



Welcome Packet

Boulder Soccer Girls Global Education Squad

Panama, June 9-17, 2019

Dear Boulder Soccer Girls Squad,

Welcome to the **Squads Abroad** trip to **Panama** from **June 9-17, 2019**. In a few months, your group will embark on an adventure-of-a-lifetime experience that includes fun and engaging cultural and volunteer immersion activities designed to enrich your understanding of the country while making a positive impact in the local community. Our staff in **Panama** is busy preparing for your group and looks forward to sharing this enriching experience and their beautiful country with your group in **June**.

This **Welcome Packet** is designed to prepare you for your upcoming adventure. This Welcome Packet includes a **Checklist and Timeline, Immunization Information, Passport Information, and Country Program Information**. We hope it will answer any preliminary questions you may have but we are also available anytime to assist with any additional questions or concerns.

A couple of weeks before your Squad trip departs we will send out the **Final Expectations Packet** which contains more detailed information about your trip along with a **Volunteer Match Assignment** detailing the project you will be working on and the community where you will be volunteering. The Final Expectations Packet will contain the **Daily Schedule, Flight Information, Packing List, Contact Sheet**, and final travel instructions.

We greatly appreciate your decision to travel with **Squads Abroad**. Last year our Squad groups provided over **3,000** service hours and over **\$22,500** in donations. With your help, we hope to continue to expand our international impact within the country and back home as more globally conscious citizens. Feel free to call **(559) 761-0351** or email any of our staff below with any questions or concerns.

Yours in the journey,

Erik Werner, Director of School Group Programs @ ewerner@squads.ngo

Hailey Roodberg, Program Specialist for Panama @ hroodberg@squads.ngo

Things to Do

Checklist

- ☐ **Registration:** Make sure you are completely registered for the trip @ <https://www.empowered.org/Boulder-County-Girls-Soccer>
- ☐ **Forms:** Complete all of your forms on your Empowered Signup/Registration Page
 - ☐ Agreement & Release: **must read and sign** online
 - ☐ Health and Information: **must complete** online
 - ☐ Behavioral Expectations: **must read and sign** online
- ☐ **Passport and Immunizations:** Make sure you have a valid passport (cannot expire within 3 months of arrival date) and schedule and complete recommended immunizations.

TIMELINE

- **90+ Days** prior to arrival in country (**March 2019**)
 - Apply for/ renew your passport if necessary
 - Talk to your doctor to set up an appointment for any necessary immunizations and medical clearances
- **60 Days** prior to arrival in-country (**by April 10, 2019**)
 - Agreement & Release and other registration forms are due
 - Passport information (exactly as it will appear on your document) is due to purchase flights
 - **The remainder of the program fee is due**
- **3-5 Weeks** prior (**May 2019**)
 - You will receive your final expectations packet including packing list, contact sheet, and final travel instructions
- **Day of Departure (June 9, 2019)**
 - Carry your passport, copy of your passport, and travel contact sheet
 - Keep an open mind, have fun, and embark on an amazing journey!

IMMUNIZATIONS

While the Panamanian government does not require any immunizations for travel in Panama, we do recommend following the [guidelines of the U.S. Centers for Disease Control](https://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel/destinations/traveler/none/panama). @ <https://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel/destinations/traveler/none/panama>. We want to emphasize that, in general, Panama is considered to be a very safe travel destination. Generally, the worst illness is traveler's diarrhea. Nevertheless, the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) do recommend some immunizations. As with *any* medical recommendation, we strongly suggest that you **consult your physician** and/or a travel medicine clinic to make the final decision about immunizations.

RECOMMENDED VACCINATIONS – MOST TRAVELERS

General Vaccinations: All routine vaccines (such as measles/mumps/rubella (MMR) vaccine, diphtheria/pertussis/tetanus (DPT) vaccine, poliovirus vaccine, etc.

Hepatitis A: CDC recommends this vaccine because you can get hepatitis A through contaminated food or water in Panama, regardless of where you are eating or staying.

Typhoid: Recommended for all unvaccinated people traveling to or working in Mexico and Central America, especially if visiting smaller cities, villages, or rural areas and staying with friends or relatives where exposure might occur through food or water.

PASSPORTS AND VISAS

Panama requires a valid passport through the length of your stay. Please reference the State Department website,

<https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/traveladvisories/traveladvisories/panama-travel-advisory.html>, to find out more information, apply for, or renew your passport.

According to the travel.state.gov website, passport processing times are as follows:

Routine 4-6 Weeks

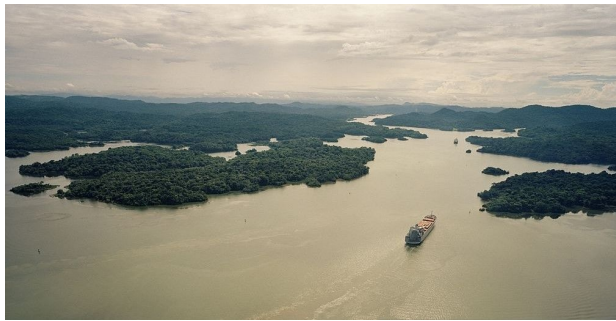
Expedited 2-3 Weeks

Expedited at 8 Business
Agency Days

Panama: An Overview

The Country

Although Panama is best known around the world for the Panama Canal, there is so much more to experience in this tropical, diverse country. From clear, turquoise Caribbean seas to the cloud forests and coffee farms in Chiriquí, Panama offers beautiful landscapes and a rich culture that culminates in one of the smallest countries in Latin America, not only in size but also in population. The Pacific coast provides amazing surf spots, while the interior of the country has everything from national parks to volcanoes.



The Community

You will be staying in West Panama at the beautiful home-base of La Iguana Eco Resort in the Coclé Province, located a little less than 3 hours from Panama City. This breathtaking compound will make you feel like you are in your own jungle paradise with beautiful fauna, swimming pools and amazing views!



The People

The population of Panama is 3.6 million people, with diverse ethnic groups and

several different indigenous communities. Because of its heterogeneous culture, with influences from four different continents, Panama's rich history has brought people from all over the world together to coexist in this small country. Latinos, Embera and Wounaan groups, and Guna people are the main populations. Afro-Caribbeans and Chinese populations comprise a large part of the country as well.



The Food

Panamanian cuisine consists of different variations of delicious rice and chicken dishes accompanied by plantains and yucca. Try sancocho, a hearty soup that is popular in the city as well as indigenous communities. Hojaldra, a flat dough fried bread, and carimañolas, little fried dough pockets with different fillings, are both common sides for all meals. Coffee and cocoa is plentiful and these flavors are incorporated in desserts and breakfast. Look forward to trying golden empanadas and fresh ceviche along with the ripest pineapples, mangos, and avocados.



General Facts

- **Official Name:** Republic of Panama
- **Capital:** Panama City
- **Nationality:** Panamanian
- **Population:** 3,608,431 (2014 est.)
- **Land Area:** 29,340 sq. miles
- **Age Distribution (%):** 0-14 years 37%; 15-59 years 56.3%; 60+ years 6.7%
- **Literacy Rate:** 90%
- **GDP:** \$61.54 billion (2013 est.)
- **Major Exports:** banana, shrimp, sugar, coffee

Panamanian Society

Panama is a constitutional democracy with an executive branch led by a president who is elected to a 5-year term, a unicameral legislature, and judicial branch. Panama has a rapidly developing economy but suffers from a weak, non-transparent judiciary. Outside the Panama City area, which has many first-class hotels and restaurants, tourist facilities vary in quality. The U.S. dollar is the paper currency of Panama, and is also referred to as the Panama Balboa. Panama has the second most unequal income distribution in Latin America. Although there is an official unemployment rate of only 4.4%, almost 30% of the population lives in poverty, primarily concentrated in rural areas. The wealthiest 20% of Panamanians control more than 50% of the country's wealth, while the poorest 40% only control 12%. Colon, Panama's second largest city, has the highest rates of poverty and crime in the country. In Colon, unemployment is estimated to be 50% among youth between the ages of 15 to 25.

The poorest people are the indigenous groups who make up only 8% of the population. This minority group lives in remote areas of the country where access to education and health care is limited. Although the indigenous populations make up only 8% of the total population, at least 80% of indigenous families live below the poverty line, and 50% live in extreme poverty. About 17% of the overall population is undernourished and almost half of all Panamanian children are living in poverty. Overall, 7.4% of the population is living on less than \$1 a day. According to Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index, Panama is ranked 84 out of 163 countries.

There are 9 provinces and 7 indigenous groups distributed among 4 main comarcas in Panama. Comarcas are similar to Native American reservations in the US, as they are administrative areas inhabited by principally indigenous peoples. The major indigenous groups are Embera, Wounaan, Kuna, and Ngöbe-Buglé.

Panamanian Cultural Groups

Latino Culture: Latinos form the largest ethnic group within Panama, making up approximately 74% of the country's 3.6 million people. This group speaks primarily Spanish, but approximately 10% of the country also speaks English. Global Brigades Panama works with many Latino communities in the Panama and Darien provinces. Latinos living in these rural areas typically work in agriculture, cattle-farming, and the lumber industry. The traditional cuisine includes chicken, rice, beans, tortillas, and local fruits. The sports they most enjoy are soccer, baseball, and boxing. The majority of the Latino population identifies with the Roman Catholic religion. Their homes are typically constructed out of cement blocks and painted bright colors, as seen in the picture to the right.

Embera-Wounaan Culture: The Embera and Wounaan groups are separate but very similar. They are distinct in that they have different native languages (although the majority speak Spanish as well) and the Wounaan population is much smaller than that of the Embera (7,000 people as compared to 31,000 people). Similarly, they reside mostly in eastern Panama, where they share a comarca. Their primary form of income is generated from agriculture and selling of artisanal crafts. Their traditional dress includes brightly colored skirts and chaquiras (elaborate beaded necklaces), as well as the frequent use of jagua, a fruit whose juice is extracted and used to paint their bodies for traditional events and ceremonies. Traditional homes are made of wood, raised off the ground, and with a roof made of chungu (a type of palm leaf).

The Embera and Wounaan are semi-autonomous groups, meaning their comarca and individual communities have their own governing bodies, with rules and regulations. The cacique is the title given to the leader of the community. Much of their land is also communally owned, but land titling still remains a prevalent issue in their communities.

Guna Culture: The majority of the Guna people reside in the comarca of Guna Yala, a string of over 350 small islands off the northeast coast of Panama. There are approximately 80,000 Guna living in Panama, many in fishing communities but many of migrated to the mainland as well. Like the indigenous Embera and Wounaan, the Guna have their own native language but many speak Spanish as well. Of the Guna that have migrated to eastern Panama and Darien, the majority work in agriculture and produce artisan crafts. They are most famously known for their beautiful cloth molas and beads worn up the arms and legs.

Additional Information:

This article from the Harvard University Review illustrates the hybrid culture in Panama that has been in the process of blending various traditions and populations for centuries.

<https://revista.drclas.harvard.edu/book/panamanian-culture>

Squads Abroad and Global Brigades



SQUADS ABROAD
A KEY CLUB PARTNER



Squads Abroad is a 501c3 non-profit organization under our parent company **Global Brigades**. Since 2004, Global Brigades has collectively mobilized more than 70,000 international volunteers to work alongside local teams and community members in the implementation of our holistic development model. Impact made by volunteers drives Global Brigades' strategic campaign, *The Empowered 100*, aimed at empowering 100 rural communities partners to rise out of poverty by meeting Healthcare, Economic Development, and Water, Sanitation & Hygiene goals. For more information, please visit www.globalbrigades.org.

The Holistic Model

Global Brigades' Holistic Model is a system of collectively implementing health, economic and education programs to meet a community's development goals. After the development of success indicators, program-monitoring tools are used to measure impact. Programs are done "with," not "for" community members. Community buy-in and leadership is crucial to the sustainability and success of our programs. Before implementation, staff work with community leaders to establish committees, collaborate with local government, and prepare community volunteers for programs. Our volunteers are the driving force behind the funding and execution of our Holistic Model. Through their funding and participation in brigades, a continual flow of volunteers build on each other to implement programs such as medical clinics, community banks, sustainable farms, and more. For more information, please visit www.globalbrigades.org.

Global Brigades in Panama

Under the direction of Thomas Sigler and Andri Wienandts, the fledgling Business program moved from Honduras to be Panama's first program in 2008. Soon after, the Environmental program was created to combat deforestation and to develop waste management projects. The Law (now called Human Rights) program was initially piloted in Costa Rica but was moved to Panama to address issues of land rights and to encourage legal empowerment. In 2009, Gabriela Valencia became the executive director of Global Brigades Panama, a role that she still holds today. In light of the 2009 coup d'état in Honduras, the Medical and Dental programs redirected some brigades from Honduras to Panama temporarily; however, those Medical and Dental brigades saw similar conditions to those in Panama so the Medical and Dental programs remained in Panama even once Honduras re-opened to brigades. In 2012, the Public Health program expanded from Honduras to Panama and Ghana. The public health program initially focused on the construction of composting latrines, but the program is currently researching new projects. In 2014, the Microfinance program began to open multiple community banks in our rural communities, to empower community members through financial education and opportunities.