

The Panama Canal & Caribbean Nature Retreat

8 days / 7 nights



DAY 1

Arrival in Panama City

On arrival at Tocumen International Airport in Panama City, you will be met by a representative of the Tocumen Royal VIP Salon at the plane's door to assist with Immigration, Customs and while your luggage is being retrieved, you enjoy complimentary beverages and snacks at the VIP lounge. Private transfer of 35-45 minutes to your hotel in Casco Viejo, Panama City's historical district.
3 nights at LA COMPAÑÍA

DAY 2

Panama City's UNESCO World Heritage Sites

Begin your exploration today with a short ride across town to the ruins of Panama Viejo (the old city). Panama City is the oldest continuously occupied European settlement on the Pacific coast of the Americas. It was founded in 1519 as a consequence of the discovery of the "South Sea" in 1513. The archaeological remains of the original settlement (known today as the Archaeological Site of Panamá Viejo) include the Pre-Columbian vestiges of the Cuevan aboriginal occupation of the same name and currently encompass a UNESCO-protected heritage site covering 32 hectares. Its growth in importance, as it profited from the imperial bullion lifeline, is reflected by the imposing stone architecture of its public and religious buildings. During its 152 years of existence, the town was affected by slave rebellion, fire, and an earthquake, but was destroyed in the wake of a devastating attack in 1671 by pirate Henry Morgan.



Continue to Casco Antiguo. In 1673, after the devastating pirate attack, Panama City was moved some 7.5 km west, to a small peninsula at the foot of Ancon Hill, closer to the islands that were used as the port and near the mouth of a river that eventually became the entrance of the Panama Canal. The relocated town, known today as Casco Antiguo or the Historic District of Panama, not only had better access to fresh water but could be fortified. The military engineers, moreover, took advantage of the morphological conditions that complemented the wall surrounding the peninsula, all of which prevented direct naval approaches by an enemy. Several buildings within the District are identified as important for the country's 17th–20th century heritage. Most outstanding are the churches, above all the Metropolitan Cathedral with its five aisles and timber roof. Other churches include San Felipe Neri, San José, San Francisco, and La Merced. The Presidential Palace, originally built in the late 17th century and partially reconstructed in the 18th, 19th, and early 20th centuries, is a revealing example of the transformations that characterize the Historic District as a whole. The House of the Municipality, the National Theatre, the Ministry of Government and Justice, and the Municipal Palace are outstanding buildings of a more recent period. Casco Antiguo is another UNESCO World Heritage Site. The tour ends with a visit to the Interoceanic Canal museum which is housed in the building that was the original headquarters for the French canal-building effort in the 1880s. Enjoy lunch at a local restaurant.

Our recommendation: hands-on cooking experience with a young Panamanian chef from 10:30–14:00 hrs (Tue–Sun) where you prepare your own lunch! Let us know if you'd like to make this adjustment.



Optional add-on: Late afternoon enjoy a 1-hour sunset helicopter flight from the Pacific to the Atlantic coast flying over the entire Panama Canal and enjoying incredible aerial views of the East and West banks of Pacific Canal Locks: Miraflores, Pedro Miguel, and the Cocoli Locks. On this 1-hour flight, you will also observe the Borinquen Dam, the Centennial Bridge, the Culebra Cut, Gatun Lake, Gatun Dam, the Chagres River's mouth on the Caribbean side of the isthmus, the Spanish Fort San Lorenzo (a UNESCO World Heritage Site), the Gatun Locks, and the Agua Clara locks, which are part of the Panama Canal expansion project that was finished in 2016. Before returning to Panama City, you will enjoy some impressive views of its skyline and the historical neighborhoods, the Pacific Ocean entrance to the Panama Canal, and the Bridge of the Americas. Upon landing, you will be transferred back to your hotel in Panama City early evening.

Overnight at LA COMPAÑÍA

(BL)



DAY 3

Jungle Boat tour on Gatun Lake for wildlife observation



Early in the morning, you are picked up at the lobby of your hotel by an Ancon Expeditions of Panama Naturalist Guide for a 45-minute drive to the town of Gamboa, where the Chagres River meets the Panama Canal. Here you board a small expedition boat and depart on an adventure that will include a voyage across Gatun Lake in the Panama Canal passing by gigantic cargo ships transiting the waterway, making contrast with the natural surroundings. Along the way, you will have the opportunity to spot Green Iguanas and Three-toed Sloths resting on tree branches, Crocodile, and Osprey in the hunt for Peacock Bass, Snail Kite, and Keel-billed Toucan among other wildlife. Gatun Lake was formed to give way to the Panama Canal in 1914. With a surface of 423 square kilometers, at the time of its creation was the largest man-made lake in the world. The flow of all the rivers within the Panama Canal Watershed is contained in Gatun Lake to provide water for the operation of the lock system. More than 52 million gallons of fresh water are used for every ship that transits through the Panama Canal from one ocean to another.

Your expedition boat will allow for close approximations to rainforest-covered islands (former hill tops) in Gatun Lake to search for the White-faced Capuchin, Mantled Howler Monkey, Central American spider monkey, and Geoffrey's Tamarin. Enjoy the extraordinary views of the Panama Canal and the natural surroundings. Picnic lunch on the boat included. You will be dropped back at your hotel in Panama City early afternoon.

Overnight at LA COMPAÑÍA

(BL)

DAY 4

Embera Indigenous People | Portobelo



Check out from your hotel. This morning you will be picked up by your guide at your Panama City hotel for a 90-minute drive to the shores of the Gatun River where you will embark on a rich cultural experience for today. You will board a motorized piragua (dugout canoe) and travel for approximately 20 minutes up through the lush forest to the indigenous village. Along the river, you may be able to spot Little Blue and Green Heron, Great Egrets, Anhingas, Neotropical Cormorant, Amazon, Ringed, and Green Kingfishers, along with Keel-billed Toucans and Ospreys flying above.

Upon arriving at the Embera village you will be greeted by the villagers with dancing and music. You will learn about Embera customs and their relationship with nature, natural medicine, clothing, education, and way of living. Ready to immerse yourself in a different world and learn about the ancient traditions of this beautiful tribe? Come along and dance with the Embera, enjoy the local children playing around the village, or peek into the classrooms during school season. There will be locally crafted artifacts, wooden-carved animals, and beautiful hand-woven baskets available for purchase. You will have a chance to be painted with the traditional *jagua*, a natural dye the Embera use to adorn their bodies and which serves as a natural mosquito repellent as part of their ancient natural medicine. After a traditional Embera lunch accompanied by fresh seasonal fruits and beverages brought by your guide, you will head back by dugout canoe to the tour van.



At last, for about 45 minutes you will be taken towards the North-Eastern Caribbean coast towards the small historic town of Portobelo. Famous for its trade fairs during the 17th century, Portobelo is a UNESCO World Heritage Site. During colonial times, it was one of the most important strongholds of the Spanish Main in the Americas. You will visit Forts San Geronimo and Santiago de la Gloria as well as the Church of San Felipe. You then say goodbye to your private guide and will be transferred by boat for approximately 7 minutes across the bay to El Otro Lado, a small boutique hotel surrounded by the National Park of Portobelo.

4 nights at EL OTRO LADO PRIVATE RETREAT
(BLD)



DAY 5

El Otro Lado Private Retreat



El Otro Lado mixes design, culture, nature, and luxury in a unique manner in order to offer its guests authentic, exclusive, and custom-made experiences. It is the perfect place to relax and disconnect while contemplating the exuberant vegetation. With views of the sea, its four exclusive houses of eclectic tropical design integrate simple details with traditional handicrafts of the Atlantic Coast. A streak of truly unforgettable experiences, El Otro Lado will take you to a harmonious and dreamlike place that is equipped with all the comforts of modern life. The Gazebo is the heart of El Otro Lado, where anything can happen. Enjoy a “Maracuaya” passion fruit mojito while sharing histories from the past with your friends; stimulate your intellect with the wide selection of our library; try the taste of daily fresh fish or listen with nostalgia to a vibrant selection of music, specially elaborated for El Otro Lado by Radio Gladys Palmera.

<< *El Otro Lado: your stay includes daily breakfast, lunch, and dinner (beverages not included), boat transfer from Portobelo to the property, complimentary use of kayaks, standup paddle boards, snorkeling equipment, beach excursions, mangrove excursion on La Faraona, visit to Fort San Fernando, hike around the lake, a cultural presentation and a tour of the property. Optional privately guided tours and excursions, such as a percussion drum class, wood art workshop, mixology class, massage treatments, and birdwatching tour, are available on-site at additional cost. >>*

Overnight at EL OTRO LADO PRIVATE RETREAT
(BLD)

DAY 6

El Otro Lado Private Retreat



El Otro Lado offers a variety of optional activities such as fishing, navigating by the mangroves, hiking, observing unique birds, beach hopping, diving at coral reefs, or submerging in the water together with professional scuba divers with the chance to see shipwreck treasures. Enjoy the calm Caribbean bay, and witness a traditional cultural Congo dance presentation during your stay.

The Congo culture is one of Portobelo's intangible UNESCO World Heritage elements and includes music, dance, and rituals influenced by African traditions brought by enslaved people to the region. The annual Diablos y Congos festival is a vibrant and culturally rich celebration that combines African, Spanish, and indigenous traditions. The festival typically takes place in early October.

For the creative ones, craft and paint your own wooden art piece at a local wood workshop at El Otro Lado with the help of a local carpenter. You get the chance to develop your skills in painting, carving, or cabinet making. When finished, you get to bring home your own creation.

You may also participate in a percussion class at the Escuelita del Ritmo in Portobelo, a cultural and educational foundation dedicated to preserving and promoting the rich cultural heritage of the region.

Overnight at EL OTRO LADO PRIVATE RETREAT
(BLD)

DAY 7

El Otro Lado



With the lodge's boat, the trip to the nearest beaches is fast and convenient. Once there, you will enjoy an idyllic place, with white sands and surrounded by palm trees. Swimming and snorkeling are popular activities in the crystal-clear, transparent water. Observe the fascinating species which can be seen in this underwater universe.

Distances: La Huerta is 10 minutes away, Puerto Francés 20 minutes and Playa Blanca 30 minutes. The boats are equipped with life jackets and dry towels. If you wish to snorkel, you can choose from a wide selection of equipment for all sizes.

Overnight at EL OTRO LADO PRIVATE RETREAT
(BLD)

DAY 8

Depart Panama

Enjoy a leisurely day before being transferred to Tocumen Airport approximately 5 hours prior to your flight departure. Return back home with loads of memories about Panama!

Trip Details

ARRIVAL

When you arrive in Panama the Tocumen Royal Salon (TRS) who will meet you at the airplane's gate will ask you for your passports, the immigration and customs forms you filled out on the plane, and your luggage stubs. Please have these documents handy. TRS will take care of the paperwork and retrieve your luggage while you relax at the VIP lounge. Once all is taken care of they will return your passports back to you and will escort you to the vehicle where our driver and your luggage will be waiting for you. Private transfer for approximately 35-45 minutes to your hotel in Panama City.

TRIP CLASSIFICATION

- Easy/moderate hiking 2-4 hours per day with rolling, slippery hills.
- Hotel or lodge accommodation comfortable

INCLUDED

- Accommodation
- Meals as specified in the itinerary (B - Breakfast, L - Lunch, D - Dinner)
- All land, air, and water transportation within Panama
- All airport/hotel transfers on scheduled arrival and departure dates
- Services on an in-bound land operator for airline re-confirmations and tour operations
- Guides' services and expenses (we try to assign the same local guide for each region)
- Park, museum, and related entrance fees
- Your stay at El Otro Lado includes daily breakfast, lunch, and dinner (beverages not included), boat transfer from Portobelo to the property, complimentary use of kayaks, standup paddle boards, snorkeling equipment, beach excursions, mangrove excursion on La Faraona, visit at Fort San Fernando, hike around the lake, a cultural presentation and a tour of the property. Optional privately guided tours and excursions, such as a percussion drum class, wood art workshop, mixology class, massage treatments, and birdwatching tour, are available on-site at additional cost.



NOT INCLUDED

- International airfare
- Meals not specified in the itinerary
- Alcoholic beverages
- Non-alcoholic beverages at El Otro Lado
- Personal equipment
- Extras in hotels (telephone calls, laundry, room service, Spa treatments, motorized tours)
- Gratuities

WHAT TO BRING

- Reusable water bottle
- Binoculars (preferably 7x35 or bigger)
- Day pack or dry sack
- Sun protection
- Hat
- Insect repellent
- Lightweight/quick dry cotton clothes
- Rain gear
- Swimwear
- Comfortable footwear (sandals, sneakers)
- Toiletries and personal medications
- Money in small denominations (US\$10 or US\$20 dollar bills are the best way to pay for local handcrafts; VISA or MASTER Card is widely accepted),

DISCLAIMER & NOTES

- Prices and itineraries are correct at the time of publishing, however, they are subject to change due to tidal/weather or local conditions, availability, or factors beyond our control.



Accommodations

LA COMPAÑÍA, PANAMA CITY



La Compañía Hotel (Hyatt Unbound Collection) is a historic gem nestled in Panama City's old town, Casco Antiguo. The hotel is on the site where La Compañía de Jesús (Company of Jesus) settled after the destruction of the original Panama City back in 1671. This beautiful hotel boasts 88 luxurious rooms, each uniquely designed to blend modern comfort with the rich heritage of the building. Three eras of Panama's history come to life at Hotel La Compañía. Each of its three wings restores a piece of the old town (Casco Antiguo) to the height of contemporary luxury. Choose a beautifully curated room in the French Colonial wing, built by Jesuit priests in 1739; the Spanish Colonial wing, dating back to 1688; or the Beaux-Arts rooms in the American wing, which dates back to 1904. Situated in the heart of the historic Casco Viejo district, La Compañía Hotel offers not only a comfortable stay but also easy access to the area's vibrant culture, nightlife, restaurants, and historical sites, making it a perfect destination for those seeking a captivating blend of history and modernity. The hotel has a Spa, swimming pool, fitness center, charming green courtyard, and five on-site restaurants, including 1739, El Santuario, American Bazaar, Luigi's, and Hari's.

Address: Calle 8va Este, Casco Viejo., Panama City, Panamá

Website: <https://www.hyatt.com/en-US/hotel/panama/hotel-la-compania/ptvub>

Phone: +(507) 302-8888

Check-in: 15:00 hrs

Check-out: 12:00 hrs

EL OTRO LADO PRIVATE RETREAT, PORTOBELO



El Otro Lado is a private retreat situated in an exceptional enclave of Portobelo Bay just across the bay of the main fishermen's village. As a member of the Design Hotels, you will find its characteristics in mixing design, art, photography, culture, nature, and luxury in a unique manner in order to offer its guests authentic, exclusive, and custom-made experiences. With about 2 hours driving from Panama City, and surrounded by the National Park of Portobelo, El Otro Lado is the perfect place to relax and disconnect while contemplating the exuberant vegetation. With views of the sea, its four exclusive houses of eclectic tropical design integrate simple details with traditional handicrafts of the Atlantic Coast. A streak of truly unforgettable experiences, El Otro Lado will take you to a harmonious and dreamlike place that is equipped with all the comforts of modern life. The luxurious rooms come with a fully equipped kitchen, room service, and many intelligent gadgets. The retreat has a beautiful infinite pool and is just a few minute's boat ride away from the main village of Portobelo within 20 minutes by boat you reach beautiful private beaches, as well as many optional activities and unique local dance presentations that make your stay unforgettable.

Address: Across the main town of Portobelo, Caribbean side of Panama

Website: www.elotrolado.com.pa

Phone: +(507) 202-0111

Check-in: 15:00 hrs

Check-out: 12:00 hrs