

Cruising Guide for Panama City, Panama

Welcome to the Pacific side of the Panama Canal. After cruising the remote Pacific Islands of Panama, the high-rise buildings of Panama City loom like Miami Beach. Approaching from the south, one sees 30-40 large ships anchored off the entrance to the Canal on the left, and the sparkling city on the right.

This guide was written as a supplement to existing guides to help cruisers orient themselves to the services Panama City has to offer. We highly recommend the The Panama Guide by Nancy and Tom Zydler, which covers all of Panama including the islands on both sides of the country; and Transiting the Canal by David Wilson. Both guides are available at Islamorada Chart Store in Balboa.

Anchoring

When approaching the Pacific side of the Canal, boats can anchor on the northwest side of Isla Perico. Landing a dinghy on the rocks near the two restaurants is daunting but possible. You can leave the dinghy for short periods of time at the blue and white restaurant. (The nearby Flamenco Marina offers a dinghy dock for \$5.00 per day) The anchorage is relatively comfortable and the views are terrific. During the months of strong northerly wind, anchoring on the other side of the causeway between the islands is recommended.

Flamenco Yacht Club and Marina

On the east side of the Pacific entrance are the islands of Flamenco and Perico. A new multi-million dollar facility called Flamenco Yacht Club and Marina is under construction between the two islands at 8d54.730N and 79d31.316W. This is the first major improvement in marina facilities in the Canal area for many years. It will be a world-class property with many services.

In January 2002, there were no permanent docks, one small floating dock, and about 15 mooring balls. Renting a mooring ball costs \$.30 per foot per day, which also entitles you to dinghy dock, water, and trash disposal. The fuel dock has gasoline, diesel, and water. There is a dockside bar, bathroom, but no showers. Within months, there will be many more docks and facilities.

The Flamenco Marina monitors VHF channel 10. The phone number is 507-314-0665 and the general manager is Gabriel Dumanoir, and dock master is Miller (Junior). Website: <www.fuerteamador.com> and email - marina@fuerteamador.com.

Flamenco Marina has a boat yard adjacent to the fuel dock with a large 150-ton travel lift. Haul outs are done at high tide only, and the boat skipper has to arrange for all supplies and workers, though Marina management will assist you in ordering and making arrangements for delivery. Sailboat haul out costs \$300.00 and \$1.50 per foot per day storage cost – excluding the day in and the day out. The power washer machine costs \$10.00 per hour, and you can hire workers at \$6.50 per hour. The power and water charge on the hard is \$10.00 per day.

Flamenco Marina has a cruise ship port under construction. Nearby on the property is a bar/restaurant **El Barco**, which is open for lunch and dinner. Numerous adjacent shops are stocked with goods and ready to do business. There are extensive plans to build a hotel and time-share villas.

Balboa Yacht Club

Located at the entrance of the Canal on the east side of the channel, is the Balboa Yacht Club in Balboa Harbor. They monitor VHF channel 6. Care must be taken to enter and turn right at buoy 14.5. Turning sooner will run you aground. The office phone is 507-228-5794. While there is no clubhouse, the Balboa Yacht Club is cruiser friendly and offers a membership fee of \$25.00 which entitles one to rent a mooring ball for 50 cents a foot per day. It can be rocky, but is a good place to transition when arranging for an advisor to board your boat for the transit of the Canal. It is also a safe place to leave your boat if you travel. They have railway haul out facilities,

showers, and 24-hour water taxi service. Adjacent to the BYC is a hotel, **The Country Inn**, and a **TGIF Friday's** restaurant.

Pedro Miguel Boat Club

Located within the Canal proper at the Pedro Miguel locks is the Pedro Miguel Boat Club. It is the most cruiser friendly place in the Canal Zone. They have docks with electricity and water, a clubhouse with a full kitchen for use by the residents including refrigerators and freezers, clothes washers and dryers, showers, telephones and haul out services. They also accept packages and mail for cruisers, whether you are docked there or not. The Club uses a freight forwarding company and provides all customs and paperwork for a reasonable fee. The address from the US is:

Pedro Miguel Boat Club
Attention: s/v _____
PTY 644
1601 NW 97th Ave.
Miami, Florida 33102-52-07

PBYC is a safe place to leave your boat for months - but requires a partial transit of the Canal to reach the facility. To continue your transit, you just call the scheduler for a continuance date. The PMBC sponsors a cruiser's potluck dinner every Saturday night with dinner at 7pm. There are other special events throughout the year. Dockage prices are \$.25 per foot per day with stays over four weeks. Fees are \$.35 per foot per day short term. The membership fee is \$15.00 per quarter. Contact the manager Jim Hood, tel. 507-232-4509, fax - 232-4165, or email pmbc@pmbc.ws and visit the website at <www.pmbc.ws>. The original disk of this Guide is in the office and available for editing.

Panama Canal Yacht Club

Located on the Caribbean side is the Panama Canal Yacht Club or PCYC. Slips are very limited and it can be difficult to offload passengers after a transit of the Canal. It is common to anchor in the "flats" about a half-mile from the PCYC, and dispatch your dinghy for the job. The PCYC office phone is 441-5882, and fax 441-7752. There is a daily cruiser's net at 0730 on VHF 72. There is an excellent article written about the area by Ian and Anne Gatenby on *Fidelio of London*, in the July 2001 issue of Seven Seas Cruising Association bulletin.

Panama Culture

We found the Panamanians to be conservative dressers, and the men always wear long pants. The adults never wear tennis shoes, and often the women are in dresses or slacks. You will find most people in business clothes when you go into town, so take that into consideration even if it is hot. We have gone shopping in shorts and polo style shirts, but are conspicuous. It is a good idea to carry an umbrella from June to December. Like any big city, hold on to your handbag and watch your wallet in crowded areas. We felt safe most of the time, and found the people friendly and helpful.

Transportation

A bus makes the Isla Flamenco circle once an hour, and there are many buses serving the city. There are cabs in the Flamenco Island area frequently and the ride for two into Amador is \$2.00. Always determine the price with the cabbie before you get in. Ask the locals what the cost should be. We highly recommend Luis Arce at 638-2273 or channel 6 on the VHF radio. He has made a business with the cruisers and speaks excellent English and is completely reliable. He charges \$8.00 as an hourly rate to run errands with you and is familiar with all the marine and hardware stores. Another excellent English speaking driver is Enrique Plummer at 674-2086. Both drivers are very customer oriented. The run to Tocumen Airport is typically \$20.00, and the ride back to PC from Colon (after a Transit) is \$40.00.

Telephones

Payphones are available throughout the city. You can purchase phone cards, or make **AT&T** or **MCI** calls. You may elect to buy a cell-phone from **Bell South** for \$75.00 and a phone card that prepays local calls.

AT&T:

To reach AT&T dial 00-800-288-2872. You'll then have to dial the access number provided on your calling card. Sometimes when you're connected to this access number you won't be able to provide input to the prompts that will follow (i.e. Select 1 for English, 2 for Spanish...). If this is the case, or if you make it through the menus and the party that you're connected to can't hear you, don't enter anything when you get to the above prompt. The system will cycle through this 2 times and then you'll be connected to a voice recognition system which will have you speak your answers to the prompts. For some reason this solves these problems.

Amador – closest town to causeway

In Amador, one can find a small strip mall with an excellent Internet called **CyberKave** 314-0742 (\$1.50 per hour – open everyday), pizza place, restaurant, liquor store, and laundry. **Denise's Lavamatico** is inexpensive, fast, and adequate. Drop off your clothes, and pick up in a few hours, or do it yourself. **Tamburelli's Pizza** delivers to the marina office, call 314-0202.

A block farther is the **YMCA** has which business offices - **Chadwick's Travel Services**, call 314-1008, or email at < Chadwick@sinfo.net>. Mike Chadwick and Terra Chadwick speak English and have been serving cruisers for almost 20 years. They will assist in planning local sightseeing trips, package trips to nearby countries, or arranging flights anywhere in the world. You can send faxes from their office. They helped us arrange a package trip to Cartagena, Colombia for Thanksgiving, and tickets back to the US.

Also in the **YMCA** in the old gymnasium, is an **Artesian Market** with high quality handcrafted Panamanian souvenirs. You can find the best quality Wounaan and Embera Indian baskets, tagua nut carvings, woodcarvings, and Kuna Indian molas.

Behind the **YMCA** is a taxi stand called *Radio Taxi Howard Corporation* at 228-6204 or 228-4787. It is easy to walk up to the small office and make arrangements for a cab.

Another block farther is **Islamorada Chart Store** and several banks with ATM machines, and a 24-hour grocery. The selection of food is better in mid-week than on a Monday. They have a small restaurant within the store. Walking a few more blocks toward the left in the direction of the Canal Administration Building is **Happy Copy** for copying books and charts, *Niko's Restaurant*, and the post office.

Provisioning

For excellent grocery shopping, take a taxi from Flamenco for \$5.00 to El Dorado Mall to the **Super 99 and El Rey Market**. Within the mall is an internet cafe, hair salons, shops, and **Gran Morrison** department store with a good selection of English magazines and books, and a little bit of everything else. There are many fast food places, computer stores, shops and restaurants all within a block of the mall. Warehouse shopping is available at **PriceSmart, MegaDepot**, among others. It is a good idea to call Winston Martinelli who is associated with Mega Depot and Super 99. He will arrange a bus or van for a group at *no charge* for a day of provisioning. His phone is 261-2114. There are new grocery stores opening all the time, and the selection is just like home. Wine and liquor are priced exceptionally low.

Airport

The **Tocumen International Airport** is modern and offers extensive duty-free shopping. There are many clothing stores, jewelry, liquor and gift stores, in a large mall inside the airport. The airport is about a 30-minute cab ride from Isla Flamenco. For early morning departures, the **Riande Hotel** (290-3333) is a block from the airport, reasonably priced, and offers a shuttle every thirty minutes.

The **Albrook Airport** offers services for commuter airlines. It is less than fifteen minutes from Flamenco Marina. The huge bus terminal station is near the airport, and a new mall with a great Super 99 grocery store.

Marine Services and Supplies

Abernathy, S.A. – 260-1222 or 260-1528 via Transistmica. They have three large, marine stores.

Centro Marino – 225-6654 or 225-6331 Ave. Nacional. 45 More choices in marine gear.

NautiPesca – 236-7473 via Rdo J Alfaro. Sales representative, Lillian Guardia, speaks excellent English. It is very customer oriented and is the newest marine store. It is well stocked, and offers cruisers a discount. On bus route from Colon.

Tropigas — 236-1343. Provides propane gas. Take a cab for propane via Ricardo J. Alfaro, Frente a la Cervceria Nacional.

Canvas Services – We found Cindy and Reed on the s/v Sea Fever to be highly skilled and helpful canvas workers in the Colón area.

Hardware Stores

Centro Industrial – via Cincuentenario 79-10. phone: 224-2233 – Excellent machine shop and good selection of tools.

Dimar, S.A. – Edificio La Balinera Vista Hermosa. Phone: 229-1444 – Fuel filters, oil filters and other supplies.

Novoy –Av 7 Central 279; via Rdo J Alfaro; or via Cincuentenario. Phone: 227-2744 – Chain of hardware stores selling everything from paint to garden hoses.

Panama Auto –Via Transistmica y Rio Abajo. Phone: 229-3022 – Motor oil, belts, etc.

Auto Centro S.A. – Via Rdo J. Alfaro av de La Amistad. Phone: 236-0666 – Water and fuel fittings

Computer Sales, Service and Repair

Multimax – 279-8588 –Via Rdo. J Alfaro Bethania - El Dorado. Large computer supply store just beyond Eldorado. Just like US computer superstores.

Sonset – 206-9500 – Avenida Brasil, near Texaco Station. Service and maintenance of computers.

I.B.C., S.R. –260-6128 –DI Miguel Brostella - detras del Supercentro El Dorado – Sells computer supplies.

Office Super One: Just down street from MultiMax. Office supplies & Computers

Marine Electronics and Repair Services

Radio Shack – Via Espana – 263-4511

Electronica Pacifico No.3 – Via Espana – 213-0453 –Electrical cable, plugs.

Icom – Centro Comercial Alhambra – 260-7144 – SSB and VHF radio service

Proteca –Via Simon Bolivar. Phone: 227-3533 – Marine electronics

Navstar Marine Electronic S.A. –Willamson Place 0752-B at La Boca Ancon. Phone: 228-0399 Marine electronics

Marina Communication Services – Balboa. Phone: 653-1286 – Marine electronics

Marine Mechanic

Andy Anderson – 639-4556 – speaks English. Works on large and small engines. Charges \$20.00 per hour, and is very reputable. Cleaned our fuel tanks, adjusted engine, and installed fuel filter.

Water Makers

Hydromundo – Via Argentine & Calle 55. 265-4158. Little ????? and 5 others. Repair/Wholesale

Stainless Steel/Aluminum Welding

Metalica Pevez – Via Corozal near Novey's downtown. 227-0846

Batteries

La Casa de Las Baterias – Via Espana & Via Porras. 264-003/0904. Owner Juan Diaz speaks English. Several stores, large volume,

Radio Shack – La Casa del Telephone – Via Brazil. 264-6438

Discount Stores/Shopping Clubs

Price Costco - At least 2 – one near Ave Argentina other ????????????????

Mega Depot (no membership) - Ave TransAmerica. Inexpensive drugstore withing

Hotels

Hotel Lisboa – Ave Cuba & Calle 21. 227-5916/5917. \$22/room. Around corner good inexpensive restaurant named Benidora

This information was compiled by Doug and Judy Decker s/v Limerence to assist those cruisers who stop in this lovely area. We stayed in the anchorage and Flamenco Marina for over two months. To download this or one of our other cruising guides, please visit: www.deckersailing.com. The Deckers can be reached through email at: cruise2000@deckersailing.com. The original disk for this guide is in the office of the Pedro Miguel Boat Club. Please make updates and additions to this guide as necessary to help others in your wake have an enjoyable stay.

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