



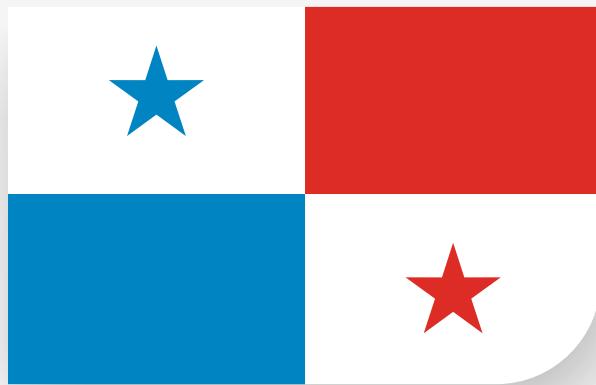
Panama

Capital

Panama

National Symbols

The Flag



The national flag of the Republic of Panama is divided in four quarters. The lower left quarter is blue and represents the Conservative party. The top right quarter is red and represents the Liberal party. The other two quarters are white representing the peace and harmony between the two aforementioned political parties. Each of these two white quarters has a star in the center. The blue star represents the purity and honesty that would characterize the civil life of the republic and the red star represents the authority and law that would impose these virtues.

Coat of Arms

The center of the Coat Of Arms contains the Isthmus of Panama. The top part of the coat of arms is divided in four parts. The lower left quarter has a cornucopia representing wealth and the lower right quarter has a



winged wheel representing progress. On the top left there are a sword and a rifle over a field of silver.

The eagle holds in its beak a banner with the phrase "Pro Mundi Beneficio" (For the benefit of the world) and over the head of the eagle there are nine golden stars representing the nine provinces that form the republic. On the sides of the oval there are two sets of flags.

National Bird

The national bird of Panama is the "Aguila Arpia" (Harpy Eagle).

National Flower

The national flower of Panama is a terrestrial orchid called "Flor del Espíritu Santo" or Holy Ghost Orchid.

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History

Independence

In 1718, the Viceroyalty of New Granada, consisting of Venezuela, Colombia, Ecuador, and Panama was split off from Peru. The history of Panama remained distant from the center of the government seated in Bogota throughout this period, developing its own identity apart from the rest of New Granada. When New Granada was liberated during the war for independence led by Bolívar, Panama went with it, becoming part of Gran Colombia and then the Republic of Colombia when Gran Colombia fell apart.

Panama became independent from Spain on November 28th, 1821 and separated from Colombia on November 3rd, 1903. Panamanians staged numerous small revolts during the nineteenth century, but they did not become independent from Colombia until 1903, when the US secured their independence.

The First President

Manuel Amador Guerrero

(30 June 1833 - 2 May 1909) was the first president of Panama from February 20th, 1904, to October 1st, 1908. He was a member of the Conservative Party.

Government

Palace of government:

Herons' Palace (Palacio de las Garzas)

Type of government:

Constitutional democracy

Governmental Representative institutions:

As is the case throughout most of Latin America, constitutional power in Panama is distributed among three branches of government: The Executive, The legislature and The Judiciary.

Power emanates from the people and is exercised by the three branches of government, each of which is "limited and separate," but all of which, in theory, work together in "harmonious collaboration." The national territory is defined as "the land area, the territorial sea, the submarine continental shelf, the subsoil, and air space between Costa Rica and Colombia." Any ceding, leasing, or other alienation of this territory to any other state is expressly forbidden.

The Executive: The executive organ is headed by the president and two vice presidents. They, together with the twelve ministers of state, make up the Cabinet Council, which is given several important powers, including decreeing a state of emergency and suspending constitutional guarantees, nominating members of the Supreme Court, and overseeing national finances, including the national debt.

The legislature: The 1983 amendments to Panama's Constitution created a new legislative organ, the Legislative Assembly, a unicameral body with sixty-seven members, each of whom has an alternate. Members and alternates are elected for five-year terms that run concurrently with those of the president and vice presidents.

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The Judiciary: The Constitution establishes the Supreme Court as the highest judicial body in the nation.

The Constitution

In 1987 Panama was governed under the Constitution of 1972 as amended by the Reform Acts of 1978 and the Constitutional Act of 1983. This was Panama's fourth constitution, previous constitutions having been adopted in 1904, 1941, and 1946. The differences among these constitutions have been matters of emphasis and have reflected the political circumstances existing at the time of their formulation. The amended Constitution contains 312 articles.

The Supreme Court of Justice

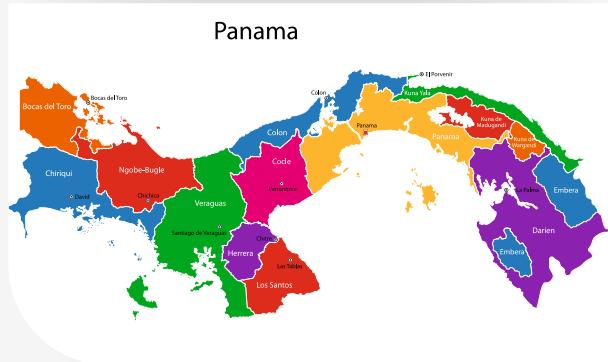
The Supreme Court consists of nine judges who serve a ten-year term. Among the functions of the Supreme Court is the enforcement of the constitution, dealing with criminal proceedings against functionaries of the state, and finding administrative solutions in labor disputes in government entities.

Principal Political Parties

The main political parties in Panama are: The PRD, The National Liberal Party (Partido Liberal Nacional or PLN), and The Democratic Party (Partido Demócrata Cristiano or PDC).

Political Division

9 provinces and 1 district, which are Bocas del Toro, Chiriquí, Coclé, Colón, Darién, Herrera, Los Santos, Panamá, Kuna Yala, Veraguas



Social Recognition

Historic Figures

Manuel Amador Guerrero

1833-1909

First president of Panama (1904-1908). A physician, he served as medical officer for the Panama RR and was a leader in the movement for Panamanian independence from Colombia.

Arnulfo Arias

1901-1988

President of Panama (1940-41, 1949-51, Oct., 1968). A Harvard-trained physician, he led the movement that deposed President Florencio Harmodio Arosemena in 1931.

Manuel Noriega

Panamanian general and Commander of the Panamanian Defense Forces in 1983. Noriega consolidated the strong-armed rule inherited from General Omar Torrijos Herrera and became the leader of Panama. Noriega was implicated in drug trafficking, the sale of U.S. secrets to Cuba, and other illegal things.

Omar Torrijos Herrera

1929-1981

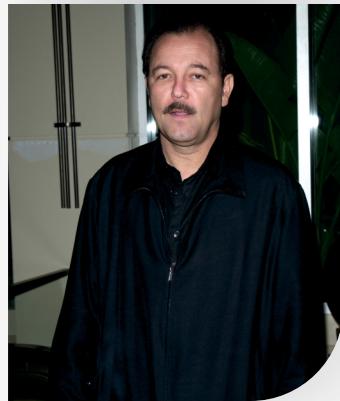
Military leader, dictator of Panama (1968-

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1978). As a Lieutenant Colonel, he led the movement (1968) that forced President Arnulfo Arias to leave his position of power. In 1969, Torrijos promoted himself to Brigadier General.

Social Figures

Panama is rich in folklore and popular traditions. Lively "Salsa Music" is the Panamanian specialty and Ruben Blades its best-known performer. Also, painter Roberto Lewis' Presidential Palace murals and ceiling in the National Theater are well known and admired.



Ruben Blades

Holidays

Festivities of the Black Christ of Portobelo

One of the most venerated representations of Christ in Panama, the Black Christ, is celebrated in the historical coastal town of Portobelo, in the province of Colon. The origin of this image is surrounded by legends. According to some versions, this image came floating to the shores of this town, while others tell that this is one of two images of Christ, a white one and a dark one, that were supposed to be shipped to South America, but every time the dark one was

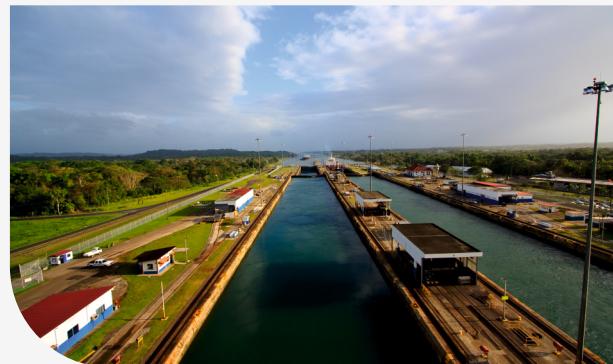
about to be set on the ship, a storm would occur, keeping it in Portobelo. One thing is certain about the Black Christ, prior to October 21st, thousands of devout to the Nazarene set on a pilgrimage to thank or ask for favors, making this date a mandatory appointment to those who attribute miracles to him.

Portobelo's Festival of "Diablos y Congos"

The Festival of the "Diablos and Congos" is held every two years in the city of Portobelo, in Colon. This cultural event takes place near the fort of San Jeronimo and exalts the African influences in Panamanian folklore by remembering the victory of good over evil through the dance of the "diablos" (devils or demons) and the hardships of the black slaves, who used dance and music to escape and mock their owners.

Tourist Sites

Panama Canal



Considered the "Eighth Wonder of the Modern World," the Panama Canal counts with three sets of locks through which a yearly estimate of 14,000 ships transit between the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans. About 56,307 workers coming from the United States, Europe, and the Caribbean were needed to conclude this engineering

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feat, which today serves as bridge to 5% of the world's commerce. The Center in Miraflores counts with expositions about the functioning and history of the Canal, where visitors can learn about its locks system, pressure valves, tow ships, and other elements needed to guide ships safely between oceans.

Zapatillas Keys

Both of these small islands or keys are located within the Isla Bastimentos National Marine National Park. They offer a white sand and coconut tree paradise where four species of turtles lay their eggs during the rainy season. The waters surrounding these islands are not too deep and allow adventuring into the coral reefs. Though sharks live toward the open sea, it is perfectly safe to swim toward the inner side of the islands. Here you can do a serious of activities such as boat rides, botanical and wild life observation, eco-tourism, marine life observation, nature walks, scuba diving and snorkeling.

Colon Free Trade Zone

The Colon Free Zone started operations in 1948. It is an important supplier of goods to other free zones such as San Andres in Colombia and Isla Margarita in Venezuela. This 400-hectares complex, divided into an Exhibition Trade Area in Colon and the Warehouse Area in France Field, houses as many as 2,435 companies. Electronic products, clothing, watches, perfumes, cosmetics, textiles, pharmaceuticals, jewelry, liquors, and cigars are among the main items imported.