



PANAMA

TROPICAL DISCOVERY

Adventuring into the Panama Canal, Rainforests, Volcanoes and Beaches



DURATION: 9 days / 8 nights
SEASON: Mid-November through May
DEPARTURES: Guaranteed with a minimum of 4 and maximum of 12 participants.
TRIP RATING: Moderate nature, cultural, educational and family-friendly Tour, Grade (I): This first-class soft adventure is an activity-oriented program featuring walking tours through forest and National Parks (3-4 hours in duration at elevations below 7,000'). Also zip lining, wildlife viewing, boat excursions, snorkeling and sea kayaking.

2024/25 DATES: On request any week of the year during the travel season.

INTRODUCTION:

Panama is a land of crossroads, bridging the gap between the Pacific and the Atlantic Oceans with the Panama Canal, a manmade wonder of nautical navigation. The small country is a cultural kaleidoscope of thriving metropolitan capital city, old world influence and traditions, indigenous heritage, laid-back coastal lifestyle, and rural agricultural livelihoods. When it comes to landforms and ecosystems, Panama serves as a microcosm of Central America – it's all here! Families, couples, birdwatchers, and nature-loving adventure travelers of all kinds will find a piece of Panama to love.

Southwind's newest itinerary takes travelers through the best-loved highlights of Panama with a tasting menu of its most exciting landscapes and cultures. You'll find yourself easily transported through drastically changing scenery, from the urban metropolitan areas to carefully conserved rainforests, from a highland cloud forest where looming volcanoes and coffee plantations coexist, and finally to the coast with its islands, mangroves and long stretches of stunning beaches.

TRIP HIGHLIGHTS:

- Get a panoramic view of Panama City from the edge of Old Town's historical quarters
- Witness the lifting and dropping of massive ships in the Miraflores Locks of the Panama Canal
- Rise above the rainforest on a 130-foot observation tower in Soberania National Park
- Have a cross-cultural encounter with the tribal people of the Embera Quera community
- Navigate the Panama Canal on a private boat to Gatun Lake, surrounded by tropical wildlife
- Fly through highland cloud forest treetops in a canopy-level zip line adventure
- Look for the elusive Resplendent Quetzal and other exotic birds in Finca Lerida's private reserve
- Follow the footsteps of pre-Columbian Indians hiking through primary cloud forest
- Explore the Gulf of Chiriqui National Park by boat, on foot, by kayak and by snorkel
- Toast the sunset over the Pacific Ocean aboard a sundown boat ride

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DAY-BY-DAY ITINERARY:

DAY 01 (SAT): TO PANAMA CITY

Depart home and arrive this afternoon to **Panama City**, the country's capital on the Pacific coast. Upon arrival to Tocumen International Airport (PTY), meet your Southwind representative and transfer to the historic **American Trade Hotel**, located at "Casco Viejo" (Old Town) in a beautifully restored Spanish colonial building. Meals are on your own today.

DAY 02 (SUN): PANAMA CITY / GAMBOA RESORT

This morning amble through the **Old Town** on foot, taking in the bright colors and architectural mixtures of Panama's many heritages – Spanish, French, Italian, and American. Old Town's charming churches, plazas, palaces and promenades have been spruced up to their original glory by a recent restoration project, which gained the district lofty status as a UNESCO World Heritage Site. From a vantage point on top of Old Town's wall, look out over the Pacific Ocean and see the modern skyline of downtown Panama City. Next is a brief visit of the fascinating **Biodiversity Museum**. Here, world-famous North American architect Frank Gehry created his only work in Latin America. The building and its eight permanent exhibition galleries are a narrative, explaining Panama's natural history as an isthmus with vast biodiversity. Enjoy a delicious lunch at nearby Casa Antigua or Las Clementinas Restaurants.

Before heading into the rainforest, we'll have one more stop en route – How do huge cargo vessels pass through the Panama Canal? Start the visit by unlocking the secrets of canal at the **Miraflores Locks**. You'll see the rising and dropping of the ships as they make their way between the only passage of water joining the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans. From here, depart on the one-hour drive to **Gamboa Rainforest Resort**, a sanctuary deep in the heart of the rainforest. (B,L)

DAY 03 (MON): SOBERANIA NATIONAL PARK / EMBERA VILLAGE

Tropical wildlife viewing and a deep village encounter await us today in **Soberania National Park**. You'll find yourself perched on a 130-foot-tall observation tower, amidst the treetops, binoculars in focus. With a bit of luck, you'll see the morning flight of the keel-billed toucan or a black hawk-eagle and glimpse the elusive mantled howler monkeys. A visit to the Discovery Center and a nature hike along the surrounding trails will round out the morning rainforest excursion. See how many of the National Park's 525 species of birds and 105 species of mammals will you come across.

After a buffet lunch back at the Gamboa Rainforest Resort, you'll find yourself gliding along the Gatun River in a dugout canoe to meet our welcoming indigenous hosts from the **Embera Quera community**. Cultures mingle here as you learn about their customs and beliefs, sample the traditional body painting, witness their music and dance, and admire their handmade crafts such as masks, vases, baskets and carvings. Here, on the shores of the Gatun Lake, the Embera people live closely attuned to nature – lives very different from our own. Return to **Gamboa Rainforest Resort** for an evening of relaxation amidst the sound of birdsong and views of the sun setting on the Chagres River. (B,L)

DAY 04 (TUE): PANAMA CANAL / BOQUETE

Today we'll meet again with the Panama Canal – this time in the heart of the rainforest. On a private expedition boat trip to **Gatun Lake**, we'll bypass huge tankers and cargo ships, all while surrounded by the sights and sounds of the jungle. If you keep your eyes open, you may spot Howler monkeys, White-face Capuchin monkeys, and maybe even a sloth swinging lazily in the branches. In the water, look for caiman and turtles swimming along oblivious to the river traffic.

Before a satisfying lunch at Gamboa Rainforest Resort, we'll have one more visit to the forest's canopy aboard an **aerial tram!** The tram ascends 280 feet above ground, covering half a mile and culminating at the top of a hill where an observation tower awaits. Ramping up another 100 feet to the top of the tower, you'll have a bird's eye view of the Chagres River, the only river in the world that flows into two oceans. The neon colors of Panama's tropical forest jump out from below.

A short drive to the Albrook National Airport and a 35-minute flight to David (capital of the Chiriqui province in western Panama) bring us to Boquete. This is the country's fertile "breadbasket", a highland area of spectacular volcanoes that provides fertile farmlands, lush cloud forests, and cooler fresh air compared to the rainforest and the coast. Transfer by van to the eastern side of the dormant Baru Volcano (the tallest mountain in Panama, at 11,398' high), reaching the quaint town of Boquete with its coffee plantations and extraordinary cloud forest ecosystem. Check in to **Finca Lerida**, just outside town. Finca Lerida is an Eco lodge on a private nature reserve and coffee plantation, located at an altitude ranging from 5,000 to 10,000 feet. It is a great place for spotting quetzals and other colorful exotic birds. Dinner is on your own this evening. (B,L)

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DAY 05 (WED): BOQUETE

This morning a waterfall hike through the **Falling Waters Nature Reserve** awaits. This remarkable trail passes through virgin cloud forest, retracing the steps of pre-Columbian Indians who panned for gold in these waters. You'll be hiking alongside Quebrada La Mina, a stream of clear waters that feeds the Rio Caldera. Among the series of waterfalls, you can even explore an underground cave and bathe yourself in the mists of the cascades. A bistro-style lunch is served in a mountain restaurant's outdoor terrace beside a garden overlooking the Palo Alto River.

Get ready for treetop thrills this afternoon at the **Tree Trek zip line!** This zip line park gives you a safe, close-up, aerial view of the highland forest, bordering La Amistad National Park and Baru Volcano, from fourteen different canopy platforms spanning 1.8 miles in length. You'll glide along the cables through the most diverse part of the cloud forest ecosystem – the canopy – where most of the birds, insects and mammals dwell. Afterwards, Return to **Finca Lerida** for the evening and to enjoy its fine Mediterranean and local cuisine at La Brulerie restaurant. (B,L)

DAY 06 (THU): FINCA LERIDA / PACIFIC COAST

Join other guests at **Finca Lerida** early this morning for a guided birdwatching and nature hike through the 900-acre estate bordering Amistad National Park, a natural reserve protected both by Panama and Costa Rica. It has been declared a UNESCO Natural World Heritage Site. Look for the Resplendent Quetzal perched in the Aguacatillo tree where it eats its favorite fruit. It is thanks to Finca Lerida's conservation efforts that quetzals and so many other rare birds (up to 250 species in this area) can still be appreciated. The nature trails pass through primary and secondary forests and also by the coffee fields, each in a slightly different microclimate, which adds variety to the kinds of beans cultivated.

After a pleasant lunch at Finca Lerida, we'll head out to the next portion of the trip – the coast! But first, we'll take in a 'bean to cup' coffee experience at **Finca La Milagrosa**. At this coffee plantation, we'll zoom in even closer on the coffee production process – from cultivation, harvest, humidity, and drying to roasting, grinding, and of course tasting! You will train your tongue on difference between Arabica and Robusta, the subtleties of Italian and French roast, and learn the traditional and artisanal aspects that make this coffee a 100% organic specialty product.

After a 2-hour scenic drive this afternoon, smell the marine scent in the air as we approach Boca Chica, a small fishing village along Panama's central Pacific Coast. This village, still mostly local and un-trodden by tourists, is uniquely positioned as the gateway to both Gulf of Chiriquí National Park and the neighboring island of Boca Brava. Check into the **Bocas Del Mar Hotel**, where you're free to explore the seaside atmosphere and find a dining option – perhaps delicious fresh fish or lobster at the resort restaurant. (B,L)

DAY 07 (FRI): GULF OF CHIRIQUI NATIONAL PARK

This morning, join other Bocas Del Mar guests for a special **Island Discovery boat excursion**. You'll head out into the stunning Gulf of Chiriqui Marine National Park with your local captain to the nearby islands. The national park, covering 60 square miles of ocean and islands, is known for its green iguana lizards, humpback whales, dolphins, manta rays, several species of turtles, stingrays, monkeys, and hundreds of types of exotic birds and tropical fish. Observe the marine life with the breeze in your hair and feel the warm tropical sunshine and sand between your toes on pristine white beaches. The boat will make one or two stops for snorkeling and beach relaxation at Isla Bolaños, Isla Paridas or Isla Gámez.

Return to Bocas Del Mar for lunch overlooking the sea. Afterwards is leisure time to soak up sun on the beach or by the hotel's beautiful infinity pools. Then, celebrate the sunset today aboard the hotel's own boat. Head out late afternoon for the **Sundown Mangrove** excursion and cruise along the serene waterways looking for wildlife and surrounded by amazing river forest vegetation. The environment here is totally different from this morning's excursion, inspiring wonder at such diversity in nearby landscapes. Toast the sunset as the boat navigates the Pacific Ocean just in time to watch the sun release a smattering of color as it disappears behind the water. Spend another pleasant night at the **Bocas Del Mar Hotel** with dinner on your own at the resort or to explore nearby Boca Chica. (B,L)

DAY 08 (SAT): PACIFIC COAST / PANAMA CITY

As a final journey on the water from Bocas Del Mar, we'll take a **kayaking tour** inshore to the calm, tropical waters surrounding Boca Chica. On this private guided excursion, enjoy unique access to local beaches and move at your own pace. You can choose between a single or a double kayak or even a pedal boat for exploration along the coast and into the thick of the mangroves. Instruction will be provided on paddling technique, self-rescue, navigation, packing and other elements of expedition sea kayaking. Cover about 4 to 6 miles, taking time to snorkel, relax, and walk along the beaches. As the kayaking is a private tour with a support motorboat, you'll get to decide how far you want to go based on experience

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and the local conditions. A shorter route closer to the bay and by nearby islands (Ventanas, Saino or Linarte) is an option. Return to the hotel for a delightful seaside lunch, then transfer one hour by vehicle to **David** airport for a short flight back to **Panama City**. Meet a Southwind representative on arrival and transfer to the elegant and central **Bristol Panama** for the night. Experience the vibrant city life with a final dinner on your own this evening to try the hotel's Salsipuedes restaurant or one of the fine restaurants nearby. (B,L)

DAY 09 (SUN): PANAMA CITY / HOME

After an early breakfast, transfer to the Tocumen International Airport (PTY) to board your international flight home. Arrive in your gateway city this afternoon and make onward connections home. (B)

NOTES ON THE ITINERARY:

Although we do our best to adhere to the above schedule, this itinerary is subject to change for numerous reasons beyond our control, including group pace and acclimatization, weather, road, trail and sea conditions, flight delays or cancellations, as well as changes in plane schedules. This trip is suitable for healthy participants accustomed to outdoor activities, age 12 and up. Changing the days of the week on this itinerary may affect the flow of activities as some of the visits may not be available every day. Depending on final flight schedules, some of the activities may follow a different sequence but all or similar activities will be provided. Distances and altitudes are approximate and travel times indicated do not include lunch breaks, rest or photo stops, etc.

2024 LAND COST for a private guided trip: 4-6 participants: from \$5,550 p.p.d.
7-12 participants: from \$5,200 p.p.d.
Single Supplement: from \$1,550

2024 Land Costs are valid for departures through May 2025.

p.p.d. = per person based on double or triple occupancy not including airfare.

Note: End of the year or holiday departures between December 20 and January 04 could have a Land Cost surcharge of 10-20%. For these departures we recommend making reservations 8 or more months in advance.

ESTIMATED AIRFARE: The Land Cost DOES NOT INCLUDE ANY FLIGHTS. Southwind's ticketing specialist can assist with all your air travel – providing an airfare quote to match your itinerary, personalized support for seating, monitoring schedule changes and coordinating directly with the airlines if any adjustments are needed. Round-trip international air from US gateways (New York, Miami, Los Angeles, San Francisco, Denver, Washington-Dulles, Houston and Atlanta) is approximately \$500-\$900/person. Airlines offering round-trip service arriving to Panama City (PTY) include American, United, Delta and Copa. Local round-trip airfare with Air Panama between Panama City and David is approximately \$380/person. You have the option to arrange your own flights or redeem award travel yourself if you prefer. Tickets should only be purchased after Southwind notifies you that your trip is confirmed. The airlines request that tickets match your passport name. Upon receipt of your deposit, Southwind provides flight booking details for your travel dates.

SERVICES INCLUDED:

- Comprehensive **pre-departure planning packet** and expert travel advice.
- **In-country transfers** and ground transportation as noted in comfortable private vehicles with professional drivers.
- Local and return flight reconfirmation, **in-country airport check-in and luggage assistance**.
- **Accommodations in first-class (4 star) hotels** as listed (or at similar hotels) on a shared basis with private bath. Advanced bookings are recommended if you plan to customized the itinerary and arrive early or extend your stay Double rooms (with king/queen bed) for couples and/or Triple/Quadruple rooms for families can be requested in advance, but cannot be guaranteed, as most hotels offer very few rooms with Triple/Quadruple beds. Also, very few connecting or adjacent rooms are available at certain hotels.
- **Meals** as indicated (B=breakfast; L=lunch; D=dinner). **Vegetarian diets accommodated** on request (advance notification required). For other diets, consult your Southwind travel specialist before making a reservation.
- **Guided tours** (as listed) conducted on a private basis (except the aerial tram, the nature hike at Finca Lerida, the zip line adventure and the Bocas Del Mar boat excursions when other hotel guests may join, but the activities will be privately escorted).

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- An experienced **English-speaking guide/escort** will lead the entire trip (Day 01-08). An assistant guide is provided for groups with 9 or more participants.
- Applicable entrance fees.
- Single Supplement provides single room accommodations in all hotels. Due to the limited number of rooms at the small boutique hotels, there is a maximum of 2 singles allowed per group. If you require single accommodations, making reservations well in advance is recommended.

NOT INCLUDED:

- Domestic nor international flights.
- Tours, meals (at about \$30-45 each per person) or other services not listed on the itinerary.
- Early check-in or late check-out at hotels.
- Alcoholic beverages nor items of a personal nature; such as clothing, equipment, laundry and phone calls.
- Tips to the local staff.
- Expenses incurred in trip preparation such as, but not limited to, non-refundable airline tickets, travel insurance, and additional expenses resulting from flight delays, schedule changes, cancellations, or missed connections.

OPTIONAL HOTEL UPGRADES:

All hotels in the Tropical Discovery have been selected based on their outstanding adherence to international standards, attention to quality and detail, and rich offering of amenities and comforts. However, for an additional fee, we can upgrade your stay to the top room category (Suite or Deluxe Bungalow). Or we can upgrade to the finest properties to be found in each location for maximum comfort, 5-star luxury and VIP treatment.

Panama City: Upgrade to the elegant Marriott hotel, the deluxe Waldorf Astoria or the luxurious Trump Ocean Club International Hotel and Tower.

Boquete: Consider the Panamonte Inn, a Small Luxury Hotel of the World property located in town.

Boca Chica: Upgrade to the exclusive Isla Palenque Resort, set in a pristine 400-acre tropical island.

Due to high demand these reservations are recommended at least 4-5 months in advance. Upgrades are subject to availability and cannot be guaranteed.

WEATHER: Panama enjoys a warm tropical climate year-round, with a rainy season between May and November. Average high temperatures are in the lower 80s, with average low temperatures in the mid 60s year-round. The weather varies considerably based on the region, with microclimates that depend on elevation and geography. The climate on the Pacific coast is humid and warmer, and in the highlands expect less humidity and cooler temperatures. Panama is a year-round destination, but ideal time to visit is during the “summer” dry season of December-April.

HOW TO SIGN UP: Please complete Southwind’s Trip Reservation eForm. There are fields for up to 6 travelers per form with the same address. The deposit is **\$1,500 per person**, [please click here to pay your deposit](#) by any major credit card through our secure CardConnect system. In the total amount due box, enter your deposit amount (without a comma) based on the number of travelers in your party. If you prefer, you can also call us at 1-800-377-9463 to make payment arrangements by phone or send a check. You will receive confirmation of your deposit.

Reservations can be accepted up to 60 days before departure, provided services and space are available. Due to the popularity of Panama, we recommend making reservations at least 4-5 months in advance for non-holiday or about 1 year prior for holiday departures. Once your trip is guaranteed to operate, you will receive comprehensive pre-departure planning documents by email.

Land Balance: Final payment is due at 120 days by Visa, MasterCard, Discover, American Express, check, or electronic funds transfer. You can split your balance on two cards. You will receive a trip invoice indicating your balance due.

TRAVEL INSURANCE: We strongly recommend purchasing coverage to protect your trip investment. Travel insurance is important in case of unexpected events prior to departure causing the need to cancel or change your dates. Weather, natural events, medical reason, quarantine, local strikes, personal injury/illness (for you, your traveling companion or family members at home), could require itinerary interruption or changes. Missed connections, delayed arrival, lost/delayed baggage or the need for medical attention or evacuation are also reasons why coverage is important.

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Southwind recommends **Travel Insured International** which offers coverage options at a good value. If you, your traveling companion or a family member has a pre-existing medical condition, you can still receive coverage if a recurrence of the condition forces you to cancel your trip, but you do need to purchase a plan **within 21 days of your deposit**. Southwind can provide eQuote for insurance to review upon receipt of your deposit and Trip Reservation eForm. [Learn more about coverage offered by Travel Insured International](#)

Specific policies will be outlined in your finalized custom trip proposal. General policies can be found under the current [Terms & Conditions](#) on Southwind's website.

We look forward to having you travel with us in Panama!

Southwind Adventures, Inc

Your Latin America Travel Specialist since 1990
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