

Miraflores Locks (Panama Canal)

The Miraflores Locks, due to their close proximity to Panama City and easy public access, is probably the most visited tourist site in all of Panama, more than Panama Viejo and Casco Viejo.

The Miraflores locks are the first pair of locks encountered by ships entering the canal from the Pacific Ocean. This building is the Miraflores lock house from which the locks are operated.

The canal locks are paired with two locks side-by-side to allow two-way traffic. The locks can also be operated in parallel in the same direction depending on the traffic flow requirements for the canal. A ship has to pass through three locks on each side of the canal to be raised to the level of Lake Gatun. Miraflores has two lock pairs. The third pair of locks on the Pacific side is at Pedro Miguel; about 3/4 mile upstream of the Miraflores locks.

The lock gates at Miraflores are the tallest of the three (the others being Gatun and Pedro Miguel), which is due to the extreme tidal variation that takes place in the Pacific Ocean; the tidal variation on the Atlantic coast is by far less. Miraflores Locks are slightly over one mile long, from beginning to end.

This is the first set of locks situated on the Pacific entrance of the Panama Canal. The locomotives maneuver the ships through the locks prior to being raised or lowered 27 feet per chamber. Twenty six million gallons of water is transferred in only 7 minutes and all done by gravity.

Miraflores Locks, completed in May of 1913, stand at the Pacific entrance to the Panama Canal. They link the Pacific Ocean with the manmade Miraflores Lake, raising and lowering ships 54 feet (16.5 meters) in two impressive steps. Of the canal's three sets of locks, these are the easiest to reach from Panama City and the best equipped to handle visitors.