

Getting here and advice about your stay

Entry requirements

The Panamanian authorities are responsible for Panama's rules of entry. If you are unsure regarding the details of these rules, contact the British Embassy Panama City: <https://www.gov.uk/world/organisations/british-embassy-panama-city#contact-us> for more information.

Visas

You do not need a visa to enter Panama, unless you are arriving by sea.

You must have evidence of onward travel, such as a return or onward ticket and you must also have at least US \$500 or a credit card on your person.

If you are travelling by land to Panama from Costa Rica, you may be stopped by the immigration authorities if you do not have legal residency in Costa Rica. If you are stopped, you will need to supply evidence of onward or return travel to the country where you have legal residence.

Immigration officials in Panama may detain you if you try to renew your tourist visa by visiting a neighbouring country. Rules and procedures must be followed when attempting to extend your visa. Please be aware that the British Embassy Panama City cannot help or intervene as the decision regarding visas is made by the immigration authorities of Panama. See the National Migration Service website: <https://www.migracion.gob.pa/> for more information.

On entry into Panama, a 180-day stay is granted. Usually, extensions will not be allowed unless you are wanting to change your immigration status, such as for business purposes or marriage, for example. However, this must be done within the 180 days granted on entry. The Embassy of Panama in the United Kingdom can help you regarding these entry requirements. See: <http://www.panamaembassy.co.uk/> for more information.

Your passport will be stamped by the immigration authorities if you disembark a ship when transiting the Panama Canal. If you are staying in Panama for less than 90 days, you will not need to apply for a visa. Cruise ships are not boarded by immigration officials and passports will not be checked.

If you are travelling to Panama by sea, except via a cruise ship, you will need to apply for a visa. Passengers and crew members must each pay a US \$100 fee plus a US \$5 registration fee. There also may be added fees charged for certain permits, such as for cruising permits. You must make sure that your passport is properly stamped with the

date you entered Panama by an immigration official. See the Embassy of Panama in the United Kingdom website: <http://www.panamaembassy.co.uk/> for more information.

[Source – FCO Foreign travel advice: Panama, gov.uk, National Migration Service, Embassy of Panama in the United Kingdom]

Passport validity

Your passport must contain several unused pages and must also be valid for at least a six month period from the date you wish to exit Panama.

[Source – FCO Foreign travel advice: Panama, gov.uk]

Airport tax

On departure, you will be charged an airport tax of US \$40, which can only be paid via cash. This tax is often included within the price of your airline ticket, therefore you must check with your airline carrier that this has already been paid.

Yellow fever certificate requirements

You can check the National Travel Health Network and Centre's TravelHealthPro website in order to check whether you will need a yellow fever certificate. See: https://travelhealthpro.org.uk/country/174/panama#Vaccine_recommendations.

Permanent residency law

For the foreign nationals of 22 countries, including the UK, that have positive relations with Panama, the Government of Panama has established a permanent residency subcategory. This decree allows foreign and British nationals to apply for a permanent residency permit when carrying out commercial or professional activities within Panama. However, please be aware that this is subject to certain limitations. Contact the Panama National Migration Service on (507) 507-1800 or see: <http://www.migracion.gob.pa/> for more information.

There are several documents that must be legalised before you arrive in Panama, these must be issued with an apostille which can only be completed at the Legislation Office in the UK. See: <https://www.gov.uk/get-document-legalised> for more details.

UK Emergency Travel Documents

In Panama, UK Emergency Travel Documents (ETDs) are accepted for entry, airside transit and exit, and must be valid for a minimum period of six months from the date of entry into Panama.

[Source – FCO Foreign travel advice: Panama, gov.uk]

Money

It can be difficult, in Panama, to carry out a bank transfer. As this can take several days, make sure you have enough money for both your stay and onward travel. Western Union: <https://www.westernunion.com/gb/en/home.html> and Money Gram: <http://global.moneygram.com/>, are money transfer services that may be quicker.

It is difficult to exchange Travellers' cheques in Panama, and foreign cheques cannot be cashed.

Currency exchange services can be carried out in some banks, as well as at exchange bureaus in the shopping areas around Via España and Via Argentina, and in Tocumen International Airport.

Most ATMs accept British credit and debit cards, although daily withdrawal limits vary between banks.

Although credit and debit cards are widely accepted, there are establishments that only accept MasterCard or Visa.

[Source – FCO Foreign travel advice: Panama, gov.uk]

Local laws and customs

Panama has very strict laws concerning possession of and involvement in drugs. Being in possession of even a small quantity of drugs can lead to a prison sentence of up to 15 years. Be aware that you can be arrested for being in the company of someone who is using drugs, even though you have not used the drug yourself.

The judicial system in Panama can be very slow, and from the time of arrest you could be waiting for up to two years before you appear before a judge and the prison conditions can be harsh.

[Source – FCO Foreign travel advice: Panama, gov.uk]

Safety and security

Crime

You should make sure that your personal security awareness is at the same level as it is in the UK. Personal attacks in Panama are rare but can occur.

Make sure you take precautions in order to protect yourself and your belongings from any form of street crime. Official crime statistics have shown an increase in crime within San Miguelito, El Chorillo and Juan Diaz. There has also been an increase in robberies at restaurants, such as in Panama City. Therefore, you must make sure you stay aware of your surroundings.

When in public, do not carry valuables or large amounts of cash — when it is convenient, leave anything of value in a hotel safe. When using an ATM in a public place, make sure you stay safe. There have been instances where people have been attacked and ATMs have been tampered with using cloning devices.

Whilst in Panama, be aware of pickpockets, mainly in areas that are busy, such as bus stations.

Violence from Columbia concerning politics and criminal activity can spill over the border into Panama. In 2016, the Colombian Government and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) signed a peace agreement, however, conflict with other armed groups remains.

Always be cautious of any stranger asking to access your home. Criminal gangs have used this method in order to commit burglaries once inside. *[Source – FCO Foreign travel advice: Panama, gov.uk]*

Local travel

The Darien province, since the 1990s, has been a site of increasing conflict due to the smuggling of refugees and drugs across the border from Columbia. Therefore, make sure that if you travel to the Darien province, you go with an organised group to any destination that is under the Panamanian police's surveillance. When at these destinations, make sure you do not stray away from the group.

When hiking in the hills of Boquete in the Province of Chiriqui, make sure you are with an experienced guide. Make sure you always take necessary precautions before you go hiking.

[Source – FCO Foreign travel advice: Panama, gov.uk]

Road travel

In Panama, driving standards are poor, although there is a reasonably good road system. In and around peak times, traffic can become heavy. Make sure you watch out for potholes and unfinished road-work repairs.

It is the law in Panama for the driver and front-seat passengers to wear seatbelts. Children under 5 must also be sat in fitted child seats in the back.

If you are involved in an accident, you must wait with the car until the police arrive.

Taxis can often have poor maintenance. Only use registered taxi companies and make sure the driver does not pick up multiple travellers.

You will need a valid photo-card UK driving licence in order to drive in Panama as the authorities will not accept a paper licence. Your licence will only be valid for 90 days once you have entered Panama. If you wish to obtain a local licence, you will need a legalised certificate of entitlement issued by the Driving and Vehicle Licensing Agency (DVLA) in the UK. In Panama, you must then contact SERTRACEN, Panama's issuing agency: <http://www.sertracen.com.pa/> for further requirement information.

[Source – FCO Foreign travel advice: Panama, gov.uk, SERTRACEN]

Swimming and water sports

There can be strong currents and undertows on the Pacific and Caribbean coasts. Therefore, you must take care when wading, swimming and taking part in water sports in these areas. There is very little warning of these dangers on the beaches; you must be vigilant in order to stay safe.

The Bay of Panama is highly polluted with untreated sewage and industrial waste, therefore you must not enter or bathe in the waters.

Political situation

Political demonstrations can occur in Panama City; these usually take place around the Panama University, the Transistmica main road, and the main road leading from Bocas del Toro. In the past, demonstrations, such as those by construction workers, indigenous groups and students, have turned violent.

Make sure you monitor local media, listen to local advice and take measures to avoid all demonstrations.

[Source – FCO Foreign travel advice: Panama, gov.uk]

Terrorism

There have been no recent terrorist attacks in Panama; however, you should stay vigilant as an attack cannot be ruled out.

UK interests and British nationals have a heightened risk of attack globally from individuals/groups motivated by, and linked to, the hostility in Iraq and Syria.

[Source – FCO Foreign travel advice: Panama, gov.uk]

Natural disasters

Earthquakes, storms, hurricanes, floods and tsunamis can occur in Panama. See the US Federal Emergency Management Agency website: <https://www.fema.gov/> for information regarding what to do, before or during a natural disaster.

April to December in Panama is the rainy season, which leads to occasional flooding. Landslides often occur in rural areas, and streets can become impassable in cities due to the rising water levels. The heaviest rainfall usually occurs in October and November.

Make sure you check weather forecasts for the region and always take local advice.

[Source – FCO Foreign travel advice: Panama, gov.uk, The US Federal Emergency Management Agency, USAID]

Health

Check the National Travel Health Network and Centre's (NaTHNaC) advice on their TravelHealthPro website: <https://travelhealthpro.org.uk/countries> at least eight weeks before travelling to Panama. See the NHS (Scotland)'s FitForTravel website: <https://www.fitfortravel.nhs.uk/destinations.aspx> and the NHS Choices' website at: <https://www.nhs.uk/using-the-nhs/healthcare-abroad/> for further information.

Medicines that can be used in the UK may have a different legal status and regulations in Panama. If you plan to travel with a prescription or over-the-counter medicine, the NaTHNaC has guidance on how to travel with medication: <https://travelhealthpro.org.uk/factsheet/43/medicines-abroad>. You can also contact the British Embassy Panama City to get advice on the legal status of certain medication: <https://www.gov.uk/world/organisations/british-embassy-panama-city#contact-us>.

In Panama City there are good private hospitals and clinics, however, outside of the capital city, healthcare can be very limited. Therefore, make sure you have adequate travel health insurance in order to cover any costs.

Be aware that dengue fever and malaria are common in Panama throughout the year.

If, while in Panama, you require emergency medical assistance, you can call 911 and ask for an ambulance. Make sure you contact your insurance company immediately if you are referred for treatment at a medical facility.

[Source – FCO Foreign travel advice: Panama, gov.uk]

FCO Foreign travel advice

If you are travelling to Panama for business, the Foreign & Commonwealth Office (FCO) website has travel advice to help you prepare for your visit overseas and to stay safe and secure while you are there.

For up-to-the-minute advice please visit the foreign travel pages on the gov.uk website: <https://www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice/panama>.

Travel insurance

Make sure you have comprehensive travel and medical insurance before you travel, as well as accessible funds to cover the cost of any medical treatment abroad and repatriation.

[Source – FCO Foreign travel advice: Panama, gov.uk]

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