



## Panama & Costa Rica

### Active Immerse Yourself Tour | 17 Days | Physical Level 2

San Jose – Arenal – Monteverde – Panama City – Gamboa – Bocas Del Toro

Explore cloud forests, indulge in coffee and chocolate, lounge on Caribbean beaches and cruise on the world-famous Panama Canal on this nature-filled adventure through Costa Rica and Panama.

- See the impressive Arenal Volcano
- Explore Monteverde Cloud Forest
- Taste the local coffee and chocolate
- Meet the Embera tribe of Panama
- Relax in laid back Bocas del Toro
- Discover the impressive Panama Canal



#### Panama & Costa Rica inclusions:

- Return international economy flights, taxes and current fuel surcharges (unless a land only option is selected)
- All accommodation
- Meals as stated
- Touring with guides and entrance fees
- All transportation and transfers
- English speaking Local Guides

*The only thing you may have to pay for are personal expenditure e.g. meals, drinks, visas, optional excursions or shows, insurance of any kind, customary tipping, early check in or late checkout and other items not specified on the itinerary*

#### Central America Active Immerse Yourself Tours:

Active tours combine the key sights with more energetic pursuits such as hiking and cycling. This allows us to explore more and discover the destination in greater depth. These tours are designed to provide a wide range of activities to ensure a varied and culturally immersive experience. These tours include:

- Cycling or walking through classic sites
- Unique cultural experiences and encounters
- Off the beaten track destinations
- More evenings at leisure for independent exploration

#### Physical Level 2:

All our tours feature a physical rating to help you select the right holiday for you. To travel on any of our tours requires unaided mobility and the ability to stroll around the sights. 'Panama & Costa Rica' is rated 2 on the physical level scale. A good level of fitness is required as you need to be comfortable walking for 2-3 hours and covering longer distances.

- There is a lot of walking on this tour, particularly through national parks and rainforest. Whilst walkways as well maintained you will spend a lot of time on your feet, and there will be some walking on an incline.
- You will be required, on several occasions, to climb on and off boats without assistance.

Of course, our Local Guides will always endeavour to provide the highest level of service and assistance; however, they cannot be expected to cater for customers who are unfit to complete the itinerary.

#### Joining Your Tour

The tour is 17 days in duration including international flights. Travellers booked on 'Land Only', the price includes your arrival/departure airport transfers if arriving/departing on the start and conclusion date of your tour. Please advise your international flight times to reservations. Join the tour on Day 1 in San Jose and end the tour on Day 15 in Panama City. Please refer to your final itinerary for more specific meeting instructions pertaining to your departure.

## Itinerary – Panama & Costa Rica

### Days 1: Fly to San Jose

Meals included: Dinner

Fly to San José, Costa Rica's vibrant, charming capital, arriving the same day due to crossing the International Date Line. You will be met at the airport and transferred approximately 40 minutes to your hotel. Enjoy the rest of the evening at leisure before a welcome dinner tonight.

#### Destination Information

**San Jose** – Located in the centre of the country, San Jose is the most important political, economic and social centre of the Costa Rican territory. It can be considered, almost in its totality, to have a complete European cultural influence.

### Day 2: San Jose to Arenal

Meals included: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Embark on a tour all about delicious chocolate! You will drive about 2 hours to visit the Tirimbina Cacao Plantation and learn about the role of cacao in Pre-Colombian Central America and its importance to Costa Rica today. Accompanied by your guide, cross a suspended bridge and walk through the forest of the Tirimbina, before reaching a small plantation of cacao tiers. Tuck into a few samples before transferring 2 hours by road to the Arenal area, named for the magnificent Arenal Volcano. Take a relaxed soak in the thermal baths spa, 'Ecotermas' before dinner.

#### Destination Information

**Arenal** – The lowlands of the north and the Arenal Volcano area are the most popular tourist destinations in Costa Rica. Before 2010, the Arenal Volcano was one of the ten most active volcanoes in the world and it was a truly majestic sight, expelling rocks and ashes from its summit daily. Today, there are no lava eruptions at the moment, but you can still see the smoke or ash that is thrown off the top of the volcano and enjoy some of the many hot springs that surround this majestic active volcano.

### Day 3: Explore Arenal

Meals included: Breakfast, Lunch

In the shadow of Arenal, the Mystic Hanging Bridges Park gives a whole new perspective on the rainforest with a series of paths and suspension bridges at canopy level. As you walk through the trees for approximately 3km you'll be able to spot all sorts of wildlife, birds, flowers and vegetation. Spend the morning walking the easy trails and taking in your beautiful surroundings. The rest of the day is at leisure.



#### Destination Information

**Mistico Park** – Located within the Volcano Arenal National Park, Mistico Park is formed of a series of suspension bridges and trails that run for 3 kilometres through a private rainforest reserve. The forest here is transitional, running from tropical into wet forest, making it extremely high in biodiversity. There are 15 bridges in total, 6 of which are hanging (will move under foot) – from many of them you will get wonderful views of the volcano and Lake Arenal.

#### Day 4: Arenal to Monteverde

Meals included: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Depart Arenal and voyage 45 minutes by boat across Arenal Lake, to the little town of Rio Chiquito. The views of the volcano as you cruise will be fantastic. Transfer 3 hours 40 minutes, the rest of the way to Monteverde by road and enjoy a tour of the Don Juan coffee estate. Learn all about the cultivating and processing of coffee beans, chocolate and sugarcane, before a tasting of the estate's wares. Arrive at your hotel and enjoy the evening at leisure.



##### Destination Information

**Monteverde** – Is a place of cloud forests and coffee plantations, monkeys, mist, and friendly locals. Due to its higher altitude Monteverde is privileged to receive a steady supply of clouds and the life-giving moisture that they contain. This helps support a complex and expansive ecosystem, one that harbours over 100 species of mammals, 400 species of birds, and thousands of insect species and varieties of plants.

#### Day 5: Monteverde Cloud Forest

Meals included: Breakfast, Dinner

Spend the day exploring the natural wonders of the Monteverde Cloud Forest Reserve. This reserve covers 26000 acres of virgin forest, which a huge amount of Costa Rica's native flora and fauna call home. The reserve shelters jaguars, pumas and over 450 species of bird, including the quetzal. After lunch, spend some time at Renario, an education centre and zoological park, home to native frogs, toads and amphibians.

##### Destination Information

**Monteverde Cloud Forest Reserve** – One of the most famous conservation areas in Central America, Monteverde consists of 26,000 acres of cloud forest, 90% of which is virgin. At 1,440 metres above sea level, the area is cloud forest rather than rainforest and within the reserve there are 2,500 plant species, 100 mammal species, 400 bird species and 120 reptilian and amphibian species. This is the best place to try and spot the resplendent quetzal, a beautiful bird native to Central America.

#### Day 6: Monteverde to Panama City

Meals included: Breakfast, Dinner

Return to San Jose, 3 hours 30 minute drive, and fly to Panama's capital, Panama city. The flight is approximately 1 hour. Panama City is considered Central America's most cosmopolitan city thanks to the international importance of the Panama Canal. On arrival, transfer 40 minutes to your hotel.

##### Destination Information

**Panama City** – It is the largest city and the first most populated in the country. As the capital of the republic, it houses the headquarters of the National Government, along with the other governmental institutions. In the course of Panama City's history, spanning 5 centuries, it has influenced society, culture, literature, art, architecture, religion and the way of dressing.

## Day 7: Discover Panama City

Meals included: Breakfast, Lunch

Discover more about Panama City's roots at Panama Vieja – founded in 1515, it was the first permanent European settlement on the Pacific. Visit Casco Antiguo and its open air museum of ruins; amongst the best preserved are the Cathedral de 'Nuestra Senora de la Asuncion', and the church and convent of Santo Domingo. Continue on to Miraflores Locks on the Panama Canal. Spend some time in the visitor centre where you can learn all about the canal's construction and its international importance, if you are lucky you will also see a ship passing through the locks. Today's sightseeing involves 2 hours on foot.

### Destination Information

**Miraflores Locks** – The Panama Canal locks, which lifts the ships 25.9 metres to the highest point of the channel at Gatun Lake, and then lowers them, were once one of the largest engineering works of its time. There was no other construction in reinforced concrete comparable in size until the construction of the Hoover Dam in the 1930s.

## Day 8: Visit Colon

Meals included: Breakfast, Lunch

Rise early to hop on a train for about an hour and travel to the Caribbean city of Colon, which sits on the opposite end of the Panama Canal to Panama city. The train runs along the canal, past locks, through jungle and across Gatun Lake, giving the perfect overview of this incredible feat of engineering. Stop by the new Aguaclara Locks and the visitor centre before visiting the colourful fishing village of Portobello. Walk through the town and ancient Spanish fortresses, visit the San Felipe Church, home of the famous Black Christ of Portobello. Touring today will last until the late afternoon.



### Destination Information

**Aguaclara Visitor center** – Here you can see the impressive technology and colossal machinery of the locks. On one side, you'll see the famous Gatun Lake, where cargo ships transit every day, while on the other side you get a full view of the new expanded locks operating since 2016.

**Portobello** - Portobello means "beautiful port" and during the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries was the richest port, since all the gold of every southern colony was deposit in this port.

## Day 9: Anton Valley

Meals included: Breakfast, Lunch

Travel out of the city, 2 hours drive, up to the village of El Valle de Anton (Anton Valley). Sat in the caldera of the dormant El Valle volcano, the village is surrounded by some beautiful nature, and you'll visit the lovely Chorro del Macho waterfall and learn the folktale of La India Dormida Mountain. Visit El Nispero, a zoological (animal rescue) park where some endemic species are taken care of, including the endangered Golden frog. Return to Panama city late in the afternoon where the rest of your afternoon is at leisure.

### Destination Information

**Anton Valley** – located in the province of Coclé at 600 meters about the sea level, geologists came to the conclusion that the Anton Valley is the crater of an inactive volcano, probably the largest in the world currently inhabited.



**Day 10: Embera community**

Meals included: Breakfast, Lunch

Travel deep into the Panamanian rainforest to visit a traditional village of the Embera people. Approximately 1 hour by road followed by a 30 minute boat ride, you'll be welcomed to the village with traditional music. Spend some time learning about this rainforest community's way of life, their history and their culture. You'll also share lunch with the villagers and be able to purchase handicrafts made by them. You will be transferred back to your hotel for the evening at leisure.


**Destination Information**

**Embera Indians** – The tribe came originally from the province of Darien in the south of the country resettled in the nearby Chagre River National Park in the 1970s. Their lives are based on fishing, hunting, farming and, until recently, artisan pottery. The Embera's relationship with tourists has only recently been established and its welcome is truly authentic.

**Day 11: Panama City to Gamboa Rainforest**

Meals included: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

After breakfast, transfer about an hour to the pier, board your boat and cruise the waters of Lake Gatun, a major part of the Panama Canal. The 25 minute ride allows you to admire the beauty of the surrounding rainforest and the machinery of the canal itself. Arrive at your resort at the heart of nature with several wildlife exhibits and a large botanical garden. After lunch, explore the virgin rainforest of Gamboa, wandering the shady forest floor before flying through the canopy on an aerial tram. The 1 hour 30 minute tour will have you arrive from your cable car to an observation tower that offers you one of the most spectacular views in all of Panama. On the tour you may be lucky enough to spot colourful birds and butterflies, sloths and capuchin monkeys.

**Destination Information**

**Gamboa Rainforest** – The forest area is a sanctuary for the native flora and fauna and wildlife including monkeys, toucans, alligators and turtles.

**Day 12: Gamboa Rainforest to Bocas del Toro**

Meals included: Breakfast, Dinner

Transfer 1 hour back to Panama City airport and board your flight to the relaxed and friendly Caribbean beach town of Bocas del Toro. Transfer 15 minutes to your hotel, where the rest of the day is at your leisure.


**Destination Information**

**Bocas del Toro** – A stunning archipelago of beaches and lush tropical vegetation packed with historical and cultural traditions.

**Day 13: Relax in Bocas del Toro**

Meals included: Breakfast

Today is at leisure to explore or relax as you wish. Your guide will be able to suggest activities (weather dependant) such as bird watching, forest trekking, snorkelling and other excursions which can be arranged and paid for locally.

**Day 14: Bocas del Toro to Panama City**

Meals included: Breakfast, Dinner

The morning is at leisure until your return flight to Panama City. This evening, enjoy a farewell meal.

**Day 15-17: Depart Panama City**

Meals included: Breakfast

Today you will transfer approximately 1 hour to the airport according to your international flight to Australia. Arriving home in 2 days due to crossing the International Date Line once again.

## Panama & Costa Rica Travel Information

### Visas

Australian passport holders currently do not require a visa to enter Costa Rica and Panama. Your passport needs to be valid for at least six months beyond your intended return date to Australia. Wendy Wu Tours does not provide a visa service for Worldwide tours. To stay up to date with the latest visa requirements, visit [www.smartraveller.gov.au](http://www.smartraveller.gov.au) It is a condition of booking with us that you take out suitable travel insurance.

### Insurance

It is a condition of booking with us that you take out suitable travel insurance. You must provide us with the name of your insurer, policy number and their 24-hour emergency contact number when you book with us or as soon as possible thereafter. These details will be available to your local guides should they be required. Wendy Wu Tours will not be liable for any costs incurred by you due to your failure to take out suitable travel insurance from the date of booking.

### Eating in Costa Rica and Panama

Food in Costa Rica and Panama is a combination of influences of both the colonial Spanish and the Afro-Caribbean. Staple foods include rice and black beans, which are served at most meals, alongside plantain and grilled or sautéed meat or fish.

Typical breakfasts include Gallo Pinto – rice and beans stir-fried together and served with eggs and sour cream or cheese, whilst a typical lunch, casado, is rice and beans (not mixed) with meat and a salad. Both are delicious and seasoned beautifully with local herbs and vegetables. The indigenous people of the Central American region ate corn as a large part of their diet, and it still features today. Tamales, for example, were introduced by the Aztecs and are still eaten at celebrations, especially Christmas. These are a dough of cornmeal, lard and spices stuffed with meat, rice and vegetables and steamed in a leaf. Another food not too miss are empanadas, a delicious snack. Similar to a Cornish pasty but with a corn-based dough, these are filled with beef, chicken, cheese or fruit.

Whilst we strongly recommend trying as many local dishes as possible, Costa Rica and Panama offer a wide range of international foods.

### Accommodation

Your accommodation is selected for convenience of location, comfort or character, and can range from business hotels to rainforest lodges. Hotels are generally rated as local three to four-star standard, but please note that there is no international classification system for hotels and differences in facilities and quality may exist between the Australia and Central America. All group tour hotels have private bathroom facilities and air conditioning where needed. If you experience any difficulty, please speak to your Local Guide. Rest assure that all hotels used by Wendy Wu Tours are regularly inspected by our staff and our partners to ensure that standards meet your needs.



## Transport

**Coaches:** Coaches with air conditioning are used on our group tours for city short excursions to the countryside and longer transfers between destinations. Roads in Central America have generally been improved over recent years, but please be aware traffic and/or weather conditions may extend driving times. There may be sections of road where the surface may be comparatively bumpy but our drivers will do their utmost to lessen the impact.

**Planes:** Internal flights are based on economy class, with reputable airlines.

## Clothing

On this tour, you will be travelling through various regions of Costa Rica and Panama with quite diverse climates especially in whilst in the cloud forests of Arenal and Monte Verde. The climate in Panama can be quite tropical due to its position between the Pacific Ocean and Caribbean Sea. It is recommended to bring lots of layers including the following: T Shirts made of breathable materials, hiking pants, with the option to turn into a short pant (rain pants optional), a fleece jacket for colder parts and the evenings and a waterproof Jacket as shell layer or a light rain jacket, a scarf and hat, warm socks. The climate in Cartagena is tropical, humid and warm we recommend to, wear light weight breathable clothing. Sensible walking shoes and a small back pack that fits into your main hand luggage to carry your daily essentials.

## Souvenirs

There are plenty of interesting bits and pieces to buy as souvenirs in Central America, such as indigenous textiles, handicrafts and artworks, coffee and chocolate. There will be some opportunities during your tour to pick up souvenirs.

## Group Size

Most of our groups consist of 10 travellers or more and will be accompanied by Local Guides. There will usually be no more than 28 travellers in each group.

All our departures are guaranteed to operate with a minimum of 8 travellers booked (unless cancelled due to factors beyond our control). However, at our discretion we may operate departures with a smaller group size as we try to operate advertised departures wherever it is viable to do so.

## Tipping Policy

Local tipping is customary in South & Central America. However, this can often lead to awkwardness in knowing when it is appropriate to tip and how much. For your convenience, with years of experience in providing the best customer service, Wendy Wu Tours operates a kitty system on your Group Tour so your Local Guide will look after this aspect of the trip for you. This ensures the amounts paid are reasonable for you and still fair to the local people. The suggested total amount is specified for each Group Tour and will be advised again on your final documentation. Tipping is paid in USD or other local currencies if specified. Any additional tipping you feel is appropriate is welcomed at your discretion.

### After your booking

Once you have booked with Wendy Wu Tours, you will receive a confirmation invoice followed by deposit documentation. Your final documentation pack will be sent to you approximately 2-3 weeks prior to departure.

### Itinerary changes

It is our intention to adhere to the day-to-day itinerary as printed; however, the order of events or sightseeing may change as we look to improve our tours or as local conditions dictate; in these circumstances we will make the best possible arrangements whilst maintaining the integrity of your trip.

### Before You Leave

We recommend that you contact either your GP or Travelvax (1300 360 164) for advice on vaccinations and travel health. Travelvax has a comprehensive website that you may also find useful [www.travelvax.com.au](http://www.travelvax.com.au).

We strongly recommend registering your travel plans with [www.smarttraveller.gov.au](http://www.smarttraveller.gov.au) as in the event of an emergency, Australian Consular assistance will be more readily available. You can also access the Australian Government's travel advisory service for up to date information about your destination on the same website

**Last updated 29/03/19**