national holidays are listed below, and most are celebrated on Monday to create long weekends. When holidays fall on a Thursday or Friday, they are celebrated on the following Monday; holidays that happen to fall on Tuesday or Wednesday are usually celebrated the prior Monday.

New Year's Day January 1

Martyrs' Day January 9

Good Friday, Easter March/April

Workers' Day May 1

Founding of Old Panama (Panama City only) August 15

Hispanic Day October 12

National Anthem Day November 1

All Souls' Day November 2

Independence Day November 3

First Call for Independence November 10

Independence from Spain November 28

Mothers' Day December 8

Christmas Day December 25

INSURANCE

Prior to your trip, signing up for a travel insurance policy to cover theft, loss and medical problems is a good idea. Be advised however that some policies specifically exclude dangerous activities, which can include scuba diving, motorcycling, even trekking.

You may prefer a policy that pays doctors or hospitals directly, rather than you having to pay on the spot and claim later. If you have to claim later, ensure you keep all documentation.

Check that the policy covers ambulances or an emergency flight home. For information on medical insurance, see p313.

INTERNET ACCESS

Most travelers make constant use of internet cafés and free Web-based email such as **Yahoo** (www.yahoo.com), **Hotmail** (www.hotmail.com) or **Gmail** (www.gmail.com).

Internet cafés are plentiful in Panama, and with the exception of remote villages, most cities and towns have at least one access point – most charge around US\$1 to US\$2 per hour.

INTERNET RESOURCES

IPAT (www.ipat.gob.pa) Panama's tourist website in Spanish. Also has a sister site in English (www.visitpanama.com).

Lanic (<http://lanic.utexas.edu/la/ca/panama>) Outstanding collection of links from the University of Texas Latin American Information Center.

Panama info (www.panamainfo.com) Also in English.

LEGAL MATTERS

The legal drinking age in Panama is 18, which is strictly enforced in Panama City and generally ignored elsewhere. In Panama you are presumed guilty until found innocent. If you are accused of a serious crime, you will be taken to jail, where you will likely spend several months before your case goes before a judge. Some simple but valuable advice: stay away from people who commit crimes. For example, you can expect to go to jail if the car you are in is stopped and found to contain illegal drugs, even if they aren't yours.

In Panama penalties for possession of even small amounts of illegal drugs are much stricter than in the USA, Europe, Australia and most everywhere else. Defendants often spend years in prison before they are brought to trial and, if convicted (as is usually the case), can expect sentences of several more years in prison. Most lawyers

won't even accept drug cases because the outcome is certain: conviction.

If you are jailed, your embassy will offer only limited assistance. This may include a visit from an embassy staff member to make sure that your human rights have not been violated, letting your family know where you are and putting you in contact with a lawyer (whom you must pay yourself). Embassy officials will not bail you out.

Remember that you are legally required to carry identification at all times. This should be a photographic ID, preferably a passport. Although this may seem like an inconvenience, police officers reserve the right to request documentation from tourists at all times, and several readers have been forced to spend the night in prison for failure to produce proper ID.

Please bear in mind that Panama is a conservative society. Generally speaking, displays of gratuitous flesh are not looked kindly upon, though this is waived once a year when the country hits the Carnival season.

With that said, it is illegal for men (and women) to walk around topless, even if you are on your way to the beach. This rule is strictly enforced in Bocas del Toro town on Isla Colón (p219), and you can expect to be stopped on the streets by police officers if you don't cover up.

MAPS

International Travel Maps (in Canada ☎ 604-879-3621; www.itmb.com) publishes an excellent 1:800,000 color map showing the geographical features, cities, towns, national parks, airports and roads of Panama.

At the **Instituto Geográfico Nacional** (Tommy Guardia; p74) in Panama City, you can buy topographical maps of selected cities and regions. Various free tourist publications distributed in Panama also have maps, though hiking maps are rarely available at national park ranger stations.

MEDIA

Newspapers & Magazines

La Prensa (www.prensa.com in Spanish) is the most widely circulated daily newspaper in Panama. Other major Spanish-language dailies include *La Estrella de Panamá*, *El Panamá América*, *El Universal* and *Crítica*.

The **Panama News** (www.thepanamanews.com) is published in English every two weeks. It is distributed free in Panama City. *The Visitor*, written in English and Spanish and targeting tourists, is another free publication. The *Miami Herald International Edition* is available in some upscale hotels.

Radio & TV

There are three commercial TV stations in Panama (channels two, four and 13) and two devoted to public broadcasting (five and 11). Many hotels have cable TV with Spanish and English channels.

Panama has over 90 radio stations that are mostly commercial based. The more popular play the following styles:

Classical 105.7

Latin jazz 88.9

Latin rock 106.7

Reggae 88.1

Salsa 97.1 and 102.1

Traditional Panamanian 94.5

US rock 93.9 and 98.9

MONEY

Panama uses the US dollar as its currency. The official name for it is the *balboa*, but it's exactly the same bill, and in practice people use the terms '*dólar*' and '*balboa*' interchangeably. Panamanian coins are of the same value, size and metal as US coins, though both are frequently used. Coins include one, five, 10, 25 and 50 *centavos* (or *centésimos*) – 100 *centavos* equal one *balboa*. Most businesses won't break US\$50 and US\$100 bills, and those that do may require you to present your passport.

For exchange rates, see inside the front cover.

For information on the cost of travel, see p17.

ATMs

Throughout Panama, ATMs are readily available except in the most isolated places – look for the red '*sistema clave*' sign. Generally speaking, ATMs accept cards on most networks (Plus, Cirrus, MasterCard, Visa, Amex), though a charge is usually levied depending on your issuing bank. The amount that can be withdrawn at one time varies from bank to bank, though it is usually around US\$500.

Credit Cards

Although they are widely accepted at travel agencies, upscale hotels and many restaurants, credit cards can be problematic almost everywhere else. In short, carry enough cash to get you to the next bank or ATM.

There are several places where it's essential to show up with cash. Among tourist destinations, the following places have no banks, and it's a long way to the nearest ATM: Santa Catalina, Santa Fé, Boca Brava, Isla Contadora, Isla Grande, Portobelo, Isla de Coiba and the Darién.

At the time of research, very few businesses on Bocas del Toro accepted credit cards. Find out if your hotel does *before* you go to avoid any unpleasant surprises.

Moneychangers

The only bank that exchanges foreign currency is the Banco Nacional de Panamá counter at Tocumen International Airport. Once you have departed from the airport, the only place that can change foreign currency for dollars is a *casa de cambio* (exchange house), which can be difficult to find outside Panama City.

Taxes

A tax of 10% is added to the price of hotel rooms. When you inquire about a hotel, ask whether the quoted price includes the tax. Note that hotel prices given in this book include the 10% tax.

A 5% sales tax is levied on all nonfood products.

Tipping

The standard tipping rate in Panama is around 10% of the bill, though in small cafés and more casual places, tipping is not necessary. Taxi drivers do not expect tips.

Traveler's Checks

Although they can be cashed at a few banks, traveler's checks are rarely accepted by businesses, and traveler's checks in currencies other than US dollars are not accepted anywhere in Panama. In addition, some banks will only accept American Express traveler's checks. The banks that do accept traveler's checks typically charge an exchange fee equal to 1% of the amount of the check.

PHOTOGRAPHY

Panamanians make wonderful subjects for photographers. However, most people resent having cameras thrust in their faces, and some attach price tags to their mugs. In the Comarca de Kuna Yala, subjects typically expect US\$1 per photo. As a rule, you should ask for permission if you have an inkling your subject would not approve.

Tropical shadows are extremely strong and come out almost black on photographs. Often a bright but hazy day makes for better photographs than a very sunny one. Photography in open shade or using a flash will help. As a general rule, the best time for shooting is when the sun is low – the first and last two hours of the day. Remember, too, that flash equipment is forbidden in Panama's churches and museums.

Since digital cameras are well on their way to replacing traditional cameras completely, it can be difficult to purchase high quality film in Panama. On the other hand, most internet cafés in the country can burn your digital pictures on CD, and cheap media is available for purchase in most large towns and cities.

POST

Airmail to the USA takes five to 10 days and costs US\$0.35 (postcards US\$0.25); to Europe and Australia it takes 10 days and costs US\$0.45 (postcards US\$0.40). Panama has neither vending machines for stamps nor drop-off boxes for mail. You may be able to buy stamps and send mail from an upscale hotel to avoid going to the post office and standing in line.

Most post offices are open from 7am to 6pm weekdays and from 7am to 4:30pm Saturday. General delivery mail can be addressed to '(name), Entrega General, (town and province), República de Panamá.' Be sure the sender calls the country 'República de Panamá' rather than simply 'Panamá,' or the mail may be sent back.

RESPONSIBLE TRAVEL

Traveling sensitively in Panama means being mindful of the environment around you. Try to patronize local businesses and industries, and spend your money where it will go directly to the people working for it.

Don't support businesses that keep caged animals around. It's an offense to keep a parrot, toucan or macaw in a cage; if it bothers you report the crime to **Ancon** (☎ 314 0060). And – hopefully this goes without saying – don't eat endangered species. If you see *tortuga* (sea turtle), *huevos de tortuga* (turtle eggs), *cazón* (shark), *conejo pintado* (paca), *ñeque* (agouti) or *enado* (deer) on the menu, take your business elsewhere.

For information on responsible tourism in the Comarca de Kuna Yala, see the boxed text (p262).

For information on responsible tourism in the Darién, see the boxed text (p277).

SHOPPING

A remarkable variety of imported goods, including cameras, electronic equipment and clothing, is sold in Panama, both in Colón's tax-free Zona Libre and in Panama City. The giant stores in the Zona Libre cater mostly to mass buyers, and most of them will not sell individual items. However, Panama City gives tourists and foreigners better shopping opportunities, offering a wide selection of high-quality handicrafts and traditional artwork.

The favorite handicraft souvenir from Panama is the *mola*, a colorful, intricate, multi-layered appliqué textile sewn by Kuna women of the Archipiélago de San Blas. Small, simple souvenir *molás* can be bought for as little as US\$5, but the best ones are sold on the islands and can fetch several hundred dollars.

It's possible to purchase high-quality replicas of *huacas* – golden objects made on the isthmus centuries before the Spanish conquest and placed with Indians at the time of burial. These range in price from US\$5 to more than US\$1000.

Other handicrafts that can be purchased include wood carvings (from the *cocobolo* tree), *tagua* carvings (from the egg-sized *tagua* nut) and baskets. These are all made by the Wounaan and Emberá tribes.

SOLO TRAVELERS

Traveling alone isn't uncommon in Panama, and there are plenty of places to meet other travelers. In particular, Bocas del Toro (p217) has emerged in recent years as a major backpacker destination, and the good network of hostels and budget hotels here means that it's hard to be alone for long.

Language schools, in either Bocas, Boquete and in Panama City, are also good spots to meet other travelers while in Panama.

TELEPHONE

Panama's country code is ☎ 507. To call Panama from abroad, use the country code before the seven-digit Panamanian telephone number. There are no local area codes in Panama.

Telephone calls to anywhere within Panama can be made from pay phones. Local calls cost US\$0.10 for the first three minutes, then US\$0.05 per minute. You can buy Telechip phonecards at pharmacies, corner shops and

TRAVEL WIDELY, TREAD LIGHTLY, GIVE SUSTAINABLY – THE LONELY PLANET FOUNDATION

The Lonely Planet Foundation proudly supports nimble nonprofit organizations working for change in the world. Each year the foundation donates 5% of Lonely Planet company profits to projects selected by staff and authors. Our partners range from Kabissa, which provides small nonprofits across Africa with access to technology, to the Foundation for Developing Cambodian Orphans, which supports girls at risk of falling victim to sex traffickers.

Our nonprofit partners are linked by a grass-roots approach to the areas of health, education or sustainable tourism. Many – such as Louis Sarno who works with BaAKa (pygmy) children in the forested areas of Central African Republic – choose to focus on women and children as one of the most effective ways to support the whole community. Louis is determined to give options to children who are discriminated against by the majority Bantu population.

Sometimes foundation assistance is as simple as restoring a local ruin like the Minaret of Jam in Afghanistan; this incredible monument now draws intrepid tourists to the area and its restoration has greatly improved options for local people.

Just as travel is often about learning to see the world with new eyes, so many of the groups we work with aim to change the way people see themselves and the future for their children and communities.

Cable & Wireless offices (the national phone company) in denominations of US\$3, US\$5, US\$10 and US\$20. You then plug this into the phone and dial the local number. Some public phones accept both cards and coins, but many accept only cards. Note that calling cell phones (which typically begin with a '6') is much pricier (US\$0.35 for the first minute, then US\$0.10 per minute thereafter).

International Calls

Travelers wishing to make international calls can do so with a phonecard or via an internet café. A Telechip Total card has a scratch-off code and can be used from any phone. They come in denominations of US\$1, US\$3, US\$5, US\$10 and US\$20. Buy at least US\$5 for an international call.

Connecting to an international operator from a residential, business or pay phone is easy. To connect with a local international operator, simply dial ☎ 106. For an international operator in the USA, dial ☎ 108 (MCI), ☎ 109 (AT&T), ☎ 115 (Sprint) or ☎ 117 (TRT). To reach a Costa Rican operator, dial ☎ 107; for a Colombian operator, dial ☎ 116.

Due to the increasing popularity of voice-over IP services like Skype, it's sometimes possible to skip the middle man and just bring a head-set along with you to an internet café. The increasing frequency of ethernet connections and wireless signals in accommodations also means that if you're travelling with a laptop, you can just connect and call for pennies.

TIME

From the last Sunday in October through to the first Sunday in April, Panama time is in line with New York and Miami. Because Panama does not observe daylight saving time, during the rest of the year (April through October), Panama is one hour behind New York. Panama is five hours behind Greenwich Mean Time (GMT) and one hour ahead of the rest of Central America. If you're coming from Costa Rica, be sure to reset your watch.

TOILETS

Panamanian plumbing generally is of high quality, although most places will ask you to place your used paper in the trash bins provided instead of flushing it away. That's because narrow piping was used during construction and the owners fear clogging.

Putting used toilet paper into a trash bin may not seem sanitary, but it is much better than clogged bowls and overflowing toilet water.

Be advised that in Kuna Yala and in some parts of Bocas del Toro, whatever you flush goes straight out to sea. While you certainly can't stop nature from calling, be sure not to flush anything else down the toilet that doesn't belong in the sea.

Public toilets can be found mainly in bus terminals, airports and restaurants. In Spanish, restrooms are called *baños* and are often marked *caballeros* (gentlemen) and *damas* (ladies). Outside the cities, toilet paper is not always provided, so you may want to consider carrying a personal supply.

TOURIST INFORMATION

The **Instituto Panameño de Turismo** (Map pp74-5; IPAT, Panamanian Institute of Tourism; ☎ 226 7000; www.ipat.gov.pa; Centro Atlapa, Via Israel, San Francisco, Panama City) is the national tourism agency. In addition to this head office, IPAT runs offices in Bocas del Toro, Boquete, Colón, David, Paso Canoas, Penonomé, Portobelo, Santiago, Villa de Los Santos, Las Tablas, El Valle and Pedasí. There are smaller information counters at the ruins of Panamá Viejo, in Casco Viejo, and in both the Tocumen International Airport and the Albrook domestic airport.

IPAT has a few useful maps and brochures, but often has a problem keeping enough in stock for distribution to tourists. Most offices are staffed with people who speak only Spanish, and the helpfulness of any particular office depends on the person at the counter. Some employees really try to help, but others are just passing the time. As a general rule, you will get more useful information if you have specific questions.

TRAVELERS WITH DISABILITIES

The **Instituto Panameño de Rehabilitación Especial** (IPHE; Panamanian Institute for Special Rehabilitation; ☎ 261 0500; Camino Real, Betania, Panama City; ☎ 7am-4pm) was created by the government to assist all disabled people in Panama, including foreign tourists. However, the law does not require – and Panamanian businesses do not provide – discounts to foreign tourists with disabilities.

Panama is not wheelchair friendly; with the exception of wheelchair ramps outside a few upscale hotels, parking spaces for the disabled and perhaps a few dozen oversize bathroom stalls, accommodations for people with physical

disabilities do not exist in Panama. Even at the best hotels, you won't find railings in showers or beside toilets.

If you have a disability and want to communicate with person with disabilities who might have been to Panama recently, consider becoming a member of **Travelin' Talk Network** (TTN; in USA ☎ 303-232-2979; www.travelintalk.net; membership per year US\$20). This organization offers a worldwide directory of members with various disabilities who communicate among themselves about travel.

Other organizations include:

Access-Able Travel Source (☎ 303-232-2979; www.access-able.com; PO Box 1796, Wheat Ridge, CO 80034) An excellent website with many links.

Gimp on the Go (www.gimponthego.com) Reported to be the most informative of the free internet-based newsletters written for persons with disabilities who love to travel.

Mobility International USA (☎ 541-343-1284; fax 541-343-6812; www.miusa.org; PO Box 10767, Eugene, OR 97440) Advises disabled travelers on mobility issues and runs an educational exchange program.

Society for Accessible Travel & Hospitality (SATH); ☎ 212-447-7284; www.sath.org; 347 Fifth Ave, Suite 610, New York, NY 10016) Lobbies for better facilities and publishes *Open World* magazine.

VISAS & DOCUMENTS

Onward Tickets

Travelers officially need onward tickets before they are allowed to enter Panama. This requirement is not often checked at Tocumen International Airport, but travelers arriving by land should anticipate a need to show an onward ticket.

If you're heading to Colombia, Venezuela or another South American country from Panama, you may need an onward or roundtrip ticket before you will be allowed entry into that country or even allowed to board the plane if you're flying. A quick check with the appropriate embassy – easy to do via the internet – will tell you whether the country that you're heading to has an onward-ticket requirement.

Passports, Tourist Cards & Visas

Every visitor needs a valid passport and an onward ticket to enter Panama, but further requirements vary by nationality and change occasionally. Anyone planning a trip to Panama would be advised to check the internet to obtain the latest information on entry requirements. Ticketing agents of airlines that fly to

Panama and tour operators that send groups there often can provide this information.

A valid passport is required to enter Panama, though additional requirements vary by country. Note that as of January 2007, US citizens can no longer enter Panama with just a driver's license and a birth certificate.

A tourist card costs US\$5, and it's available at the airport or at border posts upon arrival. Most airlines serving Panama issue the tourist cards before you arrive, as do most buses arriving from Costa Rica.

No matter where you are coming from, you will generally be given a 90-day stamp in your passport when you enter Panama. This means you are allowed to remain in Panama for 90 days without having to obtain further permission from the authorities. After 90 days, visas and tourist cards can be extended at *migración* (immigration) offices.

Travelers entering Panama overland will probably be asked to show an onward ticket and a show of sufficient cash (US\$500) or a credit card.

At the time of publication, people holding passports from the following countries need to show only their passports to enter Panama: Argentina, Austria, Belgium, Chile, Costa Rica, Denmark, Egypt, El Salvador, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Guatemala, Holland, Honduras, Hungary, Israel, Italy, Luxembourg, Paraguay, Poland, Portugal, Northern Ireland, Scotland, Singapore, Spain, Switzerland, the UK, Uruguay and Wales.

People from the following countries need a passport and a tourist card: Antigua, Australia, Bahamas, Barbados, Belize, Bermuda, Bolivia, Brazil, Canada, Colombia, Granada, Guyana, Iceland, Ireland, Jamaica, Japan, Malta, Mexico, Monaco, New Zealand, Norway, Paraguay, San Marino, South Korea, Suriname, Sweden, Taiwan, Tobago, Trinidad, the USA and Venezuela.

Citizens from countries that do not appear on this list will need to obtain a visa, available at Panamanian embassies or consulates. Contact the one nearest you or call the **immigration office** (☎ 227 1448, 225 8925; fax 227 1227, 225 1641) in Panama City.

In the event that you lose your passport while in Panama, you'll need proof of when you entered the country to be able to leave it. That proof, strangely enough, does not come from an immigration office but from the airline you flew in on. You need to go to the air-

line's main office in Panama City and request a certification of your entry date (*certificación de vuelo*). There's no charge, but you'll likely be asked to come back the next day to pick it up. When you leave the country, along with your new passport (obtained from your embassy in Panama City), you'll present your *certificación de vuelo* to an immigration agent.

Visa Extensions

Visas and tourist cards are both good for 90 days. To extend your stay, you'll have to go to an office of Migración y Naturalización in Panama City, David or Chitré. You must bring your passport and photocopies of the page with your personal information and of the stamp of your most recent entry to Panama. You must also bring two passport-size photos, an onward air or bus ticket and a letter to the director stating your reasons for wishing to extend your visit. You will have to fill out a *prórroga de turista* (tourist extension) and pay US\$10. You will then be issued a plastic photo ID card. Go early in the day as the whole process takes about two hours.

If you have extended your time, you will also need to obtain a *permiso de salida* (permit) to leave the country. For this, bring your passport and a *paz y salvo* (a certificate stating you don't owe any back taxes) to the immigration office. *Paz y salvos* are issued at Ministerios de Economía y Finanzas, found in towns with immigration offices, which simply require that you bring in your passport, fill out a form and pay US\$1.

These documents can be obtained in Panama City or in David at the following locations: **Migración y Naturalización office** (Immigration Office; Map pp76-7; ☎ 225 1373; Av Cuba & Calle 29 Este, La Exposición, Panama City; ☎ 8am-3pm Mon-Fri) **Ministerio de Economía y Finanzas, Dirección de Ingresos** (Map p79; ☎ 207 7748; cr/ Via España & Calle 52 Este, Panama City) For a *paz y salvo*.

WOMEN TRAVELERS

Female travelers find Panama safe and pleasant to visit. Some Panamanian men make flirtatious comments or stare at single women, both local and foreign, but comments are rarely blatantly rude; the usual thing is a smiling '*mi amor*' (my love), an appreciative hiss or a honk of the horn. The best way to deal with this is to do what Panamanian women do – ignore the comments and don't look at the man making them.

Panamanians are generally fairly conservative in dress. Women travelers are advised to avoid skimpy or see-through clothing. And although Emberá women in the Darién go topless, it would be insulting for travelers to follow suit.

Women traveling solo will get more attention than those traveling in pairs or groups. Although assault and rape of foreign travelers is rare, avoid placing yourself in risky scenarios. Don't walk alone in isolated places, don't hitchhike and always pay particular attention to your surroundings.

WORK

It's difficult for foreigners to find work in Panama. The government doesn't like anyone taking jobs away from Panamanians, and the labor laws reflect this sentiment. Basically, the only foreigners legally employed in Panama work for their own businesses, possess skills not found in Panama or work for companies that have special agreements with the Panamanian government.

Small boats transiting the Panama Canal sometimes take on backpackers as deckhands (line handlers) in exchange for free passage, room and food. Inquiries can be made at the Panama Canal Yacht Club in Colón. Alternatively, boat owners sometimes post notices in pensions.

Volunteer Work

The **Asociación Nacional para la Conservación de la Naturaleza** (National Association for the Conservation of Nature, ANCON; ☎ 314 0061; www.ancon.org) offers opportunities for volunteering on projects in national parks and other beautiful natural areas. Volunteers might protect nesting turtles near Bocas del Toro, do environmental-education work in the Darién or assist park rangers. You can volunteer for any length of time from a week to several months; you won't get paid, but Ancon will supply basic necessities such as food and shelter. Contact Ancon for details.

Another excellent organization that takes volunteers from time to time is the **Fundación Pro-Niños de Darién** (☎ 254 4333; www.darien.org.pa). This nonprofit organization started in 1990 and works on a variety of projects throughout the Darién. It's targeted at the improvement of the lives of *niños* (children), including educational and nutritional programs. The organization also works to help residents develop sustainable agriculture.

Transportation

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GETTING THERE & AWAY

ENTERING THE COUNTRY

The proceedings for entering Panama by air are much less scrutinized than crossing by land. When you arrive at Tocúmen in Panama City or in David, depending on your nationality (see

THINGS CHANGE

The information in this chapter is particularly vulnerable to change. Check directly with the airline or a travel agent to make sure you understand how a fare (and ticket you may buy) works and be aware of the security requirements for international travel. Shop carefully. The details given in this chapter should be regarded as pointers and are not a substitute for your own careful, up-to-date research.

Visas, p302) you may have to fill out a tourist card (US\$5). These are available either from an airline attendant during the flight or from a small desk near the passport checkpoint. It's a straightforward and painless procedure.

The same cannot be said for the most popular overland crossing from Costa Rica at Paso Canoas. Many travelers have complained about this border crossing, and the Panamanian officials – who act as if their instructions were to keep people out – receive low marks for their officious attitude. At this crossing, you will sometimes be asked to show an onward ticket – a

CLIMATE CHANGE & TRAVEL

Climate change is a serious threat to the ecosystems that humans rely upon, and air travel is the fastest-growing contributor to the problem. Lonely Planet regards travel, overall, as a global benefit, but believes we all have a responsibility to limit our personal impact on global warming.

Flighting & Climate Change

Pretty much every form of motorized travel generates CO₂ (the main cause of human-induced climate change) but planes are far and away the worst offenders, not just because of the sheer distances they allow us to travel, but because they release greenhouse gases high into the atmosphere. The statistics are frightening: two people taking a return flight between Europe and the US will contribute as much to climate change as an average household's gas and electricity consumption over a whole year.

Carbon Offset Schemes

Climatecare.org and other websites use 'carbon calculators' that allow travelers to offset the level of greenhouse gases they are responsible for with financial contributions to sustainable travel schemes that reduce global warming – including projects in India, Honduras, Kazakhstan and Uganda.

Lonely Planet, together with Rough Guides and other concerned partners in the travel industry, support the carbon offset scheme run by climatecare.org. Lonely Planet offsets all of its staff and author travel. For more information check out our website: www.lonelyplanet.com.

return bus ticket to Costa Rica will suffice – and a credit card or US\$500. The border post at Sixaola/Guabito is much more low-key. There's a third crossing at Río Sereno that's little used by travelers despite being a good option.

AIR

Airports & Airlines

Panama has two international airports. Panama City's **Tocumen International Airport** (☎ 238 4322; airport code PTY) lies 35km from downtown, and it's where most international flights to Panama arrive. **Aeropuerto Enrique Malek** (☎ 721 1072; airport code DAV), in David, which is 75km southeast of the Costa Rican border, frequently handles flights to and from San José.

COPA is Panama's national airline, offering flights to and from the USA, numerous Latin and South American countries, and the Caribbean. The US Federal Aviation Administration recently assessed COPA Airlines as Category 1, which means they are in full compliance with international aviation standards.

The following listed airlines fly in and out of Panama:

Aires (☎ 265 6044; www.aires.aero; airline code 4C; hub Cartagena, Colombia)

Aerolíneas Argentinas (☎ 269 3815; www.aerolineas.com.ar; airline code AR; hub Buenos Aires)

AeroMexico (☎ 263 3033; www.aeromexico.com; airline code AM; hub Mexico City)

Air France (☎ 223 0204; www.airfrance.com; airline code AF; hub Paris)

Alitalia (☎ 269 2161; www.alitalia.com; airline code AZ; hub Rome)

American Airlines (☎ 269 6022; www.aa.com; airline code AA; hub Dallas & Miami)

Avianca (☎ 223 5225; www.avianca.com; airline code AV; hub Bogotá)

Cathay Pacific (☎ 263 3033; www.cathaypacific.com; airline code CX; hub Hong Kong)

Continental Airlines (☎ 263 9177; www.continental.com; airline code CO; hub Houston & Newark)

COPA (☎ 227 2672; www.copaair.com; airline code CM; hub Panama City)

Cubana (☎ 227 2291; www.cubana.cu; airline code CU; hub Havana)

Delta Air Lines (☎ 214 8118; www.delta.com; airline code DL; hub Atlanta)

Grupo TACA (☎ 360 2093; www.taca.com; airline code TA; hub San Salvador)

Iberia (☎ 227 3966; www.iberia.com; airline code IB; hub Madrid)

Japan Airlines (☎ 223 1266; www.jal.com; airline code JL; hub Tokyo)

DEPARTURE TAX

Panama levies a US\$20 departure tax for outbound passengers on international flights.

KLM (☎ 264 6395; www.klm.com; airline code KL; hub Amsterdam)

Korean Air (☎ 315 0356; www.koreanair.com; airline code KE; hub Seoul)

Lan Chile (☎ 226 7119; www.lanchile.com; airline code LA; hub Santiago)

Mexicana (☎ 264 9855; www.mexicana.com; airline code MX; hub Mexico City)

Singapore Airlines (☎ 264 2533; www.singaporeair.com; airline code SQ; hub Singapore)

United Airlines (☎ 225 6519; www.united.com; airline code UA; hub Los Angeles)

US Airways (☎ 263 3033; www.usairways.com; airline code US; hub Philadelphia)

Tickets

In addition to websites such as **Travelocity** (www.travelocity.com), **Orbitz** (www.orbitz.com) and **Expedia** (www.expedia.com), all of the major carriers have their own website with online ticket sales, and tickets are sometimes discounted for online customers. You can find a comprehensive list of all international airlines with links to their websites at <http://airlinecontact.info/index.html>.

From Panama

The best place to buy tickets out of Panama is Panama City. Throughout the city, there are travel agencies scattered around that can arrange onward travel. However, the easiest way is to simply book your tickets online through any of the airlines listed.

From Asia

In Asia, there's a proliferation of **STA Travel** (Bangkok ☎ 02-236 0262; www.statravel.co.th; Singapore ☎ 6737 7188; www.statravel.com.sg; Hong Kong ☎ 2736 1618; www.statravel.com.hk; Japan ☎ 03-5391 2922; www.statravel.com.jp). Another resource in Japan is **No 1 Travel** (☎ 03-3205-6073; www.no1-travel.com); in Hong Kong try **Four Seas Tours** (☎ 2200 7777; www.fourseastravel.com/fs/en/index.jsp).

From Australia & New Zealand

The cheapest routes usually go via the USA (often Los Angeles). If you're planning a

longer trip through Latin America, an open-jaw (into one city, out of another) or even an around-the-world ticket will be your best bet. For online bookings try www.travel.com.au. The following are well-known agents for cheap fares with branches throughout Australia and New Zealand:

Flight Centre Australia (☎ 133-133; www.flightcentre.com.au); New Zealand (☎ 0800-243-544; www.flightcentre.co.nz)

STA Travel Australia (☎ 1300 733 035; www.statravel.com.au); New Zealand (☎ 0508-782-872; www.statravel.co.nz)

From Canada

There were no direct flights from Canada to Panama at the time of writing. As a result, travelers need to connect through one of the gateway cities in the USA. United Airlines, Continental Airlines and American Airlines all have good connections from major Canadian cities.

A recommended Canadian travel agency is **Travel Cuts** (☎ 800-667-243-544; www.travelcuts.com), Canada's national student travel agency. Websites such as www.expedia.ca and www.travelocity.ca are also good bets.

From Central America, Cuba & the Caribbean

Grupo TACA provides services between all the Central American capitals and Panama City. In addition, COPA (the Panamanian airline) offers flights between Panama City and Costa Rica, Cuba, the Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Guatemala, Haiti, Jamaica and Mexico. Cubana has the cheapest flights in the region between Panama City and Havana.

From Europe

At the time of publication, Iberia was the only airline flying direct from Europe to Panama; the cheapest fares are usually via Madrid. Air France and Lufthansa also fly from Europe, connecting in the USA. Recommended UK ticket agencies include the following:

Journey Latin America (☎ 020-8747 3108; www.journeylatinamerica.co.uk)

STA Travel (☎ 0870-2300 040; www.statravel.co.uk)
For travelers under the age of 26.

Trailfinders (☎ 0845-058 5858; www.trailfinders.co.uk)

For online booking, try www.dialaflight.com or www.lastminute.com.

From South America

In South America you'll discover that services to and from Panama are offered by Avianca and Aires in Colombia, LAB in Bolivia, Lan Chile in Chile and Aerolineas Argentinas in Argentina. American Airlines, Continental Airlines, Delta Air Lines and United Airlines all have connections from Panama City to several different South American countries.

From the USA

The principal US gateways to and from Panama are Miami, Houston, Newark, New York, Washington DC, Dallas and Los Angeles. At the time of writing, sample roundtrip economy fares for direct flights from Miami to Panama City ranged between US\$400 and US\$600. Fares from Los Angeles ranged between US\$500 and US\$700.

The following websites are recommended for online booking:

- www.cheaptickets.com
- www.expedia.com
- www.lowestfare.com
- www.orbitz.com
- www.sta.com
- www.ticotravel.com

LAND

Many travelers arrive in Panama by bus from Costa Rica. It's recommended that you get to the border early in order to ensure that you don't miss onward transportation on the other side. There are no roads into Colombia, and travelers are strongly discouraged from crossing overland due to the instability of the border region.

Border Crossings

There are three road border crossings between Costa Rica and Panama. The most frequently used (and least pleasant) crossing between the two countries is on the Interamericana. Border-crossers should note that Panama is always one hour ahead of Costa Rica.

To enter Panama from Costa Rica, you'll need a passport, an onward ticket and proof of solvency – US\$500 or a credit card. At the border you'll fill out a US\$5 tourist card (some nationalities are exempt, while others need a visa to enter; see p302).

PASO CANOAS

This chaotic and heavily used border is on the Interamericana, not quite halfway between Panama City and San José. If you've been traveling overland through other countries, you're liable to find this one of the least pleasant crossings in Central America. The border hours here change frequently; at last check the border was open 7am to 11pm daily. Note that there are hotels on the Costa Rican side of Paso Canoas but none on the Panamanian side.

Make sure you get all of your stamps – proof of exiting from Costa Rica, proof of entry in Panama. A few travelers in the past have gone through without the proper entry/exit stamps only to encounter problems later on.

If you don't have an onward ticket and are asked to show one, you'll have to buy a bus ticket from either Panaline or Tica Bus at the border. This will be a Panama City–San José ticket and will cost US\$25.

Among the services here is a **Banco Nacional de Panamá** (☎ 8am–3pm Mon–Fri, 9am–noon Sat) just beyond the immigration window. At the bank you can use their ATM, cash traveler's checks and get cash advances against credit cards. However, it's not possible to change Costa Rican *colones* to US dollars. Men on the street will offer to change money if they see you standing in front of the bank looking perplexed. To lower the risk of being cheated, ask for their exchange rate and calculate how many US dollars you should receive for the amount of *colones* you intend to unload *before* reaching for your cash.

Once you have entered Panama, you will see taxis and buses stationed just past the border, on your left and ahead 50m. The nearest Panamanian city with a hotel is David. Buses depart Paso Canoas from this station (immediately to the left) for David (US\$1.50, 1½ hours, every 10 minutes, 5am to 9:45pm); look for a bus with 'Frontera – David' on its windshield. Three buses depart daily for Panama City (adult/child US\$12/US\$6, 10 hours, 8:30am, 11am and 4pm) making numerous stops along the way; a fourth bus departs at 10pm (adult/child US\$17/\$8.50, 8 hours) making only a couple of brief food stops.

Fifty meters east of that bus station is an unmarked, often-overlooked bus station that features bus rides to Panama City (US\$12, about 9 hours; 5:45am, 7am, 8:30am, 10am, 11:30am, 2pm, 4pm and 6:45pm), including

two express services (US\$17, about 7½ hours; 9:45am and 10:45pm). These buses make stops at David and all the other major cities along the way (they'll even stop at a hamlet along the Interamericana or at a turnoff if you ask the driver to stop ahead of time).

There is a taxi stand near the first bus station. Taxis are available 24 hours a day. A taxi ride from the border to David will cost from US\$25 to US\$30 per party, depending on the driver and the hour.

If you are entering Costa Rica, you may be required to show a ticket out of the country, although this is rarely requested.

SIXAOLA/GUABITO

This crossing is on the Caribbean coast. Sixaola is the last town on the Costa Rican side; Guabito is its Panamanian counterpart. There are no hotels or banks in Guabito, but stores there will accept your Costa Rican *colones*, Panamanian *balboas* or US dollars. *Colones* are not accepted south of Guabito.

The border is officially open from 7am to 11pm daily. However, immigration and customs officers often don't work past 7pm, which is when bus service on both sides also grinds to a halt. During the day, there are frequent minibuses from Guabito to Changuinola (\$US1), 17km away. The minibuses can be found on the southern side of the elevated entrance road, just past the immigration office. Taxis are found on the northern side of the road; the fare to Changuinola is US\$5.

In Changuinola there are numerous hotels, several banks, some decent restaurants and an airstrip with daily services to David and Panama City. You can catch a water taxi from here to Bocas del Toro (see p217 for details).

RÍO SERENO

This little town at the eastern terminus of the scenic Concepción–Volcán road sees so few tourists that locals often stare at those who pass through. If you arrive here from Costa Rica by small bus (as most people do), you'll be hard pressed to figure out where one country ends and the other begins. The Río Sereno crossing is open from 7:30am to 5pm daily.

The little immigration office is near the base of a huge police communications tower – look for the orange-and-black 'Migracion' sign.

The **Banco Nacional de Panamá** has an ATM and provides services such as offering cash

advances against major credit cards and cashing traveler's checks. However, foreign currency cannot be exchanged here.

There's a bus terminal two blocks northeast of the bank (ie along the same street and away from the border). Buses depart from Río Sereno to Volcán (US\$2.65, 40km, hourly) and

continue on to David (US\$4), with the first bus departing at 5am and the last at 5pm.

Bus

At all three border crossings, you can take a local bus up to the border on either side, cross over, board another local bus and con-

DRIVING TO PANAMA FROM NORTH AMERICA

Every year, readers send us letters detailing their long-haul road trip across the continent. If you think you're game for a little overland adventure, here is a selection of reader-tested tips for making the most of the big drive:

- **Think it through.** Driving yourself through Central America is *not* a cheap option. Having your own car will afford you greater comfort and flexibility, though you *will* spend more than you expect on petrol, insurance and import fees. Unless you are planning to spend a lot of time off the beaten track or detest the idea of slumming it on local buses, public transport will probably be a cheaper and easier way to go.
- **Buy a Japanese car.** Toyotas, Hondas and Nissans are extremely popular in Central America, which makes them substantially easier to service if problems arise. Their popularity also makes them easier to sell in Panama, though you should not expect to recoup your initial expenditure.
- **Get insurance in the USA or Canada.** Since most Central American countries will not offer fully comprehensive insurance for vehicles with foreign license plates, this may be your last opportunity to ensure that you're covered.
- **Learn to service your car.** A degree of mechanical know-how will allow you to make minor repairs yourself, and help you avoid being ripped off by unscrupulous mechanics. If you do need to repair your vehicle, be advised that mechanics charge much more in Panama than in other Central American countries.
- **Be prepared.** It's a good idea to plan for the worst, so make sure you bring along a good tool kit, an emergency jerry can of petrol, plenty of emergency food and water, and the always handy roll of industrial-strength duct tape. A spare tire or two is also a good idea, especially if you're planning on going off-road or traveling over rough terrain.
- **Know the law.** Panamanian law requires that all vehicles be fitted with a catalytic converter. Bear this in mind if you remove your catalytic converter elsewhere in Central America due to the poorer grades of fuel, which can cause clogging of the catalytic converter.
- **Nationalize your car.** If you plan on selling your car in Panama, you will probably have to nationalize it before selling it – this should cost you approximately 20% to 25% of the vehicle's value in taxation. Note that any damage to the vehicle will reduce its value – do not have any mechanical or aesthetic work carried out until after you nationalize it. Technically, the buyer can also nationalize the vehicle, though most don't want the hassle of dealing with customs.
- **Advertise your wares.** The easiest way to sell your car in Panama is to take out a classified in the *La Prensa* newspaper. The best day to do this is Sunday when the majority of car buyers are looking. If you place your advertisement on a Thursday morning, you should be able to get inclusion for both Saturday and Sunday editions, only paying for one of those days.

And most importantly:

- **Drive defensively.** As one reader puts it, 'Understand that many drivers are clinically insane.' Driving in Panama and the rest of Central America is not for the faint of heart – be smart, be safe and arrive alive.

tinue on your way. Be aware that the last buses leave the border crossings at Guabito and Río Sereno at 7pm and 5pm, respectively; the last bus leaves Paso Canoas for Panama City at 10pm.

Two companies, **Panaline** (☎ 227 8648; fax 227 8647) and **Tica Bus** (☎ 262 2084; fax 262 6275), operate daily *directo* (direct) buses between San José, Costa Rica and Panama City, departing from the Albrook bus terminal. Both recommend that you make reservations a few days in advance.

Car & Motorcycle

You can drive your own car or motorcycle from North America to Panama, but the costs of insurance, fuel, border permits, food and accommodations will be much higher than the cost of an airline ticket. As a result, many people opt for flying down and renting cars when they arrive in Panama City. However, if you can sell your car when the journey is complete, it is possible to recoup some of the travel costs.

If you consider driving, factor in the following: driving Central American roads at night is not recommended – they are narrow, rarely painted with a center stripe, often potholed and subject to hazards such as cattle and pedestrians in rural areas. Also bear in mind that traveling by day from the USA or Canada takes about a week, considerably more if you want to visit some of the fantastic sights en route.

If you decide to drive to Panama, get insurance in advance, have your papers in order and never leave your car unattended (fortunately, guarded lots are common in Latin America). US license plates are attractive to some thieves, so you should display these from inside the car.

If you are bringing a car into Panama, you must pay US\$5 for a vehicle control certificate (*tarjeta de circulación*) and another US\$1 to have the car fumigated. You will also need to show a driver's license, proof of ownership and insurance papers. Your passport will be stamped to show that you paid US\$6 and followed procedures when you brought the vehicle into the country.

For tips on driving to Panama from North America, importing your car and selling it afterwards, see the boxed text, opposite.

SEA

For information on crossing to Colombia by sea, see the boxed text on p263.

GETTING AROUND

AIR

Panama has two major domestic carriers: **Air Panama** (☎ 316 9000; www.flyairpanama.com/tickets) and **Aeroperlas** (☎ 315 7500; www.aeroperlas.com). Domestic flights depart Panama City from **Aeropuerto Albrook** (Albrook Airport; ☎ 315 0403) and arrive in destinations throughout the country. For most flights it's wise to book as far in advance as possible – this is particularly true of flights to the Comarca de Kuna Yala. At the time this was written, most islands had only one flight leaving per day, with flights booked weeks in advance. Fares run from US\$35 to US\$70 one way.

BICYCLE

You can bicycle through the country easily enough, but using a bicycle to travel within larger Panamanian cities – particularly Panama City – is not a wise idea. The roads tend to be narrow, there are no bike lanes, bus drivers and motorists drive aggressively and it rains a lot, reducing motorists' visibility and your tires' ability to grip the road.

Outside the cities, the Panamanian stretch of the Interamericana is the best quality in Central America, although parts are extremely narrow, leaving little room to move aside should a car pass by. Of course, once you leave the well-paved Interamericana, roads in many of the provinces (especially in Veraguas and Colón) are in bad shape – plan accordingly and bring lots of spare parts.

There's one professional outfitter in Panama City if you need gear, maintenance or to purchase a quality bicycle – see *Bicicletas Rali* on p86.

Lodging in Panama is rarely more than a day's bike ride away.

BOAT

Boats are the chief means of transportation in several areas of Panama, particularly in Darién Province, the Archipiélago de las Perlas, and the San Blas and Bocas del Toro island chains. And while at least one eccentric soul has swum the entire length of the

Panama Canal, most people find that a boat simplifies the transit enormously.

From Panama City, frequent boats depart from the Causeway (p86) and head to the nearby island of Isla Taboga (p115). Panama City is also the jumping-off point for partial and full Panama Canal transits (see p109).

If you're planning an excursion to Isla de Coiba and the national marine park, the best way to reach the island is through an organized boat tour – for more information, see p189. Local fishermen also ply the waters off the coast of Veraguas (p190), though this is a much riskier proposition as the seas can really get rough in these parts.

The tourist mecca of Bocas del Toro on Isla Colón is accessible from Changuinola by speedy and inexpensive water taxis – see p235 for details.

Colombian and Kuna merchant boats carry cargo and passengers along the San Blás coast between Colón and Puerto Obaldía, stopping at up to 48 of the islands to load and unload passengers and cargo. However, these boats are occasionally used to traffic narcotics, and they're often dangerously overloaded. Hiring a local boatman is a wiser option – see the Comarca de Kuna Yala section (p265) for more details.

Since there aren't many roads in the eastern Darién Province, boat travel is often the most feasible way to get from one town to another, especially during the rainy season. The boat of choice here is a long canoe, or *piragua*, carved from the trunk of a giant ceba tree. *Piraguas'* shallow hulls allow them to ride the many rivers that comprise the traditional transport network of eastern Panama. Many such boats – including the ones travelers usually hire – are motorized. See the Darién Province section (p279) for more details.

BUS

You can take a bus to just about any community in Panama that is reachable by road. Some of the buses are huge, new Mercedes Benzes equipped with air-con, movie screens and reclining seats. These top-of-the-line buses generally cruise long stretches of highway.

More frequently used – and often seen on the Carretera Interamericana – are Toyota Coaster buses that can seat 28 people. These are affectionately called *chivas*, and are not as comfortable as the Mercedes Benzes, but they aren't bad and they're less expensive. They are

an excellent way to visit towns on the Península de Azuero and along the Interamericana.

Also seen on Panamanian roads – particularly within cities – are converted school buses. They are neither comfortable for most adults (they were designed for children) nor convenient (they stop every 10m, or so it seems), and they are usually crowded. Still, they are an extremely cheap way to get around and they beat hoofing it.

CAR & MOTORCYCLE

Few tourists drive to Panama in their own vehicles, though it is certainly possible to do so. Renting a car is also a possibility. Because of difficult driving conditions, there are speed limits of 80km per hour on all primary roads and 60km per hour or less on secondary roads. Drivers should carry their passports as well as driver's licenses.

If you are involved in an accident, you should not move the vehicles (even if they're blocking traffic) until after the police have arrived and made a report. This is essential for all insurance claims. If you see oncoming cars with headlights flashing, it often means that there is some kind of road problem or a police speed trap ahead. Slow down immediately. Also be on the lookout for a pile of branches placed on the road near an edge; this often means that a vehicle is broken down just ahead.

Rental

Due to the low cost and ready availability of buses and taxis, it isn't necessary to rent a vehicle in Panama unless you intend to go to places far off the beaten track. Should you choose to rent, however, you'll find car-rental agencies in major cities such as Panama City and David. Several agencies also have offices at Tocumen International Airport in the capital. To rent a vehicle in Panama, you must be 25 years of age or older and present a passport and driver's license – if you are over 21 and can present a valid credit card, some rental agencies will waive the age requirement.

Prices for rentals in Panama run from US\$45 per day for a tiny car to US\$100 per day for a 4WD vehicle (or a '*cuatro por cuatro*'). When you rent, carefully inspect the car for minor dents and scratches, missing radio antennae, hubcaps and the spare tire. These damages *must* be noted on your rental agreement; otherwise you may be charged for them when you return the car.

There have been many reports of theft from rental cars. You should never leave valuables in an unattended car, and you should remove all luggage from the trunk when you're checking into a hotel overnight – most hotels provide parking areas for cars.

HITCHHIKING

Hitchhiking is not as widespread in Panama as elsewhere in Central America; most people travel by bus, and visitors would do best to follow suit. The exception is holiday weekends, when buses are full to overflowing and hitchhiking may be the only way out of a place. If you get a ride, offer to pay for it when you arrive; '¿Cuánto le debo?' (How much do I owe you?) is the standard way of doing this.

Hitchhiking is never entirely safe in any country, but it's not uncommon as you arrive in rural areas.

LOCAL TRANSPORTATION

Local buses serve the urban and suburban areas, but services can be difficult to figure out and there are few roadside signs indicating destinations. Panamanians are usually friendly, and this includes bus drivers; they'll often be able to tell you where to wait for a particular bus, if you ask in Spanish (few bus drivers speak English). But in general, unless you've come to Panama specifically for its urban-bus experience, leave that for another lifetime and take taxis – they're cheap and will save you a lot of time and hassle.

Taxis

Panamanian taxis don't have meters, but there are some set fares. Taxis are cheap and, most of the time, they are plentiful. However, they can be difficult to hail late at night and just before and during holidays. At times like these, it's best to call for a radio taxi. Listings for reliable radio taxis can be found in the yellow pages of phone directories throughout Panama, under the heading Taxis.

There is one group of taxis that do charge more than others. These 'sedan' taxis operate from particular upscale hotels, including the Hotel Caesar Park (p93) and the El Ejecutivo Hotel in Panama City. Taxi drivers generally mill about the front doors of the hotels and ask every exiting individual if he or she would like a cab. These drivers charge at least twice what you'd pay a hailed cab.

TOURS

Although Panama has much to offer the tourist, the country's tourism industry is still young and the number of local tour operators quite small. With that said, the quality of available operators is extremely high, and many of Panama's top attractions including the Darién (p273) and Coiba (p188) are relatively inaccessible without a guide. So, even if you're a staunch independent traveller, Panama is one destination where you might want to consider joining an organized tour. And remember: good guides are like flying first class – they make the trip so much more enjoyable.

Prices vary depending on the services you require. Two people wishing to travel with a private English-speaking guide and a private vehicle will obviously pay more than two people who are prepared to join a group.

Each of the agencies listed below is highly recommended for anyone in search of a guided tour of Panama.

Ancon Expeditions of Panama (Map p79; ☎ 269 9415; www.anconexpeditions.com; El Dorado Bldg, Calle Elvira Mendez) Created by Panama's top private conservation organization, Ancon Expeditions employs the country's best nature guides and offers a superlative level of service. For more information on offerings, see the boxed text on p89.

Scubapanama (☎ 261 3841; www.scubapanama.com) This is the country's oldest and most respected dive operator, and offers a variety of dive trips throughout the country. It's recommended that you book a tour prior to your arrival.

Panama Surf Tours (☎ 6671 7777; www.panamasurftours.com) The only tour operator in Panama that offers customized surf tours throughout the country – guides are local surfers who have lived and surfed Panama all their lives. It's recommended that you book a tour prior to their arrival.

TRAIN

The country's only rail line is the historic Panama Railroad, which runs from Panama City to Colón. In 2001, the **Panama Canal Railway Company** (PCRC; ☎ 317 6070; www.panarail.com) introduced a passenger service that included a fully operational vintage train. Aimed at tourists looking to relive the heyday of luxury rail travel, the hour-long ride runs parallel to the canal, and at times traverses thick jungles and rainforests.

There are daily departures (one-way/round-trip US\$22/38) from Panama City at 7:15am and Colón at 5:15pm. Note that the Panama City terminus is located in Corazal, which is a 15-minute cab ride from the capital.

For more information on train services, see the boxed text on p246.

Health

Dr David Goldberg

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Panama has a high standard of hygiene and very few travelers get seriously sick during their stay. However, food-borne as well as mosquito-borne infections do exist and though many of these illnesses are not life-threatening, they can certainly ruin your trip. Besides getting the proper vaccinations, it's

important that you take insect repellent and exercise care in what you eat and drink.

BEFORE YOU GO

Since most vaccines don't produce immunity until at least two weeks after they're given, visit a physician four to eight weeks before departure. Ask your doctor for an International Certificate of Vaccination (otherwise known as the 'yellow booklet'), which will list all the vaccinations you've received. This is mandatory for countries that require proof of yellow-fever vaccination upon entry, but it's a good idea to carry it wherever you travel.

Bring medications in their original containers, clearly labeled. A signed, dated letter from your physician describing all medical conditions and medications, including generic names, is also a good idea. If carrying syringes or needles, be sure to

RECOMMENDED VACCINATIONS

There are no required vaccines for Panama, but a number are recommended:

Vaccine	Recommended for	Dosage	Side effects
hepatitis A	all travelers	1 dose before trip; booster 6-12 months later	soreness at injection site; headaches; body aches
typhoid	all travelers	4 capsules by mouth, 1 taken every other day	abdominal pain; nausea; rash
yellow fever	all travelers	1 dose lasts 10 years	headaches; body aches; severe reactions are rare
hepatitis B	long-term travelers in close contact with the local population	3 doses over 6-month period	soreness at injection site; low-grade fever
rabies	travelers who may have contact with animals and may not have access to medical care	3 doses over 3-4 week period	soreness at injection site; headaches; body aches
tetanus-diphtheria	all travelers who haven't had a booster within 10 years	1 dose lasts 10 years	soreness at injection site
measles	travelers born after 1956 who have had only one measles vaccination	1 dose	fever; rash; joint pains; allergic reactions
chickenpox	travelers who've never had chickenpox	2 doses one month apart	fever; mild case of chickenpox

MEDICAL CHECKLIST

- Acetaminophen (Tylenol) or aspirin
- Adhesive or paper tape
- Antibacterial ointment (eg Bactroban) for cuts and abrasions
- Antibiotics
- Antidiarrheal drugs (eg loperamide)
- Antihistamines (for hay fever and allergic reactions)
- Anti-inflammatory drugs (eg ibuprofen)
- Bandages, gauze, gauze rolls
- DEET-containing insect repellent for the skin
- Iodine tablets (for water purification)
- Malaria pills – recommended if going to the Darién (see p273)
- Oral rehydration salts
- Permethrin-containing insect spray for clothing, tents and bed nets
- Pocket knife
- Scissors, safety pins, tweezers
- Steroid cream or cortisone (for poison ivy and other allergic rashes)
- Sun block
- Syringes and sterile needles
- Thermometer

have a physician's letter documenting their medical necessity.

Most doctors and hospitals expect payment in cash, regardless of whether you have travel health insurance. If you develop a life-threatening medical problem, you'll probably want to be evacuated to a country with state-of-the-art medical care. Since this may cost tens of thousands of dollars, be sure you have the insurance to cover this before you depart. You can find a list of medical-evacuation and travel-insurance companies on the **US State Department** (www.travel.state.gov/travel/abroad_health.html) website. If your health insurance does not cover you for medical expenses abroad, consider supplemental insurance. Find out in advance if your insurance plan will make payments directly to providers or reimburse you later for overseas health expenditures.

INTERNET RESOURCES

There is a wealth of travel-health advice on the internet. For further information, the **Lonely Planet** (www.lonelyplanet.com) website is a good place to start. A superb book called *International Travel and Health*, revised annually and available online at no cost, is published by the **World Health Organization** (www.who.int/ith/). Another website of general interest is **MD Travel Health** (www.mdtravelhealth.com), which provides complete travel-health recommendations for every country, updated daily, also at no cost.

It's usually a good idea to consult your government's travel-health website before departure, if one is available:

Australia (www.dfat.gov.au/travel/)

Canada (www.hc-sc.gc.ca/pphb-dgspssp/tmp-pmv/pub_e.html)

United Kingdom (www.doh.gov.uk/traveladvice/index.htm)

United States (www.cdc.gov/travel/)

FURTHER READING

For further information, see *Healthy Travel Central & South America*, also from Lonely Planet. If you're traveling with children, Lonely Planet's *Travel with Children* may be useful. The *ABC of Healthy Travel*, by E Walker et al, is another valuable resource.

IN TRANSIT**DEEP VEIN THROMBOSIS (DVT)**

Blood clots (deep vein thrombosis) may form in the legs during long-haul plane flights, chiefly because of prolonged immobility; the longer the flight, the greater the risk. Though most blood clots are reabsorbed uneventfully, some may break off and travel through the blood vessels to the lungs, where they could cause life-threatening complications.

The chief symptom of deep vein thrombosis is swelling or pain of the foot, ankle, or calf, usually but not always on just one side. When a blood clot travels to the lungs, it may cause chest pain and difficulty breathing. Travelers with any of these symptoms should immediately seek medical attention.

To prevent the development of deep vein thrombosis on long flights you should walk

about the cabin, perform isometric compressions of the leg muscles (ie contract the leg muscles while sitting), drink plenty of fluids and avoid alcohol and tobacco.

JET LAG & MOTION SICKNESS

Jet lag is common when crossing more than five time zones, resulting in insomnia, fatigue, malaise or nausea. To avoid jet lag, try drinking plenty of fluids (nonalcoholic) and eating light meals. Upon arrival, get exposure to natural sunlight and readjust your schedule (for meals, sleep etc) as soon as possible.

Antihistamines such as dimenhydrinate (Dramamine) and meclizine (Antivert, Bonine) are usually the first choice for treating motion sickness. Their main side effect is drowsiness. A herbal alternative is ginger, which can work like a charm for some people.

IN PANAMA

AVAILABILITY OF HEALTH CARE

Good medical care is widely available in Panama City. The following hospitals and clinics are generally reliable:

Centro Medico Paitilla (☎ 265 8800; cnr Av Balboa & Calle 53, Paitilla)

Clinica Hospital San Fernando (☎ 278 6300, emergency ☎ 278 6305; www.hospitalsanfernando.com; Vía España, Las Sabanas Apartado 363)

Clinica Hospital San Fernando Hospital Pediátrico (☎ 229 2299/229 2477; www.hospitalsanfernando.com; Vía España, Las Sabanas 363)

Hospital Nacional (switchboard ☎ 207 8100, emergency room 207 8110; Av Cuba btwn Calle 38 & 39)

Medical facilities outside Panama City are limited. David has the best hospitals outside the capital:

Hospital Centro Medico Mae Lewis (☎ 775 4616; Vía Panamericana, Apartado 333)

INFECTIOUS DISEASES

Chagas' Disease

Chagas' disease is a parasitic infection that is transmitted by triatomine insects (reduviid bugs), which inhabit crevices in the walls and roofs of substandard housing in South and Central America. In Panama, Chagas' disease occurs in rural areas. The triatom-

TRADITIONAL MEDICINE

The following are some traditional remedies for common travel-related conditions.

Problem	Treatment
jet lag	melatonin
motion sickness	ginger
mosquito-bite	oil of eucalyptus
prevention	soybean oil

ine insect lays its feces on human skin as it bites, usually at night. A person becomes infected when he or she unknowingly rubs the feces into the bite wound or any other open sore. Chagas' disease is extremely rare in travelers. However, if you sleep in a poorly constructed house, especially one made of mud, adobe or thatch, you should be sure to protect yourself with a bed net and a good insecticide.

Cholera

Cholera has not been reported in Panama in recent years. Cholera vaccine is not recommended.

Dengue Fever (Breakbone Fever)

Dengue fever is a viral infection found throughout Central America. In Panama, most cases occur in San Miguelito and in the Panama City metropolitan area. Dengue is transmitted by aedes mosquitoes, which bite preferentially during the daytime and are usually found close to human habitations, often indoors. They breed primarily in artificial water containers, such as jars, barrels, cans, cisterns, metal drums, plastic containers and discarded tires. As a result, dengue is especially common in densely populated, urban environments.

Dengue usually causes flu-like symptoms, including fever, muscle aches, joint pains, headaches, nausea and vomiting, often followed by a rash. The body aches may be quite uncomfortable, but most cases resolve uneventfully in a few days. There is no treatment for dengue fever except to take analgesics such as acetaminophen/paracetamol (Tylenol) and drink plenty of fluids. Severe cases may require hospitalization for intravenous fluids and supportive care. There is no vaccine. The cornerstone of prevention is to avoid being bitten.

Hantavirus Pulmonary Syndrome

This is a rapidly progressive viral infection that typically leads to respiratory failure and is frequently fatal. The disease is acquired by exposure to the excretions of wild rodents. Most cases occur in those who live in rodent-infested dwellings in rural areas. An outbreak of hantavirus pulmonary syndrome was recently reported from Los Santos Province.

Hepatitis A

Hepatitis A is the second most common travel-related infection (after traveler's diarrhea). It's a viral infection of the liver that is usually acquired by ingestion of contaminated water, food or ice, though it may also be acquired by direct contact with infected persons. The illness occurs throughout the world, but the incidence is higher in developing nations. Symptoms may include fever, malaise, jaundice, nausea, vomiting and abdominal pain. Most cases resolve without complications, though hepatitis A occasionally causes severe liver damage. There is no treatment.

The vaccine for hepatitis A is extremely safe and highly effective. If you get a booster six to twelve months later, it lasts for at least 10 years. You really should get it before you go to Panama or any other developing nation. Because the safety of hepatitis A vaccine has not been established for pregnant women or children under age two, they should instead be given a gammaglobulin injection.

Hepatitis B

Like hepatitis A, hepatitis B is a liver infection that occurs worldwide but is more common in developing nations. Unlike hepatitis A, the disease is usually acquired by sexual contact or by exposure to infected blood, generally through blood transfusions or contaminated needles. The vaccine is recommended only for long-term travelers (on the road more than six months) who expect to live in rural areas or have close physical contact with the local population. Additionally, the vaccine is recommended for anyone who anticipates sexual contact with the local inhabitants or a possible need for medical, dental or other treatments while abroad, especially if a need for transfusions or injections is expected.

Hepatitis B vaccine is safe and highly effective. However, a total of three injections

is necessary to establish full immunity. Several countries added hepatitis B vaccine to the list of routine childhood immunizations in the 1980s, so many young adults are already protected.

HIV/AIDS

This has been reported from all Central American countries. Be sure to use condoms for all sexual encounters. Reliable, American-made brands are available at most pharmacies.

Leishmaniasis

Leishmaniasis occurs in rural and forested areas throughout Panama, especially the eastern and south-central regions. The disease is generally limited to the skin, causing slow-growing ulcers over exposed parts of the body, but the infection may become generalized, especially in those with HIV. Leishmaniasis is transmitted by sandflies, which are about one-third the size of mosquitoes. There is no vaccine. To protect yourself from sandflies, follow the same precautions as for mosquitoes, except that netting must be finer-size mesh (at least 18 holes to the linear inch).

Leptospirosis

Leptospirosis is acquired by exposure to water contaminated by the urine of infected animals. In Panama, leptospirosis is reported throughout the country. The greatest risk occurs at times of flooding, when sewage overflow may contaminate water sources. Outbreaks have been reported among military personnel performing jungle training exercises. The initial symptoms, which resemble a mild flu, usually subside uneventfully in a few days, with or without treatment, but a minority of cases are complicated by jaundice or meningitis. There is no vaccine. You can minimize your risk by staying out of bodies of fresh water that may be contaminated by animal urine. If you're engaging in high-risk activities in an area where an outbreak is in progress, you can take 200mg of doxycycline once weekly as a preventative measure. If you actually develop leptospirosis, the treatment is 100mg of doxycycline twice daily.

Malaria

Malaria is transmitted by mosquito bites, usually between dusk and dawn. The main symptom is high-spiking fevers, which may

be accompanied by chills, sweats, headache, body aches, weakness, vomiting, or diarrhea. Severe cases may involve the central nervous system and lead to seizures, confusion, coma and death.

In Panama, malaria pills are recommended for rural areas in the provinces of Bocas del Toro, Darién and Kuna Yala. For Bocas del Toro, the first-choice malaria pill is chloroquine, taken once weekly in a dosage of 500mg, starting one to two weeks before arrival and continuing through the trip, and for four weeks after departure. Chloroquine is safe, inexpensive and highly effective. Side effects are typically mild and may include nausea, abdominal discomfort, headache, dizziness, blurred vision or itching. Severe reactions are uncommon.

Protecting yourself against mosquito bites is just as important as taking malaria pills, since no pills are 100% effective.

If you may not have access to medical care while traveling, you should bring along additional pills for emergency self-treatment, which you should take if you can't reach a doctor and you develop symptoms that suggest malaria, such as high-spiking fevers. One option is to take four tablets of Malarone once daily for three days. If you start self-medication, you should try to see a doctor at the earliest possible opportunity.

In areas east of the Canal Zone, including the Darién and Kuna Yala, there are chloroquine-resistant mosquitoes. Your options there are mefloquine (which has severe side effects for some travelers), doxycycline (which is milder on the system, but makes you more susceptible to sunburn) or Malarone.

If you develop a fever after returning home, see a physician, as malaria symptoms may not occur for months.

Rabies

Rabies is a viral infection of the brain and spinal cord that is almost always fatal. The rabies virus is carried in the saliva of infected animals and is typically transmitted through an animal bite, though contamination of any break in the skin with infected saliva may result in rabies.

In Panama, rabies is transmitted mainly by vampire bats. All animal bites and scratches must be promptly and thoroughly cleansed with large amounts of soap and water, and local health authorities contacted to deter-

mine whether or not further treatment is necessary (see p74).

Tick-Borne Relapsing Fever

This fever, which may be transmitted by either ticks or lice, is caused by bacteria that are closely related to those which cause Lyme disease and syphilis. The illness is characterized by periods of fever, chills, headaches, body aches, muscle aches and cough, alternating with periods when the fever subsides and the person feels relatively well. To minimize the risk of relapsing fever, follow tick precautions as outlined below and practice good personal hygiene at all times.

Typhoid

Typhoid fever is caused by ingestion of food or water contaminated by a species of salmonella known as *Salmonella typhi*. Fever occurs in virtually all cases. Other symptoms may include headache, malaise, muscle aches, dizziness, loss of appetite, nausea and abdominal pain. Either diarrhea or constipation may occur. Possible complications include intestinal perforation, intestinal bleeding, confusion, delirium or (rarely) coma.

Unless you expect to take all your meals in major hotels and restaurants, typhoid vaccine is a good idea. It's usually given orally, but is also available as an injection. Neither vaccine is approved for use in children under the age of two.

The drug of choice for typhoid fever is usually a quinolone antibiotic such as ciprofloxacin (Cipro) or levofloxacin (Levaquin), which many travelers carry for treatment of traveler's diarrhea. However, if you self-treat for typhoid fever, you may also need to self-treat for malaria, since the symptoms of the two diseases may be indistinguishable.

Yellow Fever

Yellow fever is a life-threatening viral infection transmitted by mosquitoes in forested areas. The illness begins with flu-like symptoms, which may include fever, chills, headache, muscle aches, backache, loss of appetite, nausea and vomiting. These symptoms usually subside in a few days, but one person in six enters a second, toxic phase characterized by recurrent fever, vomiting, listlessness, jaundice, kidney failure and hemorrhage, leading to death in up to half of the cases. There is no treatment.

Yellow-fever vaccine is not required for travel to Panama, but is strongly recommended for all travelers greater than nine months of age, especially those visiting Chepo, Darién and Kuna Yala.

The vaccine is given only in approved yellow-fever vaccination centers, which provide validated International Certificates of Vaccination (yellow booklets). The vaccine should be given at least 10 days before any potential exposure to yellow fever and remains effective for approximately 10 years. Reactions to the vaccine are generally mild and may include headaches, muscle aches, low-grade fevers or discomfort at the injection site. Severe, life-threatening reactions have been described but are extremely rare. In general, the risk of becoming ill from the vaccine is far less than the risk of becoming ill from yellow fever and you're strongly encouraged to get the vaccine.

Taking measures to protect yourself from mosquito bites (see right) is an essential part of preventing yellow fever.

TRAVELER'S DIARRHEA

To prevent diarrhea, avoid tap water unless it has been boiled, filtered or chemically disinfected (iodine tablets); only eat fresh fruits or vegetables if cooked or peeled; be wary of dairy products that might contain unpasteurized milk; and be highly selective when eating food from street vendors.

If you develop diarrhea, be sure to drink plenty of fluids, preferably an oral rehydration solution containing lots of salt and sugar. A few loose stools don't require treatment but, if you start having more than four or five stools a day, you should start taking an antibiotic (usually a quinolone drug) and an antidiarrheal agent (such as loperamide). If diarrhea is bloody or persists for more than 72 hours, or is accompanied by fever, shaking chills or severe abdominal pain, you should seek medical attention.

ENVIRONMENTAL HAZARDS

Animal Bites

Do not attempt to pet, handle or feed any animal, with the exception of domestic animals known to be free of any infectious disease. Most animal injuries are directly related to a person's attempt to touch or feed the animal.

Any bite or scratch by a mammal, including bats, should be promptly and thoroughly cleansed with large amounts of soap and

water, followed by the application of an antiseptic such as iodine or alcohol. The local health authorities should be contacted immediately for possible post-exposure rabies treatment, whether or not you've been immunized against rabies. It may also be advisable to start an antibiotic, since wounds caused by animal bites and scratches frequently become infected. One of the newer quinolones, such as levofloxacin (Levaquin), which many travelers carry in case of diarrhea, would be an appropriate choice.

Insect Bites

To prevent mosquito bites, wear long sleeves, long pants, hats and shoes (rather than sandals). Bring along a good insect repellent, preferably one containing DEET, which should be applied to exposed skin and clothing, but not to eyes, mouth, cuts, wounds or irritated skin. Products containing lower concentrations of DEET are as effective, but for shorter periods of time. In general, adults and children over 12 years of age should use preparations containing 25% to 35% DEET, which usually last about six hours. Children between two and 12 years of age should use preparations containing no more than 10% DEET, applied sparingly, which will usually last about three hours. Neurologic toxicity has been reported from DEET, especially in children, but appears to be extremely uncommon and generally related to overuse. DEET-containing compounds should not be used on children under the age of two.

Insect repellents containing certain botanical products, including oil of eucalyptus and soybean oil, are effective but last only 1½ to two hours. DEET-containing repellents are preferable for areas where there is a high risk of malaria or yellow fever. Products based on citronella are not effective.

For additional protection, you can apply permethrin to clothing, shoes, tents and bed nets. Permethrin treatments are safe and remain effective for at least two weeks, even when items are laundered. Permethrin should not be applied directly to skin.

Don't sleep with the window open unless there is a screen. If sleeping outdoors or in accommodations that allow entry of mosquitoes, use a bed net, preferably treated with permethrin, with edges tucked in under the mattress. The mesh size should be less than 1.5mm. If the sleeping area is not otherwise protected,

use a mosquito coil, which will fill the room with insecticide through the night. Repellent-impregnated wristbands are not effective.

Snake Bites

Panama is home to several venomous snakes and any foray into forested areas will put you at (a very slight) risk of snake bite. The best prevention is to wear closed, heavy shoes or boots and to keep a watchful eye on the trail. Snakes like to come out to cleared paths for a nap, so watch where you step.

In the event of a venomous snake bite, place the victim in an restful position, keep the bitten area immobilized and move the victim immediately to the nearest medical facility. Avoid using tourniquets, which are no longer recommended.

Sun

To protect yourself from excessive sun exposure, you should stay out of the midday sun, wear sunglasses and a wide-brimmed sun hat and apply sunscreen with SPF 15 or higher, with both UVA and UVB protection. Sunscreen should be generously applied to all exposed parts of the body approximately 30 minutes before sun exposure and should be reapplied after swimming or vigorous activity. Travelers should also drink plenty of fluids and avoid strenuous exercise when the temperature is high.

Water

Tap water in Panama City is safe to drink, as is the water in most other parts of the country. However, you're better off buying bottled water or purifying your own water in the provinces of Bocas del Toro and Kuna Yala.

If you have the means, vigorous boiling for one minute is the most effective way of water purification. Another option is to disinfect water with iodine pills; add 2% tincture of iodine to one quart or liter of water (five drops to clear water, 10 drops to cloudy water) and let stand for 30 minutes. If the water is cold, longer times may be required.

TRAVELING WITH CHILDREN

In general, pregnant women and children less than nine months of age should avoid going to Panama, since yellow-fever vaccine, which is strongly recommended for all parts of the country, may not be safe during pregnancy or the first few months of life.

Older children may be brought to Panama. However, you should be particularly careful not to let them consume any questionable food or beverage. Also, when traveling with children, make sure they're up-to-date on all routine immunizations. It's sometimes appropriate to give children some of their vaccines a little early before visiting a developing nation. You should discuss this with your pediatrician.

Language

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THE LANGUAGES OF PANAMA

Although Spanish is the official language of Panama, there are several indigenous languages spoken throughout the country. In general, Spanish is widely spoken among minority groups, though this is not always the case amongst older people and in extremely isolated areas.

The country's largest indigenous group, the Ngöbe-Buglé, are actually subdivided into two separate ethno-linguistic categories, the Ngöbe and the Buglé. However, since the distinction is minor, both are commonly referred to in conjunction with one another.

Living within the boundaries of the Darién are the Emberá and the Wounaan. Although the groups' cultural features are virtually identical, they prefer to be thought of as two separate peoples, a fact that is reinforced by their divergent languages.

The Kuna, Panama's most independent indigenous group, implement their own system of governance and economy while still maintaining their unique language. As a result, Spanish is not widely spoken in

their *comarca* (autonomous region), though this is now changing rapidly due to rapid Westernization.

On the island of Bastimentos in Bocas del Toro, the town of Old Bank is home to a West Indian population that originally emigrated to Panama to work in the banana industry. Here, you'll hear Gali-Gali, the distinct Creole language of Bocas del Toro Province that combines Afro-Antillean English, Spanish and Ngöbe-Buglé.

LEARN SOME LINGO!

Just as most Panamanian immigrants have learned to speak Spanish as a second language, any traveler to Panama would be wise to learn at least a little Spanish as a matter of courtesy and convenience. Basic Spanish is easily acquired (perhaps more so for speakers of English and Romance languages), and a month-long language course taken before departure can go a long way toward facilitating communication and comfort on the road. Language courses are available in Panama City (see p88) for those interested in the added benefits of learning Spanish while in the country. Even if classes are impractical, you should make the effort to learn a few basic phrases and pleasantries. At the very least your Spanish should cover 'good morning,' 'good afternoon,' 'good evening,' 'goodbye,' 'thank you' and 'glad to meet you.' Don't hesitate to practice your language skills – in general, Latin Americans meet attempts to communicate in the vernacular, however halting, with enthusiasm and appreciation. If you try speaking Spanish in Panama and the person you are talking to speaks English, that person will usually respond in English.

PHRASEBOOKS & DICTIONARIES

Lonely Planet's *Latin American Spanish Phrasebook* will be extremely helpful during your trip. Another very useful resource is the University of Chicago *Spanish-English, English-Spanish Dictionary*. It's small, light and has thorough entries, making it ideal for travel. It also makes a great gift for any newfound friends upon your departure.

SPANISH IN PANAMA

Think you know enough Spanish? Here's a quick rundown on some of the local expressions and colorful colloquialisms you may hear while traveling in Panama.

salve – street slang for propina, or tip

tongo – street slang for cop

hota – street slang for police car

diablo rojo – 'red devil'; refers to public buses

mangajo/a (m/f) – someone who is filthy

buena leche – 'good milk'; means good luck

salado/a (m/f) – 'salty'; refers to someone who is having bad luck

Eso está bien pretty. – refers to something nice

¡Eso está pretty pretty! – refers to something super nice

¡Entonces laopé! – Hey, dude!

¡Hey, gringo! – Hey, white person! (friendly)

¡Juega vivo! – Be alert, look out for your best interests!

Voy por fuera. – I'm leaving right now.

¡Ayala bestia! – Holy cow!

¡Chuleta! – common expression similar to 'Holy cow!'

pelao or pelaito – common expression for a child

Pa' lante. – Let's go now.

enantes – just now

Eres un comierda. – refers to someone pretentious

¡Pifioso! – a showoff, or something that looks cool

Tas buena, mami. – You're looking good, mama.

Nos pillamos. – We'll see each other later.

una pinta or una fría – literally, 'one pint' or 'a cold one'; means a beer

Dame una fría. – Give me a cold one (a beer).

guaro – hard liquor

chupata – an all-out drinking party

¡Bien cuidado! – 'Well taken care of!'; often used by a street person when asking for a tip for taking care of your car, normally in parking lots at restaurants, cinemas, bars, etc

Me estoy comiendo un cable. – 'I'm eating a cable'; I'm down on my luck.

rabiblanco/a (m/f) – 'white tipped'; pejorative reference to a member of the socioeconomic elite; the term comes from *paloma rabiblanco/a* (white-tipped dove), a bird that walks with its head held out high and its chest thrust out in a seemingly pretentious way

racataca – also *meña*; both terms refer to women who wear lots of gold jewelry and are perceived as low class

chombo/a (m/f) – an acceptable reference to a black person of Antillean descent

ladilla – 'crab louse'; refers to an annoying person

nueve letras – 'nine letters'; refers to Seco Herre-rano (the word 'Herrerano' has nine letters)

vuelve loco con vaca – 'makes crazy with cow'; refers to drinking *seco* and milk

vaina – common word that substitutes for 'thing,' as in *Pasame esa vaina.* (Pass me that thing.)

yeye – refers to kids and adults who wear fancy clothes and maybe drive a fancy car and who pretend to be rich but who in reality are living well beyond their means for as long as they can

LATIN AMERICAN SPANISH

The Spanish of the Americas comes in a bewildering array of varieties. Depending on the areas in which you travel, consonants may be glossed over, vowels squashed into each other, and syllables and even words dropped entirely. Slang and regional vocabulary, much of it derived from indigenous languages, can further add to your bewilderment.

Throughout Latin America, the Spanish language is referred to as *castellano* more often than *español*. Unlike in Spain, the plural of the familiar *tú* form is *ustedes* rather than *vosotros*; the latter term will sound quaint and archaic in the Americas. Another notable difference is that the letters **c** and **z** are never lisped in Latin America; attempts to do so could well provoke amusement.

PRONUNCIATION

Spanish spelling is phonetically consistent, meaning that there's a clear and consistent relationship between what you see in writing and how it's pronounced. In addition, most Spanish sounds have English equivalents, so English speakers shouldn't have too much trouble being understood.

Vowels

a	as in 'father'
e	as in 'met'
i	as in 'marine'
o	as in 'or' (without the 'r' sound)
u	as in 'rule'. Note that the 'u' is not pronounced after q , or in the letter combinations gue and gui , unless it's marked with a diaeresis (eg <i>argüür</i>), in which case it's pronounced as English 'w'

y at the end of a word or when it stands alone, it's pronounced as the Spanish **i** (eg *ley*); between vowels within a word it's as the 'y' in 'yonder'

Consonants

As a rule, Spanish consonants resemble their English counterparts. The exceptions are listed below.

While the consonants **ch**, **ll** and **ñ** are generally considered distinct letters, **ch** and **ll** are now often listed alphabetically under **c** and **l** respectively. The letter **ñ** is still treated as a separate letter and comes after **n** in dictionaries.

- b** similar to English 'b,' but softer; referred to as 'b larga'
- c** as in 'celery' before **e** and **i**; otherwise as English 'k'
- ch** as in 'church'
- d** as in 'dog,' but between vowels and after **l** or **n**, the sound is closer to the 'th' in 'this'
- g** as the 'ch' in the Scottish *loch* before **e** and **i** ('kh' in our guides to pronunciation); elsewhere, as in 'go' (invariably silent. If your name begins with this letter, listen carefully if you're waiting for public officials to call you.
- j** as the 'ch' in the Scottish *loch* (written as 'kh' in our guides to pronunciation)
- ll** as the 'y' in 'yellow'
- ñ** as the 'ni' in 'onion'
- r** a short **r** except at the beginning of a word, and after **l**, **n** or **s**, when it's often rolled
- rr** very strongly rolled
- v** similar to English 'b,' but softer; referred to as 'b corta'
- x** usually pronounced as **j** above; in some indigenous place names **x** is pronounced as the 's' in 'sit'; in other instances, it's as in 'taxi'
- z** as the 's' in 'sun'

Word Stress

In general, words ending in vowels or the letters **n** or **s** have stress on the next-to-last syllable, while those with other endings have stress on the last syllable. Thus *vaca* (cow) and *caballos* (horses) both carry stress on the next-to-last syllable, while

ciudad (city) and *infeliz* (unhappy) are both stressed on the last syllable.

Written accents will almost always appear in words that don't follow the rules above, eg *sótano* (basement), *América* and *porción* (portion).

GENDER & PLURALS

In Spanish, nouns are either masculine or feminine, and there are rules to help determine gender (there are of course some exceptions). Feminine nouns generally end with **-a** or with the groups **-ción**, **-sión** or **-dad**. Other endings typically signify a masculine noun. Endings for adjectives also change to agree with the gender of the noun they modify (masculine/feminine **-o/-a**). Where both masculine and feminine forms are included in this language guide, they are separated by a slash, with the masculine form first, eg *perdido/a*.

If a noun or adjective ends in a vowel, the plural is formed by adding **s** to the end. If it ends in a consonant, the plural is formed by adding **es** to the end.

ACCOMMODATIONS

I'm looking for ...	<i>Estoy buscando ...</i>	<i>e-stoy boos-kan-do ...</i>
Where is ...?	<i>¿Dónde hay ...?</i>	<i>don-de ai ...</i>
a cabin	<i>una cabina</i>	<i>oo-na ca-bee-na</i>
a camping ground	<i>un camping/ campamento</i>	<i>oon kam-ping/ kam-pa-men-to</i>
a guesthouse	<i>una casa de huéspedes</i>	<i>oo-na ka-sa de wes-pe-des</i>
a hostel	<i>un hospedaje/ una residencia</i>	<i>oon os-pe-da-khe/ oon-a re-see- den-sya</i>
a hotel	<i>un hotel</i>	<i>oon o-tel</i>
a youth hostel	<i>un albergue juvenil</i>	<i>oon al-ber-ge khoo-ve-neel</i>

Are there any rooms available?

<i>¿Hay habitaciones libres?</i>	<i>ay a-bee-ta-syon-es lee-bres</i>
--------------------------------------	---

I'd like a ...	<i>Quisiera una</i>	<i>kee-sye-ra oo-na</i>
room.	<i>habitación ...</i>	<i>a-bee-ta-syon ...</i>
double	<i>doble</i>	<i>do-ble</i>
single	<i>individual</i>	<i>een-dee-vee-dwal</i>
twin	<i>con dos camas</i>	<i>kon dos ka-mas</i>

How much is it per ...?	<i>¿Cuánto cuesta por ...?</i>	<i>kwan-to kwes-ta por ...</i>
night	<i>noche</i>	<i>no-che</i>
person	<i>persona</i>	<i>per-so-na</i>
week	<i>semana</i>	<i>se-ma-na</i>

MAKING A RESERVATION

(for phone or written requests)

To ...	A ...
From ...	De ...
Date	Fecha
I'd like to book ...	Quisiera reservar ... (see the list under 'Accommodations' for bed and room options)
in the name of ...	en nombre de ...
for the nights of ...	para las noches del ...
credit card ...	tarjeta de crédito ...
number	número
expiry date	fecha de vencimiento
Please confirm ...	Puede confirmar ...
availability	la disponibilidad
price	el precio

full board	<i>pensión completa</i>	pen-syon kom-ple-ta
private/shared bathroom	<i>baño privado/compartido</i>	ba-nyo pree-va-do/kom-par-tee-do
too expensive	<i>demasiado caro</i>	de-ma-sya-do ka-ro
cheaper	<i>más económico</i>	mas e-ko-no-mee-ko
discount	<i>descuento</i>	des-kwen-to

Does it include breakfast?*¿Incluye el desayuno?* een-kloo-ye el de-sa-yoo-no**May I see the room?***¿Puedo ver la habitación?* pwe-do ver la a-bee-ta-syon**I don't like it.***No me gusta.* no me goas-ta**It's fine. I'll take it.***Está bien. La tomo.* es-ta byen la to-mo**I'm leaving now.***Me voy ahora.* me voy a-o-ra**CONVERSATION & ESSENTIALS**

In their public behavior, Latin Americans are very conscious of civilities. You should never approach a stranger for information without extending a greeting, such as *buenos días* or *buenas tardes*.

Central America is generally more formal than many of the South American countries, and the usage of the informal second-person singular *tú* and *vos* differs from country to country. When in doubt, use the more formal *usted*, which is used in all cases in this guide; where options are given, the form is indicated by the abbreviations 'pol' and 'inf.'

You should use only the polite form with the police and public officials.

Hi.	<i>Hola.</i>	o-la (inf)
Good morning.	<i>Buenos días.</i>	bwe-nos dee-as
Good afternoon.	<i>Buenas tardes.</i>	bwe-nas tar-des
Good evening/night.	<i>Buenas noches.</i>	bwe-nas no-ches

The three most common greetings are often abbreviated to simply *buenos* (for *buenos días*) and *buenas* (for *buenas tardes* and *buenas noches*).

Bye/See you soon.	<i>Hasta luego.</i>	as-ta lwe-go
Goodbye.	<i>Adiós.</i>	a-dyos
Yes.	<i>Sí.</i>	see
No.	<i>No.</i>	no
Please.	<i>Por favor.</i>	por fa-vor
Thank you.	<i>Gracias.</i>	gra-syas
Many thanks.	<i>Muchas gracias.</i>	moo-chas gra-syas
You're welcome.	<i>De nada.</i>	de na-da
Apologies.	<i>Perdón.</i>	per-don
May I?	<i>Permiso.</i>	per-mee-so
	(when asking permission)	
Excuse me.	<i>Disculpe.</i>	dees-kool-pe
	(used before a request or when apologizing)	

How are things?*¿Qué tal?* ke tal**What's your name?***¿Cómo se llama usted?* ko-mo se ya-ma oo-sted (pol)
¿Cómo te llamas? ko-mo te ya-mas (inf)**My name is ...***Me llamo ...* me ya-mo ...**It's a pleasure to meet you.***Mucho gusto.* moo-cho goos-to**The pleasure is mine.***El gusto es mío.* el goos-to es mee-o**Where are you from?***¿De dónde es/eres?* de don-de es/er-es (pol/inf)**I'm from ...***Soy de ...* soy de ...**Where are you staying?***¿Dónde está alojado?* don-de es-ta a-lo-kha-do (pol)
¿Dónde estás alojado? don-de es-tas a-lo-kha-do (inf)**May I take a photo?***¿Puedo sacar una foto?* pwe-do sa-kar oo-na fo-to**DIRECTIONS****How do I get to ...?***¿Cómo llego a ...?* ko-mo ye-go a ...**Is it far?***¿Está lejos?* es-ta le-khos**Go straight ahead.***Siga/Vaya derecho.* see-ga/va-ya de-re-cho

Turn left.*Voltée a la izquierda.* vol-te-e a la ees-kyer-da**Turn right.***Voltée a la derecha.* vol-te-e a la de-re-cha**Can you show me (on the map)?***¿Me lo podría señalar (en el mapa)?* me lo po-dree-a se-nya-lar (en el ma-pa)**SIGNS**

Entrada	Entrance
Salida	Exit
Información	Information
Abierto	Open
Cerrado	Closed
Prohibido	Prohibited
Comisaria	Police Station
Servicios/Baños	Toilets
Hombres/Varones	Men
Mujeres/Damas	Women

north	<i>norte</i>	<i>nor-te</i>
south	<i>sur</i>	<i>soor</i>
east	<i>este</i>	<i>es-te</i>
west	<i>oeste</i>	<i>o-es-te</i>
here	<i>aquí</i>	<i>a-kee</i>
there	<i>ahí</i>	<i>a-ee</i>
avenue	<i>avenida</i>	<i>a-ve-nee-da</i>
block	<i>cuadra</i>	<i>kwa-dra</i>
street	<i>calle/paseo</i>	<i>ka-lye/pa-se-o</i>

HEALTH**I'm sick.***Estoy enfermo/a.* es-toy en-fer-mo/a**I need a doctor.***Necesito un médico.* ne-se-see-to oon me-dee-ko**Where's the hospital?***¿Dónde está el hospital?* don-de es-ta el os-pee-tal**I'm pregnant.***Estoy embarazada.* es-toy em-ba-ra-sa-da**I've been vaccinated.***Estoy vacunado/a.* es-toy va-koo-na-do/a

I'm allergic to ...	<i>Soy alérgico/a a ...</i>	<i>soy a-ler-khee-ko/a a ...</i>
antibiotics	<i>los antibióticos</i>	<i>los an-tee-byo-tee-kos</i>
peanuts	<i>los maníes/cacahuates</i>	<i>los ma-nee-es/ka-ka-wa-tes</i>
penicillin	<i>la penicilina</i>	<i>la pe-nee-see-lee-na</i>

I'm ...	<i>Soy ...</i>	<i>soy ...</i>
asthmatic	<i>asmático/a</i>	<i>as-ma-tee-ko/a</i>
diabetic	<i>diabético/a</i>	<i>dya-be-tee-ko/a</i>
epileptic	<i>epiléptico/a</i>	<i>e-pee-lep-tee-ko/a</i>

EMERGENCIES

Help!	<i>¡Socorra!</i>	<i>so-ko-ro</i>
Fire!	<i>¡Fuego!</i>	<i>fwe-go</i>
Go away!	<i>¡Déjeme!</i>	<i>de-khe-me</i>
Get lost!	<i>¡Váyase!</i>	<i>va-ya-se</i>
Call ...!	<i>¡Llame a ...!</i>	<i>ya-me a</i>
the police	<i>la policía</i>	<i>la po-lee-see-a</i>
a doctor	<i>un médico</i>	<i>oon me-dee-ko</i>
an ambulance	<i>una ambulancia</i>	<i>oo-na am-boo-lan-sya</i>

It's an emergency.*Es una emergencia.* es oo-na e-mer-khen-sya**Could you help me, please?***¿Me puede ayudar, por favor?* me pwe-de a-yoo-dar por fa-vor**I'm lost.***Estoy perdido/a.* es-toy per-dee-do/a**Where are the toilets?***¿Dónde están los baños?* don-de es-tan los ba-nyos

I have ...	<i>Tengo ...</i>	<i>ten-go ...</i>
a cough	<i>tos</i>	<i>tos</i>
diarrhea	<i>diarrea</i>	<i>dya-re-a</i>
a headache	<i>un dolor de cabeza</i>	<i>oon do-lor de ka-be-sa</i>
nausea	<i>náusea</i>	<i>now-se-a</i>

LANGUAGE DIFFICULTIES**Do you speak English?***¿Habla/Hablas inglés?* a-bla/a-blas een-gles (pol/inf)**Does anyone here speak English?***¿Hay alguien que hable inglés?* ai al-gyen ke a-ble een-gles**I (don't) understand.***(No) Entiendo.* (no) en-tyen-do**How do you say ...?***¿Cómo se dice ...?* ko-mo se dee-se ...**What does ... mean?***¿Qué significa ...?* ke seeg-nee-fee-ka ...

Could you please ...?	<i>¿Puede ..., por favor?</i>	<i>pwe-de ... por fa-vor</i>
repeat that	<i>repetirlo</i>	<i>re-pe-teer-lo</i>
speak more slowly	<i>hablar más despacio</i>	<i>a-blar mas des-pa-syo</i>
write it down	<i>escribirlo</i>	<i>es-kree-beer-lo</i>

NUMBERS

1	<i>uno</i>	<i>oo-no</i>
2	<i>dos</i>	<i>des</i>
3	<i>tres</i>	<i>tres</i>

4	<i>cuatro</i>	<i>kwa-tro</i>
5	<i>cinco</i>	<i>seen-ko</i>
6	<i>seis</i>	<i>says</i>
7	<i>siete</i>	<i>sy-e-te</i>
8	<i>ocho</i>	<i>o-cho</i>
9	<i>nueve</i>	<i>nwe-ve</i>
10	<i>diez</i>	<i>dyes</i>
11	<i>once</i>	<i>on-se</i>
12	<i>doce</i>	<i>do-se</i>
13	<i>trece</i>	<i>tre-se</i>
14	<i>catorce</i>	<i>ka-tor-se</i>
15	<i>quince</i>	<i>keen-se</i>
16	<i>dieciséis</i>	<i>dye-see-says</i>
17	<i>diecisiete</i>	<i>dye-see-sye-te</i>
18	<i>dieciocho</i>	<i>dye-see-o-cho</i>
19	<i>diecinueve</i>	<i>dye-see-nwe-ve</i>
20	<i>veinte</i>	<i>vayn-te</i>
21	<i>veintiuno</i>	<i>vayn-tee-oo-no</i>
30	<i>treinta</i>	<i>trayn-ta</i>
31	<i>treinta y uno</i>	<i>trayn-ta ee oo-no</i>
40	<i>cuarenta</i>	<i>kwa-ren-ta</i>
50	<i>cincuenta</i>	<i>seen-kwen-ta</i>
60	<i>sesenta</i>	<i>se-sen-ta</i>
70	<i>setenta</i>	<i>se-ten-ta</i>
80	<i>ochenta</i>	<i>o-chen-ta</i>
90	<i>noventa</i>	<i>no-ven-ta</i>
100	<i>cien</i>	<i>syen</i>
101	<i>ciento uno</i>	<i>syen-to oo-no</i>
200	<i>doscientos</i>	<i>do-syen-tos</i>
1000	<i>mil</i>	<i>meel</i>
5000	<i>cinco mil</i>	<i>seen-ko meel</i>

PAPERWORK

birth certificate
border (frontier)
car-owner's title
car registration
customs
driver's license
identification
immigration
insurance
passport
temporary vehicle
import permit
tourist card
visa

certificado de nacimiento
la frontera
título de propiedad
registración
aduanas
licencia de manejar
identificación
migración
seguro
pasaporte
permiso de importación
temporal de vehículo
tarjeta de turista
visado

SHOPPING & SERVICES

I'd like to buy ...

Quisiera comprar ... *kee-sye-ra kom-prar ...*

I'm just looking.

Sólo estoy mirando. *so-lo es-toy mee-ran-do*

May I look at it?

¿Puedo verlo/a? *pwe-do ver-lo/a*

How much is it?

¿Cuánto cuesta? *kwan-to kwes-ta*

That's too expensive for me.

Es demasiado caro *es de-ma-sya-do ka-ro*
para mí. *pa-ra mee*

Could you lower the price?

¿Podría bajar un poco el precio? *po-dree-a ba-khar oon po-ko el pre-syo*

I don't like it.

No me gusta. *no me goos-ta*

I'll take it.

Lo llevo. *lo ye-vo*

Do you accept ...?

¿Aceptan ...? *a-sep-tan ...*

American dollars credit cards

dólares *do-la-res*
americanos *a-me-ree-ka-nos*
tarjetas de crédito *tar-khe-tas de kre-dee-to*
cheques de viajero *che-kes de vya-khe-ro*

traveler's checks**more**

más *mas*

less

menos *me-nos*

small

pequeño/a *pe-ke-nyo/a*

large

grande *gran-de*

I'm looking for the ...

Estoy buscando ... *es-toy boos-kan-do*

ATM

el cajero automático *el ka-khe-ro ow-to-ma-tee-ko*

bank

el banco *el ban-ko*

bookstore

la librería *la lee-bre-ree-a*

exchange house

la casa de cambio *la ka-sa de kam-byo*

general store

la tienda *la tyen-da*

laundry

la lavandería *la la-van-de-ree-a*

market

el mercado *el mer-ka-do*

pharmacy/chemist

la farmacia *la far-ma-sya*

post office

la oficina de correos *la o-fee-see-na de ko-re-os*

supermarket

el supermercado *el soo-per-mer-ka-do*

tourist office

la oficina de turismo *la o-fee-see-na de too-rees-mo*

What time does it open/close?

¿A qué hora abre/cierra?

a ke o-ra a-bre/sye-ra

I want to change some money/traveler's checks.

Quisiera cambiar dinero/cheques de viajero.

kee-sye-ra kam-byar dee-ne-ro/che-kes de vya-khe-ro

What is the exchange rate?

¿Cuál es el tipo de cambio?

kwal es el tee-po de kam-byo

I want to call ...

Quisiera llamar a ...
kee-sye-ra lya-mar a ...

airmail	<i>correo aéreo</i>	ko-re-o a-e-re-o
letter	<i>carta</i>	ka-r-ta
registered (mail)	<i>certificado</i>	ser-tee-fee-ka-do
stamps	<i>timbres</i>	teem-bres

TIME & DATES

What time is it?	<i>¿Qué hora es?</i>	ke o-ra es
It's one o'clock.	<i>Es la una.</i>	es la oo-na
It's seven o'clock.	<i>Son las siete.</i>	son las sye-te
Half past two.	<i>Dos y media.</i>	dos ee me-dya
midnight	<i>medianoche</i>	me-dya-no-che
noon	<i>mediodía</i>	me-dyo-dee-a

now	<i>ahora</i>	a-o-ra
today	<i>hoy</i>	oy
tonight	<i>esta noche</i>	es-ta no-che
tomorrow	<i>mañana</i>	ma-ny-a-na
yesterday	<i>ayer</i>	a-yer

Monday	<i>lunes</i>	loo-nes
Tuesday	<i>martes</i>	mar-tes
Wednesday	<i>miércoles</i>	myer-ko-les
Thursday	<i>jueves</i>	khwe-ves
Friday	<i>viernes</i>	vyer-nes
Saturday	<i>sábado</i>	sa-ba-do
Sunday	<i>domingo</i>	do-meen-go

January	<i>enero</i>	e-ne-ro
February	<i>febrero</i>	fe-bre-ro
March	<i>marzo</i>	mar-so
April	<i>abril</i>	a-breel
May	<i>mayo</i>	ma-yo
June	<i>junio</i>	khoo-nyo
July	<i>julio</i>	khoo-lyo
August	<i>agosto</i>	a-gos-to
September	<i>septiembre</i>	sep-tyem-bre
October	<i>octubre</i>	ok-too-bre
November	<i>noviembre</i>	no-vyem-bre
December	<i>diciembre</i>	dee-syem-bre

TRANSPORT**Public Transport**

What time does ... leave/arrive?	<i>¿A qué hora ... sale/llega?</i>	a ke o-ra ... sa-le/ye-ga
the bus	<i>el bus/autobús</i>	el bus/ow-to-boos
the ferry	<i>el barco</i>	el bar-ko
the minibus	<i>el colectivo/ la buseta/ el microbus</i>	el ko-lek-tee-vo/ la boo-se-ta/ el mee-kro-boos
the plane	<i>el avión</i>	el a-vyon
the train	<i>el tren</i>	el tren

the airport	<i>el aeropuerto</i>	el a-e-ro-pwer-to
the bus station	<i>la estación de autobuses</i>	la es-ta-syon de ow-to-boo-ses
the bus stop	<i>la parada de autobuses</i>	la pa-ra-da de ow-to-boo-ses
the train station	<i>la estación de ferrocarril</i>	la es-ta-syon de fe-ro-ka-reel
the luggage locker	<i>la consigna para el equipaje</i>	la kon-see-nya para el e-kee-pa-khe
the ticket office	<i>la boletería/ ticketería</i>	la bo-le-te-ree-ya/ tee-ke-te-ree-ya

A ticket to ..., please.

Un boleto a ..., por favor.
oon bo-le-to a ... por fa-vor

What's the fare to ...?

¿Cuánto cuesta hasta ...?
kwan-to kwes-ta a-sta ...

student's	<i>de estudiante</i>	de es-too-dyan-te
1st class	<i>primera clase</i>	pree-me-ra kla-se
2nd class	<i>segunda clase</i>	se-goona da kla-se
single/one-way	<i>de ida</i>	de ee-da
return/round trip	<i>de ida y vuelta</i>	de ee-da e vwel-ta
taxi	<i>taxi</i>	tak-see

Private Transport

I'd like to hire a ...	<i>Quisiera alquilar ...</i>	kee-sye-ra al-kee-lar ...
4WD	<i>un todo terreno</i>	oon to-do te-re-no
car	<i>un auto/carro</i>	oon ow-to/ka-ro
motorcycle	<i>una motocicleta</i>	oo-na mo-to-see-kle-ta
bicycle	<i>una bicicleta</i>	oo-na bee-see-kle-ta
pickup (truck)	<i>camioneta</i>	ka-myo-ne-ta
truck	<i>camión</i>	ka-myon
hitchhike	<i>hacer dedo</i>	a-ser de-do

Where's a gas (petrol) station?

¿Dónde hay una gasolinera/bomba?
don-de ai oo-na ga-so-lee-ne-ra/bom-ba

How much is a liter of gasoline?

¿Cuánto cuesta el litro de gasolina?
kwan-to kwes-ta el lee-tro de ga-so-lee-na

Please fill it up.

Lleno, por favor.
ye-no por fa-vor

I'd like ... worth of gas (petrol).

Quiero ... en gasolina.
kye-ro ... en ga-so-lee-na

diesel	<i>diesel</i>	dee-sel
leaded (regular)	<i>gasolina con plomo</i>	ga-so-lee-na kon plo-mo

ROAD SIGNS

Acceso	Entrance
Acceso Permanente	24-Hour Access
Acceso Prohibido	No Entry
Ceda el Paso	Give Way
Construcción de Carreteras	Roadworks
Curva Peligrosa	Dangerous Curve
Despacio	Slow
Desvío/Desviación	Detour
Mantenga Su Derecha	Keep to the Right
No Adelantar	No Passing
No Hay Paso	Road Closed
No Pase	No Overtaking
Pare/Stop	Stop
Peligro	Danger
Prohibido el Paso	No Entry
Prohibido Estacionar	No Parking
Salida (de Autopista)	Exit (Freeway)

petrol (gas)	<i>gasolina</i>	ga-so-lee-na
unleaded	<i>gasolina sin plomo</i>	ga-so-lee-na seen plo-mo
oil	<i>aceite</i>	a-say-te
tire	<i>llanta</i>	yan-ta
puncture	<i>agujero</i>	a-goo-khe-ro

Is this the road to ...?*¿Por aquí se va a ...?*

por a-kee se va a ...

(How long) Can I park here?*¿(Por cuánto tiempo) Puedo estacionar aquí?*

(por kwan-to tyem-po) pwe-do ess-ta-syo-nar a-kee

Where do I pay?*¿Dónde se paga?*

don-de se pa-ga

I need a mechanic/tow truck.*Necesito un mecánico/remolque.*

ne-se-see-to oon me-ka-nee-ko/re-mol-ke

Is there a garage near here?*¿Hay un garaje cerca de aquí?*

ai oon ga-ra-khe ser-ka de a-kee

The car has broken down in ...*El carro se ha averiado en ...*

el ka-ro se a a-ve-rya-do en ...

The motorbike won't start.*La moto no arranca.*

la mo-to no a-ran-ka

I have a flat tire.*Tengo una llanta desinflada.*

ten-go oo-na yan-ta des-eeen-fla-da

I've run out of petrol.*Me quedé sin gasolina.*

me ke-de seen ga-so-lee-na

I've had an accident.*Tuve un accidente.*

too-ve oon ak-see-den-te

TRAVEL WITH CHILDREN**I need .../Do you have ...?***Necesito .../¿Hay ...?*

ne-se-see-to .../ai ...

a car baby seat*un asiento de seguridad para bebés*

oon a-syen-to de se-goo-ree-da pa-ra be-bes

a child-minding service*oon club para niños*

oon kloob pa-ra nee-nyos

a crèche*una guardería*

oo-na gwar-de-ree-a

(disposable) diapers/nappies*pañales (de usar y tirar)*

pa-nya-les (de oo-sar ee tee-rar)

an (English-speaking) babysitter*una niñera (que habla inglesa)*

oo-na nee-nye-ra (ke a-bla een-gle-sa)

formula (milk)*leche en polvo*

le-che en pol-vo

a highchair*una silla para bebé*

oo-na see-ya pa-ra be-be

a potty*una bacinica*

oo-na ba-see-nee-ka

a stroller*una carroela*

oona ka-re-o-la

Are children allowed?*¿Se admiten niños?*

se ad-mee-ten nee-nyos



Also available from Lonely Planet:
Latin American Spanish Phrasebook

Glossary

For terms for food, drinks and other culinary vocabulary, see p47. For additional terms and information about the Spanish language, see the Language chapter on p320. This glossary contains some words in Kuna (K) - for more on their language, see the boxed text on p268.

ANAM – Autoridad Nacional de Ambiente; Panama's national environmental agency

ANCON – Asociación Nacional para la Conservación de la Naturaleza; National Association for the Conservation of Nature, Panama's leading private environmental organization

apartado – post office box

árbol – tree

artesanía – handicrafts

bahía – bay

balboa – the basic unit of Panamanian currency

baño(s) – restroom(s)

biblioteca – library

bohío – a thatched-roof hut

boleto – ticket; for bus, museum etc

boroquera – blowgun once used by the *Emberá* and *Wounaan* Indians

bote – motorized canoe

buceo – diving

caballero(s) – gentleman (gentlemen)

cabaña – cabin

cacique – *Kuna* tribal leader

calle – street

campesino/a – rural resident; peasant

carretera – highway

casa de cambio – money-exchange house

cascada – waterfall

catedral – cathedral

cayuco – dugout canoe

centavos – cent(s); 100 *centavos* equal one US dollar (or one Panamanian *balboa*)

cerro – hill

certificación de vuelo – certification of entry date into Panama

cerveza – beer

chévere – cool (slang)

chitra – sand fly

chiva – a rural bus, often a 28-seat Toyota Coaster bus

chocosano (K) – storm that comes from the east

chorro – waterfall

cielo – the sky; the heavens

cigarro – cigarette

cine – cinema

ciudad – city

cocina – kitchen

cocobolo – a handsome tropical hardwood; used for carving life-size images of snakes, parrots, toucans and other jungle wildlife

comarca – district

conejo pintado – raccoonlike animal abundant in Parque Nacional Volcán Barú

cordillera – mountain range

corredor de aduana – customs broker

cuatro por cuatro – 4WD vehicle

cuidado – caution

Cuna – see *Kuna*

dama(s) – lady (ladies)

directo – direct bus

día feriado (días feriados) – national holiday(s)

edificio – building

Emberá – indigenous group living in Darién Province

feria – festival

finca – farm

floresta – forest

frontera – border

fuerte – fort

Gali-Gali – the distinct Creole language of Bocas del Toro Province; it combines English, Spanish and Guaymí

galón (galones) – gallon(s); fluid measure of 3.79L

gruta – cave

guacamayo – macaw

habano – Havana cigar

haras – stable (for horses)

herida – injury

hombre – man

hormiga – ant

hospedaje – guest house

huaca(s) – golden object(s); made on the Panamanian isthmus in the pre-Columbian era and buried with Indians

iglesia – church

INAC – Instituto Nacional de Cultura; Panama's National Institute of Culture

Interamericana – the Pan-American Hwy; the nearly continuous highway running from Alaska to Chile (it breaks at the Darién Gap)

invierno – winter

IPAT – Instituto Panameño de Turismo; the national tourism agency

isla – island

kilometraje – mileage

Kuna – the 70,000-strong indigenous tribe living in the Comarca de Kuna Yala

ladrón – thief

lago – lake

lancha – motorboat

lavamático/lavandería – laundromat

librería – bookstore

llanta – tire

llantería – tire repair shop

lleno – full

lluvia – rain

loro – parrot

manglar – mangrove

mariposa – butterfly

mercado – market

Merki (K) – North American

mestizo/a – person of mixed indigenous and Spanish ancestry

metate – flat stone platform; used by Panama's pre-Columbian Indians to grind corn

migración – immigration

Migración y Naturalización – Immigration and Naturalization office

mirador – lookout point

molas (K) – colorful hand-stitched appliqué textiles made by Kuna women

mono – monkey

montaña – mountain

montuno – fine embroidered shirt; typically worn during festivals on the Península de Azuero

muelle – pier

mujer(es) – woman (women)

museo – museum

nadar – to swim

Naso – an indigenous group scattered throughout the Bocas del Toro Province; also called the Teribe

Ngöbe Buglé – an indigenous tribe located largely in Chiriquí Province

ola(s) – wave(s)

pájaro – bird

palapa – thatched, palm leaf–roofed shelter with open sides

panadería – bakery

parada (de autobús) – bus stop

Patois – a local dialect on the islands of Boca del Toro; a blend of English, Spanish and Gali-Gali

PDF – the Panama Defense Forces; the national army under Manuel Noriega

penca – palm tree leaves

permiso de salida – exit permit

pescador – fishers

pescar – to fish

piragua – canoe carved from a tree trunk

playa – beach

polleras – the intricate, lacy, Spanish-influenced dresses of the Península de Azuero; the national dress of Panama for festive occasions

pozo(s) – spring(s)

preservativo(s) – condom(s)

prohibido – prohibited; forbidden

propina – tip; gratuity

prórroga de turista – a permit that resembles a driver's license, complete with photo; it allows you to stay in Panama for longer than the 90 days permitted for tourists

protector solar – sunscreen lotion

puente – bridge

puerto – port

punta – point

puro – cigar

quebrada – stream

rana – frog

rana dorada – golden frog

rancho – a thatched-roof hut

regalo – gift; present

río – river

selva – jungle

Semana Santa – Holy Week; preceding Easter

sendero – trail

serpiente – snake

serranía – mountain range

sol – sun

supermercado – supermarket

tabla – surfboard

tagua – an ivory-colored nut that is carved into tiny figurines

taller – workshop

tarjeta(s) – plastic phonecard(s)

tarjeta de circulación – vehicle control certificate

taxi marino – water taxi

tigre – jaguar

típico – typical; traditional Panamanian folk music

tortuga – sea turtle

traje de baño – swimsuit

trucha – trout

urbano – local (as in buses)

valle – valley

verano – summer

viajero – traveler

viento – wind

volcán – volcano

waga (K) – tourist

Wounaan – indigenous group living in Darién Province

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