

Panama – CENTRAL AMERICA

'Panama' translates as 'an abundance of fish' in the Cueva Indian language. It certainly is an area of great interest to gamefishermen. These rich waters are home to plentiful marlin and an exotic mix of inshore treats.

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1513 when Balboa crossed the isthmus to become the first European to 'discover' the Pacific Ocean. The modern country is most renowned for the presence of the Panama Canal. This structure is certainly the greatest influence on Panama's economy (which is mainly service-based) and its future.

TARGET SPECIES

The fishing is divided into offshore and inshore endeavours. Offshore the marlin fishing is generally superior to other regions of Central America. Although blue marlin are the most frequently encountered species in most of the tropical Pacific American coastline, this is black marlin territory, where they outnumber the blues five to one. Striped marlin, so numerous farther north, are seldom caught in the Gulf of Chiriquí. The marlin taken in these waters will generally run around 150kg, although marlin of 250kg are a good chance, and 'granders' have also been caught in Panama.

Sailfish, wahoo and dolphinfish are abundant in their seasons. Huge schools of enormous (over 100kg) yellowfin tuna migrate through here in the springtime.

Inshore there are exotic roosterfish, which can run upwards of 40kg, and big cubera snapper (which are like a giant mangrove jack) and amberjack await among the rocky underwater escarpments. There are plenty above 20kg waiting to volunteer their services. There are large snook and sea bass in the river's mouths, but these fisheries are underdeveloped. The inshore fishing is available throughout the year, although the weather is poor in October. ☒

HISTORY

Panama is the name of the first village founded by Spanish explorers in the early 1500s and subsequently settled as a colony. One of the first European footholds in the New World, Panama City is now a modern metropolis made rich by the thriving business of the Panama Canal. The land was the property of the country of Columbia until its independent government was recognised in 1903. The USA took on construction of the canal in 1904 after a failed effort by the French. Control of the canal was signed back to Panama in 1979. Freed from despotic dictator Manuel Noriega in the 1980s, it is a democracy rife with opportunity for travel and pleasure.

Like most of Latin America, the population is heavily *mestizo*, a mixture of European and Indian blood. The official language is Spanish. More than 80 per cent of the nationals are Roman Catholic.

WHERE IS IT?

The threadlike isthmus joins the massive continents of North and South America like two separated lovers reaching out to touch at the fingertips. Despite modern development, this is a wild land of stunningly jagged and beautiful shore on the Pacific side and Caribbean white sand and turquoise water on its Atlantic seaboard. The country stretches some 772km from west to east, but has over 5600km of coastline.

Bounded by Costa Rica to the north and Columbia at the southern frontier, its predominant physical feature is a central spine of volcanic mountains. Travellers typically arrive at this destination by flying into David, the country's third-largest city and the site of the Panama Big Game Fishing Club. From here anglers can strike points including Coiba and Hannibal Bank.

FAMOUS FOR

Every schoolchild encounters Panama in their history book for the event of



CHARTER BOATS

The Panama Big Game Fishing Club provides all-inclusive packages. www.panamabiggamefishingclub.com

Coral Star – a 115ft mothership towing a small fleet of fishing boats. www.coralstar.com

Pesca Panama – a 70ft motorised barge, with fishing boats, off Coiba Island. www.pescapanama.com

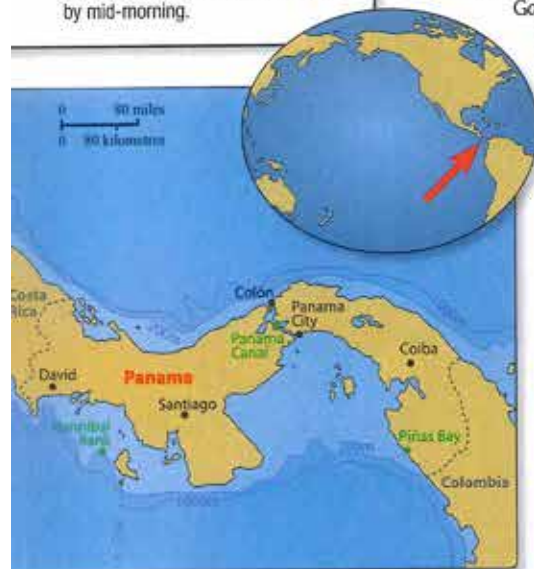
Tropic Star Lodge, Piñas Bay – offers all-inclusive packages for fishing on 31ft Bertrams. www.tropicstar.com

The all-inclusive packages vary between \$US3000-\$7000 per person during the high season. In general, all operations provide lures and conventional tackle up to 24kg.

GETTING THERE

Multiple carriers offer services to Panama City. From Australia, travellers need to fly via Los Angeles or San Francisco. If stopping off in Hawaii, there is also a route through Houston, Texas.

Arriving at Panama's Tocumen Airport, travellers need to transfer 30 minutes by car to Albrook Airport for domestic flights. There are many flights to David, starting early, so even with an hour of water taxi transfer out to Bocas Bravas you can still step on to your fishing boat by mid-morning.



	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	June	July	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
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SPECIES

Black marlin										*		
Blue marlin										*		
Sailfish										*		
Cubera snapper										*		
Roosterfish										*		
Wahoo										*		
Dolphinfish										*		
Yellowfin tuna										*		

LEGEND: Excellent (Red), Good (Orange), Fair (Yellow), Poor (Blue), Undetermined (Grey)

*The fishing is actually good in October, but the weather is not favourable for fishing.