

# PANAMA CITY - GATEWAY TO NATURAL PARADISE



The Central American state of Panama is a very surprising place. Many tend to associate its character to the very unfortunate times of the rule of the military dictator Noriega. Between 1983 and 1989, this gangster gained too much power and misused it to run drugs and guns across Central America. Luckily, those times are long gone. In 1999, Panama took control over from the United States and was grateful for the financial assistance the U.S. had provided.

The capital, Panama City, with its booming business and skyscraper-skyline simply strikes one with its almost futuristic character. Tourists who are eager to enjoy both the pulsating life of this passionately modern city and a bit of quiet seclusion of wild nature will be surprised. Panama City's got it all.

Within 45 minutes, the eager traveler may get a completely different picture of Panama. The Gamboa Rainforest Resort is not 40 minutes away by car and offers some amazing kayaking possibilities. Though visitors who come here should keep their eyes open - crocodiles are not unexceptional in the Panama Canal Zone - the Gatun Lake and the Chagres River. If kayak seems too adventurous, tourists are welcome to enjoy a boat trip and discover the rich fauna and flora of the wild forest.

The Emberá Drua at the Rio Chagres takes the tourists to a genuine rainforest community of indigenous Indians, the Emberá. Even though they live in the forest and still retain many aspects of their traditional way of life, they are no strangers to modern technologies. Using mobile phones or cameras is really not uncommon for them. Yet still, they are very welcoming, willing to teach their visitors about the rainforest plants, and their culture.

For those who don't mind taking a plane in order to see some remote areas, the Darien National Park will sound very appealing. There used to be a goldmine here, though it has long been swallowed up by the unstoppable wilderness of the rainforest. It is a true bird-watcher's paradise, and the enthusiasts may even pay for a 5day / 4 night trip to the midst of this wild jungle and enjoy its hidden treasures.

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