

# *Exploring Panama - The Land Between the Seas*

December 27, 2018 – January 3, 2019  
\$3,965 Per Person, Double Occupancy from Chicago





# Day by Day Itinerary

## Thursday, December 27 – CHICAGO / PANAMA CITY (I)

We depart Chicago's O'Hare Airport this afternoon by scheduled service of Copa Airlines to begin our journey south to Panama City, Panama. On arrival at Tocumen International Airport we'll meet our Tour Guide who will travel with us throughout our stay in Panama City, followed by a short drive to our downtown hotel. Cosmopolitan and compact, Panama's capital city spreads along the shores of a broad Pacific bay at the southern entrance to the Panama Canal. At a crossroads between two continents and two oceans, Panama City has served for centuries as a commercial route between the Old and New Worlds.

## Friday, December 28 – PANAMA CITY (B,L)

Today we explore Panama City, beginning our day with a visit to Panama Viejo where Pedro Arias de Avila founded the first Spanish City on August 15, 1519. We'll visit the Old Panama Museum tracing the nation's history from the arrival of Balboa until 1977 and climb the steps inside the Cathedral Metropolitana tower for a sweeping panoramic view. Then we'll travel to the Old Quarter of Casco Viejo, the most colorful and intriguing part of the city, full of historic buildings, quaint plazas, charming sidewalk cafes, and museums. After lunch, we'll travel to Balboa, named for Vasco Nunez de Balboa, the first Spaniard to see the Pacific Ocean. Here, we'll visit the Miraflores Locks Visitor Center to enjoy a presentation by the Panama Canal Authority on the history of the Panama Canal.

## Saturday, December 29 – PANAMA CITY (Panama Canal Tour) (B,L)

One of the great engineering feats of the 20th century, the Panama Canal accomplished what nature forgot to do; it connected the Atlantic to the Pacific and reduced the 12,000-mile sailing distance between New York and San Francisco by more than 7,000 miles. Without question, the best way to experience this magnificent wonder is from the deck of a transiting ship.

This morning we travel to the Flamenco Marina in Amador, where we'll board the Pacific Queen for a northbound journey through the Panama Canal. We'll begin by cruising under the Bridge of the Americas, which rises over 300 feet above sea level and reunites the land divided during construction of the canal forming a link on the Pan-American Highway. The first set of locks that we'll pass through are the Miraflores Locks, the tallest in the locks system due to the extreme tidal variation of the Pacific Ocean. In two steps, our boat will be raised 56 feet in the almost 1¼ mile long lock set, where the transition takes place from salt water to fresh water. From here we enter Lake Miraflores, an artificial body of fresh water that separates the Miraflores Locks and the Pedro Miguel Locks. Entering the Pedro Miguel Locks, our boat will be raised an additional 30 feet in one step. Then we'll cruise through an 8.5-mile-long portion of waterway named the Gaillard Cut. The narrowest section of the Panama Canal is

flanked by the backbone of the Continental Divide and with luck, we may see toucans and parrots bursting from the green forests that line the waterway. Our journey will come to an end as we cruise beneath the Centennial Bridge where we'll disembark near the town of Gamboa, before returning to Panama City.

## Sunday, December 30 – PANAMA CITY (El Valle de Anton) (B,L)

Today we travel to the picturesque mountain town of El Valle de Anton, known simply as El Valle. As we'll soon find out, El Valle has a geologically unique setting; it's nestled in the second largest volcano crater in the world. This 5 by 3-mile crater was created when a volcano blew up five million years ago. Look up - those "mountains" surrounding El Valle are the edges of the giant crater. El Valle's great variety of attractions includes an open-air Handicrafts Market. The Ngobe-Bugle Indians flock to the traditional market to sell crafts, including the figurines of ranas doradas, the endangered yellow-and-black poison dart frogs synonymous with El Valle. For the more adventurous travelers in our group, you'll have an opportunity to enjoy an *optional* exhilarating Canopy Zipline Adventure carrying you through the rainforest canopy and over a waterfall – a thrilling experience you're sure to remember forever.

## Monday, December 31 – PANAMA CITY (Colon & Embera Village) (B,L,HD)

This morning we leave Panama City and travel to the Agua Clara Visitor Center. Located near Colon City and the Atlantic entrance to the Panama Canal, the Visitor Center is a place where the Panama Canal has made it clear that both its legacy and its grandeur will continue to bear fruit for the world. With an unparalleled setting, the Agua Clara Visitor Center offers a breathtaking panoramic view. On one side we find Lake Gatun, where cargo ships and other vessels transit every day, while on the other side, we'll be amazed by the view of the expansion works. Afterward, we'll travel to El Corotu on the shores of Lake Madden. Here we'll embark aboard a motorized piragua, or dugout canoe, and travel up the Gatun River to an Embera indigenous village. The journey will take us through Chagres National Park, the largest of the National Parks protecting the Panama Canal Watershed. On our arrival, we'll be greeted with music and dancing followed by an introduction to the Embera customs. We'll also enjoy a traditional lunch, and you'll have an opportunity to be painted with the traditional jagua, a natural dye the Embera use to adorn their bodies.

Tonight, we'll ring in the New Year with a New Year's Eve dinner party at our hotel. Panama City is fast becoming a popular destination in Central America for welcoming the New Year. What makes celebrating NYE in Panama City unique is the amount of fireworks that go off, so be sure to find a good viewing spot and enjoy the spectacular show!

## Tuesday, January 1 – PANAMA CITY

### (Rainforest Boat Tour)

(B,L)

Happy New Year! The morning is at leisure to enjoy our hotel facilities. Early this afternoon we'll travel to the town of Gamboa, where the Chagres River meets the Panama Canal. Here we'll board an expedition boat and depart on an adventure that will take us on an in-depth exploration of Lake Gatun, formed to give way to the Panama Canal in 1914. With a surface of 163 square-miles, at the time of its creation Lake Gatun was the largest man-made lake in the world. The flow of all the rivers within the Panama Canal Watershed is contained in Lake Gatun to provide water for the operation of the lock system. Our expedition boat will allow for extraordinary views of the Panama Canal and closer access to the rainforest-covered islands, where we'll have an opportunity to spot iguana and three-toed sloth resting on tree branches, crocodile, osprey in the hunt for peacock bass, snail kite and keel-billed toucan, among other wildlife.



## Wednesday, January 2 – PANAMA CITY

### (La Chorrera Agrotourism)

(B,RD)

This morning we leave Panama City and travel to the town of La Chorrera. Located southwest of Panama City, La Chorrera's warm tropical climate and fertile lands make it one of the most productive agricultural regions in the country. We'll enjoy an introduction to Agrotourism, a different way to get to know Panama, with a visit to Verba Odrec. Founded in the 1970's by the Vergara Barrios family, we'll learn about their production of Golden Fresh Pineapples. A tour of the 395-acre plantation will offer a unique experience as we learn how to plant and pick pineapples, and how these delicious tropical fruits make their way to our supermarkets. Afterward, we'll return to Panama City for an afternoon at leisure, an opportunity to explore the Area Bancaria, El Cangrejo, and Bella Vista neighborhoods. Considered part of the city's "upscale zone," you'll find everything from shopping to trendy restaurants, and nightlife.

## Thursday, January 3 – PANAMA CITY / CHICAGO (B,L)

Today we travel to Amador Causeway where we'll visit Frank Gehry's famous Biodiversity Museum. The Biomuseo unites, in a unique way, science, art and design to tell the story of how Panama changed the natural world as we know it. Highlighting the natural and cultural history and emphasizing the role of humans in the 21st century, a visit to the Biomuseo will enrich our trip to Panama and is a must for everyone who visits the country. Afterward, we'll enjoy lunch on Amador Causeway, the second longest boardwalk in the city which has a varied selection of national and international restaurants. Then, as all good things must come to an end, we travel to Tocumen International Airport in preparation for our return journey home. No better time to celebrate a beginning of new friendships and reflect on memories of our *Exploring Panama – The Land Between the Seas* vacation to last a lifetime!

\*\*\* Welcome Home \*\*\*

**Visit myniu.com to make your reservation.**

#### **The Tour Price Includes:**

- Pre-trip assistance.
- Informational packet.
- Alumni staff assistance for a worry-free travel experience.
- Economy-class air transportation by scheduled service of Copa Airlines.
- Transportation by deluxe private motor coach with accompanying Tour Guide.
- First-class hotel accommodations.
- All meals as shown in the Day by Day Itinerary.
- Sightseeing as detailed in the Day by Day Itinerary including applicable entrance fees.
- Luggage handling and portage charges for one suitcase per person at the hotel.
- Taxes for included ground services, **and airline taxes and fuel surcharge of \$280 per person.**

**The Tour Price Does Not Include:** Items of a personal nature such as passport fees; gratuities to the motor coach driver(s), Tour Guide, and local guide(s); luggage handling at airports; personal and baggage insurance; meals other than those stated above; and optional group tours.

## TOUR CONDITIONS

**Tour Deposit and Payment:** Reservations may be made by check or credit card (Visa, MC, or Discover). Tour prices do increase every year and it is possible that increases could occur after the printing of this brochure in advance of your tour's departure.

**Tour Pricing:** This is a package tour in which land tour costs and special group airfares have been combined in the most advantageous way. Should you wish to make any deviation from the package tour by changing your departure and/or return dates, the advantages of the package tour price may be eliminated and additional charges will be assessed.

**Travel Insurance:** Travel insurance is very important and can be purchased through USI Travel Insurance Services. This insurance is designed to cover you and your trip investment from trip cancellation/interruption penalties and provide medical expense, medical evacuation, baggage and personal effects loss, and accidental death coverage, as well as emergency assistance. There is an advantage to early enrollment in this travel insurance program. Purchasing coverage within 21 days (Plus and Elite Options) of your initial trip deposit can make you eligible for 1) Pre-existing Medical Condition Exclusion Waiver, and 2) Optional Cancel for Any Reason Coverage (Elite Option). If you wish to take advantage of the special above provisions, you must enroll within 21 days of the date your initial trip deposit is received. Contact Travel Insurance Services at 1-800-937-1387.

## RESPONSIBILITY

**THE NORTHERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY ALUMNI ASSOCIATION** and/or any travel agency and/or supplier of services pursuant to or in connection with this itinerary shall not be responsible or become liable for any delay incurred by any person in connection with any means of transportation; nor for any loss, damage or injury to person or property by reason of any event beyond the control of any agency or supplier, or occurring without the fault or negligence of such agency or supplier. The right is reserved to substitute the airline to be used; the type of aircraft; and to alter the dates of the tour; the tour routing; or to cancel the trip if a minimum number of bookings is not reached for either the air or land portion of this itinerary. The right is also reserved to substitute hotels for other hotels in available categories. Further, the right is reserved to decline to accept or to retain at any time any person as a participant on any tour or to cancel any tour. No refund will be made for voluntary absence from the tour unless arrangements are made at the time of booking. The schedules contained herein are subject to change without notice. All rates are based on current Tariff and Exchange rates in effect at the time of the printing of this itinerary and are subject to adjustment without prior notification in the event of changes therein or in changes in the number of participants on which the rates are based. The carriers concerned are not to be held responsible for any act, omission or event during the time passengers are not on board their plane or conveyance. The passage contract in use by carrier concerned, when issued, shall constitute the sole contract between the carrier and the purchaser of this tour.

**For more information contact the NIU Alumni Association at 815-753-1512 or visit the Travel section at [myniu.com](http://myniu.com) to make your reservation.**

*\$100 of the trip cost is tax-deductible as a charitable donation.*

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