Panama Canal Cruise & Panama: A Continent Divided, Oceans United

SMALL SHIP CRUISE TOUR

Plus optional extensions in

Bocas del Toro: Wild Archipelago;
Colonial Cartagena:
The Emerald of the Caribbean

PMA 2013

Grand Circle Cruise Line
Panama Canal Cruise & Panama:
A Continent Divided, Oceans United
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INTRODUCTION

ABOUT THIS HANDBOOK
We've gathered some introductory information that may prove helpful for this Grand Circle Cruise Line itinerary. For detailed and timely information, it's wise to visit appropriate websites and confirm luggage regulations, weather conditions and other variable elements of your trip. If you expect to embark on personal exploration, or wish to discover more about the countries you visit, we suggest that you consult your choice of the many in-depth travel guidebooks devoted to your destinations. Refer to our additional resources section (at the end of the handbook) for other sources of insight.

ABOUT GRAND CIRCLE TRAVEL
Grand Circle Travel, founded in 1958 to serve the American Association for Retired Persons (AARP), is the leader in international travel, adventure and discovery for Americans aged 50 and over. Grand Circle vacations have been recommended by *The New York Times*, *Condé Nast Traveler*, *The Los Angeles Times*, *Travel+Leisure*, *The Wall Street Journal*, *Arthur Frommer's Budget Travel*, among other publications. But our most impressive reviews come from the more than one million people who have traveled with us and from readers of *Condé Nast Traveler* who placed Grand Circle Cruise Lines, the cruise branch of Grand Circle, in the Top 10 of the World's Best Cruise Lines for eight years — in 2012 ranking Grand Circle Cruise Lines the #1 World's Best River Cruise Line. Grand Circle has earned a spot on the prestigious *Condé Nast Traveler* Gold List for seven consecutive years as well. For 2011 *Condé Nast Traveler* named seven Grand Circle Cruise Line river ships among the 20 best river ships in the world; for 2012 the Grand Circle Cruise Lines was named to their Platinum Circle of top cruise lines.

YOUR GCCL PROGRAM DIRECTOR
During your Grand Circle Cruise Line Small Ships Cruise Tour, you'll have reliable assistance available at all times from an on-site Grand Circle Cruise Line Program Director. Your Program Director is fluent in English and can give you an inside perspective on your destinations. Along the way, your Program Director is supported by local tour guides who guide you expertly through particular sites and cities.

Many Grand Circle Cruise Line Program Directors are graduates of professional education programs for travel guides. In addition, they receive specialized training directly from Grand Circle Cruise Line, training that is based on what we've learned from thousands of past travelers about how to make the trip most enjoyable. Your Program Director offers both a deep knowledge of the region and a commitment to make this a very pleasant, informative, and rewarding travel experience for you.

Your Program Director will provide sightseeing tips, handle all travel details, reserve optional tours you choose to take, oversee your Discovery Series events, and provide any other assistance you may need. You will be in the company of the Program Director throughout your Small Ship Cruise Tour, and during the optional trip extensions in Bocas del Toro and Cartagena if you choose to take them.

1. PASSPORT, VISAS AND TRAVEL DOCUMENTS

Passport Required

U.S. citizens need a valid passport for this itinerary.

Note

Your passport should meet these requirements for this itinerary:

- It should be valid for at least 6 months after your scheduled return to the U.S.
- It should have the recommended number of blank pages (see below for details).
- The blank pages must be labeled "Visas" at the top. Pages labeled "Amendments and Endorsements" are not acceptable.

Recommended number of blank pages:
This recommendation is based on a "worst case" scenario. On this trip you might use fewer pages depending on the whims of the Immigration officials you meet. Since the consequence of having too few pages can be severe—you could be denied entry into a country—we take a *better safe than sorry* stance, and we recommend these guidelines:

- **Main trip only:** If you are taking only the main trip, you will require 2 blank passport pages.
- **Pre-trip extension Bocas del Toro:** This extension does not require any additional pages beyond the 2 needed for the main trip.
- **Post-trip to Colonial Cartagena:** You will need 1 more page, for a total of 3 blank pages.
- **Both the pre- and post-trip extensions:** You will need a total of 3 blank passport pages.

Please take moment to ensure that your passport meets *all* of these requirements. If not, you could be refused entry into a country and **you might be required by that country to return to the U.S. immediately, which would be at your own expense**.

If you need to renew your passport or get extra pages:
Contact the National Passport Information Center (NPIC) at **1-877-487-2778**, or visit their website at **www.travel.state.gov** for information on obtaining a new passport, renewing your existing passport, or for additional pages. You can renew your passport by mail if it is not damaged, you obtained it within the last fifteen years, and it's in the name you want on your new passport. Many local post offices carry forms for renewing by mail or obtaining extra pages. Allow several weeks for processing your passport. You may also contact our recommended visa service company, PVS International, at 1-800-556-9990 for help with your passport.

NOTE: When updating your passport, it is worthwhile to check the prices on all the different services that might apply to you. For example, it might be less expensive to renew your passport than to have pages added, depending on the number of pages you need.

No Visas Required

- **Panama (main trip & extension)**: U.S. citizens do not need visas for entry into Panama.
- **Colombia (optional extension)**: For U.S. citizens, no visa is required for entry into Colombia for stays of up to 60 days.

If you are staying longer in any of these countries, you should check with their embassy for the applicable regulations:

Columbia: (202) 387-8338 Panama: (202) 438-1407

No U.S. Passport?

Non-U.S. citizens or non-U.S. passport holders: If you are **not** a U.S. citizen or if you possess a passport from a country other than the U.S., it is your responsibility to check with your local consulate or embassy about possible visa requirements. Or, you may contact PVS International directly, who can also assist non-U.S. citizens.

PVS International
Passport & Visa Services
1700 N Moore Street
Rosslyn Center, suite 310
Arlington, VA 22209
Telephone: 1-800-556-9990

Backup Photocopies

The smartest and easiest security precaution you can take is to carry photocopies of the personal information pages of your passport, your air ticket, traveler's check serial numbers (if you're carrying these checks), and your credit cards. Store them separate from the originals. Bring along extra passport-sized photos. Add phone and fax numbers for reporting lost credit cards, for your travel protection plan company if you have purchased one and for your medical emergency network. This can save you immeasurable time, money, and bother if your documents are lost or stolen during your trip. In addition, you can scan these photocopies and email them to your personal email address so that a replacement can be printed out if needed (if/when Internet service is available.)

Your Flight Itineraries

You will receive a preliminary flight itinerary approximately 75 days prior to your departure. Please examine it carefully to ensure that your first and last names appear exactly as they do on your passport. (We do not need middle names). You will receive your finalized flight itinerary in your final documents package approximately 14 days prior to your departure. If the airlines make a change in your flight times, we'll adjust your reservation accordingly. If time permits, we'll send you an updated flight itinerary. If the change is made close to your departure, you'll be advised by way of the finalized flight itinerary. You may also view your most up-to-date flight arrangements through the My Account feature of our web page, **www.gct.com.**

All flight arrangements are subject to change at any time for reasons beyond GCCL's control.

Depending on your airlines, you will most likely receive electronic tickets (E-tickets) for your flights. But occasionally, specific airlines or specific flights may require paper tickets instead. If needed, paper tickets will be sent as part of your final documents package. If you receive paper tickets, please guard them the way you would guard cash, as they cannot easily be reissued. Plus a reissue always entails a fee from the airlines that you would be responsible for.

During the course of your trip you may have regional flights within the destination. Due to international ticketing regulations, some of these flights must be ticketed within the country they originate from. If so, these flights may not be listed in your air itinerary, but your Program Director will advise you of these flight schedules during the trip. To see if your tour includes regional flights, please refer to your brochure.

2. YOUR HEALTH

Keep Your Abilities In Mind

Is This Adventure Right For You?

We've worked closely with our local Program Directors and regional associates to identify the aspects of this adventure that you should be aware of, from physical requirements to cultural factors. **Please carefully review the information below prior to departing on this adventure.**

We reserve the right for our Program Directors to modify participation, or in some circumstances send travelers home, if their condition would adversely affect the health, safety, or enjoyment of themselves or of other travelers.

Physical requirements This adventure is not appropriate for travelers using wheelchairs or other mobility aids. You must be able to walk 3 miles unassisted over the course of each day, exploring on foot and standing for up to a half hour at a time. You must also be comfortable participating in 5-6 hours of daily physical activities.

Pacing *5 locations in 11 days with 1 one-night stays*; early morning sightseeing on some days. We will cruise for a total of 3 days, for about 8-10 hours a day. There are several overland drives, including a 2-hour transfer to El Valle on Day 3. Some of the roads are bumpy and dusty. During our cruise of the Panama Canal, we'll have the opportunity to explore via Zodiac and kayak. Agility and good balance are required for getting in and out of these smaller boats.

Climate & terrain February, March, and April are hottest during the day, with temperatures reaching to 90+ degrees F. This is also the time of year with the littlest rainfall. Humidity is quite high year-round in Panama, averaging about 80%. *Please consider your tolerance for heat when selecting a departure date.*

On the cruise portion of our adventure, there is the chance that we could experience rough seas due to weather. On land, we'll travel over some rugged paths, as well as bumpy, unpaved, dusty roads—both by air-conditioned bus and on foot.

Transportation We spend 3 nights aboard a small ship, and we'll also travel via air-conditioned minibus, train, zodiacs, canoes, and kayaks.

Accommodations We spend 3 nights aboard a 24-passenger catamaran in cabins that offer double or twin beds, individual climate control, and private bath. All other accommodations are hotel-standard, with a variety of amenities and personal service, as well as private baths with hot showers.

Group size & leadership 24 maximum with 1 Program Director.

Cultural insight: For the adventurous soul, the challenges of traveling in Panama—in addition to the country's beauty and cultural richness—make it a uniquely rewarding destination. In Panama City, you should be prepared for large crowds and congested traffic with drivers who often do not yield to pedestrians. As in any city, there are neighborhoods where it is best to exercise caution by traveling in groups and taking taxis at night. In parts of Panama, including Panama City and the Embera Indian Village, we will see people living in poverty, which may be distressing for some travelers.

Health Check and Inoculations

If you have any ongoing medical conditions or concerns about your health, we highly recommend that you schedule a checkup with your personal physician at least six weeks in advance of your departure date. Your trip will take you into remote areas, with no nearby medical facilities. Please notify us in writing about any medical condition that may require special attention. (If your report is normal, you don't need to send it to us.) If you do send us a medical report, we don't use it to determine if you should take this trip, or if you are likely to enjoy it. Those decisions are up to you and your doctor. Discuss with your doctor any aspects of your international itinerary that may affect your health and be guided by his or her advice. A loose filling or developing cavity would be difficult to remedy while you are traveling. You may want to have a dental exam before your trip.

If you have a condition that requires special equipment or treatment, you must bring and be responsible for all necessary items related to your condition. If you take medications regularly, be sure to pack an ample supply that will last your entire trip, as obtaining refills of your medication can be difficult during your trip. Pack these medications in your carry-on bag, and keep them in their original, labeled containers. To be prepared for any unforeseen loss of your medications, you should also bring copies of the prescriptions, written using the generic drug name rather than a brand name.

Vaccinations:

Check with the CDC: To ensure you receive any needed vaccinations we suggest that you check the current recommendations of the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) for your destination. You can contact them at:

On-line — if you have access to the Internet, we suggest you visit the CDC's Web site at **www.cdc.gov/travel**, where you will find comprehensive information about preventing illness while traveling.

By phone—at the CDC's Hotline toll-free at **1-800-232-4636** 24 hours a day. Please note that automated information may be arranged topically by disease, rather than by country or region.

Consult your doctor: After checking the CDC's recommendations we strongly suggest that you consult your family physician (at least 6 weeks prior to departure) concerning any vaccinations or medications that you may need on this trip. At the time of print there were no specific vaccinations required for entry into any of the countries on your itinerary (but the CDC and your doctor may have health recommendations specific to you, so please check).

Yellow Fever Vaccination—*Recommended*, but not Required

Yellow Fever in general: Yellow fever is a mosquito-borne disease, so the easiest steps against the disease are to prevent mosquito bites. For example, use insect repellant (preferably containing DEET at 30-35% strength) and to wear clothing that keeps your arms and legs covered. There is also a vaccination against yellow fever that is widely available at doctor's offices, and sometimes available through clinics run by your local/state health authority. When you receive this vaccination your doctor will give you a Yellow Fever Card, also known as an International Certificate of Vaccination. This card is valid beginning ten days after your vaccination and is good for ten years.

On this adventure: According to the CDC, Yellow Fever is present in Colombia and Panama, but not in Panama City or in the Canal Zone. The CDC states that this means the vaccination is recommended for Panama and Colombia, but not required. The vaccination is only required if you have previously visited an endemic country. (By "endemic", the local governments mean a country that is known to have occurrences or outbreaks of Yellow Fever, for a complete list of these countries, see the CDC website at www.cdc.gov.).

Since we spend most of our time on the main trip in areas where Yellow Fever is not known to be present, it is unlikely that you will need the vaccination if you are taking the main trip only. Travelers on the post-trip extension should note that the vaccination is recommended for Colombia.

***TIP**: We recommend that if you have received the vaccination, you should have your Yellow Fever Card with you when traveling. If you cannot receive the vaccination for medical reasons, we suggest you bring with you a letter from your medical provider stating so. If either Panama or Colombia makes a last-minute change to its entry policy before you leave, having one of these documents with you could make all the difference.*

Prescription Medications

If you take prescription medications regularly, be sure to pack an ample supply that will last your entire trip. Pack these medications in your carry-on bag, and keep them in their original, labeled containers. To be prepared for any unforeseen loss of your medications, you should also bring copies of the prescriptions, written using the generic drug name rather than a brand name.

Also, when you visit your doctor, get a prescription for an antibiotic medication for gastrointestinal illness. In addition, you should ask your doctor for a prescription for a pain medication, such as Tylenol with codeine. You might need this in the unlikely event of an injury in a location where medical attention would be delayed. Our Program Director does not carry prescription medications.

TIP: *The motion sickness medication, Dramamine, will be available onboard, free of charge, to help alleviate any seasickness.*

Jet Lag Relief

You will feel better on the first days of your trip if, shortly before you leave home, you start to adjust to the different time zone of your destination. Since you will cross several time zones to reach your destination, you may lose many hours of regular sleep. On arrival, your body then will have to suddenly adjust to new sleeping and eating patterns. The result is jet lag. Its symptoms are fatigue—often compounded by insomnia and general restlessness—irritability, and vague disorientation. You cannot totally avoid jet lag; but you can minimize it. Here's how:

- Start your trip well rested. Begin a gradual transition to your new time zone before you leave.
- Switch to your destination time zone when you get on the plane. Attempt to sleep and eat according to the new schedule.
- Try to sleep on overnight flights.
- Avoid heavy eating and drinking caffeine or alcoholic beverages right before–and during–your flight.
- Drink plenty of water and/or fruit juice while flying.
- Stretch your legs, neck, and back periodically while seated on the plane, and make an effort to get up and walk about the cabin a few times to keep your blood circulation normal.
- After arrival, avoid the temptation to nap.
- Don’t push yourself to see a lot on your first day.
- Try to stay awake your first day until after dinner.

Staying Healthy on Your Trip

Safe Water

Tap water is safe to drink in most parts of Panama, but if you prefer bottled water, it is readily available. Water from the tap is also perfectly fine to drink on the Panama Canal cruise ship. However, tap water is not safe to drink on the island of Bocas del Toro. If you are taking the optional pre-trip extension, drink bottled water only.

Safe Food

We've carefully chosen the restaurants for your group meals. Be very careful with food sold from vendors on the street, and with uncooked fruit and other foods. Fruit that you peel yourself is usually safe—avoid lettuce and other unpeeled produce.

This is especially important for this trip because once illness or disease is brought onboard it can quickly and easily spread from passenger to passenger within the confined space of the ship and could affect the health of all onboard.

General Health Tips

Wash your hands frequently: before meals, before snacks, when brushing your teeth, after visiting the bathroom. Carry your own handkerchief to dry your hands thoroughly each time. For times when running water is not handy when you want it, you can bring moist towelettes (in a box, not individually wrapped) or anti-bacterial "water-free" hand cleanser. Avoid touching your face, biting your nails, and putting things in your mouth out of habit. Don't share your water bottle with others.

Take short showers aboard the boat, as fresh water will be in restricted supply onboard.

3. LUGGAGE REGULATIONS

Size, Number and Weight Restrictions

It may seem early to discuss luggage and packing, but if you know current industry standards for international flights you can start to plan what type of luggage you'll use, how much clothing to bring, etc. The following information can help you in your trip preparations. We'll remind you to confirm your U.S./international luggage limits (and update regional limits, if applicable) in your final documents (arriving about two weeks before your departure).

In addition to the international flights, you will also take domestic flights within the region on your main trip. The luggage limits on these flights are less than the average allowance for international flights. **This means that even if your international airline offers a larger weight limit, you will need to pack according to the lower restrictions, as indicated in the following chart.**

MAIN TRIP LIMITS	
Pieces per person	One checked bag and one carry-on bag per person
Weight restrictions	Varies by airline. The current **standard** is **44 lbs for checked bags** and **17 lbs for carry-on bags**.
Size restrictions	Varies by airline. Measured in linear inches (*length+width+depth*). Generally, **62 linear inches is the checked bag limit**; **carry-on limit is 45 linear inches**.
Luggage Type	A sturdy, fabric-sided suitcase with built-in wheels and lockable zippers is recommended.
PRE TRIP EXTENSION LIMITS	
Pieces/size and type of luggage same as main trip; **Weight restrictions:** Checked bag: **25 lbs;** Carry-on: **10 lbs** (storage ***is*** available)	
POST TRIP EXTENSION LIMITS	
Pieces/size and type of luggage same as main trip; **Weight restrictions:** Checked bag: **44 lbs;** Carry-on: **15 lbs** (storage ***is not*** available)	
REMARKS / SUGGESTIONS	
One suitcase and one carry-on bag per person: Due to the space limitations on bus transfers, you'll be restricted to one suitcase and one carry-on bag per person. This is to ensure that we have room for everyone's luggage. We ask that you abide by this limit to avoid inconveniencing your fellow travelers and prevent additional airlines luggage fees (which are your responsibility). Most airlines now charge to check more than one suitcase per person for flights to Europe and other international flights. **Note**: Enforcement of published restrictions by countries and airlines is a matter of governmental and corporate policy. Enforcement may include spot checks and be inconsistently applied. Expect penalties and fines to be imposed immediately, however. If you choose to ignore the restrictions you should ask: *Do I feel lucky?* And, even if you do, you should make sure that you have the ability to pay the fine. **Luggage storage on the extensions:** For the pre-trip Bocas del Toro extension, additional luggage can be left behind at your hotel in Panama city. If you chose to use this service, please bring an extra bag and lock for the hotel to store. You can pick up your "left luggage" on your return to Panama City for the main trip. If you are taking the extension to Colonial Cartagena, you will not be able to store extra luggage at the hotel in Panama during this extension. (You fly from Colombia back to the U.S. without returning to Panama.) Since the maximum checked luggage on your flight from Panama to Colombia is 44lbs, you should stay within the 44lb limit for the entire trip.	

Should I confirm luggage restrictions with my U.S./international airline(s) before departure?
Absolutely, confirm current restrictions about a week or so before your departure. You should take this step no matter if your vacation has a lower limit then the average international flight or not, because there may be recent changes, such as new security regulations, or an update to the standard weight/size allowances. For your convenience, we maintain a list of the toll-free numbers for the most common airlines on our webpage in the *FAQ* section.

You should also check with the airlines on luggage fees—many airlines charge to check luggage, sometimes even on international flights. Others will charge a fee if you bring a second carry-on item, like a purse or a laptop. **These fees are not included in your trip price**; they are payable directly to the airlines. If you are making a connecting flight, you should also confirm if your luggage can be checked through to your final destination. For more information about air travel, see the "Air Travel" section of your Important Information booklet.

Airport Security/TSA

Restrictions on what can be included in your carry-on luggage may change. To avoid inadvertently packing restricted items in your carry-on, we suggest that you consult the Transportation Security Administration website at www.tsa.gov/public.

Liquids and your carry on: Follow the **TSA's 3-1-1 rule**: Liquids must be in a 3.4 ounce or less (100ml) bottle (by volume); all bottles must be in a 1 quart-sized, clear, plastic, zip-top bag; 1 bag per passenger placed in screening bin. One-quart bag per person limits the total liquid volume each traveler can bring. The 3.4 ounce (100ml) container size is a security measure. Note that this rule is used increasingly throughout the world.

For flights that originate in the U.S:
To reduce the risk of damage to your luggage, do not lock your bags when checking in for flights originating in the U.S. The Transportation Security Administration (TSA) is responsible for screening all checked luggage at commercial airports throughout the U.S. TSA baggage-handling agents may need access to your luggage and will break locks if required. TSA "accepted and recognized" locks are widely available: screeners can open and re-lock bags using these locks if a physical inspection is required.

For flights originating outside the U.S.:
On all flights outside of the U.S., we strongly recommend you lock your luggage. This is not a legal requirement but merely a precaution against theft. Have the keys handy, as you may need to open your luggage for a security screening or for customs in the U.S. or Europe.

4. WHEN YOU ARRIVE

GCCL Air Travelers

U.S. Departure: If you are among a group of ten or more GCCL travelers who depart the U.S. from your international gateway city, it is our goal to have a GCCL Representative assist you at the U.S. airport with the check-in of your flight. Unless there are extenuating circumstances beyond our control, the Representative will be at the check-in counter three hours before your departure time and at the gate one hour before your departure time (security permitting).

Please note that if you are arriving at your international gateway city via a connecting domestic flight, the Grand Circle Cruise Line Representative will be stationed at the check-in counter for your departing international flight, not at the domestic arrival gate.

Important note on porters: *Airport porters are NOT allowed in the customs hall area. On arrival, you must take your luggage off the baggage carousel and load it onto a cart, which you will then move through customs. When you exit customs, you'll handle your cart until reaching your motor coach. Your motor coach driver will load your luggage onto your motor coach.*

Arrival in Panama City—main trip & optional pre-trip extension: When you deplane from your flight to Panama City, a Grand Circle Cruise Line Representative will meet you at the airport after you exit Customs and assist you with the transfer to your hotel.

U.S. Return: At the end of your base trip or optional post-trip extension, you'll be transferred by motor coach to the airport for your return flight to the U.S. If you are among a group of ten or more GCCL travelers who return to the same U.S. gateway city, a GCCL Representative will meet you as you exit Customs and help you find taxis, buses, hotel accommodations, or connecting flights. Again, it is our goal to have our GCCL Representative waiting to assist your group. In rare instances, unforeseen circumstances may prevent this service.

Name Tags: *Please remember to wear your Grand Circle Cruise Line nametag when you exit Customs, upon arrival and when you return to the U.S., so that you are readily identifiable as a GCCL traveler.*

5. MONEY MATTERS

How to Carry Your Money

Generally speaking carrying a mix of different payment methods is the best option—some cash for exchange, a couple of credit/or debit cards, and *maybe* a few traveler's checks as a last resort—so that you'll be prepared for any situation. In this section, we offer some tips on each type of payment method.

Cash or Traveler's Checks?

Cash has an advantage over traveler's checks. Cash is more readily exchanged and accepted than traveler's checks, and sometimes commands a better exchange rate. Cash is also a better choice for rural or undeveloped areas where ATMs and credit card machines are scarce. Panamanian currency is Balboa (PAB) divided into 100 centavos. 1 Balboa equals 1 US dollar and names "balboa" and "dollar" are used interchangeably. Panama doesn't have its own paper money (US dollar bills are used), but it does have its own coins that are the same size and weight as US coins. Both Panamanian and US coins can be legally used. Large U.S. Bills ($100 or $50) may not be accepted. So, bringing U.S. dollars makes sense.

Traveler's checks are *not* recommended. We urge you not to rely on traveler's checks for your personal expenses. They can be difficult to exchange and the commission fee for cashing them is quite high. Although most banks or exchange offices will cash them as long as you carry your passport with you, the exchange rate may be worse than exchanging cash. It's more practical to view any traveler's checks you might bring as a last resort in the event of a special situation. American Express Traveler's checks are rarely accepted in shops and restaurants.

ATMs

When traveling in Panama, PLUS, Cirrus, MasterCard, Visa and Amex are available throughout large cities, though small towns may not have any. Always notify your bank before you leave home that you are going abroad so that they may remove any blocks on your account and also ask them about the number of withdrawals you may make abroad. For cash withdrawals, don't forget to memorize the actual ***digits*** of your card's 4-digit PIN (Personal Identification Number). Many keypads at foreign ATMs only display digits and do not include letters on their keypads.

TIP: *Many banks charge a fee ranging from $1 to $5 for every time you use an ATM in a foreign city. Others will charge you a percentage of what you withdraw. Check with your bank on what fees they charge before you leave the country. That way you can decide if it is better for you to take out one or two large sums, or make smaller but more frequent withdrawals. Your Program Director can advise you on ATM locations, but when to exchange money is left to your discretion.*

Credit Cards (and Debit Cards)

Even if you do not plan on using it, having a credit or debit card as a "backup" is helpful in an emergency. Credit Cards are most likely to be accepted only at larger restaurants, at hotels and bigger stores in Panama City. Outside of the capital, credit cards acceptance can be very limited. Most commonly used cards are Visa and MasterCard, but American Express and Diners Club can also be used. Not every shop will take every card, so it is best to ask if your type of card is accepted before deciding on your purchase, and having a couple different cards can be useful. Please note that Discover cards are not widely accepted outside of the U.S.

***TIP**: Many credit card companies and banks have fraud alert departments that will freeze your card if they see suspicious charges—such as charges from another country. To avoid an accidental security block, it is a good idea to notify your credit card company or bank that you will be using your cards abroad. You can do this by calling their customer service number a week or two before your departure.*

You should also double-check what phone number you should call if you have a problem with a card while you are abroad. Don't assume you can use the 1-800 number printed on the back of your card—most 1-800 numbers don't work outside of the U.S.!

Please be aware that credit cards might not be accepted for small purchases or in the markets. Keep your receipts in case you have questions about the conversion or exchange rate. Also, keep your receipts as proof of purchase for items to be shipped home.

Optional Tour Payments & Shipboard Expenses

During your trip you will be able to book optional tours directly with your Program Director. He or she will ask you to confirm the payment for these tours by filling out a payment form. Optional tours can only be purchased with a credit or debit card. We accept Visa, MasterCard, or American Express credit cards only. (We also accept debit cards with the logo of one of these credit card companies, but it must be a card that allows you to sign for purchases.)

In order to process these charges, there can be a delay of 2-3 months from the date of your return for the charges to be posted to your account. Therefore we ask that you use a card that will not expire in the 2-3 months following your return. Because our headquarters are in Boston, charges may appear to be from Boston or might be labeled as "**OPT Boston**" (depending on your credit card company).

Currency By Destination

For current exchange rates, please refer to our website, your bank, or the financial section of your newspaper.

In Colombia

The official currency of Colombia is the Colombian *peso*. Banknote and coin denominations are as follows:

- Bills come in denominations of 1, 2, 5, 10, 20, 50, and 100 pesos
- Coins come in denominations of 1, 5, 10, 200, 500 and 1,000 centavos

U.S. dollars are ***not*** widely accepted in Colombia. You may find some street vendors or people in tourist-related industries willing to accept dollars, but generally the local currency is preferred.

In Panama

United States currency is legal tender in Panama, and it circulates freely with the Panamanian balboa, which only printed in coin form and divided into 100 centésimos. Because US dollars are legal currency, you will not need to convert money in Panama.

For those interested in collecting coins (or just curious) centésimos coins are of identical size, denomination and metal as U.S. coins, but with different designs. The coins of both nations are used interchangeably in Panama, so you may get centésimos in your change even if you paid in U.S. dollars.

Shopping

It is Grand Circle Cruise Line's goal to identify and provide you with shopping opportunities that highlight unique, locally produced products with good value from reliable vendors. For this reason there may be scheduled visits to local shops during your adventure. There is **no** requirement to make a purchase during these stops, and any purchase made is a direct transaction with the shop in question, subject to the vendor's terms of purchase. **Grand Circle Cruise Line cannot be responsible for purchases you make on your trip or for the shipment of your purchases.**

If you plan a major purchase, we strongly recommend that you research the prices and quality available at home before your trip. Just one visit to an import shop or gold dealer will put you way ahead when you go shopping. This is the only way to know if you are getting a good price.

By Destination

Souvenirs

Panama: In Panama, locally made items can be found at good prices. Look for leatherwear, beaded necklaces strung by local Guaymí Indians, native costumes, jewels and precious stones, straw products, electrical equipment, handicrafts of carved wood, ceramics, *papier mâché* artifacts, macramé and mahogany bowls.

Colombia: In Colombia, be on the lookout for gold jewelry and leather products. Colombia is especially known for first-grade precious stones; it is said to have perfect emeralds.

Your purchase decisions are very personal. You must use your best judgment when deciding whether an item is worth the price being asked. If you plan a major purchase, we strongly recommend that you research the prices and quality available at home before your trip. Just one visit to an import shop or dealer will put you way ahead when you go shopping. This is the only way to know if you are getting a good price.

Bargaining

Some shops have fixed prices. In other places, merchants enjoy negotiating over prices. If this is your first experience at bargaining, don't worry—you'll quickly find your own style. Your opening offer should be well under the asking price. The only rule is that, if you make an offer, you should be prepared to buy at that price. And remember, whatever price you pay is okay, as long as the item is worth that price to you.

U.S. Customs Regulations and Shipping Charges

Exemption Amounts

Articles totaling $800, at fair retail value where they were acquired, may be imported free of charge if you bring them with you. A flat rate of duty—usually a percentage—will be applied to the next $1,000 worth (fair retail value) of merchandise. The U.S. Customs Inspector determines the value of your items when you enter, and is not bound by your bill of sale. In almost every case, however, a genuine bill of sale will be honored.

Fees on Items Shipped Home

Items shipped home are *always* subject to duty when received in the U.S. There will also be charges for shipping. Although some shops abroad may offer to include shipping and duties in the price, this typically means shipping to the customs facility closest to you and payment of the *export* duties (the fee to remove an item from its country of origin) not door-to-door shipping or *import* duties (the fee the U.S. government charges to bring an item into the U.S.). All additional duties or shipping charges would be the responsibility of the purchaser—you.

Therefore unless the item is small enough to mail or to be sent by a global parcel service (like FedEx) you should be prepared to pay customs duties and for shipping or pick-up from the nearest customs facility. This is why the U.S. Customs & Border Protection service states: “The most cost-effective thing to do is to take your purchases with you if at all possible.”

Illegal Items
It is illegal to import products made from endangered animal species. U.S. Customs & Border Protection will seize these items, as well as most furs, coral, tortoise shell, reptile skins, feathers, plants, and items made from animal skins. For more information on what you may or may not bring back into the United States, you can obtain the publication “Know Before You Go” from the U.S. Bureau of Customs & Border Protection by phone, mail or from their website:

U.S. Bureau of Customs & Border Protection
1300 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20229
Tel. **1-877-227-5511**
www.cbp.gov/xp/cgov/travel/

Problem with a Purchase?

The best way to address a problem with a purchase is to not have one in the first place! So don’t forget to examine merchandise before paying for it, check contracts or agreements before signing, and review your receipt before leaving the shop. For major purchases, don’t hesitate to ask in advance about the return policy—local practice may vary from U.S. standards, so don’t assume that you have a certain number of days after the purchase to speak up.

But what if you do discover an issue with an item later on? In that case, your best recourse is to contact the vendor directly. For this reason we recommend that you keep a copy of all your receipts, invoices, or contracts, along with the shop’s contact information. Expect that any resolution will take longer than it would in the U.S. due to delays in communication, the complexities of international shipping/customs duties, and even cultural differences in how business is conducted.

To Tip or Not to Tip

Sometimes *that* is the question. The good news is twofold: we’re fresh out of Shakespearean soliloquies, so no thesauri will get hurt here; and the answer the question “**to tip or not to tip** (and how much to tip if you so choose)” is ***always*** a personal decision. Tipping is a common practice both at home and abroad and we offer these guidelines to answer requests for appropriate tipping amounts. It can be useful to have this information on site – when the question *must* be answered – and ahead of time for travel budgeting purposes. Tips below are quoted in U.S. dollars; tips can be converted and paid in local currency (usually preferred) or in U.S. dollars (personal/traveler's checks should ***never*** be used for tips).

GCCL Program Director: It is customary to express a personal "thank you" to your GCCL Program Director at the end your trip, especially if he or she has provided you with individual assistance. As a guideline, many travelers give $7-$10 per person, per day.

Included Meals: Your Program Director will tip waiters for included meals.

Shipboard: Shipboard gratuities to the cruise personnel are not included in the cost of your cruise. The ship's tipping guidelines recommend a total tip of $9-$11 U.S. per person, per day, for the crew and the Cruise Director combined. (That breaks down to about $3-4 for the Cruise Director and about $6-7 for the crew.) Please distribute your tip to the crew and the Cruise Director using the two separate envelopes available onboard.

For convenience, staff tips can be paid in U.S. cash or local currency. Credit card payments are not accepted for tipping.

Drivers: $3-$4 per person, per day

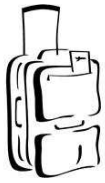
Local guides: $3-$4 per person, per day

Housekeeping staff at hotels: $1-2 per room, per night

Waiters: Your Program Director will tip waiters for included meals. If you are dining on your own, bear in mind that it is common for restaurants in this region to add a service charge (usually of about 10%). If that is the case, you do not tip.

Taxi drivers: If you are taking a taxi by yourself, keep in mind that tipping is not common practice, but many people simply let the driver keep the change by rounding up the fare to the next whole number.

6. PACKING FOR YOUR TRIP



In General

Travel light: **PACKING FOR TRAVEL** Just as no two people are the same, your packing needs aren't like anyone else's. The trick of packing is to bring only what you need to be comfortable – and only you can determine what answers that need. We've compiled some *suggestions* from our local Trip Leaders and from past travelers to help you refine your packing – and to ensure that nothing critical is forgotten.

Our travelers' top three comments about packing are "I wish I had brought less," "I should have double-checked the weather," and "You said I'd need (*insert something you don't need here*) and I didn't." These suggestions are springboards, **not** requirements – take them with a grain of salt. Finally, remember the **Golden Rule of Packing Light**: whatever you think you need at first—take half the clothes and twice the money.

Pack casual clothes: Comfortable, informal apparel is perfectly acceptable at each of your destinations. Basic pants, shirts, sportswear, everyday dresses/skirts, supportive shoes, and functional outdoor clothes that are relatively easy to care for are recommended. Our list suggests several layers of clothing, so you can adjust to warmer and cooler conditions. Most of your clothing can be cotton or cotton-synthetic blends. If you like to hand-wash your clothes, bring socks, underwear, and even shirts and pants made of synthetics or cotton/synthetic blends that will dry overnight. You can also buy clothing specially designed for travel.

Functional Tips
As you will experience a good deal of humidity and rainfall during some parts of the year, our list suggests several layers of clothing. You'll want fairly good-quality rain gear for your visit to Gamboa Rain Forest. Your clothing can be made of cotton or cotton-synthetic blends. If you like to hand-wash your clothes, bring socks and underwear, and even shirts and pants, made of silk, synthetics, or a cotton-synthetic blend that will dry out overnight. You can buy clothing designed especially for travel. Look for clothes that offer adequate sun protection.

Footwear: You'll be on your feet a lot during the trip, and walking over some rough and slippery surfaces. Because of the terrain, the goal is for your footwear to have good traction and good support. We suggest something like a pair of light hiking shoes, trekking shoes, or sports shoes—in other words, something that offers better traction and better support then regular street shoes. During your visit to the Anton Valley in Panama, we suggest you bring something that can get wet but also has traction, such as water shoes or sports sandals.

Light rain gear is recommended: Regardless of when you travel, rainfall is a possibility. While it may not rain on your trip, we suggest you bring a waterproof shell or coat, preferably with a hood. This is usually a better choice than a folding umbrella, which is less effective in wind.

Clothing Options

We've included information below on the weather you can expect for the regions you'll be visiting on your travels. Taking into account the climate you'll encounter and the general suggestions we offer above will enable you to create a flexible wardrobe that's light enough for sophisticated travel and will guarantee comfort in all the conditions you can expect to encounter. The luggage weight and size restrictions imposed by travel realities today have made traveling light an absolute necessity. With modern fabrics – Gore-Tex, Polarfleece, polypropylene, etc. – lightweight packing for comfort and protection through a wide range of weather is easy. A visit to any on-line or local sporting goods/outdoor stores (L.L. Bean, REI, EMS, etc.) will yield a treasure trove of lightweight, specialized, easy to care for and fashionable clothing and gear that is readily adaptable to your itinerary.

Luggage Suggestions

Consider a duffel bag or soft-sided suitcase for your checked luggage. Due to space limitations on our motor coaches, you are allowed one piece of checked luggage per person. Porterage at airports and hotels is provided for **one** bag per person. All bags should have luggage tags.

Consider a daypack or small backpack as your carry-on bag. It will do double duty during excursions and walking trips. A daypack leaves your hands free and distributes its weight onto your back. Packed with daily travel needs (sweater, camera, rain/wind jacket, water bottle, etc.), it will compress to fit the storage space of foreign motorcoaches, and yet still have room for an impulse buy at a local street market.

Inner bags: Packing is easier if you use inner bags to help organize your gear. Use plastic bags, nylon stuff sacks, or packing cubes to organize inside your suitcase. Isolate liquids, store camera gear and important papers in heavy-duty Ziploc style bags.

Tip**:** *Bring a second, empty lockable bag folded into your main suitcase, with a luggage tag and small lock. Use this to carry souvenirs home – but remember that you may incur extra luggage fees. If you're traveling with a companion we recommend "cross-packing," i.e., pack 2 outfits of your clothing in your companion's luggage and vice-versa, in case one bag is delayed.*

Packing Your Carry-On

Using a daypack as a carry-on bag for your flights is a smart solution. We **strongly urge** you to pack your carry-on with at least one full change of clothes, your camera gear, medications, changes of socks and underwear, your important travel documents, and other irreplaceable items, in case your checked bags go astray. Store camera gear and important papers in plastic bags to protect them from dirt and moisture. With a daypack you can then remove these items on arrival and load your bag with the gear you'll need on walking tours and excursions.

NOTE**:** Restrictions on what can be included in your carry-on luggage change frequently. To avoid inadvertently packing any restricted items in your carry-on luggage, we strongly suggest that you consult the Transportation Security Administration website, at **www.tsa.gov** which keeps a current list of restricted items. From the main website click on *Our Travelers*, then *Air Travel*, and then you will see a link for *Prohibited Items*.

Travel Gear Suggestions

Though it's fun to do things the locals do, it can be frustrating when daily necessities or conveniences from home aren't available. To travel wisely these days you must juggle your personal needs and preferences against the physical constraints of your transportation—whether it's an international airplane, a transfer motorcoach, a small ship or a daylong trek on a camel. You'll have to distinguish between what you **must** have, what you'd *like* to have, whether you can zip your suitcase closed, and what you can reasonably expect to wrestle through airport hallways and security checkpoints. Consult the following items to create your personal checklist – ignoring what you don't need and making the tough decisions over borderline cases. Remember that many airlines today will charge you extra for added luggage.

Our hotels/ships provide basics like soap and shampoo, but if you are sensitive to fragrances or new products, you may wish to bring your preferred brands. Most hotels do *not* provide a washcloth, so you may wish to pack one.

What not to pack: do not pack aerosol cans, as they tend to leak during air travel. Avoid packing glass bottles; use plastic containers instead. Leave at home checkbooks and any credit cards not essential for your trip, valuable jewelry, and anything that you would hate to lose.

Don't Forget: Emergency photocopies of your passport, air itinerary, and prescriptions, a list of your credit card numbers and phone number to reach the credit card company or bank to report loss or theft.

Clothing

- ❑ Shirts: short and long-sleeved in a breathable fabric, (cotton or blend.) Polo shirts are more versatile than T-shirts; sleeveless tops are optional.
- ❑ Light rain jacket/windbreaker with hood
- ❑ Shoes and socks: comfortable walking, running shoes, or light hikers
- ❑ Consider sport sandals
- ❑ Pants/jeans: comfortable, loose fitting for comfort and movement.
- ❑ Walking shorts: long cut for modesty
- ❑ Cotton sweater or sweatshirt for the air-conditioned bus
- ❑ Wide-brim sun hat or visor (seasonal)
- ❑ Swimsuit, for hotel pools
- ❑ Underwear and sleepwear

Consider …

- ❑ Daily essentials: toothbrush, toothpaste, floss, hairbrush or comb, shaving items, deodorant, shampoo/conditioner, shower cap, body soap, etc.
- ❑ Spare eyeglasses/contact lenses and your prescription
- ❑ Sunglasses and a neck strap
- ❑ Sunscreen, SPF 15 or stronger.
- ❑ Insect repellent with 30-35% DEET
- ❑ Compact umbrella
- ❑ Washcloth (not always supplied)
- ❑ Pocket-size tissues
- ❑ Moist towelettes and/or anti-bacterial "waterless" hand cleanser
- ❑ Flashlight, extra batteries/bulb
- ❑ Passport, air ticket, credit card photocopies
- ❑ Extra passport-sized photos
- ❑ Moisturizer, lip balm
- ❑ Travel money purse, worn under your shirt or jacket; money belt

Medicines

- ❑ Your own prescription medicines
- ❑ Vitamins
- ❑ Cold remedies: Sudafed/Dristan
- ❑ Pain relievers: Ibuprofen/naproxen/aspirin
- ❑ Laxatives: Senokot/Ex-Lax
- ❑ Antihistamine: Benadryl
- ❑ Stomach upset: Pepto-Bismol/Mylanta
- ❑ Anti-diarrheal: Imodium
- ❑ Band-Aids
- ❑ Moleskin foot pads
- ❑ Antibiotic: Neosporin/Bacitracin
- ❑ Motion sickness medicine

Optional Gear

- ❑ Travel alarm or watch with alarm
- ❑ Compact binoculars
- ❑ Hanging toiletry bag with pockets
- ❑ Hair dryer (this is provided in all hotels)
- ❑ Washcloth, handkerchiefs
- ❑ Basic sewing kit
- ❑ Hand-wash laundry soap (Woolite), clothespins/travel clothesline/stopper
- ❑ Electrical transformer & plug adapters—see “Regional Electricity” below
- ❑ Travel journal/note pad/reading material
- ❑ Home address book
- ❑ Photos, small gift for home-hosted visit
- ❑ Phrase book
- ❑ Collapsible walking staff
- ❑ Pocket calculator for exchange rates

7. REGIONAL CLIMATE INFORMATION

We can't predict the weather you'll have on your travels – our local weathermen are lucky to get tomorrow right! So, as your departure nears, it's a great idea to visit the *My Account* feature of **www.gct.com** for a current 10-day forecast of temperatures and conditions at your destinations. Or check Internet weather sites (www.wunderground.com is very comprehensive) for those forecasts and tweak your wardrobe accordingly. You'll find historical averages and general information on local climates below – but, given recent weather extremes, it's even more important to consult up-to-the-minute resources.

Climate Charts

The following charts reflect the average *climate* as opposed to *weather* conditions. This means they serve only as general indicators of what can reasonably be expected. As your departure approaches you may wish to monitor current weather conditions online. Here is the official data from the weather observation stations closest to our destinations.

Here are the data from the weather observation stations at or closest to our destinations:

Average Daily High/Low Temperatures (°F), Humidity, & Monthly Rainfall

MONTH	Panama City, Panama		
	Temp. High-Low	% Relative Humidity (avg)	Monthly Rainfall (inches)
JAN	89-76	80	1.6
FEB	90-76	77	0.6
MAR	90-77	77	0.6
APR	89-78	78	3.4
MAY	87-78	84	7.9
JUN	86-77	86	7.5
JUL	87-77	85	7.3
AUG	86-77	85	7.8
SEP	86-76	86	7.1
OCT	85-76	87	10.3
NOV	86-76	84	8.9
DEC	87-76	81	5.3

MONTH	Bocas del Toro, Panama (optional extension)			Cartegena des Indias, Colombia (optional extension)		
	Temp. High-Low	% Relative Humidity (avg)	Monthly Rainfall (inches)	Temp. High-Low	% Relative Humidity (avg)	Monthly Rainfall (inches)
JAN	84-72	80	4.8	85-75	81	0.2
FEB	85-72	79	10.4	85-76	79	0.0
MAR	86-73	78	3.3	86-77	79	0.1
APR	88-75	78	14.5	86-78	80	1.0
MAY	83-76	84	7.0	87-79	82	3.8
JUN	82-76	86	10.1	87-79	82	4.2
JUL	83-75	85	16.5	87-79	81	3.4
AUG	81-74	85	17.3	87-79	82	4.7
SEP	82-74	86	12.2	87-78	83	5.2
OCT	82-75	87	5.9	86-78	84	8.8
NOV	81-74	84	11.3	86-78	84	5.3
DEC	84-73	81	22.1	86-76	82	1.3

Please note: The data cited here reflect *climate* as opposed to *weather* conditions, and serve only as general indicators of what can reasonably be expected. A 60 degree ***average*** high temperature means that days may be as warm as 80 or as cool as 40 – but it's most likely you'll encounter temperatures in the 50 to 70 degree range.

8. TRAVEL AND TECHNOLOGY

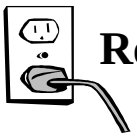
In General

Smartphone, tablet, digital camera/camcorder, MP3 player: travel today can involve technology that didn't exist even five years ago. The usefulness of digital devices is enormous: smartphones can keep you connected and offer up-to-the-minute information via your cell plan or a local Wi-Fi connection. With a tablet (or smartphone) you can store multiple country guidebooks, access maps and connect to the internet in a small, lightweight device. (***Tip**: you can download **this** document from the Grand Circle Travel website and import it into your tablet or e-reader, many of which can display PDF files.)*

Compact and lightweight, digital camcorders and cameras take high definition movies and still images of the people you meet and places you visit. For robust use a laptop may be effective; for occasional use it's wiser to rely on Internet cafes or a tablet and hotel Internet access rather than shoulder the heft and size of a laptop.

To use these devices you should first consider the services available at your destinations. You'll encounter a range of electrical standards, varied plug configurations to access the local current, erratic availability (electricity and internet access), and differing technological standards.

You'll need to assess your power and data storage needs, and the accessories required to recharge/connect/use these devices. Finally, it's smart to read the owner's manual *before* you depart. Pay particular attention to electrical, power and storage requirements to ensure that you understand exactly what you need. Thorough preparation is the best guarantee that your devices will work up to their potential.



Regional Electricity

Outside the U.S. most countries use electrical systems that differ from the standard U.S. 110 V 60 Hz current and flat two- or three-pronged polarized plug system. However, both Panama and Colombia operate on the same voltage and same plug types as the U.S. You will not need adapters or transformers for this trip – and your appliances will work fine.

A constant electricity supply cannot be guaranteed during overnight stays. Passengers dependent on electricity supply (as in the case of those with sleep apnea) should consider a different GCCL vacation.

If you use multiple digital devices—cell phone, digital camera, MP3 player, etc. – it's handy to have a travel power strip, perhaps with a surge suppressors and USB port for charging cell phones, MP3 players or e-readers without carrying device-specific plugs.

Can you hear me now?

Just picking up the phone or getting a paper can be a new experience in a foreign country. To ensure you are available during your trip to friends and relatives at home, you will receive two copies of your hotel list, including phone numbers, with your final documents package. One copy is for you to bring, and one to leave behind with friends or relatives in case they need to contact you during the trip.

When calling overseas from the US, dial 011 for international exchange, then the country's code, then and the number. The country code, which is indicated by a plus sign (+), is +57 for Colombia and +507 for Panama. Phone numbers abroad may not have the same number of digits as US numbers; even numbers within a country can vary depending on the city and if the phone is a land line or cell phone. When calling from the US, you may need to drop the first digit of the area code.

When calling the US from abroad, generally you dial 00 for international exchange, then the US country code +1, and then the number with area code.

Smartphones

It will require some effort to get the most out of your smartphone when you travel. Even with an international roaming plan, costs can add up quickly – those handy apps often pile up download fees. The simplest solution is to shut down all cell phone functions, automatic data feeds and roaming options, and take advantage of your phone via any available Wi-Fi. With an Internet VOIP app (like Skype) you can make inexpensive calls. If necessary, turn international roaming back on and your phone will work as usual – albeit at added cost. If your phone doesn't support international roaming (most smartphones do), some carriers offer loaners.

App quality, availability and costs vary – as do platforms (iPhone, Android, Blackberry …), so again you'll need to do some legwork. Apps come in all forms: packing lists, currency converters, language translators, maps, journals, Wi-Fi hotspot finders … one problem is going to be searching through the vast array of available apps to uncover what works best and what you're likely to use most. Smartphones have a lot to offer, but their small size can be a drawback for some uses (maps, extended reading, etc.)

Cell Phones

If you want to use a standard cell phone while traveling overseas, be sure to check with your service provider (www.verizon.com, www.t-mobile.com etc.) to see if your phone will work outside the U.S. or whether you're better off renting an international phone. The websites www.travelcell.com and www.globalcellularrental.com have good information on rentals. Or, consider buying an inexpensive local phone for your stay.

Phone Calling Cards

If you don't carry a phone, you can use a prepaid calling card to call the U.S. with minimal additional charges. Besides the prepaid long distance charges, you might have a local fee of a few cents and possibly a connection fee if you are using your card at a hotel. Check with the reception desk prior to using it to avoid unexpected charges.

Calling cards purchased locally are usually less expensive than those purchased in the U.S. and are more likely to work with the local system. Note that dialing a U.S. 1-800 number outside the continental United States will incur costly long distance fees, since 1-800 does not work outside the U.S.

Photo Gear

For many people, capturing the highlights of their travel experiences in photographs or movies and sharing them is one of the most enjoyable aspects of the journey. Remember, however: some individuals and cultures and are less tolerant of photography than others. It's always best to respect local customs. And in some countries you might be charged for photography at specific sites, or banned from taking any photographs at all.

Digital cameras and camcorders are excellent travel companions—and many do dual duty by recording movies *and* still images. Fist sized camcorders can capture HD movies and high quality still photos; cameras the size of a deck of cards are great for snapshots and casual movie clips. With an ample supply of high-capacity memory cards you can record your whole trip with a small, lightweight package.

But you must remember the batteries. Recharging batteries is sometimes impossible, cameras can drain batteries *very* quickly, and replacements may be unavailable. Whether you need standard or proprietary batteries, it's wise to have spares. Be sure your charger will work with the local electrical system, and bring more than enough memory cards—they may be hard or impossible to find. Memory cards are small, thin and light: you can never have too much storage.

Compact cameras are impractical for distant subjects and are often weak in dim light. Some models have a zoom lens of up to 120mm, which is good for middle distances. For distant subjects a *megazoom* (with a zoom lens of at least 300mm) or a single lens reflex (DSLR) camera with up to a 300mm telephoto lens are good choices. With a DSLR you can use multiple lenses, though your gear can quickly get complex, weighty and cumbersome. Cameras or lenses that need a tripod are impractical for travel photography. A single mid-range telephoto lens (18-200mm) coupled with a small, fast prime lens (for low light/no flash situations) is an effective, flexible and compact kit. Consider mirrorless interchangeable lens cameras (MILC), which combine small bodies and multiple, small lenses with high quality for both still and HD movie images.

If you use a DSLR or MILC camera, protect the lenses with a UV filter and bring lens caps, covers, cleaning paper and a waterproof bag (a heavy duty Ziploc-style bag is good) to protect your gear. Be sure your camera has a flash that you can turn off, and if it's detachable, remember to pack it. (At many sites and museums, flashes are ***not*** permitted.)

Consider disposable cameras, as well. They are inexpensive and capable of acceptable photos as long as the light is not too dim or bright. X-rays do not damage the data of digital cameras (in any media format), and so pose no problems for travelers using digital cameras.

9. YOUR SHIP

Aboard Ship: the *Discovery*

A special feature of our trip is the type of small ship we use. We have specifically chartered a smaller ship as we feel this is the best way to experience the Panama Canal and to focus on exploration. Once the exclusive province of large ocean liners, a Panama Canal transit is a travel milestone; our small ship allows us to experience this milestone from a unique in-depth perspective.

Amenities: The *Discovery* features three decks – an upper deck with an open-air observation area, a mid deck with a lounge and dining room, and a lower deck with 12 all-outside cabins, each with a large window for viewing.

Your cabin amenities include a private bathroom with shower, hairdryer and in room air-conditioning. The decks, dining room, and lounge are spacious and attractively decorated, providing welcoming locations for relaxing with your traveling companions.

The ship is also equipped with Zodiacs and kayaks, and a unique platform that lowers kayakers gently into the water and retrieves them just as gently for safety and comfort.

Dress: There are no formal dinners on board; casual dress is encouraged.

Dining: Meals are taken in a window-lined dining room. The food on board includes international food and typical local dishes. If you require a special diet, please request this in advance—you may do so by contacting one of our Travel Counselors. There is no room service on board. Dining times will vary according to the scheduled daily activities. In keeping with regional custom, dinner is served at a later hour (7:30 pm) than Americans may be accustomed to.

A complimentary glass of wine is served with diner; cocktails can be purchased at the bar. If you would like to enjoy your own wine or alcohol on the *Discovery*, you may do so in the dining room, which has a corkage fee of $10 per bottle, or at leisure in your cabin. Liquor you purchase on shore and bring aboard cannot be consumed in the lounge or any public areas on board.

Electricity: Cabins are equipped with 220-volt outlets. In your bathroom you will find one 110-volt outlets, for use with electric shavers and such.

Internet: Internet access is not available on the ship.

Laundry Services: There is no laundry service available on board.

Medical Services: The crew is trained in First Aid and medical facilities are rarely more than a half hour away. There is no doctor on board.

Open Bridge: The *Discovery* has a policy of Open Bridge, which means the command room of the ship will be open to you during the trip.

Shipboard Payments: US dollars or Travelers Checks are accepted for purchases made on board.

Smoking Policy: Smoking is prohibited on board, with the exception of one outdoor deck area reserved for smokers.

Wheelchairs: The ship is not built to accommodate wheelchairs.

10. ABOUT YOUR DESTINATIONS

We’re including some handy practical details and a brief introduction to the places you’ll visit on your Small Ship Cruise Tour. If you expect to explore in depth on your own, we recommend that you consult one of the many available book-length guides to your destinations. If you have one or two specific sites, museums or features that you’re interested in, an Internet search is the ideal way to get-up-to-date information and details. And of course your Grand Circle Cruise Line Program Director or Hospitality Desk Representative will be able to assist you with suggestions and arrangements of activities you wish to participate in during your stay.

Panama City in Brief

City Layout

If you have a picture of a sleepy seaport town, you’ll have to discard it. Panama City is a vibrant metropolis at the crossroads of two oceans and two continents that has become Central America’s capital of international finance.

Panama City's layout has some startling incongruities. On a small peninsula at the southwest end of the Bay of Panama stands the old city centre of Casco Viejo (also called San Felipe), a jumble of ruins and restored colonial buildings that might evoke your sleepy port town – except for being in the shadow of the banking and commercial skyscrapers of the El Cangrejo district, about two miles to the north. To Casco Viejo’s west, the former US Canal Zone town of Balboa presents a distinctly North American face. To the east of El Cangrejo, set amid sprawling suburban slums, you’ll find the ruins of Panamá Viejo, the first European city on the Pacific coast of the Americas. Off the coast you’ll find numerous islands that stud the sea, shielded by ocean from the hustle of the city.

Henry Morgan destroyed the old city in 1671 (now visible as the ruins of Panama Viejo) and the Spanish moved to a more defensible position on a rocky peninsula on the foot of Cerro Ancón. Protected by reefs and surrounded by a massive wall, the old town languished as the wealthy abandoned it and the urban expansion moved the city center eastward.

Today, the Casco Viejo buildings that have been restored give a sense of how impressive the area must have looked long ago, and the area was declared a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 2003. Some of the allure of Casco Viejo's remains the dilapidated charm of the crumbling buildings, abandoned houses and boarded-up ruins.

Cuisine

As you might suspect from a city at the crossroads of oceans and continents, Panama City offers a wide variety of international cuisine—including Japanese, Italian, Thai, Middle Eastern, Chinese … you can probably find any ethnic cuisine you’d like somewhere in the city. Since there’s a large U.S. expatriate population, you’ll have no problems finding cafes and restaurants serving up standard American-style fare, like burgers and fries. Generally speaking, dining is casual, though you’ll have no difficulty finding upscale restaurants.

The diverse population of Panama influences the local cuisine, with an emphasis on Spanish, American, Afro-Caribbean and indigenous elements. Generally dishes are spicy or highly seasoned. Most meals are based around coconut rice (rice made with coconut milk), beans and fried green plantains (*patacones*.) You'll find a lot of fried foods – even at breakfast—so you may have to navigate around that if you're dieting or working around health issues. Breakfast options include eggs, toast, and fruit – but you'll also find Panamanian tortillas – a deep-fried corn batter topped with eggs and cheese. Spotted rooster – *gallo pinto* – is a kind of porridge made with rice, beans, and pork.

Chicken is a staple — as *sancocho*, a chicken stew unique to Panama — attests. You'll often find pork and beef on the menu, as well. You would expect seafood, as Panama means "abundance of fish" — and you'll find everything from red snapper to crab and octopus. *Langostino* (jumbo shrimp) and lobster are available, but are pricey due to overfishing. Traditionally, Panamanian seafood is offered fried, grilled, *al ajillo* (prepared with a spicy garlic sauce) and *a la españoula* (sautéed with tomatoes and onions). Fresh fruit is a constant, with pineapple, papaya, melon and banana always in evidence. However, vegetables are a bit harder to come by. The hot, humid climate here doesn't sit well with vegetables that thrive in more temperate regions.

If you're just feeling a bit peckish, try some tasty *ceviche*—cubed fish (usually sea bass) and onion marinated in lemon juice. It's a popular dish throughout Latin America. Or investigate the meat-stuffed cornmeal pastries known as *empanadas*. Panama also boasts its own version of the *tamale*, which is similar to the Mexican snack, but served in banana leaves.

Other Panamanian treats include:
Carimanola — a fried yucca roll filled with meat and boiled eggs.
Yucca frita — fried yucca root that fills the role of tropical French fries. Served with many meals.
Plantains are generally served in one of three ways: *patacones* — salty fried green plantains cut crosswise; *maduros* — mature fried plantains (slightly sweeter); and *tajadas* — baked plantains sprinkled with cinnamon.
Gallo pinto — rice and beans, usually mixed with pork.

And even if you're a confirmed tea drinker, Panamanian coffee is a must.

Drinking Water

Tap water in Panama City is *usually* safe, but many travelers opt for better-tasting bottled water, which is readily available.

Local Transportation

Taxi: Probably the most popular way to get around the city. The city is divided into four zones, and fares are around $1.25 per zone. Depending on your distance, you should expect to pay from 1.25 to $5.00. The Canal Zone is in a separate district and will cost at lest $5.00. If you're traveling with others, expect to pay $.50 per passenger. Taxi drivers may pick up additional passengers en route – but they should drop off the first fare before continuing on to new destinations. Tipping taxi drivers is not standard. Know, also, that some taxi drivers will try to overcharge you, as the government is not strict in enforcing penalties.

Buses: Also popular, inexpensive, but not quite as convenient as a taxi and possibly confusing due to ongoing changes. The privately owned and operated "red devil" busses (many were retired school busses from Florida, converted locally for urban use) are being phased out in favor of safer, air conditioned, more consistent, and state operated metro buses. The standard $.25 fare will rise to $.45 sometime in 2012. (The new metro busses do not accept cash – you'll need to buy a fare card before you board.) In either case, the busses are often mobbed during rush hours and it best to avoid them at that time.

The city is also embarking on building the first metro subway system in Central America, but it won't be functional until 2014 at best.

11. DEMOGRAPHICS, HISTORY AND CULTURE

We encourage you to learn about the regions of the world you will soon be exploring before your departure. The ancient and contemporary cultures of this area are rich and complex. Even a small amount of background reading can help you make sense of the kaleidoscope of facts and impressions that will come your way. Having some knowledge in advance can complement and enrich what you can learn from your expert Program Director.

Panama at a Glance

Panama Today

Capital: Panama City
Population: 3,410,676 (July 2010 estimate)
Ethnic groups: Mestizo (mixed Amerindian and white) 70%, Amerindian and mixed (West Indian) 14%, white 10%, Amerindian 6%
Languages: Spanish (official), English 14%; (many Panamanians are bilingual)
Religions: Roman Catholic 85%, Protestant 15%
Time zone: Panama is in Eastern Standard Time, so when it is noon in New York, it is noon in Panama.

In September 2007, Panamanians began work to expand the Panama Canal. Channels and locks will be widened to accommodate supertankers and decrease waiting times. The ambitious project has created jobs for locals. It is partially funded by canal tolls and foreign investors. Its estimated completion date is in 2015.

The Land

Panama is a west-to-east S-shaped isthmus between Costa Rica to the north and Colombia to the south. (The country is the most commonly cited point as the divide between the continents of North and South America.) At its narrowest point, it is about 40 miles wide. A mountain range, the Cordillera Central, runs down its center.

Historical Overview

Pre-20th-Century History

The first known inhabitants of Panama—the Cuevas and the Coclé—were wiped out when the Spanish arrived in the 16th century. It was both weapons and diseases brought from Europe that eradicated their populations. Their conquest complete, the Spanish settled along the Pacific Coast and founded Panama City in 1519. In search of gold, Spaniards headed south to Peru and the riches that they brought back drew the attention of pirates. It wasn't long before travel through the Caribbean was ripe with the threat of piracy and many Spanish, in an effort to protect their cache, brought it all the way back to Europe via Cape Horn.

As a result, the once-rich Panama slipped into poverty. When neighboring Colombia declared its independence in 1821, it claimed Panama as a province. It wasn't until 1846 that the U.S. became involved in the region, signing a treaty to allow America to build a railway from the Pacific to the Caribbean, and to defend it with force. U.S. interests aligned with the revolutionary ambitions of Panama's opposition party, and the former supported the latter as it declared its sovereignty in 1903. Soon after, a new treaty was signed, granting the U.S. a canal zone in perpetuity ten miles wide and five miles on either side. The Panama Canal would soon become reality.

Modern History

The canal treaty also granted the U.S. liberal rights to intervene in Panamanian affairs, resulting in tense relations. Canal construction began in 1904, and only ten years later the first ship negotiated its waters. (See below for a history of the Panama Canal). In 1936, the U.S. relinquished its right to interfere with

Panama's affairs outside the Canal Zone. But it wasn't until 1999 that Panama formally gained control of the canal.

In 1984, General Manuel Noriega—once head of Panama's secret police and once a CIA operative—rose to power as dictator. Over the next five years, he murdered his opponents and stomped on attempts at democracy, trafficking drugs and laundering money along the way. The 1989 election results seemed to promise new leadership, but the winning candidate was beaten on national television and the election annulled. Noriega was becoming an embarrassment around the world. Still, he declared himself the winner and announced a state of war with the U.S. The killing of an unarmed U.S. soldier fueled these flames.

"Operation Just Cause" was launched with 26,000 U.S. troops to bring down Noriega and bring democracy to Panama. More than 2,000 civilians lost their lives in the operation, and thousands were left homeless. Noriega fled, claimed asylum in the Vatican embassy, and was ultimately captured and convicted of money laundering.

Panama has seen five presidents since, its first female president among them. Privatization has increased, infrastructure has improved, and more attention has been paid to health care and education.

History of the Panama Canal

Early Canal Plans

The idea of connecting the Atlantic and Pacific oceans by way of a water passage across the Isthmus of Panama can be traced to Vasco Nuñez de Balboa's Isthmian crossing of 1513. He realized that only a narrow strip of land separated the two oceans. It was then suggested to Holy Roman Emperor Charles V (who was also Charles I of Spain) that digging out this strip of land would significantly reduce the time it took to bring gold from the new world to Spain. As a result a decree was issued in 1534 ordering the Panama regional governor to survey a canal route. This was the first survey for a proposed ship canal through Panama. However, wars in Europe and doubt over the feasibility of the task put plans for building a canal on hold.

In the mid 19th century the discovery of gold in California spurned further interest by the Spanish government in digging the canal; however, the company that was created to build it went bankrupt. Then, in 1869 Ulysses S. Grant ordered survey expeditions to Central America, looking for a possible canal route.

Meanwhile, a French company was organized by Ferdinand Marie de Lesseps—the builder of the Suez Canal. De Lesseps suggested a sea-level canal similar to the Suez Canal. French Navy Lieutenant Lucien N.B. Wyse then traveled to Bogotá with de Lesseps' canal plan and negotiated a treaty with the Colombian government (who occupied Panama at the time) that granted Lesseps' company exclusive rights to build an inter-oceanic canal through Panama. This treaty became known as the Wyse Concession.

Afterward, an International Congress for Study of an Inter-Oceanic Canal was planned in Paris on May 15, 1879. At this congress 14 canal proposals were presented, including the U.S. delegation's Nicaragua plan. But in the end, de Lesseps' confidence and charisma won out, and the congress agreed to back his sea-level canal plan.

French Construction
In the first few years of construction, outbreaks of yellow fever and malaria took their toll on the workforce. And after continued flooding of the Chagres River it also became clear to the engineers that a sea-level canal would not work, and that a high level lock canal was needed. De Lesseps, however, was determined to continue with his plan. He brought in various construction companies, and none were able to finish the sea-level canal. Eventually in January of 1889, Lesseps' company ran out of funds and construction ceased that May.

With the Wyse Concession to expire in 1893, Wyse returned to Bogotá where he negotiated a ten-year extension. Meanwhile, a new French-backed company was organized called the Companie Nouvelle de Canal de Panama. With little initial backing, the company hoped to attract investors who would help them fund the completion of the canal. However, both the public and the French government had lost faith in the canal. The company had no choice but to abandon the project.

U.S. Construction
President Theodore Roosevelt's interest in a Central American canal was heightened by an incident in Cuba in 1898. During the Spanish-American War, a U.S. battleship stationed there was blown up—with 260 lives lost. Another battleship, the *Oregon*, stationed in San Francisco at the time, was ordered to the Atlantic to help. The 12,000-mile journey took the *Oregon* 64 days to complete which, fortunately, was not too late for them to join in the Battle of Santiago Bay. The incident, however, convinced Roosevelt that the canal was absolutely necessary.

The U.S. Isthmian Canal Commission of 1899-1902 suggested for a second time that the canal be built through Nicaragua and popular sentiment agreed. At the same time, the French Companie Nouvelle de Canal de Panama proposed a deal with the Americans to sell them their parcels of land in Panama. In the end, the President was authorized to acquire the French company's assets—but if arrangements could not be agreed upon between the United States and Colombia within "a reasonable time" the President would be authorized to seek an agreement for the alternate route through Nicaragua.

Colombia rejected the initial treaty to build the canal in Panama. Roosevelt grew impatient and began supporting Panama's independence movement. He dispatched war ships on both sides of the isthmus and defeated a Colombian land force of 2,000 near the Darien jungle. Panama declared independence on November 3, 1903. Afterwards a new treaty granting the U.S. a canal zone concession in perpetuity ten miles wide and five miles on either side of the Canal prism line, was sent to Panama and shortly after accepted.

To begin construction, chief engineer John F. Stevens needed to overcome the fact that Panama was in no way equipped to support the additional population created by the growing Canal labor force. Stevens saw at once that the Panama Railroad was the lifeline of canal construction and therefore the railroad underwent a complete overhaul. The French equipment was replaced with the most durable, and trained men were brought in to rebuild the railroad.

Stevens also developed the ingenious system of canal excavation and disposal of rock and soil called "spoil". He devised a complex but capable and very efficient system of railroad tracks at different levels within the Cut. Spoil trains were scheduled to coordinate with the level where excavation was being done.

Stevens convinced Roosevelt that locks were needed; this could be no sea-level canal. The estimated building time was set at 8 years. With canal construction off the ground and going well, Stevens suddenly and explicably resigned in April of 1907. General George Washington Goethals took his place.

The Culebra Cut was the "special wonder" of the canal. Men and machines labored here to conquer an 8.75-mile stretch extending through the Continental Divide from Gamboa on the north to Pedro Miguel on the south. The lowest elevation between these points was at 333.5 feet above sea level.

Landslides were a constant threat at Culebra Cut. The first occurred at Cucaracha on October 4, 1907 when 500,000 cubic yards of removed material fell into the cut, following several days of heavy rain. The slide moved an average of 14 feet every 24 hours.

Design of the locks
The original lock plan called for one three-step set of locks at Gatun, one step at Pedro Miguel and a two-step set at Sosa Hill. Later the Sosa Hill locks were moved further inland to Miraflores. All lock chambers were built with the same 100 by 1,000 feet dimension, and are built in pairs, allowing for two lanes of traffic. It took four years to build all of the locks.

In spite of the newness of the science at the time, after 80 years of service the concrete of the Panama Canal locks remains in almost perfect condition—which to present day engineers is among the most exceptional aspects of the entire canal.

The key factor in the canal is water. Water lifts ships 85 feet above sea level to the surface of Gatun Lake, floats them across the Continental Divide, and lowers them again to sea level in the opposite ocean. There are no pumps used in the canal, water does its work by gravity alone. Water also generates electrical power for the electric motors that open and close the gates.

End of Construction
The first complete Panama Canal passage by a self-propelled vessel took place on January 7, 1914. A celebration was planned to recognize the completion of the canal; however, the Great War in Europe was setting a somber tone and the world's-fair-style festivities were cancelled.

At the end of construction the canal cost Americans around $375,000,000—which, unlike any other such project on record, was under budget. In fact, the final figure was $23,000,000 below the 1907 estimate, in spite of landslides and a design change to a wider canal.

There was, of course, loss of life. According to hospital reports, 5,609 lives were lost from disease and accidents during the American construction era.

Colombia at a Glance (optional extension)

Colombia Today

Capital: Bogotá
Population: 44,910,000
Ethnic groups: Mestizo 58%, white 20%, mulatto 14%, black 4%, mixed black-Amerindian 3%, Amerindian 1%
Languages: Spanish
Religions: Roman Catholic 90%, other 10%
Time zone: Colombia is in Eastern Standard Time, so when it is noon in New York, it is noon in Colombia.

The Land

Colombia is the fourth largest country in South America—roughly the size of Texas and California combined. It is also the third most populous country in South America, with most of the population centered in the cities. Located in the northwest corner of the continent, just south of Panama, it enjoys both Pacific and Caribbean coastlines. In the west, low peaks rise over the flat Pacific lowlands. Moving inward, these give way to the three mountain chains that run across the center of the country. Mountain peaks of up to 13,000 feet soar over these central regions. Moving further east, the countryside descends to grassy lowlands, and then to the coastal areas on the Caribbean Sea.

Historical Overview:

Pre-19th-Century History

Among the cultures scattered in the Andean region before Europeans arrived were the Tayrona, Sinú, Muisca, Quimbaya, Tierradentro, and San Agustín. Many of these tribes produced intricate goldwork and pottery. Some left behind tombs and rock paintings which give today's anthropologists insight into their ancient cultures.

The first recorded Spanish visit occurred when Alonso de Ojeda stepped ashore on the Guajira Peninsula in 1499. (Yes, Colombia is named for Christopher Columbus, but actually he never visited the country.) Like so many explorers, De Ojeda was in search of the mythical land of El Dorado, and the Amerindians' gold work made him think he had found it. Word spread about the region's potential wealth and more expeditions followed. In the end, three different Spanish expeditions raced to the interior looking for the mythical land (and hoping for very real treasure).

At first, local tribes tolerated the visitors, but they soon rebelled when it became clear that the colonists wanted only to enslave them and take their land. But they were no match for the advanced weaponry of the invaders, and soon Spain controlled much of the country. Colonial towns began to prosper, including Cartagena (founded in 1533). In the mid-1500s, Colombia, then called "New Granada," became part of the Viceroyalty of Peru, and remained under that domain for almost 200 years. During that time the country flourished, and in 1717 Bogotá was declared the capital of the newly created Viceroyalty of New Granada. Sadly, much of the prosperity was due to the widespread practice of importing slave labor from Africa. Some historians estimate that so many Africans were brought to Colombia that they outnumbered the indigenous peoples.

Independence

Throughout the 18th century, the Spaniards held tight control over the land. Spain regulated commerce, taxes, and duty; in addition, only the Spanish court could award the highest political offices. Protests for autonomy increased during the turn of the 19th century, but it was actually events in Europe that would spark Colombia's independence. As with many other Spanish colonies, it was the news that Spain had been attacked by Napoleon that forced the issue to the surface. In Colombia, the news divided the country. Many cities or regions formed their own autonomous governments, which is why this period is sometimes nicknamed "*la Patria Boba*," or "the foolish fatherland."

In the end, the great unifier of these various groups was the Venezuelan liberator Simón Bolívar. (This is not as odd as it may seem at first—modern-day Venezuela was part of the New Granada territory.) As the Spanish troops tried to retake their former territories, his army led the fight for independence. With the decisive Battle of Boyaca on August 7, 1819, Bolívar's troops won the war. Colombia joined Venezuela and Ecuador to form the Republic of Gran Colombia, but even with Bolívar as the first elected president, political differences led to the dissolution of the republic after ten years.

Political Division

Many of the differences were actually centered on Simón Bolívar and his vice president, Francisco de Paula Santander. The two had very different views on how the new country should be governed; by 1849, these differences were formalized into two political parties—the Conservatives and the Liberals.

Conservatives had centralist tendencies, believed the government should be allied with the Roman Catholic Church, and favored a limited voting pool. The Liberals leaned toward a decentralized federal government, preferred a separation between church and state, and advocated broader voting rights.

This division set the tone for the rest of the century. Civil chaos festered. Fifty insurrections and up to eight civil wars unfolded, culminating in the bloody War of a Thousand Days in 1899. ("Up to eight civil wars" because some historians classify certain conflicts as revolts, uprisings, or attempted coups.)

Modern History
After such an epic century, and an inauspicious beginning to the next, it might come as a surprise to find that Colombia was relatively quiet from 1902-1947. The main concerns during this period were the building of the Panama Canal and the two World Wars (which Colombia fought on the Allied side). The Panama Canal was especially upsetting to Colombia because until 1903, Panama was a province of Colombia. At the time, it was widely felt that the U.S. had encouraged Panama to break off from Colombia in order to broker a more advantageous deal.

But Colombia's struggles with political division were far from over. Conflict between the Conservatives and the Liberals ignited again in 1948 with *La Violencia*, this time killing 300,000 people. A 1953 military coup by General Gustavo Rojas Pinilla helped bring an end to the bloodshed, but did not result in the hoped-for reforms. In the end, both parties collaborated to launch a counter-coup against the general in 1957. The two parties—now called the National Front—agreed to share power for the next 16 years. The suggested power share took an unusual form—instead of governing together, the parties would take turns in presidential office. (So the for the first 4-year term Colombia had a Liberal president, for the next 4-year term it was a Conservative, and so forth.)

The National Front agreement ended in 1974 with the election of Liberal President Alfonso López Michelsen, but some semblance of the two-party system continued. Meanwhile, left-wing guerrilla groups were surfacing: the National Liberation Army (ELN), Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) and the April 19 Movement (M19).

Drug cartels in Medellín and Cali were also gaining power and influence at this time—often through violence, but also through newfound wealth. The relations between the burgeoning cartels and guerilla groups became complicated. Some guerilla groups began using the drag trade to fund their actives, while others rejected the cartels entirely, even going so far as to kidnap cartel family members. In reaction, many of the cartels started death squads that were, in theory, to protect themselves from the guerrillas. (In reality, many of the death squads were right-wing paramilitary groups who were used to terrorize civilians and increase the cartel's share of the drug trade.) The most notorious of these *paramilitares* was the United Self-Defense Forces of Colombia (AUC).

By 1990, widespread violence threatened to paralyze the country. In 1991, government control was strengthened with the signing of a new constitution and the surrender of Pablo Escobar, the head of the Medellín cocaine cartel. After his escape in 1992, he was tracked down and killed. After Escobar's death, and the public arrests of other key drug kingpins, many of the large cartels began to break up into small groups that turned on each other.

The 1990s also saw a change in public sentiment about politicians' relationship with the cartels. Although it was widely understood that corruption was rampant, many had been hesitant to speak out. But in the late 1990s, accusations arose that claimed President Ernesto Samper's campaign had been financed by drug money. Independent conservative Andres Pastrana, who had blown the whistle on Samper's Cali connections, won the 1998 election. It was Pastrana who first unveiled "Plan Colombia," a comprehensive plan to combat drug trafficking, strengthen the democratic process, and improve Colombia's human-rights record.

Recent History
Vowing to continue his predecessor's "Plan Colombia," independent Álvaro Uribe was elected president in 2002. He was a staunch adversary of the guerrillas, and for the first few months of his presidency, the war grew intense. But a major breakthrough occurred in 2003 with a peace treaty between the government and the right-wing paramilitary AUC. Talks with the last remaining left-wing guerrilla group (FARC) have been on and off for a decade, but today their numbers have dwindled to half of what they were in 2000. Uribe was re-elected in 2006, and succeeded by Juan Manuel Santos in August 2010.

Cultural Interaction

Language Barrier

You can have some great “conversations” with local people who do not speak English, even if you don’t speak a word of the local language. Indeed, this non-verbal communication can be a highly rewarding part of travel. To break the ice, bring along some family photographs, or a few postcards of your hometown. Your Program Director can help get the ball rolling. Keep in mind, however, that it is always good form to know at least a few words in the local language.

Your attire is a key part of your non-verbal presentation. Your clothing should show a respect for local tradition. This means you should dress in a relatively modest style. Avoid revealing or tight-fitting outfits.

Taking Photographs

The etiquette of photographing most people in the countries on your itinerary is about the same as it would be on the streets of your hometown. You need permission to take a close-up, but not for a crowd scene. Be especially polite if you want to photograph an older woman. If you want to shoot a great portrait, show interest in your subject, try to have a bit of social interaction first. Then use sign language to inquire if a picture is OK. Your Program Director can help.

Safety & Security

Common Sense and Awareness

As you travel, exercise the same caution and awareness that you would in a large American city. Don’t be overly nervous or suspicious, but keep your eyes open. There have been thefts in Panama. If you are venturing out after dark, go with one or two other people.

Carry a one-day supply of cash in your pocket. Carry most of your money, and your passport, in a travel pouch or money belt under your shirt. Replenish your pocket supply when you are in a safe and quiet place, or in our vehicle. Don't leave valuables unattended in your hotel room. Every hotel will offer use of a hotel safe at the front desk or an electronic in-room safe.

Pickpockets may create a sudden distraction. In any sort of puzzling street situation, try to keep one hand on your money belt. If an encounter with a local turns out to be long and complicated and involves money or your valuables, be very careful. Con artists sometimes target travelers.

12. ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Books, Maps, and Movies

If your local store or library doesn't stock the books or movies below, the Internet offers a wide variety of options for finding older or rare stock – try AbeBooks (abebooks.com), Alibris (albris.com), Amazon (amazon.com) or Barnes & Noble (bn.com) — or any of the smaller websites. Of course, this selection is not meant to be comprehensive, and is offered as a starting point for your research.

General:

A Brief History of Central America by Lynn V. Foster (History) A good overview of the economic and cultural history of the region. An earlier book by the same name but written by Hector Perez-Brignoll is also good, but isn't as up-to-date as this edition.

Nature of the Rainforest, Costa Rica and Beyond by Adrian Forsyth (Natural History) Although based in Costa Rica, biologist Forsyth used his experience to explain the basic ecology and conversation of any rainforest. Over 100 wonderful photographs complement the text.

The Monkey's Bridge: Mysteries of Evolution in Central America by David Rains (Natural History) An absorbing account of the history, exploration, and evolutionary role of the Central American land bridge by an award-winning nature writer.

Travelers' Tales Central America by Larry Habegger and Natanya Pearlman (Travel Account) A collection of eyewitness reports by journalists, travelers and writers, including Joan Didion, P.J. O'Rourke, and Paul Theroux.

Panama:

How Wall Street Created a Nation: J.P. Morgan, Teddy Roosevelt & the Panama Canal by Ovidio Diaz Espino (History) An intriguing look into the treachery, behind-the-scenes financial wrangling and Roosevelt-era dollar diplomacy that resulted in both the Panama Canal and the establishment of Panama as an independent nation.

Panama Canal by Cruise Ship by Anne Vipond (Guidebook) An outstanding guide to the Panama Canal that features a mile-by-mile guide to the transit, a history of the building of the canal, and a detailed pullout map.

Panama Wildlife Guide, Birds of the Panama Canal Zone and Adjacent Areas by Roger Tory Peterson and Virginia Marie Peterson (Field Guide) A handy 14-panel fold up card, featuring 250 color illustrations of the birds of Panama.

The Path Between the Seas: The Creation of the Panama Canal, 1870-1914 by David McCullough (History) McCullough reveals the full scope of the Panama Canal with page-turning storytelling ability. Capturing the international intrigue, it reads more like a suspense novel than a historical account.

The Tailor of Panama by John Le Carre (Novel) Set in Panama, this thriller by master storyteller John Le Carre includes spymasters, corrupt officials, arms manufacturers and other unsavory types.

Colombia:

One Hundred Years of Solitude and Love in the Time of Cholera by Gabriel Garcia Marquez (Literature) Seminal works by Colombia's most famous author, known for his lyrical prose and stories that mix the real with the magical. *Years* is the sprawling tale of a family that founds a town and their subsequent relations with the inhabitants. *Love* is a sometimes-difficult tale about the complicated diseases that we call love and romance.

Colombia by Colors by Benjamin Villegas (Culture, Photography) A lovely "coffee table" book that records and explains Colombian culture and traditions in words and photographs. May not be in stock at your local store, but can be found online.

Guidebooks:

Your Program Director will be happy to provide recommendations and suggestions during the trip, so a guidebook is not a necessity. But a good one can be invaluable as a one-stop reference, so for those travelers who have asked for suggestions, we offer these guidelines. Since different guidebook series each have their own target audience and structure, it is well worth your time to browse your local library or bookstore to find the one(s) you like best. To get you started, here is some general information on the most popular series:

Culture Smart! – Focuses on local customs and etiquette instead of sights, dining, etc.
DK Eyewitness – Innovative visuals make these books easy to use and a nice souvenir once the trip is over. The focus is primarily on the sights and activities.
Fodor's – A classic guidebook with strong information on activities, shopping, and dining. Good mix of upscale recommendations and budget suggestions.
Frommer's – A comprehensive guide series that is known for its restaurant recommendations.
Insight – Offers more information on history and culture than usual, nice visuals, good maps.
Lonely Planet – Practical guides geared towards a more adventurous traveler on a budget.
National Geographic – From the same company that publishes the magazine. Excellent photographs, good information on history, nature, and culture.
Rough Guides –For the independent traveler on a budget. Particularly known for their maps.

Maps:

Most hotels will provide maps free of charge at the reception desk or in your room. These maps are usually sufficient for our travelers, but if you plan on any independent exploration, you may wish to consider purchasing a map before your departure. This can be especially useful in a country that doesn't use the Roman alphabet as the hotel maps may only be printed in the local language.

Some recommended map series include: Rand McNally international maps (especially the StreetWise series), Insight's FlexiMaps, and Rough Guide's destination maps. We suggest that you visit your local bookstore or library to get a better sense of which type of map is best for your needs before making a purchase.

Suggested Movies

Here are few of our favorite movies that are about, or set in, or from the region you'll be traveling. Most are available at movie rental stores and websites—or even your public library. Sometimes films produced outside of the US may be harder to find, but they are usually available online.

Central America:

El Norte starring Zaide Silvia Gutiérrez, and David Villalpando (1984, color) Partially funded by the Public Broadcasting System (PBS) and nominated for an Oscar for Best Original Screenplay in 1985. Escaping certain persecution in Guatemala, a brother and sister travel through Mexico and on to Los Angeles in search of a better life.

Love in the Time of Cholera starring Javier Bardem and Benjamin Bratt (2008, color) A story about love, patience, and (of course) cholera. Based on the novel of the same name.

NOVA: A Man, a Plan, a Canal – Panama produced by PBS (2004, color) An interesting and informative documentary on the sheer engineering feat that is the canal. Hosted by David McCullough, the author of *A Path Between the Seas.*

Romancing the Stone starring Kathleen Turner and Michael Douglas (1984, color) Part adventure, part romantic comedy—a novelist and an adventurer team up to on a treasure hunt in Colombia.

Salvador starring James Woods, James Belushi, and Michael Murphy (1986, color) An American journalist covering the Salvadorian civil war becomes entangled with both sides.

Spirits of the Jaguar produced by the BBC (2006, color) Four-part series that offers an easy and clear introduction to the history and peoples of Central America. Includes programs on the Maya and the Aztecs.

The Mosquito Coast starring Harrison Ford and Helen Mirren (1986, color) Filmed on location in Belize, ***Coast*** follows an ex-pat American family looking for an ideal life in Central America. But the ideal proves elusive due to the increasingly stubborn and strange behavior of their father.

The Tailor of Panama starring Pierce Brosnan, Geoffrey Rush, and Jamie Lee Curtis (2001, color) The film adaptation of the classic John Le Carre spy thriller. Bosnan plays a spy, but a very different one from his famous 007 role.

Grand Circle Community & Useful Websites

If you have access to the Internet, the following sites offer good travel information:

Grand Circle Travel Store
www.grandcircleshop.com

Electric current and plug types
www.kropla.com/electric2.htm

Foreign exchange rates
www.oanda.com/converter/classic

ATM locators
www.mastercard.com/atm for Cirrus ATMs
www.visa.com/pd/atm for PLUS ATMs

Tourist information
www.visitpanama.com/?id=&lang=en **Panama**
www.wordtravels.com/Travelguide/Countries/Colombia **Colombia**

Travel books
www.amazon.com
www.barnesandnoble.com

World weather
www.intellicast.com
www.weather.com
www.wunderground.com

Foreign languages for travelers: basic terms in more than 80 languages
www.travlang.com/languages

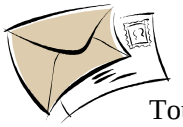
Travel tips: packing light, choosing luggage, etc.
www.travelite.org

Net café guide: 100s of locations around the globe
www.cybercafes.com

U.S. Customs & Border Protection: traveler information
www.cbp.gov/xp/cgov/travel

Transportation Security Administration (TSA): agency that screens luggage in U.S.
www.tsa.gov/public

National Passport Information Center (NPIC): for passport information
www.travel.state.gov



Tourist Board Addresses

Tourist offices offer free brochures, maps, and pamphlets with information that pertains to many of your destinations. Some of this material has moved to the Internet, but you can also contact the following embassies for information:

Panama Embassy
2862 McGill Terrace N.W.
Washington, D.C.
20008
Phone: 1-202-483-1407
Fax: 1-202-483-8413
Email: info@embassyofpanama.org
www.embassyofpanama.org/cms/index3.php

Colombian Embassy
2118 Leroy Place NW
Washington DC 20008
Tel: 202-387-8338
Fax: 202-232 8643
Email: embassyofcolombia@colombiaemb,org