

Panama - OVERVIEW

Updated: March 4, 2014



Country Name Long Form: Republic of Panama

Government Type: Constitutional Democracy

Languages Spoken: Spanish, English

National Flag



Panama is a Tier III Country. Significant security measures are necessary.

	Overall Assessment	Political Violence	Crime	Terrorism	Travel Safety
Panama					
Key: (L) Low – (M) Medium – (H) High – (C)Critical					

POLITICAL CONDITIONS

Political Violence is rated at LOW

There may be demonstrations to protest domestic issues or more rarely, manifestations of anti-American sentiment by small groups. While most demonstrations are non-violent, it is a good security practice to avoid demonstrations. The Panamanian National Police have used tear gas and/or other riot control measure in response to demonstrations, particularly when roadways have been blocked. Demonstrations and marches can and do occur in many locations around the country, to include Colon and areas along the Pan American Highway.

TERRORISM

Terrorism is assessed as MEDIUM

There is no direct threat from terrorism in Panama and there have been no significant terrorist incidents in recent years. The presence of Colombian terrorist groups, drug traffickers and other criminals is

Panama - OVERVIEW

common around the Panama-Colombia border area, increasing the danger to travelers in that area. While

RULE OF LAW / CORRUPTION

The Transparency International Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI) for 2013 gave Panama a score of 35, indicating that the country has high level of corruption. The CPI rates countries by the perceived levels of corruption in their public sector, with the least corrupt country receiving a maximum score of 100.

CRIME

Crime is assessed as MEDIUM

Panama remains relatively safe when compared to other Central American countries, yet crime rates are higher than one would encounter in most of the United States.

Crime is a growing problem in the country, particularly in the poorer districts of the capital Panama City, and in the Atlantic port city of Colon. While instances of violent crime have decreased in recent years, opportunistic crime has risen significantly during that timeframe, including pick-pocketing and other forms of petty theft. Gang activity accounts largely for high crime rates, and the most prominent gangs in the country.

KIDNAPPING

Kidnapping is a growing concern in Panama, with express kidnapping rates increasing substantially in larger cities. Kidnap for ransom primarily occurs near the Colombian border, where the Colombian insurgency group Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) is known to operate.

SEXUAL ASSAULT

Sexual assaults have risen sharply in recent years. The number of sexual assaults increased by 26% between 2009 and 2012, during which time the number of reported cases rose from 809 to 1100.

NATURAL DISASTERS

Panama has a tropical climate with high temperatures year round at low altitudes. Rainfall occurs throughout the year with majority of rainfall reported between May and November.

Panama is susceptible to the North Atlantic hurricane season, which generally runs from June to November through it has not been affected by a hurricane since 1969. The hurricane season occurs near simultaneously with the country's rainy season, which runs from May to November, potentially exacerbating the threat of flooding and landslides.

Panama - OVERVIEW

Earthquakes and low intensity tremors occur occasionally in Panama. While most seismic events do not cause significant damage, some earthquakes can be powerful resulting in structural damage and high casualty counts.

Panama is also considered to be at high risk from tsunamis. Earthquakes and volcanic eruptions can result in a tsunami. Tsunamis can move at very high speeds and threaten any low-lying coastal areas.

STANDING TRAVEL ADVICE

- Formal dress is generally worn for business meetings. Attire for men usually consists of a suit and tie, and women typically wear conservative dresses or skirts with blouses.
- Associates with titles such as “Professor” or “Doctor” should be addressed as such, not as the more informal “Senor”.
- A shirt should be worn in public at all times. Consequences for being shirtless in public include large fines or arrest.
- Touching during conversations is generally considered rude and should be avoided.
- Hugs should be reserved for familiars. Strangers greet one another by shaking hands.
- Stay in groups, travel in a caravan consisting of two or more vehicles, and stay on the main roads.
- Ensure that someone not traveling with you is aware of your itinerary.
- Avoid hotels that do not have adequate security.
- Intercity travel after dark anywhere in should be avoided.
- It is preferable to stay in the main tourist destinations.
- Pay close attention to your surroundings, especially when walking.
- Official taxis are a suitable means of travel in daylight hours in urban areas. It is highly recommended that taxis be arranged through your hotel, or program office. Negotiate the price in advance.
- Women should be especially careful when traveling alone and avoid staying out late without a trusted male escort.
- Make sensible security precautions to mitigate the risk of petty crime, particularly pick pocketing and bag snatching.
- Carry a photocopy of your passport when traveling to avoid losing it in a robbery.
- Do not resist if you are being robbed and avoid eye contact and to not make any sudden movements. Victims have been killed when they resisted attack or refused to give up their money or other valuables.
- Be aware of your surroundings at all times and keep a low profile.
- Never leave your food, drinks or belongings unattended.
- Carry bags close to your body and make sure the fasteners are secure.
- Avoid carrying large amounts of cash or wearing expensive jewelry or valuables.
- Leave all important documents in a safe or safe deposit box at your hotel and only carry certified copies.
- Trust your instincts. If someone or something makes you uneasy, avoid the situation.

Panama - OVERVIEW

Important Contact Details

International Dialing Code: +507

International Dialing Prefix: 00

Victims of crime in should contact the following phone numbers for assistance

POLICE: The local equivalent to the “911” emergency line in is: 911 or 104

FIRE DEPARTMENT: 911 or 103

AMBULANCE: 911 or 103

Note: Police, ambulance or fire department response may be unreliable in some parts of the country.

TRAVEL & ROAD SAFETY

- Road infrastructure in Panama is generally good in large urban center; however it may be severely limited in rural areas.
- There is adequate lighting and signage on most major roads in large cities; these conditions are lacking in more remote portions of the country.
- Roads in rural areas are not well maintained, many are unpaved and potholes are common.
- Electricity is largely produced through hydroelectric power and is sufficient for the needs of the country; however occasional blackouts have been reported both in large cities and in more remote areas in the past.
- Panama has the most advanced telecommunications infrastructure in Latin America.

RECOMMENDED TRAVEL RESTRICTIONS

- No photographs of the Panama Canal or its traffic unless it's from an authorized viewpoint.
- No photographs of any of the Canal's power stations.
- No rural travel after dark.
- No deviation from approved travel routes.
- No use of ATMs after dark.
- No bathing or swimming in rivers.

HEALTH

The provision of medical care is adequate in Panama City, but extremely limited in the outlying, rural areas of the country. Facilities outside urban centers may offer only basic care, while certain types of medical equipment and medicines may be in short supply; more serious medical conditions may require evacuation to another country.

Panama - OVERVIEW

- Tap water in Panama City and other large urban centers is generally safe to drink; however, water quality becomes variable in rural areas.
- Travelers should only consume sterilized or bottled water as a precaution. This applies to water used for brushing teeth, making ice or washing foods.
- Unpasteurized milk should be avoided.
- Powdered or tinned milk should be used as an alternative if pasteurized milk is not available.
- Fruits and vegetables should only be consumed if they have been peeled or cooked.
- Undercooked meat and fish should not be consumed.
- Food from street vendors should be avoided, as they carry a higher risk causing infection.

The following vaccinations are recommended or required if traveling to Panama:

- Hepatitis A (recommended)
- Hepatitis B (recommended)
- Rabies (recommended)
- Typhoid (recommended)
- Yellow Fever (required for individuals arriving from a country where yellow fever is present)

It is also important to ensure that routine vaccinations are up to date for disease including influenza, varicella (chickenpox), polio, measles, mumps, rubella, diphtheria, pertussis and tetanus.

SIGNIFICANT DISEASES –

- Malaria – A life threatening parasitic disease transmitted by mosquitoes. The malaria risk in Panama is prevalent in rural areas east of the Panama Canal toward the border with Colombia and in the provinces of Darien, Bocas del Toro, Chiriqui, Kuna Yala (San Blas), and Veraguass throughout the year. There is minimal risk of contracting the disease in Panama City.
- Dengue Fever – An infectious disease carried by mosquitoes. Outbreaks occur annually in Panama, particularly during the rainy season (May to November). The worst affected areas include San Miguelito province and densely populated areas such as Panama City.
- Yellow Fever – A viral disease mainly transmitted by the Aedes mosquito. There is a risk of contracting the disease in the country, particularly in the Darien and San Blas provinces.
- Diarrhea – A common illness among individuals and can be caused by bacteria, viruses or parasite. One of the most common causes is a bacterium known as E. coli, which is transmitted by ingesting contaminated food and liquids.

HOSPITALS –

Centro Medico Nacional

Panama - OVERVIEW

Family Hospital Corporation Ave Justo Arosemena y Cl 38
Panama City
Tel: +507 (0) 227 5444
Fax: +507 (0) 227 5545

Centro Medico Paitilla
Avenue Balboa Calle 53
Panama City 0616 – 03075
Tel: +507 (0) 265 8800
Fax: +507 (0) 265 8861
<http://centromedicopaitilla.com/>

US EMBASSY – CONSULATE LOCATIONS

UNITED STATES EMBASSY

Building 783, Demetrio Basilio Lakas Avenue
Clayton, Panama
Tel: +507 317 5000
Fax: +507 317 5568
Email: panamaweb@state.gov

USF INTERNATIONAL HOTLINE

USF 24/7 EMERGENCY ASSISTANCE LINE: 813-317-5815

AXA Assistance 24/7 EMERGENCY ASSISTANCE LINE: 1-877-577-9504 / +1-203-399-5130 (Call collect from abroad)

ASSIST ID #: GLMN 04983932. <http://www.culturalinsurance.com/resources/>

* Information derived from CIA World Fact Book, US Department of State, OSAC, and Travel Guard. This travel overview summarizes some of the most important concerns; however, it does not negate the need for detailed trip planning.