

Touristic places to visit in Panama

PANAMA CANAL

Gatún Locks, on the Caribbean side, do the job by themselves. Each lock chamber is the same size as those on the Pacific 1,000 by 110 feet (almost 305 by 34 meters) but there are three pairs of them on this side, versus two (at Mira Flores) and one (Pedro Miguel) on the Pacific. That makes Gatún Locks absolutely massive, a little less than a mile (more than 1.5 kilometers) from end to end. All this is by way of saying that the Gatún Locks are an especially impressive sight. An observation platform up a long flight of stairs gives an excellent view of the locks, the Caribbean entrance to the canal, and Lago Gatún.

SAN BLAS ISLANDS

Panama has seven different Indian groups. On the San Blas Islands you will find one of these groups called the Kuna. It is still possible to get a glimpse of the culture and traditions of these interesting people. Additionally the area has stunning natural beauty. As such this place should be high on your list of places to visit when in Panama.

VOLCAN BARU

Volcan Baru National Park is located in the Province of Chiriqui, with a surface of 14,325 hectares (35,000 acres) and has a highly valuable geological and ecological scenic landscape that protects a biological diversity with some unique species of this area. In this park you will find tropical rainforest landscapes with highlands species and the remains of the last blast of the Baru Volcano that happened millions of years ago.

THE RUINS OF PANAMA LA VIEJA

The ruins of Panama Viejo or "Old Panama" can be visited today. A lonely cathedral spire surrounded by the crumbling arches, pillars, and walls are all that remains of this once grand Spanish colony. The city was rebuilt three years later on a peninsula five miles (8 km) to the southwest. This area, now known as Casco Viejo, is one of Panama City's most historic neighborhoods. Along its narrow streets, rundown tenements rub cornices with old Spanish churches, ruined convents, and handsome 19th-century buildings constructed by the French during their failed attempt to dig the Panama Canal from 1878-1889.

THE RUINS OF PORTOBELLO

An easy-going town on a beautiful Caribbean bay 62 miles from Panama City, Portobelo's claim to fame is its well-preserved 18th-century forts built by the Spanish to protect their booty from pirates. There is also a museum (open Tuesday to Sunday 9 am to 5 pm) in the restored Casa de la Aduana (Customs House). Portobelo is a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

PANAMA CANAL MUSEUM

This spanking new museum facing the Plaza Central in Casco Viejo occupies a beautifully refurbished building used by the French as their canal-building headquarters until 1903. Artifacts, photographs, and videos trace the canal area's history from pre-Columbian times to the present. Hours are Tuesday to Sunday 9:30 am to 5:30 pm. Admission is US\$2.