

**Record: 1**

**Title:** Monkeyshines On Panama.

**Authors:** Goldman, Phyllis Barkas

**Source:** Monkeyshines on Cultures & Customs From Around the World; 1997, p33-37, 5p, 2 maps, 7 bw

**Document Type:** Article

**Subject Terms:** CULTURE  
CULTURAL pluralism  
MANNERS & customs  
HOLIDAYS  
ETHNIC groups  
FOOD  
DANCE

**Geographic Terms:** PANAMA Report Available

**Abstract:** Panama borders on the north with the Atlantic Ocean on the north Pacific Ocean on the south, Colombia, on the east, Costa Rica on the west. Panama, the strip of land that joins Central and South America, is a beautiful country that is rich in customs and traditions as well as ethnic diversity. Panama has many ethnic groups. Panamanians hold a five-day carnival in which various cities throughout the country pick a queen and several princesses. People dance in the street to national and Caribbean music. Panama's national music is called el tipico, and the main dance is El Tamborito. The national dress from Panama is la pollera, an embroidered and crocheted skirt and blouse. Popular foods in Panama include omelets and tortillas.

**Lexile:** 1030

**Full Text Word Count:** 1128

**ISBN:** 1-888325-03-8

**Accession Number:** 12560541

**Database:** MAS Ultra - School Edition

**Monkeyshines On Panama**

Panama borders on the north with the Atlantic Ocean on the north Pacific Ocean on the south, Colombia, on the east, Costa Rica on the west.

|               |  |
|---------------|--|
| National name | Republica de Panama                        |
| Location      | Central America                            |
| Area          | 29,761 square miles                        |
| Capital       | Panamá City                                |
| Largest City  | Panamá City                                |
| Currency      | Balboa (coins) and American dollar (paper) |
| Language      | Spanish and English                        |
| Religions     | Roman Catholic, Protestant, Jewish         |

**Holidays** January 1 New Year's Day January 9 Martyr's Day May 1 Labor Day  
October 11 National Revolution Day November 3 Independence from Colombia

**November 4 Flag Day November 28 Independence from Spain December 8  
Immaculate Conception and Mother's Day December 25 Christmas**

## **Cultures and Customs**

Panama, the strip of land that joins Central and South America, is a beautiful country that is rich in customs and traditions as well as ethnic diversity.

Most Panamanians, are mestizos (people of mixed Spanish and Indian heritage). Others are black, white, Indian and Asians.

Some Panamanians live primitive lifestyles in small rural communities. These generally include various Indian groups who live very much as their ancestors did.

In contrast, most Panamanians live sophisticated and modern lifestyles in the cities. They shop at malls, eat at restaurants, and attend performances at theaters.

Most Panamanians make their living from agriculture. Others in the working population are employed in manufacturing, commerce, service industries, public utilities, transportation, construction and sanitation.

As for fine arts, Panama's contribution has not been large. However, some Panamanians made significant contributions to world literature during the early 20th century. Among the most notable of this group was the poet Ricardo Miro, Demetrio Korsi, a contemporary writer, and Rogelio Sinan, a poet and novelist.

Panama's culture is a blend of Spanish and Indian tradition.

The elegance and romanticism of the Spanish colonial period is still vivid in some areas of Panama. An Asian influence was introduced to the country by immigrants from China, Japan, and India.

Europeans, Blacks, and native Indians have also influenced the rich culture of Panama. Panamanians are proud of the legacy left by their ancestors; a legacy of pride and respect, in their history and their people.

## **Holidays**

Panamanians hold a five-day carnival in which various cities throughout the country pick a queen and several princesses. People dance in the street to national and Caribbean music. Parades and festivals are held to celebrate the Carnival de Panama.

Panamanians also celebrate New Year's Day (January 1 and 2), Day of Martyrs (January 9), Good Friday, Anniversary of the Revolution (October 11), Independence from Spain (November 28), Mothers' Day (December 8), and Christmas (December 25).

## **Music, Dance, and Instruments**

Panama's national music is called el tipico, and the main dance is El Tamborito. A symphony composed of flutes, comet, bass violin, drums, and an accordion.

El Tamborito is characterized by the improvised lyrics of the singers while the dancers, la pollera for the women and el montuno for the men, dance various steps such as la caída (bending of the knees), vuelta (turn), seguidilla (continuous side to side steps facing partner), and the zapateo (stomping the feet). El típico has romantic, allegoric, African, Spanish, and Indian themes.

After many marriage ceremonies, the bride and groom often dance the romantic and elegant El Punto.

## **Dress and Jewelry**

The national dress from Panama is la pollera, an embroidered and crocheted skirt and blouse. The dress is made of linen and cotton with designs which are cross-stitched.

The headpiece is composed of golden hair combs resembling balconies, and tembleques (shakers), which are made out of clean, dry fish scales. The tembleques can be shaped like flowers, centipedes, peacocks, or butterflies. Golden and silver thread and pearls are used to make the beautiful designs.

The men wear a white linen long-sleeve shirt, black pants, and a hat. This outfit is called el montuno. Urban male workers wear camisillas, or open-necked lightweight shirts. Women dress in styles similar to those worn in the United States. Shorts are rarely worn by women in the streets.

Panamanians love to eat rice, meat, beans, vegetables, and fruits. Arroz con pollo, or rice with chicken, is cooked with seasoned rice and shredded chicken with chopped onions, green peppers, and other spices. Avocado, or aguacate to Panamanians, is served with meals as part of a salad. It is sliced and sprinkled with a bit of salt.

Sancocho is the national soup of Panama. Sliced chicken pieces are mixed in the water with yucca, potatoes, carrots, onions, sweet potatoes, and corn. It is delicious. Tamales are made out of ground corn cooked together with shredded chicken, olives, and spices. They are made into a patty and wrapped with palm leaves. Chicheme is a sweet corn drink.

Popular foods in Panama include omelets and tortillas. Oranges, lemons, and apples are used for natural juices. Mangoes are either sweet or sour and are used for salads and for vinegar.

## **The Panama Canal**

**[Among the hundreds of manmade creations that have brought world progress, the Panamá Canal is a sure success.](#)**

The Spanish King Charles I ordered the first topographical studies of the Isthmus of Panama, three centuries before its construction. From 1880 to 1900 the French struggled with the construction of the canal, but diseases and lack of money proved too much for the French engineers and their men.

The French Canal Company sold the rights for the construction of the Canal de Panamá to the United States for 40 million American dollars. The government of the United States paid the Panamanian government 10 million American dollars to allow the construction,

and annual fees were determined under the Hay-Bunau Varilla treaty in 1903. The treaty gave the United States rights over the 10-mile wide strip across the Isthmus of Panamá.

The canal's construction took 10 years at a cost of 387 million dollars. The canal laborers' hard work included cutting through the Continental Cordillera to construct the biggest earth dam known; then, giant locks and gates were designed and constructed to allow the ships' navigation through the canal.

Finally, in 1914 the Panamá Canal gates opened and the waters of the Pacific and Atlantic Oceans were united to allow vessels from all over the world to cross one of the most amazing wonders made by humans.

El Canal de Panamá saves vessels thousands of miles of navigation. For example, if an American merchant vessel leaves the United States destined for Japan, the Americans save 3,000 miles if they transit through the canal.

Copyright, First edition 1997, by the North Carolina Learning Institute For Fitness & Education, Inc. PO Box 10245, Greensboro, NC 27404. All rights reserved.

MAP: Panama

MAP

PHOTO (BLACK & WHITE): Panama

PHOTO (BLACK & WHITE)

~~~~~

By Phyllis Barkas Goldman

Illustrated by John Grigni

---

Copyright of Monkeyshines on Cultures & Customs From Around the World is the property of Great Neck Publishing and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.