**Half-day Visit to Panama City**

Go to the fizzy Panama City in a half-day visit. The tour starts at the neighborhoods located at the foot of Ancón Hill – the highest point in the city – which belonged sometime to the so-called Canal Zone where U.S. army officers and officials lived in during the U.S. administration of the canal. There will be a brief stop for contemplating an incredible view showing on one hand skyscrapers, part of a modern and lively city, and on the other hand the little historic center and its wonderful gulf. The tour continues at Amador Causeway, an artificial street that was built for communicating Naos, Culebra, Perico and Flamenco Islands with the continental part of the city; they were used for protecting the canal entrance. Nowadays, it offers one of the most spectacular panoramas of the city where the Bridge of the Americas and the line of ships that are waiting to go through the canal are visible. The tour continues at the *Biomuseo* or Museum of Biodiversity designed by Frank Gehry, the creator of the Bilbao Guggenheim Museum in Spain. It exhibits the amazing biodiversity of Panama by means of its eight rooms. The next stop is at the Old Quarter of the city, the historic center of San Felipe founded in 1673 after the destruction and plundering perpetrated by the Pirate Henry Morgan. It was inscribed as a World Heritage Site by UNESCO in 1997, thanks to its eclectic fusion of colonial, neoclassic and French architecture. This stop includes a walk in the streets, squares and gravel roads and a visit to emblematic colonial buildings, churches and palaces. San José church is one of them; it is famous because of its gold altar, a surprising baroque altar that survived to Morgan’s dreadful plundering in Old Panama. Straightaway, after crossing the A Avenue, you will reach *Plaza Francia* [France Square] which is probably the most beautiful square due to its extraordinary location in front of the sea, at the end of the peninsula. Sometime, it was the main square in the city and a guard of a fort destroyed late in the XXth century. In the middle of the square, there is an obelisk erected with a Gallic rooster surrounded by the bust of Ferdinand de Lesseps and other characters in homage to France and the role it played in the construction of the canal. Among the historic buildings surrounding the square, there are the Embassy of France, the National Institute for Culture and the Anita Villalaz Theater. A few meters away, there is the *Plaza Bolívar* [Bolívar Square], a lovely square surrounded by beautiful buildings, modern bars and restaurants offering the best night environment in the city. This square was known as *Plaza San Francisco* until 1926, a year during which it changed its name in homage of Simón Bolívar, The Liberator, for having led the pro-independence fight against Spain. The little but attractive San Francisco Church and the sumptuous National Theater designed by the Italian Architect Ruggieri located close to it; the theater is definitely one of the most representative works of the neoclassic architecture. If you raise your eyes, you will find the bell tower, decorated with mother of pearls, of the Church of San Felipe Neri and its adjacencies where it is located the oldest house in the Old Quarter that survived several fires, Casa Góngora [Góngora House], built in 1756 by a Spanish dedicated to the trade of pearls, where art exhibitions are currently performed. The Independence Square is other of the bastions of the Old Quarter, in fact, it is the most important square in the area, it is commonly known as *Plaza de la Catedral* [Cathedral’s Square]. Close to it, you may have regard for extraordinary residences and constructions, among them, there are the splendid Metropolitan Cathedral with its part-Moorish and part-baroque façade protected by two extremely white bell towers, and the imposing City Hall built in 1910 under the neoclassic style where it was proclaimed Panama as an independent republic from Spain and the separation from Colombia. The tour ends at the Executive Mansion (entrance is not guaranteed), a structure dating from 1673 which after numerous transformations, turned into the President’s residence. It is also known as *Palacio de las Garzas* [Herons Palace] because of the herons decorating its backyard; they were brought from Darién and were given as a present to President Belisario Porras. It holds inside wonderful halls, *Salón Amarillo* [Yellow Hall] stands out among them; it is the most significant hall because the most important ceremonies of the country are held there and *Salón de los Tamarindos* [Tamarind Hall] where the most famous murals of Roberto Lewis representing the history and culture of the country are visible right over there.

DURATION: approximately 4 to 5 hours.

TIMES: to be agreed. It may be done both in the morning and in the afternoon.

GUIDE: a private Spanish speaker guide.

INCLUSIVE: shuttle service from/to the hotel, visits and entrances.

NOTES: the *Biomuseo* is closed on Tuesdays and it is open from 10:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. Cerro Ancón may be visited in small buses (15 people max.) only. The Executive Mansion is closed on Saturdays, Sundays and Mondays. Entrance is not guaranteed. Casa Góngora is closed on Mondays.

ATTENTION: Visits order may be modified, even during the tour and not every building will be visited inside.