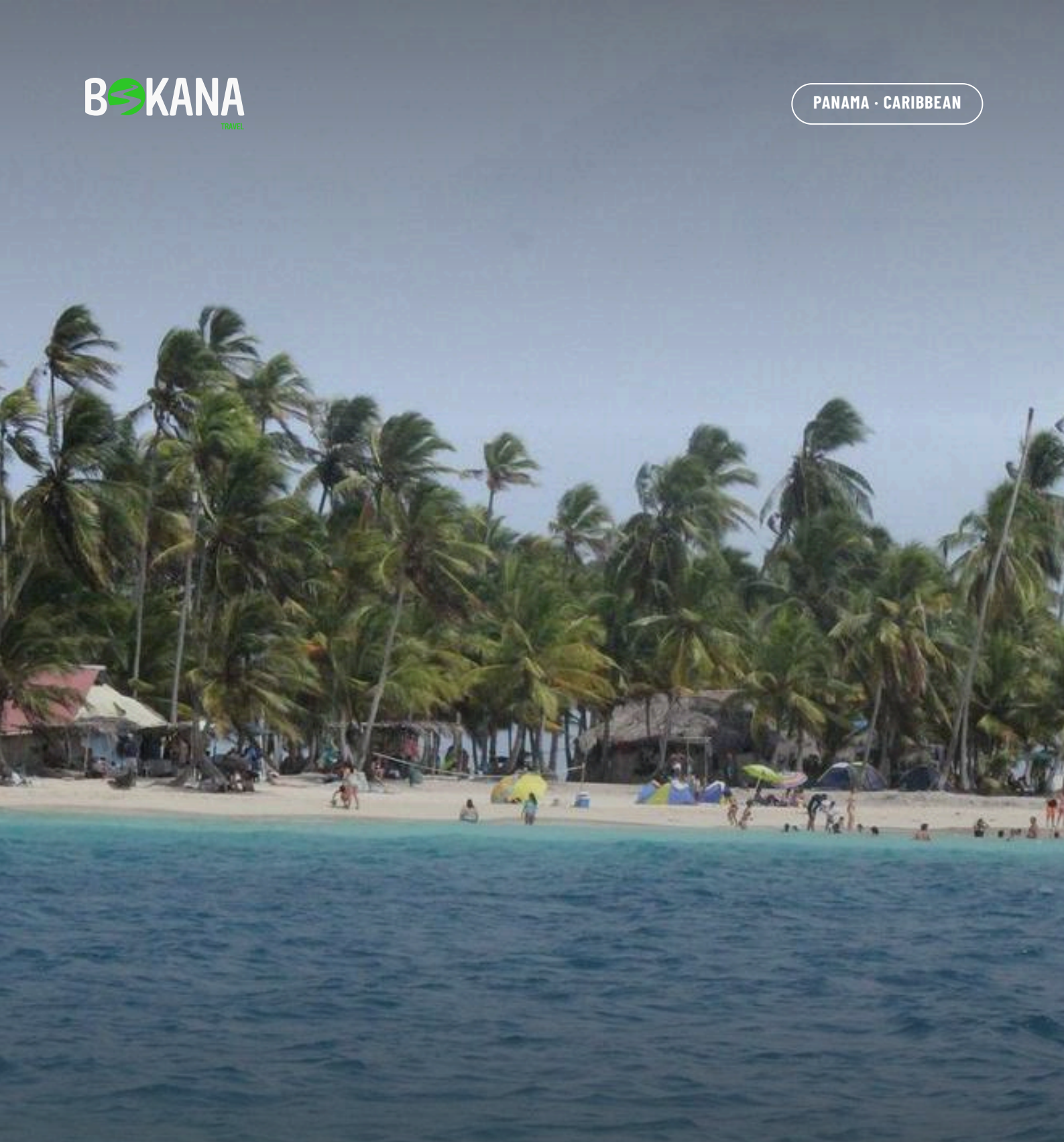
BOKANA TRAVEL

PANAMA · CARIBBEAN



TRAVEL GUIDE 2026

PANAMA & SAN BLAS

An hour and a half's flight brings you to a UNESCO-listed colonial quarter, a working Canal and the Guna Yala islands, governed by their own people.

Travel. Discover. **Connect.** bokanatravel.co

THE ESSENTIALS

FROM THE CANAL TO THE GUNA ISLANDS

Panama City is Copa's hub and one of the best-known layovers for travelers from Colombia, but it deserves more than a connection. The Casco Antiguo (old quarter), rebuilt after the first city was destroyed in 1671, forms a World Heritage Site together with the ruins of Panamá Viejo. A few minutes away, at the Miraflores Locks, you watch ships cross from one ocean to the other, and on the Amador Causeway stands the Biomuseo, Frank Gehry's only building in Latin America.

On the Caribbean side lies Guna Yala, formerly San Blas: a strip of coast and some 365 islands, about 50 of them inhabited, on the border with Colombia. It's an autonomous comarca (Indigenous territory) of the Guna people, who decide how tourism works on their land and charge an entry fee. You get there by 4x4 on the El Llano-Cartí road, then by boat. Lodging is simple, cabins and hammocks, and the reward is the quiet.

WHERE IT IS

Panama City, on the Pacific coast, and the Guna Yala comarca, on the eastern Caribbean coast next to the Colombian border.

GETTING THERE

Nonstop on Copa to Tocumen (PTY): about 1 h 45 min from Bogotá and around 1 h 30 min from Medellín and Cali. Several flights a day.

WEATHER

Tropical, averaging about 27 °C (81 °F) year-round: highs of 31 to 33 °C (88 to 91 °F) and lows of 21 to 23 °C (70 to 73 °F). Dry season from December to April; rain from May to November, heaviest in September and October.

DOCUMENTS

Colombian passport holders: valid passport (6 months recommended), return ticket and proof of funds of at least USD 500. No visa; tourist stays of up to 90 days.

MONEY

The balboa, pegged one-to-one to the US dollar. There are no balboa bills: people use US dollar bills along with local and US coins. Cards work well in the city; in Guna Yala almost everything is paid in cash, in small bills.

LANGUAGE

Spanish. In Guna Yala people speak the Guna language (dulegaya); many Guna also speak Spanish.

TIME ZONE

UTC-5 year-round, with no daylight saving time: the same time as Colombia.

PLUGS

Types A and B, 120 V and 60 Hz, same as in Colombia. You won't need an adapter.

DON'T MISS

HIGHLIGHTS

01
CASCO ANTIGUO

Plazas, churches, restored balconies and views of the skyscrapers across the bay. Walk it early or at sunset, when the heat eases, and finish on a rooftop looking at the modern city across the water.

02
MIRAFLORES LOCKS

The Panama Canal Authority's visitor center is open 8 a.m. to 6 p.m., with ticket sales until 5 p.m. It has viewing decks over the locks, a museum and an IMAX film. Ship transits vary with the vessel schedule.

03
AGUA CLARA AND THE EXPANDED CANAL

On the Caribbean side, near Colón, the Agua Clara visitor center shows the locks of the expanded Canal, used by Neopanamax ships. Worth the trip if you want to see both faces of the Canal.

04
BIOMUSEO AND THE AMADOR CAUSEWAY

Frank Gehry's biodiversity museum explains how the isthmus changed the planet by joining two continents. Open Tuesday to Sunday. Afterward, bike the causeway, with views of ships waiting their turn.

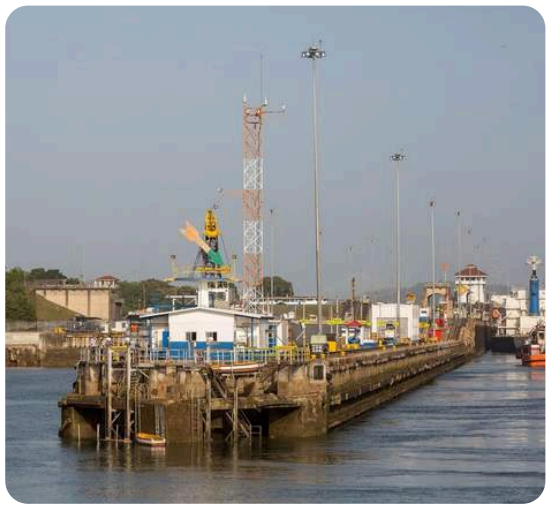
05
THE GUNA YALA ISLANDS

Small islands of white sand, palm trees and clear water, a short boat ride from Cartí. Stay at least one night: at sunrise and sunset, once the day-trippers leave, the islands go quiet.

06
MOLAS AND COMMUNITY LIFE

Molas, textile panels hand-sewn by Guna women, are the main income for many families. Visit an inhabited island with a local guide and buy directly from the artisans.





PLAN YOUR TRIP

WHEN TO GO

The dry season, December to April, brings sunny days in the city and is the most popular time to go. In Guna Yala it coincides with the trade winds: from January to March the sea gets choppy and long boat rides are rough. From May to November there's more rain, mostly afternoon downpours, and the Caribbean is usually calmer, with better visibility for snorkeling.

JAN	FEB	MAR	APR	MAY	JUN	JUL	AUG	SEP	OCT	NOV	DEC

BEST

JAN – MAR

The best time to go.

GOOD

APR · DEC

A good time, with a catch on weather or crowds.

RAINY

MAY – NOV

More rain: keep plans flexible.

WHAT YOU NEED TO TRAVEL

For Colombian passport holders: you can enter Panama as a tourist without a visa for up to 90 days. At immigration, officers may ask for your passport, an onward ticket and proof of funds. For Guna Yala, you also pay an entry fee to the Guna General Congress. Traveling on another passport? Requirements differ, so message us and we'll check yours.

- Valid Colombian passport. The Colombian Consulate in Panama calls for at least 6 months of validity; other sources say 3 months. Travel with 6 to avoid problems.
- Return ticket to Colombia or an onward ticket.
- Proof of funds: the law sets no amount, but the Colombian Consulate in Panama recommends being able to show at least USD 500 per person, in cash or by credit card.
- Agree to an interview with the immigration officer, biometric data collection and a baggage check, under Panama's Migration Law.
- Maximum tourist stay: 90 days. Tourists may not work in Panama.
- Minors traveling without one parent: a duly authenticated permit from the absent parent.
- Guna Yala: the Guna General Congress entry fee, reported at about USD 22 for foreigners, paid in cash at the checkpoint on the El Llano-Cartí road. Some islands charge a small separate landing fee.
- Bring your passport to Guna Yala: checkpoints in the comarca ask for documents.

Checked in September 2026 with Panama National Migration Service: requirements for tourists. Rules change, so confirm with the official source before you travel, or message us and we'll help.

WHAT WE'D TELL A FRIEND

BOKANA TIPS

1 Keep proof of funds handy

Carry your credit card with its statement or the cash equivalent of USD 500, your return ticket and your hotel address. At Tocumen they may ask for them without warning, especially in high season.

2 Book Guna Yala with a Guna operator

The Guna General Congress reserves tourism in the comarca for registered Guna operators and lodges. Book your 4x4, boat and lodging package with them; your money stays in the community and you avoid surprises at the checkpoints.

3 Predawn departure for Cartí

The 4x4s pick you up in the city around 5 a.m. to make the morning boats at Cartí port. The El Llano-Cartí road has sharp curves: if you get carsick, come prepared.

4 Photos only with permission

Always ask before photographing people; some communities charge per photo. Guna tourism rules ban photos of cemeteries and ritual sites without permission from local authorities.

5 Dress for the community

On inhabited islands, don't walk the streets in swimwear; Guna tourism rules prohibit it. Pack a T-shirt and shorts or a skirt for community visits.

6 Cash in small bills

In Guna Yala almost everything is paid in cash. Bring dollars in 1, 5, 10 and 20 bills for the entry fee, island landing fees, molas and drinks; getting change out there is hard.

7 Pack light, bring a dry bag

The boats are open and the waves splash. Bring a small backpack, a dry bag for your phone and documents, a flashlight, insect repellent and mineral sunscreen. Lodges are rustic, so bring whatever you'll need.

8 Miraflores first thing

Arrive at opening, 8 a.m., to beat the lines and the midday heat. Buy your ticket online on the Canal's official website. Pair it with the Casco Antiguo or the Amador Causeway the same day.

TRAVEL MINDFULLY

In Guna Yala, don't order or buy lobster between March 1 and May 31, the closed season the Guna people set for themselves in 2000 (Panama's national closed season, set by ARAP, runs until June 30). Don't touch or collect coral, shells or starfish either: Guna rules prohibit taking marine resources.

WHERE TO EAT

OUR RESTAURANT PICKS

Chosen for their food, their track record and what past diners say. Price: $ budget · $$ mid-range · $$$ splurge.

FONDA LO QUE HAY $$

Contemporary Panamanian, seafood · Casco Antiguo (Panama City)

★ **4.5** · 1,900 reviews on Google Maps

Chef José Olmedo Carles's fonda reworks everyday Panamanian food with seafood. It made the extended list of Latin America's 50 Best 2025, at No. 82.

What diners love: Nearly everyone recommends the tuna on toasted yuca. Reviewers praise the short, frequently changing menu, the cocktails and the laid-back mood.

Order: Toasted yuca with tuna

It fills up at dinner; book or arrive early. Closed Mondays.

CALETA (SOFITEL LEGEND CASCO VIEJO) $$$

Signature seafood, Panamanian produce · San Felipe, Casco Antiguo (Panama City)

★ **5.0** · 1,190 reviews on TripAdvisor

The Sofitel's waterfront restaurant in the Casco, with local ingredients and careful plating. It made the extended list of Latin America's 50 Best 2025.

What diners love: Reviewers highlight the sea view, the very attentive service and well-presented dishes with Panamanian flavors. Popular for celebrations.

Order: Catch of the day or the tasting menu

Book for dinner; weekday lunch is quieter.

CAFÉ COCA-COLA $

Traditional Panamanian fonda · Plaza Santa Ana, at the edge of the Casco (Panama City)

★ **4.3** · 1,900 reviews on Google Maps

Open since 1875, it's the oldest restaurant in the city. A good stop for a cheap meal and a look at everyday Panama a few blocks from the Casco.

What diners love: Reviewers love the nostalgic feel, the low prices and the generous portions. Locals and travelers come alike, especially for breakfast.

Order: Sancocho or breaded corvina (sea bass)

Open daily from 8 a.m.

EL TRAPICHE $

Classic Panamanian · Vía Argentina, El Cangrejo (Panama City)

★ **4.4** · 4,150 reviews on Google Maps

Serving traditional Panamanian food since 1983. It's the easiest way to try the country's classics in one place.

What diners love: Reviewers single out the ropa vieja (shredded beef), the sancocho and the traditional breakfasts, with a festive mood and fair prices. Some mention uneven service.

Order: Traditional breakfast with carimañolas (meat-filled yuca fritters)

The original location is on Vía Argentina. Opens at 7 a.m.

LA TAPA DEL COCO $$

Afro-Panamanian and Caribbean · Calle 68 Este, San Francisco (Panama City)

★ **4.9** · 1,050 reviews on TripAdvisor

Chef Isaac Villaverde revives the Afro-Antillean cooking of Colón, Bocas del Toro and Río Abajo. No. 61 on Latin America's 50 Best 2025.

What diners love: Reviewers praise the one pot colonense, a Colón-style one-pot rice dish, plus the curried clams and the salt cod fritters. A lively room and good value.

Order: One pot colonense

Book for dinner; it's outside the Casco, so take a taxi.

MAITO $$$

Signature Panamanian · Calle 50, Coco del Mar (Panama City)

★ **4.5** · 1,300 reviews on Google Maps

Mario Castrellón's restaurant, the first Central American entry on Latin America's 50 Best (2016) and No. 18 in 2025. It blends Afro, Indigenous, Asian and Creole roots.

What diners love: Reviewers highlight the tasting menu, the rice dishes and the cocktails made with local ingredients. Some felt the service was rushed.

Order: Tasting menu or one of the rice dishes

Book several days ahead. Closed Sundays.

Ratings and review counts checked in October 2026; they change over time. Review summaries are our own. Hours and prices vary, so check before you go.

LOCAL FLAVORS

WHAT TO EAT

PANAMANIAN SANCOCHO

Hen soup with ñame (a starchy yam) and culantro (a punchy cousin of cilantro), served with white rice. It's Panama's national dish, and you'll find it at almost any fonda (casual local eatery).

FISH WITH COCONUT RICE

In Guna Yala, meals revolve around the day's catch: fried or stewed fish, coconut rice and plantain.

CEVICHE AT THE MERCADO DE MARISCOS

Fish or shrimp cured in lime with onion and chili, served in little cups. The seafood market sits between the Casco Antiguo and the Cinta Costera, the waterfront boulevard.

HOJALDRAS

Fried dough, puffy and slightly sweet, a Panamanian breakfast staple with eggs or steak. Order them at a local fonda.



BOKANA
TRAVEL

PICTURE YOURSELF IN PANAMA & SAN BLAS? LET'S PLAN IT TOGETHER.

Join one of our groups on your own, or bring your people on a private trip.
Scan the code or message us.

Chat with us on WhatsApp

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