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# PANAMA

Special Report



Marbella, Panama City: Cosmopolitan Hub Of The America...



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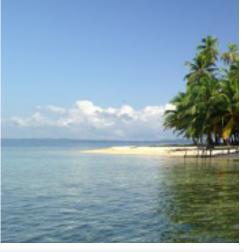
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# PANAMA SPECIAL REPORT

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# Marbella: Cosmopolitan Hub Of The Americas

By Jocelyn Carnegie

Marbella and its surrounding area is Panama City's banking district and the engine room of the country's booming economy. As long as you are set for full city living, you'll be at home in this area.

This area brings you the oceanfront Avenida Balboa, the Multicentro shopping mall, the Radisson Decapolis Hotel and Casino, the towering Hard Rock Hotel, Calle 50, with all its lofty and outlandish bank buildings, the city's year-old metro system, and a small handful of old villas left from a time when Panama City was populated by men in Panama hats.

# History

The evolution of Marbella and its surrounding area began in the mid-20th century with the building of large villas for Panama's elite oldmoney families and aspiring upper classes. Until then, they had lived in San Felipe and Casco Viejo in postcolonial splendor, with rambling mansions of singular architectural magnificence.

In the mid-1970s, President General Omar Torrijos introduced social programs in the city. Torrijos was hailed as a man of the people, and the effects of his social reforms can still be seen today. Some rich homeowners in Casco Viejo and the surrounding areas were forced to give up their homes in favor of low-income housing. The houses were split into apartments, new blocks were built on the edges of the old city, and it became a breeding ground of gangs and social deprivation. Unwittingly, the reforms created a ghetto around Casco Viejo, while Marbella and surrounding area flourished.

Today, Marbella sits at the center of Latin America's most successful financial capital, its more than 100 glittering banks and financial institutions taking advantage of a highly favorable investment framework and legal structure.

# **Redefining The City Center**

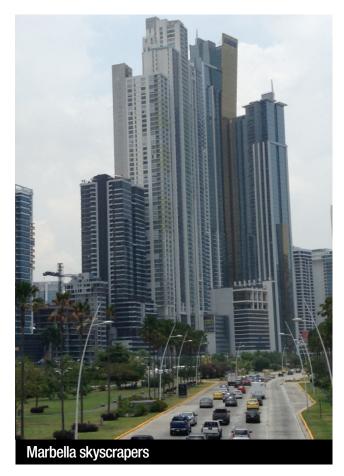
Some say that the name "Marbella" derives from an original homebuilder in the area, but it more likely derives from the beautiful views of the ocean from the first homes and apartment buildings built in the 1930s and 40s.

Sadly, not many of these buildings remain intact today, though there are still a few just off the oceanfront Avenida Balboa. Their architectural style includes pantiled roofs with wide eaves for shade and to divert rainwater, verandas, and, often, finely carved woodwork. The area is now highlighted by large-scale infrastructure and housing projects with landmark residential and office buildings continuing to dominate.

Panama City has been going through a process of redefinition over the last five to ten years. As the city center has expanded, every inch of space giving way to a new tower, Marbella has become more sophisticated and mature as a neighborhood. Landmark hotels and lifestyle brands such as Hilton, Le Meridien, and Yoo have popped up, mingling effortlessly to form a modern and vibrant center with the stunning backdrop of the Bay of Panama and its marina.

# Lifestyle

Living in Marbella and Bella Vista is definitively an urban experience, but somehow even the skyscrapers, traffic, and constant sounds of this cosmopolitan hub feel cowed by the blue waters of the Bay of Panama. The bay and its oceanfront boardwalk, the Cinta Costera, dominate this area. Along with it, the small Parque Urracá, located behind the Intercontinental Hotel, offers the whole area a spectacular and healthy slice of ocean breeze and open air, whether you like to head out for an



early morning exercise or an evening stroll up to sample the bars, restaurants, or National Theater in Casco Viejo.

One of the big advantages of living in Marbella is that you are close to anything you need and within an easy walk's distance.

However, being a Latin American city, Panama does have its fair share of chaos. The city's layout was not planned with much forethought, hence walking is not that easy in most areas. In fact, planning is not a word that stands out when thinking of Panama City. Frankly speaking, there was none. The last few years have come a long way to redressing a chronic lack of infrastructure in the center of the city, but we are a ways off having hole-free sidewalks in many areas. However, Marbella and surrounding area is largely an exception to that rule. I used to walk every day from my apartment in Punta Paitilla to the heart of Marbella. In those days, before the Cinta Costera was built, there were some rough moments on Avenida Balboa, but most of my 15-minute walk was through genteel and leafy Marbella streets populated by fine, gardened villas.

When they were building the Cinta Costera, I was walking to work early one morning. Just another sunny day in paradise,

minding my own business. As I was passing the Multicentro shopping mall, a crane was lifting large pieces of preformed concrete onto a new overpass, its boom and all four outriggers extended. As I marveled at the height of the boom, the machine lurched, and, in an instant, I was on the run, not quite believing what was happening. The crane came down with a remarkably tidy crash, and its boom came to rest on its side about 15 yards behind me. A lot of Latin American chaos followed—arms waving around, a lot of shouting, and a startled-looking driver emerging unscathed. Remarkably, nobody was hurt.

I think part of the joy of establishing a new life overseas is to reinvigorate one's life. At the end of the day, it's stimulating, engaging, and energizing to come close to being crushed by a truck walking to work. It may seem a curious thing to say, but it is that curiosity in life that I believe can be sparked by such an overseas move.

# **Drinking And Dining**

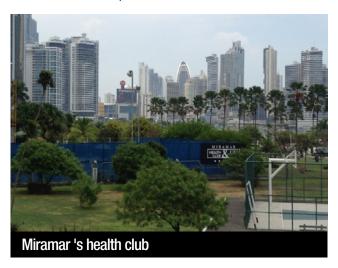
One good reason for not walking in Panama City is, of course, the weather (never mind the falling cranes). Either frazzled in the relentless sun, stewed by the humidity, or caught in a torrential downpour, you are bound to end up staring longingly at air-conditioned cars passing by. Luckily, distances in this area are not too great, and there is always somewhere to shelter on the way to anywhere.

A short stroll from your front door anywhere in Marbella is likely to lead you fairly quickly to somewhere you'll want to spend time.

In under an hour's walk, you can be in a different world in the vibrant Casco Viejo (a stunning walk along the oceanfront). Living just off Avenida Balboa near Los Delfines, I used to love to walk through the relative quiet of these streets to stock up at Felipe Motta on 53rd, close to the Paitilla Hospital and less than a 10-minute walk behind my building. Felipe Motta is a gastronomic treasure trove with an extensive and high-quality deli section as well as a wide selection of wines and liquors from around the world. A treat is to stop at Petit Paris, a fairly genuine French patisserie where you can find a proper croissant and other French delicacies.

Sunday mornings around Marbella are a treat, with a choice of world-class brunch venues such as the Intercontinental Miramar Hotel and the slightly more recent Waldorf Astoria. Although expensive, the Miramar's health club, spa, and gym facilities are good, and the outdoor pool does feel as if you are

away from the city's main drag. A tennis club membership is US\$55 per month and full club membership about US\$1,000 per year. There could be a benefit in having a pool-only membership for US\$615 per year (you can take up to a maximum of four people), but many buildings in and around Marbella have swimming pools and social areas, so you may not need a membership like that.



Just beyond Marbella proper lies the stretch of Calle Uruguay, a quarter-mile strip of bars, clubs, hotels, and restaurants of every type. The sort of club life you get on Calle Uruguay is not everyone's cup of tea, as it tends to start late and finish with sunrise. But, earlier in the evening, there are enough bars and restaurants to entertain every wallet and palette. You can begin an evening with a happy-hour cocktail at the Waldorf, Brickhaus pub, or on Habibis' terrace, then proceed for a predinner drink at Cielo, on the rooftop of the chic boutique Manrey Hotel.



# Marbella: Cosmopolitan Hub Of The Americas

Dinner options are numerous, and a wide variety of price options allows a lot of choices, from the low cost Panamanian restaurant Don Blas to the restaurants at the Waldorf. This also happens to be the hub of the Henesy-Rodriguez Group. David Henesy is arguably Panama City's leading restauranteur. His flagship is La Posta, a Panama City institution for sealing a deal over lunch or dinner or celebrating a special occasion. La Posta has just moved down the road a block or so and is now close to Henesy's other place, The Market, a dependable and much more affordable alternative.

You'll also find every type of music and atmosphere here, from electronic at bar Seis to a quieter atmosphere downstairs at Prive, reggae and Latin at Moods, and rock and retro at Sahara or Urbano.

There are really too many restaurants to mention, but leading venues that ought to be mentioned are Eurasia, just off Federico Boyd, a fusion of Asian and European tastes, as its name might suggest. Authentic Panamanian food can be found at Las Tinajas on Calle 51.

You get a great view of the ocean over your martini from Sparkles bar on the fifth floor at the Miramar, where you can also find some decent live music. A few minutes away, you can find a whole world of food, from reasonably priced Indian at Sabor de la India, a genuine German brat and sauerkraut at Rincon Aleman, an amazing green Thai curry at The Garden 2112 on 48th, or the extremely good quality and consistently well-priced Sukhi Thai around the corner from the Marriott. If you appreciate a fine cigar, then Habanos is the place to go, but you might not want to stay too late into the evening, as the girls that congregate there at night are "on the clock." In other words, it is not a place for the family. Costa Azul is one of my favorite Panamanian 24-hour places for breakfast, lunch, or dinner. If you like that sort of thing, an authentic fabada asturiana (Spanish bean stew with ham and chorizo) is about US\$6.

# Buy Out And Eat In

Shoppers are spoiled for choice in the area. Riba Smith, nearby in Bella Vista (also now in Coronado and Chitré), provides supermarket goods, stocking brands you'll recognize as well as local brands all at reasonable prices. There is a real quality that sets Riba Smith apart from the others, especially when it comes to the fresh meat counter, with the difference being that they know how to cut a piece of meat in the correct way.



Multicentro mall is within easy reach of anywhere in the area and can provide anything you'll need. Another hidden gem is Super Deli K, an all-kosher supermarket in the basement of the mall. It is expensive, but you may be able to find things here that you will not find elsewhere.



One of the many streetside shops around Marbella

Marbella and surrounding area has a number of smaller strip malls with restaurants, boutiques, and services, such as Plaza New York on 50th and 53rd, and Balboa Plaza and Balboa Boutiques on Avenida Balboa.

# **Getting To Know People**

One of the huge benefits of being in a central location of a cosmopolitan and compact city such as Panama is that you never starve for the company of other expats. A good source of contacts could be to contact and perhaps join the Chamber of Commerce, for example AMCHAM or the British equivalent British BCCP, both of which hold fairly regular social and networking events.

It is worth mentioning that German brauhaus Rincon Aleman, run by long-term Panama resident and ever-welcoming Fritz Schmutte, is a magnet for groups of expats, whether it is to watch World Cup matches, play liar's dice on a Saturday morning, drink a malt whiskey, or dance Scottish country dances.

If you are looking for a quiet and civilized place with a relaxing ambiance, the downstairs bar at the Bristol Hotel is a great venue or, for an authentic English pub, try The Londoner on Calle Uruguay.

### **Health Care**

Waking up to bright strip-lighting bouncing off duck-eggblue walls, unfamiliar surroundings, shuffling slippers, and the urgent bustling of nurses stalking around in soft shoes, pain and vulnerability, in equal measure, hang heavy in the air. Loud chatter in Spanish fills the halls and surrounds the nurse's station outside the ward.

Waking up in a hospital bed in a foreign country is many people's nightmare—unfamiliar surroundings, an unspoken language, different practices, perhaps a perception of ignorance, even malpractice.

That is often what we believe. I woke up in a hospital recently, and it's bad enough when you are not entirely sure what's up or what the immediate future holds. You imagine panic in the cockpit...

But this is Panama, and it is immediately discernable that this is different: The familiar air of efficiency breaks through the stark lighting and clinical walls. English is spoken, and there's an unusual hush about the place. There's no crazed moaning nor chaotic rushing of trollies and doctors. One can immediately see this place is state-of-the-art. From the decoration to the equipment, the room is clinical yet has a warmth about it that is absent in many other hospitals.

This is the Johns Hopkins, and down the road is CMP Punta Paitilla. Within 2 miles of this area are several hospitals and clinics—a number of them private. The Panamanian social security hospitals may not be much to write home about and are considerably more chaotic than these private clinics, but only in the way any state health authority hospitals can be.

Unbeknown to many, health care here in Panama is second to none. Any type of procedure seems to be available,

from surgical to clinical, medical to alternative, invasive to noninvasive, health treatments to cosmetics. It's all here and all available, normally at a fraction of the cost of the United States.

Many Panama hospitals are affiliated to leading U.S. medical facilities: the Centro Medico Paitilla with the Cleveland Clinic, San Fernando with Tulane University, Baptist Health with Miami Children's Hospital, Hospital Nacional with Harvard and the University of Nebraska, and Punta Pacifica with Johns Hopkins.

Obviously the choice is great in Panama City, but there are other smaller private health facilities in David, Coronado, and, more recently, Chitré.



I can assure you that the 20-some million Americans still without health insurance would jump at the chance to pay up to 75% less for everyday procedures in Panama.

So why would you up sticks and move to Panama? Health care is one of the top reasons. Despite what many Americans think, there is a functioning health care system in other parts of the world.

Your wait will be much shorter, and the medical care, services, and your surroundings are likely to be at least similar if not better than you'll get at home. What's more, you will end up paying a fraction of the cost for your procedure.

I went along to Punta Paitilla Hospital with a pain in my lower back. I was seen, diagnosed, and back at my desk within two hours, and all for the low cost of about US\$35. Similarly, I went to see a kinesiologist the other day. He's dealt with sport injuries for a number of leading NFL, NBA, and MLB players over the years. It is obviously difficult to get to him, but when

Marbella Apartment Rental Costs (for 2 people)		
Rent	US\$1,000 to US\$1,500	Basic two-bedroom apartment with all gas and water included
Electricity	US\$75	US\$125 with air conditioning
Cable TV, telephone, and Internet	US\$90	
Transportation	US\$100	Mostly public transit and taxis
Entertainment	US\$250	Dining out once a week, occasional movie or event
Groceries	US\$500	
Medical care or insurance	US\$35	
TOTAL	US\$2,050 to US\$2,550	

you do, he charges a mere US\$15 per hour from his tiny office in El Dorado.

I also had a somewhat involved but routine knee operation that cost me around US\$3,750 in a Panamanian hospital. The procedure took over two hours and was conducted by one of the city's leading surgeons. He said it would take 20 minutes, but, instead of giving me a quick fix in the allocated time, he took it upon himself to go in and fix the source of the problem, thus avoiding my needing a new knee within a decade. My neighbor at the time had been an orthopedic surgeon at the Beverly Hills Clinic and, hearing my story, said he would never have been allowed to attempt such a thing... and, anyway, it would have cost around US\$25,000.

My recent angioplasty might have cost around US\$14,000 in the U.K., perhaps US\$9,500 or so in Spain, but only about US\$6,500 in Panama (and anywhere between US\$28,000 and a staggering US\$61,000 in the United States). My three nights in hospital in the U.K. probably would have cost the state around US\$6,000 extra—probably more in the United States—but, in Panama, the three nights cost around US\$750.

The general rule of thumb is that costs for medical care can be around 50% less in Panama, but some patients report costs of only 10% for some procedures.

## The Beautiful Ocean

Marbella and its surrounding area is one of Panama City's top choices for urban lifestyle, not only in Panama, but in all of Latin America. With the big, blue, beautiful ocean so close, minutes from your doorstep, finding something to do is never difficult.



The Marbella neighborhood proper is a quiet oasis surrounded by the loud chaotic streets of the city's downtown, but it still is not removed from the modern conveniences of big-city living. Panamanian by nature, but with a definitive Western influence, this area should be high on the list for any foreigner looking to relocate to Latin America.

# **About The Author**

Jocelyn Carnegie has long experience setting up home, family, and business in different countries around the world, from the UK to Ireland, from the United States to France, and from Central Europe to Central America.

He and his current endeavors currently call Panama home, and we welcome Jocelyn to our Panama Letter team.



# Ingredients

- 1 beef foot bone from the lower leg
- 1 tablespoon of lime juice
- 1 chopped onion
- 2 chopped cloves of garlic
- 6 finely chopped plump tomatoes
- 2 chopped Panamanian cilantro leaves
- 2 chopped sweet green peppers
- 2 pounds of ñame (yam)
- 2 pounds of cassava (yucca)
- 2 pounds of taro root (otoe)
- 1 teaspoon of dry oregano
- 1 teaspoon of salt

# Instructions

- Wash and brush the beef foot very well to clean it, taking away the earth and soil.
- 2. Chop the beef foot and place the pieces in a pot with water, bring to a boil, and add the lime juice.
- Cover with the lid and cook for 40 minutes. Then add the onion, garlic, tomato, cilantro leaves, and the sweet green pepper.
- 4. Let them cook until the beef foot is soft. Then add the rest of the ingredients. Add the oregano and salt at the last moment.

Continue next page

**Beef Feet And Bread** 

We thought we'd try to find a really

we were inspired to have a look at

the after-hours menus on offer on

Calle Uruguay. All we could find

were taco carts selling Toledano

chicken burgers, tacos (seriously

hotdogs. We had to cast the net

the gentrification of Casco Vieio.

area called the Terraplane. It was

said that if you had an item stolen

in a petty robbery then it may well be worth sending a trusted local to look for it in the Terraplane the next morning: It was the black

marketer's market.

next to the fish market was an

wider and go back in time. Prior to

good after a night out), and

traditional late night recipe, and





MAMALLENA
Bread Pudding

Remnants of the old jumble of rickety stalls and shops still do exist between the new Cinta Costera entrance to Casco and Avenida B, but it is only a fragment of what it was.

Terraplane was also the site of the former meat market, and, after a long night and early morning, it was the custom for some enterprising street chefs to concoct these recipes. "Waste not; want not" is probably the overriding force behind such a dish, and it would have had to have been a very, very long night to bring it past these lips, but traditional it certainly is.

# **Ingredients**

- 1/2 pound of bread
- 2 cups of milk
- 1 cup of sugar
- 4 eggs
- 1/4 pound of melted butter
- 1 teaspoon of salt
- 1 teaspoon of vanilla extract
- 1/2 cup of raisins

# **Instructions**

- 1. Grease a square glass baking tray.
- Place the bread in a blender and add the milk. Leave it to soak for 20 minutes.
- 3. Grind or tear up the bread and then add the sugar and mix.
- 4. Beat the eggs lightly and incorporate to the bread mix.
- 5. Add the rest of the ingredients and pour into baking tray and bake at 350 degrees Fahrenheit for 50 minutes or until it's slightly brown and dry.
- 6. Let it cool and refrigerate.



# **Expat Interview: Harry Segil**

South African pop artist and designer <u>Harry Segil</u> made his reputation in the brazen Los Angeles design scene of the 1980s. Despite a host of A-list clients ranging from Madonna and Patti Smith to Robin Williams and Diane Keaton and a career encompassing everything from sculpture to painting to furniture design, Harry left the bright lights and celebrity behind in 2007 to make his home in Panama.

Though he moved here for a change of pace, the grandfather of five is not one for lying on the beach too long—he is currently exhibiting at Projektcasa and A Priori Gallery at Addison House Design Centre Gallery in the Panama City neighborhood of Obarrio.

### Where are you from?

I'm from South Africa, just outside of Johannesburg. It's an exquisite place. To be honest, Panama reminds me of Africa a lot. There are a lot of similarities—the flora and fauna, the distinct climatic zones, two oceans. I drive through the countryside and the beautiful birds and flowers give me a feeling of South Africa.

### Why did you decide to move to Panama?

I moved to America to educate my children, and we loved it. But, after a while, I needed a change. In Los Angeles, I worked with a lot of Hispanic people, and I love Hispanic culture. So I started researching and looked at Costa Rica, Mexico, Panama—a lot of places.

When I arrived here, I found the Panamanians very calm and respectful. The respect for family moved me.

You see very young fathers in the supermarket holding their babies, and it's so natural. Here you don't hear people screeching at their children to do this and that like you do in other places. And Mother's Day—the importance of Mother's Day—it's just such a family oriented place, and that's very important to me.

Also, Panama is a place of the future in many respects, this is a country coming into its own, starting to appreciate its own culture. In general, I see a lot of opportunities, and it's amazing to see the growth of self-expression—this place could be a cultural center the way that Buenos Aires is.

# With a lot of interesting neighborhoods in Panama City, why did you choose Marbella?

I'm so lucky here. I can walk to the Cinta Costera, and I have Parque

Urracá. I can walk to inexpensive restaurants, to the banking district, to the metro. I'm close to hospitals, and I can drive to any of the shopping centers—Albrook, Multiplaza, Multicentro—in five minutes.

I walk up to Avendia Central and I see the Kuna ladies shopping in their amazing clothes. And I can go to the places they go to buy their fabrics.

And it's still fairly quiet. Of course, when I arrived, there was no Cinta Costera, and Panamanian friends told me they used to play on the beach here. When I bought my apartment I had an amazing view, breathtaking, and I still do, but the area has grown in leaps and bounds, so it has been encroached on a bit.

I also love the Spanish Revival architecture. Between my apartment and the synagogue is a Spanish Revival mansion. It's like what you would see in 1920s and 30s buildings around Los Angeles—LA has Hispanic heritage too.

# What are the biggest changes you have seen in Panama since your arrival?

The type of person I see coming here has changed. Before it was just *pensionados*, but now it's everyone. Sailors arrive on boats and stay, young people bring their families—it's inspiring. Everyone sees opportunity here. In my building, there are people from all over the world—Guatemala, Russia, China, people who work in Dubai, young people from Spain who are here to start a business. Anyone could knock on my door.



# What is it about Panama that gives you the greatest joy?

There is so much beauty. From my balcony I can see Casco, the flag on Ancon Hill, and the Cinta Costera.

The air is clear because of the sea. I have a gallery in my apartment, and people can make an appointment to come and meet me and see my work, and that gives me joy. People can just send me a message on my Facebook page—I welcome anyone who wants to see my work and be inspired.

### What are your frustrations?

We haven't caught up with infrastructure. There is no refuse collection. Sometimes I find pieces of black plastic on my balcony, and it's from people burning garbage. We need to teach children and educate them to see things differently—inspire them.

I'm seeing used-furniture stores now and used clothing, and I think that's the influence of expats, people who, like me, have a different view.

# How would you describe the art and design scene in Panama City?

There are so many new galleries opening and artists arriving from all over the world. People are opening their minds and becoming more educated. It's stimulating. I see a lot of retirees arriving here and then finally finding ways to express themselves, taking up painting or sculpture.

People need to know that there is more here than golf and meeting friends for drinks.

# Does Panama inspire your work?

The first time I came to Panama I was on Avenida Central and saw some Kuna women in their amazing outfits, and I just followed them. In a way it reminded me of South Africa—the beadwork, the same colors, the use of stripes—it's so graphic. The culture runs so deep. There are 15 tribes in South Africa, and I was always inspired by them. Now my work is chiefly inspired by the color of Panama, mixed with LA and South Africa. I use *molas* a lot and Kuna fabrics.

In my home in Coronado, I have a white concrete sculpture. I based it on a seashell I found in Bocas del Toro. On the right there is a bird, which represents the celebration of life, and on the left is a third eye, the sign of intuition. When I arrived in Panama, most people didn't know what the third eye was, but now I see people becoming more spiritual, more mystical.

# Speaking of your home in Coronado, is it important to you to get out of the city?

Absolutely. I can get in my car and be in Coronado in just over an hour. I have a meditation garden there, where you

can rake the stones—like the Zen gardens of Kyoto. I have a huge noni tree there. It's a traditional medicinal tree, and, if I cut myself, I head straight to the noni.

# Do you have any hints or tips for people considering a move to Panama?

You need to understand it's a whole new culture; you won't have the same life. But it's exciting and stimulating.

If you arrive in any country with fixed ideas, you're going to have problems, so don't be hasty in your decisions. Take time to absorb your feelings and remember that you are coming from a different place with different ideas.

Maybe rent somewhere first and see how you feel.

# You have a reputation as a trend-spotter. What do you see as the "next big thing" for Panama?

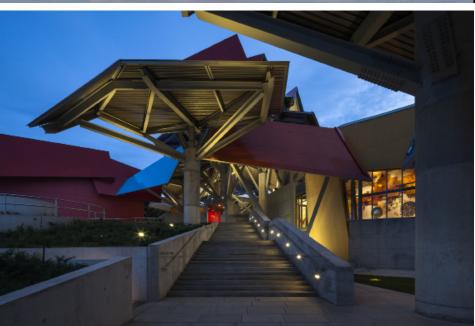
Fashion is a big thing here, and people have their own style. I go to Caledonia and see the girl who works in a shop wearing 6-inch heels, and I see the Kuna in their amazing traditional outfits. And that's just like what you see on the catwalks and in Paris, a girl with purple hair, a Hermes handbag, and some kind of handmade indigenous jewelry. It's about expressing yourself. And men here are starting to express themselves too.

I would say to expat men: This is your chance to grow. Throw away the short khaki pants and the shirts from Hawaii and the baseball caps—wear beautiful linens, wear a *guayabera*, buy a Panama hat. Enjoy what we have here. I do, and I love it!



# <u>Biomuseo</u>

# Panama



Located on the Amador Causeway at the entrance to the Panama Canal, Panama City's new Biomuseo is designed to tell the story of the Panamanian Isthmus rising from the ocean, creating a bridge between continents and transforming the biodiversity of the planet forever.

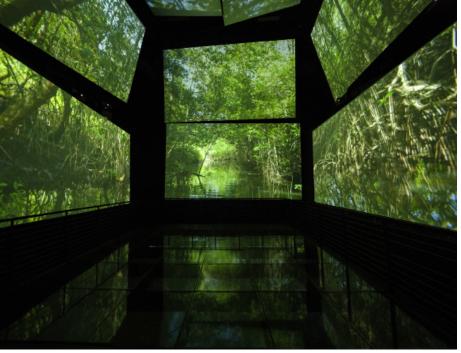
The only example of architect Frank Gehry's work in Latin America, the 4,000-square-meter museum houses eight galleries, a shop, a cafe, and a public atrium and is surrounded by a biodiversity park.

Exhibitions are designed in consultation with scientists from the neighboring Smithsonian Tropical Research Institute, and two new aquariums, representing the Pacific and Atlantic oceans are expected to be open by the end of the year.











# **Opening Hours**

Monday: 10 a.m. to 4 p.m.

Tuesday: Closed Wednesdy to Friday: 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Saturday and Sunday:

10 a.m. to 5 p.m.

# Admission Panamanians and residents

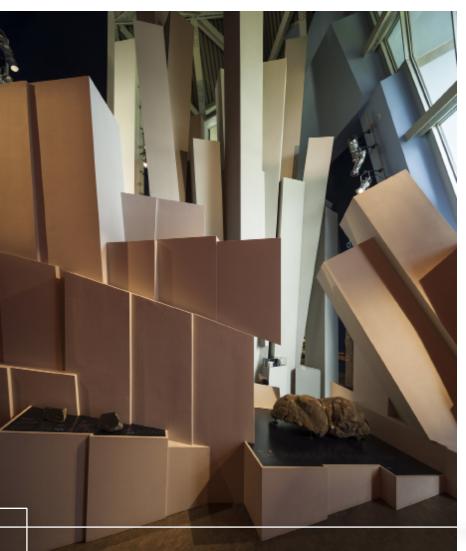
Adults: US\$12

Seniors, students, and children: US\$6

# **Nonresidents**

Adults: US\$22

Students and children: US\$11

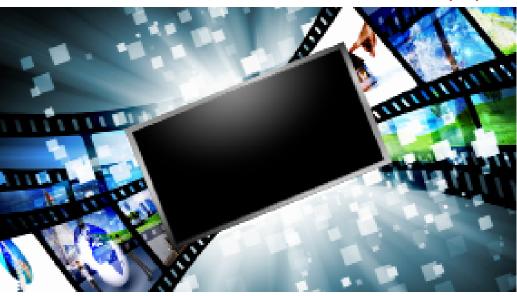






# **How To Watch American TV Shows In Panama**

By Joey Bonura



So you did it—you got yourself to Panama. You survived your first stressful week adapting to a new city and a new culture, and now all you want to do is catch up on your favorite TV from back home.

Lucky for us, the Internet Age has made creature comforts like TV available to us no matter our location... right? Unfortunately, no. There is no equal-opportunity viewing for those of us abroad.

Once you get online, no matter what service you try to use, you'll be stopped by a pop-up that looks something like this:



or like this:



or like this:

# App not available

This might be because your phone software needs to be updated, the app is exclusive to a different mobile provider, or the app is not available in your country/region.

No matter what service you use to watch TV online, it won't work outside of the United States.

Yup... it's a dark reality for anyone that wants to keep up with their U.S. media in a new country. The majority of TV network sites and paid subscription services either completely block their content from being viewed outside of the United States or the amount of content is limited.

In my four years in Panama, I would say I've become an expert in getting around anything that keeps me from watching the latest episode of "Scandal." Here's what I've learned...

# 1. Know Where To Go To Get What You Want

### On Demand Services

Sign up for Netflix and/or Amazon Prime. I use both and find them both to offer a great variety of TV and movies. And, in most cases, if something isn't available on one, you'll find it on the other. Hulu is another good option.

These services are great for movies or seasons of TV series that are already available on DVD. But the big drawback is that shows aren't uploaded live or immediately after airing... meaning you'd have to wait nearly a year to see the latest season of a given show.

### **Network Sites**

Most major networks like Fox, ABC, NBC, etc. upload their TV shows to their websites and make them viewable for free.

The upside of using these sites is that you can watch the show almost immediately after it airs live (sometimes you may have to wait a bit, but usually the upload is immediate).

However, the big downside here is that

shows are usually only available for a limited time, meaning you need to keep up or risk missing an episode and not finding it elsewhere. The other annoyance is that these can only be streamed, so your Internet speed can drastically influence your viewing experience. I find streaming to be nearly intolerable now. But, if you're more patient than I am, this is a good option.

### **US TV Now**

US TV Now is a cool website that allows you to watch most of the basic cable channels like Fox, ABC or CBS live and for free.

### **Popcorn Time**



Popcorn Time is an app for computers that allows you to stream nearly any TV show or movie for free. It even boasts an elegant Netflix-like interface... but don't be fooled into thinking this is a legal viewing system. Popcorn Time may look good, but it streams its media from torrents, which are illegal downloads floating around the web.

### 2. Get Access

Now to the nitty-gritty... gaining overseas access to these on-demand services. The overseas user has three basic service options for viewing licensed content outside the States: a proxy server, a VPN, or a DNS proxy.



For best results, find a service provider that offers all three types of service. It will cycle through them, as they are more or less effective with different media services.

### **Proxy Servers**

Anonymous proxy browsers were one of the first (and most common) ways to get around these annoying overseas licensing restrictions. A proxy changes your IP address to appear as though it's wherever you want it to be. You could tell the Internet that you're in the United States, the U.K., Japan, or anywhere in the world, based on your proxy IP number.

The basic idea is that the proxy acts as an intermediary between you and the server you're trying to reach. This intermediary (as long as its server is located Stateside) fools the server you're trying to connect with (for example, Netflix's U.S. server) into thinking your server is actually your proxy server (and therefore is also in the States).

It worked for a while; however, now proxies are all but useless. Most services have figured out how to recognize and block them. All of this is a moving target, though, the rules change daily. For months in Panama, my proxy stopped working, so I switched to a VPN. Oddly, in recent weeks, my proxy has started to work again with some services. I am mystified.

### **VPNs**

VPNs (or virtual private networks) are the 2.0 version of proxies. Instead of just acting as an intermediary, a VPN creates

an entirely new network for you—your own private virtual network that you can "locate" anywhere in the world.

Aside from fooling the Internet into thinking you're in the States (or wherever), they also provide a more secure and more private Internet connection. It's a win-win for those of us who resent being spied on by anyone with the know-how to get into your Wi-Fi network.

VPNs do have their flaws. They have been criticized for sucking up your bandwidth and slowing your entire household's Internet (and sometimes other computer functions) to a crawl.

And, now, several years in, many media services have figured out how to recognize and block VPNs as well as proxies. Hulu and Netflix especially have begun cracking down heavily and are blocking VPN users more and more.

Some still-good VPN service providers include:

Hide My Ass: This is a little-known but highly effective VPN service. It's a paid service (from US\$11.52 a month), but it's worth the cost for the security. Plus it comes in app form, meaning none of your devices will be left out of the plan; you can stream or download from your tablet, smartphone, or computer with equal convenience. It's been recommended by network security professionals, since 2010.

**Safer VPN:** This is the paid VPN service that I personally use, and I have found it to be one of the best. It's not the cheapest service, but it is in the low end, with plans starting at US\$5.99 a month.



### Flashed router

Often, cheaper services slow down the Internet connection too much to be worth it. With Safer VPN, my connection speed remains about the same, and I find the service to be reliable.

**Hola:** This is a free, easy-to-use service. You enter a website into their search bar and they'll make it look like you are accessing that site from any country you choose.

You get what you pay for... this service is unreliable at best. If you're really opposed to paying for a service, this will do the trick in a pinch, but expect long load times and infuriating streaming.

### **Get A Flash Router**

If you're committed to a VPN, you may need to go the extra mile and purchase a special router that allows the VPN connection to run all of the time. I made the investment because I have an Apple TV, which doesn't allow you to input any

VPN settings, so I could only access the Panama version of Netflix and Hulu... and most other apps were completely blocked from it.

While the router is more expensive than your everyday version, I'm happy with it and the service. My Apple TV works 100%.

### **DNS Proxy**

DNS (domain name system) proxies are the next-gen of proxy services and the best thing on the market right now. They are, as yet, nearly undetectable by any on-demand media service. They work across all devices on any Internet-capable device (meaning this will allow your Apple TV to work all the time, without the purchase of a flash router). It works faster than a VPN and doesn't suck up bandwidth from the rest of the household.

Smart DNS Proxy is one of the best package services out there. It offers all three levels of service (proxy servers, VPN, and DNS), making sure you are covered on all fronts. It's super fast, user-friendly, and affordable at US\$4.90 a month or less. You could get two years of coverage for only US\$50 if you pay upfront.



Joey Bonura is from Louisville, Kentucky, and moved to Panama in 2011 to finish his degree in international business. He enjoyed the hot tropical

weather and the lifestyle on offer in Panama City so much that he decided to make this his permanent residence. He has been managing our social media at Live and Invest Overseas since 2013.

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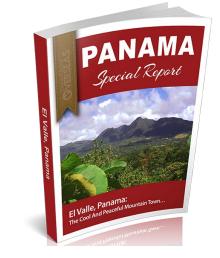
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