Panama City is the Pacific cruise port for passage through the canal. Ships anchor and tender passengers to Flamenco Marina. Bus and taxi tours depart from the marina.

Panama City was founded in 1519. It was on the trade route to transport gold and silver to Spain. The original Panama City was destroyed by pirate Henry Morgan on January 26, 1671. The ruins at that location are now called Panama Viejo. It's an important archeological and tourist site.

A new city was built on the peninsula in 1673. The second site for Panama City is called Casco Antiguo by locals. Visitors and travel websites call it Old Town, Casco Viejo, or San Felipe. It is a very popular tourist site.

The current location of Panama City has many high-rise buildings. It's the largest city, the capital of Panama, one of the most important cities in Central America, and an international banking and commerce center.

Unfortunately, Panama City has a high crime rate. This guide includes citations from the US Department of State Travel Advisory and the 2012 Crime Report. I used this data to assess risk and make travel plans. Please DO NOT consider MY BELIEFS on travel safety as a recommendation. Determine what is safe for you. Make your travel plans for your preferences and your risk tolerance.

There are many tour options from the port. The train ride along the canal, the small boat tour of the locks, and tours into the countryside get rave reviews. This guide describes tourist sites of Casco Viejo (Casco Antiguo), Panama City, Panama Viejo ruins, and Miraflores Locks. We took a 3-hour taxi tour. We loved the tour, felt safe, and found it very reasonably priced.

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CAVEAT

Information contained herein is believed to be accurate. PLEASE verify the information you use for your travel plans. Opinions expressed are my own. This port guide is protected by copyright law - see the last page of this guide for legal notices.

Tom Sheridan
Cruise Ship Tender Dock
Cruise ships anchor in the harbor and tender passengers in. The tender dock is shown on the map below. The “Old Town,” historic district is west of Center City. It is called Casco Viejo, Casco Antiguo, or San Felipe.

![Map of Panama City with Tender Dock, Bridge of the Americas, and Casco Viejo highlighted.]

**Tenders dock at Flamenco Marina (photo below).** The marina has a few restaurants and the Amador Duty-Free store. To view merchandise sold in the store, go to the link below and check on “photos”


You do NOT have to join Facebook to view this page.

![Photo of Flamenco Marina with Tender Dock, Amador Duty-Free Shopping, and Taxis & Hop On Bus highlighted.]

It's an upscale marina. The building is modern, clean, and attractive. There is an office to purchase tickets for the Hop-On bus. Taxis line up in the parking lot for private tours.
CRIME in Panama - US Dept of State Travel Advisory & 2012 Crime Report

See [http://travel.state.gov/travel/cis_pa_tw/cis/cis_994.html#safety](http://travel.state.gov/travel/cis_pa_tw/cis/cis_994.html#safety) for the Travel Advisory


Excerpts that caught my attention:

- The provinces of Panama, Colon, and Chiriqui with the largest cities had the highest overall crime rates. The entire city of Colon is a high crime area; travelers should use extreme caution anywhere in Colon.

- Crimes include shootings, rapes, armed robberies, muggings, purse-snatchings, thefts from locked autos by breaking windows, thefts of unsecured items, and petty theft. “Express kidnappings” are also a source of worry for personnel moving about the city. This is an incident where armed robbers approach the victim who is either on foot or stopped in a car and force the victim to accompany them to one ATM machine after another until the account is depleted. The victims are released a short time later, unharmed.

- The use of handguns and knives in the commission of street robberies is common; however, gratuitous violence is uncommon as long as the victim complies and hands over the property.

- Police continue to conduct vehicle check points at key intersections in the city in an effort to raise their visibility and hamper criminals' movements.

- The high crime areas in and around Panama City are El Chorrillo, San Miguel, Santa Ana, Cabo Verde, Curundu, Veracruz Beach, Santa Librada, Rio Abajo, San Miguelito, Panama Viejo, and the Madden Dam Overlook. Casco Viejo (old town) is a high crime area, particularly at night.

- We advise against using the local city buses called Diablos Rojos or "Red Devils." A modern public transit with new buses is being rolled out. It's premature to evaluate the security of the new transit system. Taxicabs are a better form of public transportation, especially radio-dispatched taxis.

Location of High Crime Areas Relative to Popular Panama City Area Tourist Sites

Miрафlores Locks is not a high crime area. My concern was around Panama City. The popular tourist site of Casco Viejo (Old Town) is a high crime area and there are four high crime areas between the ship's tender dock and Panama City. Panama Viejo ruins, at the site of the original Panama City, is also a high crime area. I used GPS coordinates for the center of the crime areas to determine proximity to my travel route.

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<td>N 8 53 34.15, W 79 36 55.90</td>
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Safe Travel Tips

Experts recommend dressing down to blend-in. Do NOT wear expensive looking jewelry, watches, or carry valuables. It's risky to wander around on your own in unfamiliar, high crime areas. Do NOT travel alone. Travel with, or stay near, a group. If possible, travel with a local guide. A guide familiar with the trouble spots, can recognize, and avoid problems. MY BELIEF is that the safest excursion to the Panama City areas is with a local guide either on a ship's excursion or a private tour in a taxi. We opted for a private taxi tour.
Safety of Excursions to Old Town Casco Viejo (Casco Antiguo) and the Panama City Area

Police are stationed around Old Town (Casco Viejo) when ships are in port. Our ship arrived on December 23, 2012. Police were everywhere. They stopped tourists from walking along the road into Old Town. The police said it was unsafe to walk, and had the tourists hire a cab into Old Town.

**My Belief = Ship's tours are the safest travel option.** Cruise lines are sophisticated companies. They are fully aware of risks and take every measure to protect passengers. The ship has a network of communication with their local agent in the port, the tour bus drivers, the guides on the buses, and police in the port city. Local guides on the buses are familiar with the areas. They can anticipate and avoid potential problems and they carry cell phones.

This doesn't mean there will never be a safety issue, but you can be assured that everything has, and will be done to anticipate, avoid, and respond to potential problems. We were on a Princess tour in Athens Greece when an unexpected demonstration began. Our tour guide was notified by cell phone. She changed the bus pick-up point for our group. The bus driver was in phone contact with the ship. He took a different route back to the port to avoid the demonstration. It was a non-event for us. We were safe.

**My Belief Regarding Taxicabs for Self-Guided Touring**

The US Department of State recommends taxicabs with radios as the safest form of transportation in Panama. Some cruisers take a cab to Old Town and walk the area on their own. We wanted to minimize walking because my wife has arthritic knees. **For us, a taxicab was the best option for self-guided touring.** We could see and photograph Old Town sites from the air-conditioned cab. We walked in the waterfront area near the bay. Our driver walked with us to explain the sites. I believe that walking with a taxi driver in Old Town is similar to the safety of walking with the guide on the ship's excursion bus.

**City-Sightseeing HopOn bus** has a ticket office at the Amador Duty-Free store. The HopOn bus drops passengers off near Old Town to walk the area. We did not want to walk near slums and stand on the street corner in high crime areas waiting for the next bus. The HopOn bus would have been OK to visit the locks and drive through the city. However, we did not judge it safe for us to exit the bus and explore the areas on our own. I wanted a local guide walking next to me.

City-Sightseeing is the largest HopOn bus company in the world. The tour is $ 29 USD per person and has two routes. Download the tour map shown below from [https://static.city-sightseeing.com/documents/tours/375.pdf](https://static.city-sightseeing.com/documents/tours/375.pdf)
The cruise ship's tender dock is stop number 6 shown on the lower left corner of the map above.
Note that the HopOn bus map shows 55 tourist sites.
Taxi Tour of Old Town (Casco Viejo) and the Panama City Area

A disadvantage of the ship's bus tour to Old Town is that you have to walk, single file, sweating in the hot sun, following your tour guide. A bus is too big to drive the narrow, crowded streets in Old Town.

A taxi is small enough to drive through narrow streets. Our driver stopped at sites, so I could step out of the air-conditioned cab to take a photo. He parked near the bay and walked with us to explain the sites.

Our taxi driver was Tomas Woodley email = tomas_woodley@yahoo.com phone = 6504-5213.

Tomas spoke excellent English. He knew all the tourist sites. He would stop at the best spots for photos and have me open the window or step out of the cab to take pictures. He recognized my wife's problem with arthritic knees and made sure she did not have to walk very far. Tomas is a charming man. He made us feel welcome in Panama, as if we were with an old friend. We talked and laughed, took a lot of photos, felt safe, and had a wonderful time. I highly recommend him for a taxi tour!!!

In 2012, taxi tour prices were about $ 55 for a 3-hour city area tour and $ 75 for a complete city tour, including Miraflores Locks, the Causeway, and Ancon Hill area. I describe our 3-hour tour in this guide. Tomas wanted to take us to more sites, but the battery on my camera ran out (drats, curses, & rats!). And we were tired, so he took us back to the dock.

Our tour route was from the ship's tender dock to “Old Town” (Casco Viejo - Casco-Antiguo), downtown Panama City, Panama Viejo (ruins at the original site of Panama City), and Miraflores Locks.

Map of Taxi Tour Route

I used these GPS coordinates in Google “Get Directions” to create the map above
A) Cruise tender dock GPS = N 8 54 41.66, W 79 31 10.17
B) Casco Viejo (Old Town) GPS = N 8 57 10.84, W 79 32 8.07
C) Panama Viejo GPS = N 9 0 27.03, W 79 29 6.59
D) Miraflores Locks GPS = N 8 59 50.25, W 79 35 28.38

For more guides, see www.TomsPortGuides.com
Using GPS Coordinates to Explore Tourist Areas

Throughout this guide, I use GPS coordinates to show the position of tourist sites, estimate travel distance and time, create maps, etc. In this section of the guide, I'll show some slick ways to use these coordinates on your home computer to study, and become familiar with, the tourist areas. Open this guide in one window on your computer and Google in a second window. Copy and paste the GPS coordinates into Google Maps.

Google shows the GPS coordinate location as a down pointing green arrow and places a red balloon at the nearest street address. The GPS green arrow is visible in street, terrain, satellite, and Google Earth map views. Even though there is no distance scale in terrain and Earth maps, you can still pinpoint exact locations.

If you use GPS coordinates in “Get Directions,” the locations shown are the closest street addresses (not the exact GPS location) with balloons lettered A, B, C, etc. I've created a walking tour map of Old Town.

Google has done a phenomenal job of creating 3-D images of tourist sites in Panama City. The images are only available in the Earth view. Use the GPS coordinates to explore tourist sites by rotating the view and changing the angle to look at the front of the building. You can also create some slick walking route maps using the Earth view. I have illustrated several examples in this guide.

Tourist Sites in Old Town. It's called Casco Antiguo by locals and Casco Viejo by tourists.

Casco Viejo was the second location for Panama City. The “original” Panama City was established in 1519 at the site we now know as Panama Viejo. It's about 10 km east of Casco Viejo. The first settlement was used to transport gold and silver back to Spain. The city was attacked by pirate Henry Morgan on January 26, 1671. He destroyed the city and stole everything of value he could transport.

In 1673, a new “Panama City” was built at Casco Viejo. Parts of some of the buildings were relocated from the ruins of the “original” Panama City to Casco Viejo.

A) Iglesia de La Merced GPS = N 8 57 9.83, W 79 32 12.73

In 1680, the church facade was disassembled, moved from Panama Viejo, and reassembled at its current location. Today, the church it is a museum. (Photo at right)

B) Plaza Herrera GPS = N 8 57 7.02, W 79 32 12.43

There's a section of the old wall of the city and a statue of General Tomás Herrera. He fought in the wars of independence from Spain and Colombia. (Photo Below)
C) Iglesia de San Jose (Altar de Oro)  
GPS = N 8 57 5.63, W 79 32 9.38

Saint Joseph Church has a gold leaf covered wood altar. (Photo at left). According to legend, a monk coated the gold altar with silver oxide to make it look black and unfinished when the Henry Morgan, the pirate, was looting Old Panama. The disguise worked.

In 1675, after Old Panama was destroyed, the altar was moved and the church was rebuilt in Casco Viejo.

The church is 18th Century Baroque style. It has many beautiful features, including a window made in Florence Italy.

**Saint Joseph Church** is at Avenue A and Calle 8A (Eighth Street).

D) Ruinas de la Compania de Jesus  
GPS = N 8 57 5.92, W 79 32 6.97

The Convent and Iglesia de la Compania de Jesus were originally built in Panama Viejo. See page 14 of this guide. They were rebuilt here, but destroyed by a fire and an earthquake. Only the shell of the building remains with an iron gate.

Our driver pulled over to the side of the road so I could step out of the air-conditioned cab to take a few photos.

On the next page, there is a 3-D Google Earth view of the tourist sites A through D described above.

Using GPS coordinates is an excellent way to explore the Old Town. You can rotate the image and change the angle to see the front entrance of the site and you can print the maps to create you personalized walking tour.

I almost like the 3-D Google Earth view better than my photos. I'd need a helicopter to get this perspective for my photos. I highly recommend using GPS coordinates to take a “virtual tour” of the area before you visit it.
The Canal Museum preserves, researches and disseminates information on the history of Panama Canal.

The main square in Casco Viejo is a memorial to independence from Spain and Colombia. It is known by three names; namely, Plaza Independencia, Plaza Mayor, and Plaza Catedral.

St. Francis of Assisi Church was damaged by fires in the 1700s. It was modernized in the early 1900s.

The tourist sites designated as K, L, M, and N (below) are must visit areas.

**E) Museo del Canal Interocéanico**  
GPS = N 8 57 9.22, W 79 32 6.45  
The Canal Museum preserves, researches and disseminates information on the history of Panama Canal.

**F) Plaza Catedral o Independencia**  
GPS = N 8 57 11.32, W 79 32 7.70  
The main square in Casco Viejo is a memorial to independence from Spain and Colombia. It is known by three names; namely, Plaza Independencia, Plaza Mayor, and Plaza Catedral.

**G) Presidencia de la República**  
GPS = N 8 57 12.82, W 79 32 4.15  

**H) Plaza Bolivar**  
GPS = N 8 57 11.03, W 79 32 0.07  

**I) Iglesia Santa Ana**  
GPS = N 8 57 10.14, W 79 31 59.10  

**J) Iglesia de San Francisco**  
GPS = N 8 57 11.46, W 79 31 58.71  
St. Francis of Assisi Church was damaged by fires in the 1700s. It was modernized in the early 1900s.

**K) Paseo Esteban Huertas**  
GPS = N 8 57 2.82, W 79 31 54.75  
This passageway is named after General Esteban Huertas. He played a key role in establishing independence of Panama from Colombia. This is a must visit location. It has a bougainvillea canopy where Kuna women sell handicrafts. The views and photo opportunities are outstanding of the Panama high-rise buildings, the Bridge of the Americas, tenements of El Chorrillo, and Panama Bay.

**L) Las Bovedas**  
GPS = N 8 56 58.48, W 79 31 54.63  
The arched chambers in the wall of Plaza Francia were used as battlements and dungeons. Today, they are used for art exhibits and a French restaurant called Las Bóvedas.

**M) Obelisk**  
GPS = N 8 56 58.46, W 79 31 55.81  

**N) Plaza de Francia**  
GPS = N 8 57 0.85, W 79 31 56.44  
Plaza de Francia has an obelisk with a rooster at the top, a symbol of the French nation. Twelve marble slabs describe the history of the Panama Canal. There are busts of Panamanian engineer Pero J. Sosa and French citizens prominent in the construction of the Canal. This monument honors the 22,000 workers and engineers who died (due to Yellow Fever & Malaria) working on the canal. You will also find the French Embassy, Anita Villalaz Theatre, and the National Institute of Culture Building at this Plaza.
This map was created by entering GPS coordinates into Google Maps “Get Directions” and clicking on the walking man icon.
The Earth view map below shows the most important area of Old Town to explore on foot.

This was the center of Panama City in the 1700s. Our cab driver parked and walked with us pointing out the sites. We walked along Paseo Esteban Huertas under the bougainvillea canopy to photograph high-rise buildings. “Revolution Tower” is the “glass corkscrew” with a white top in the center of the photo below.

We walked along Las Bovedas to photograph the Bridge of the Americas and ships in the harbor.

Plaza de Francia offers photo opportunities of the canal memorial and many scenic buildings.

Photos above: Rooster at top of Obelisk and whimsical metal art in the plaza.
Sources of Information on Casco Viejo (Old Town)

http://caanpa.blogspot.com/

http://www.cascoviejo.org/content/?cid=10&cat1=57&cat2=0&cat3=0&level=1&id=57

http://es.wikipedia.org/wiki/Casco_Antiguo_de_Panam%C3%A1

For a 360° tour, see http://www.seeit360.com/360-virtual-tours/plaza-bol%C3%ADvar-casco-antiguo-panama

Panama Viejo  GPS = N 9 0 27.03, W 79 29 6.59

Panama Viejo is the ruins of the original Panama City established in 1519. It's 10 km east of Casco Viejo.

For an overview and description of both Panama Viejo and Casco Viejo, see:

Archaeological Site of Panamá Viejo and Historic District of Panamá
UNESCO website = http://whc.unesco.org/en/list/790/

There is an excellent archeological description of Panama Viejo ruins at:

The Panama Viejo Archeological Organization
http://www.panamaviejo.org/monumentos/default.html

NOTE: Panama Viejo is listed by the US Department of State as a high crime area. The ruins cover a large area. We felt safe in the cab. Our driver pointed out important ruins and stopped for photos. You can get remarkably good photos from the side of the road using a 5x zoom lens.

This list of ruins sites shows GPS coordinates. The letters A, B, C, etc, appear on the driving tour map.

A) Ruins next to Panama Viejo Museum
GPS = N 9 0 13.63, W 79 29 38.87

B) Ruins next to the road   GPS = N 9 0 20.56, W 79 29 24.63
C) Convento de Las Monjas de la Conception  GPS =  N 9° 22.22, W 79° 29.1582

Ruins of the Convent of the Conception are well preserved with the rest of the historic monuments of Panama Viejo. According to John B. Sosa, the Convent of the Nuns became a sumptuous building between recollection and devotion dedicated to the city for many concurrent and favorable circumstances.

Note: this is not my photo. My picture was taken from the side of the road and does not show the front of the building.

D) Convento de la Compania de Jesus  
GPS =  N 9° 22.48, W 79° 29.1339

This is “original” location of the convent and church. When the “original” Panama City was abandoned, a new church and convent were built in Casco Viejo. It’s the church with the iron gate across the front of the structure shown on page 9 of this guide.

The photo below was taken from the taxicab at the side of the road with the lens at 5x zoom.

E) Cathedral Tower  GPS =  N 9° 23.34, W 79° 29.1049

According to historians, the present cathedral was the third (or maybe fourth) church on that site. The present cathedral was built in 1619-1626. The cathedral tower is the most important architectural element in the area called “Plaza Mayor”.
Our taxi tour was an excellent way to see the ruins. Our driver called our attention to points of interest and stopped for me to take photos. As you can see in the map below, all of these ruins are close to the road.
This aerial photo (below) shows the driving route along the Panama Viejo ruins.

Convento de la Compania de Jesus is not visible in this photo; it's blocked by the trees.
Revolution Tower

GPS = N 8 58 43.83, W 79 31 0.08

The Revolution Tower is an unforgettable icon in the heart of Panama City's Banking and Business district. This commercial tower offers units of 2000 to 6500 square meters, with private, secure working areas and superb views of the ocean and glittering city lights. It's 233 meters high. (Photo left)

We drove through Panama City on our way to Panama Viejo. Tomas stopped the cab in a McDonalds parking lot so I could take the photo. Then he drove us to the ruins.

When we left the ruins, we drove back through the city to Miraflores Locks.

Miraflores Locks

GPS = N 8 59 50.25, W 79 35 28.38

Our driver dropped us off at the front door so we wouldn't have to walk far. He told us to buy tickets to see the boats, not to visit the museum. The tickets were $5 USD per person. Tomas parked the cab and met us inside to point out areas of interest. We took the elevator to the top floor. It was crowded, but we got to see everything and take a few photos before my camera battery ran out.

The photos below show ships entering the locks. Note the two gates that seal the lock in the photo at right.

The photo below shows a 4-mast sailboat leaving the locks. The “mule” trains guide vessels via cables.
Passage Through the Panama Canal

We sailed from Panama City on the Coral Princess on December 24, 2012. The ship raised the anchor around 5 AM. It passed under the Bridge of the Americas around 6 AM. We were fortunate to have Bill Fall as our Port Lecturer. He is extremely knowledgeable, an excellent speaker, and very personable. Bill narrated our passage through the locks on the ship's PA system. He called our attention to what we should look for, where to stand for photos, and explained the passage in great detail.

Here are the coordinates to map the passage:

A) Panama CityTender Dock  GPS = N 8 54 41.66, W 79 31 10.16
B) Bridge of the Americas  GPS = N 8 56 40.86, W 79 33 39.81
C) Miraflores Locks  GPS = N 8 59 49.78, W 79 35 28.26
D) Pedro Miquel Locks  GPS = N 9 1 4.70, W 79 36 45.82
F) Colon  GPS = N 9 21 31.97, W 79 53 57.07

The map below shows the canal passage as red dots. The road is shown as a blue line. It's 110 km and a 2 hour drive from Panama City to Colon.
The **photo above** is a Google satellite view of the Miraflores Locks at 200-foot map scale. Google Earth View is also quite good. Set the map scale to the resolution you prefer and use your mouse to “sail” down the Panama Canal. It's an easy and fun way to preview your cruise. If you use “Screen Capture” software, you can integrate Google aerial photos with your pictures to create a slide show of your vacation.

**An Educational, Enjoyable, Cruise Experience**

Coral Princess does a superb job on the Panama Canal cruise. Port Lecturer Bill Fall provides an in-depth introduction to the canal, the amazing engineering accomplishment, and details on every aspect of it. His lectures are complimented by a movie on the canal. The ship offers a variety of excursions from Panama City port to see the canal from different perspectives. There are bus excursions to the locks, train rides along the canal, and small boat excursions into the locks. These excursions get rave reviews from passengers.

The day before we entered the canal, the captain explained timing for our sailing. Many of us got up early to see the Bridge of the Americas and entrance of our ship into the locks. Bill Fall narrated what was happening and provided tips on where to look and what to photograph. It was a great cruise experience.
Bridge of the Americas

Extra Lookouts to “Help” our Captain

Men in rowboats connect lines to the ships

The lines are pulled by trains “mules”

Tug boats guide container ships into the locks

A tug boat stays behind the ship in the lock

Panama-03-26-2013
User Feedback Is Welcome

Goal
My guides are designed to help you plan a great cruise vacation by providing information such as where the ship docks, location of tourist sites, public transit, walking tour maps, things to see and do, travel issues unique to the port, etc. Knowledge of ports is important when planning shore excursions because you have to make many decisions and commitments long before your ship docks. I believe the information in this guide is accurate, however you are responsible to verify accuracy of the information that you use to plan your vacation.

Information on cruise ports frequently changes such as bus routes, admission fees to sites, rental car locations, etc. Cruise Critic is the best source for up-to-date, detailed information on travel details for shore excursions, reviews of cruise ships, etc. There are many knowledgeable people on Cruise Critic who are willing to share their expertise and travel experience. I highly recommend www.CruiseCritic.com; it's free to join.

Why feedback is important
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Tom Sheridan

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