

Information note for participants to the UNCCD XI Regional meeting for Latin America and the Caribbean

Location of the meeting:

Hotel Riande Continental & Casino * * * * *

Located in the Via España in the very heart of the financial and commercial area of the city and at short distance from a great number of restaurants and the city's nightlife.

With 400 rooms, 5 elevators for guests including a panoramic one, a 5 floor parking building with capacity for 400 vehicles, an elegant Executive Floor, 15 rooms for conferences and conventions, swimming pool, gym, Jacuzzi, cafeteria, lobby bar, Business Centre, casino and gourmet restaurant.

For more information on the Hotel, please go to: www.hotelesriande.com

The Hotel will offer corporate prices for the participants of the meeting.

ROOM	PRICE IN USD*
Single	70,00
Double	80,00
Junior Suite	85,00

* 10% tax has to be added

General Information on Panama:

Official Name: Republic of Panama

Capital: Panama City

Official Language: Spanish

Climate: Panama has a pleasant tropical climate where the temperature is usually uniform all year round. The nights are generally cool and the mean temperature is 27°C. The country has a wet and a dry season. The first runs from May to December but the sun is still present for a large part of the day. The dry season, which begins in the middle of December and ends in April, is always tempered by the pleasant Alisio winds.

Local Time: 5 hours behind GMT

Taxes: There is a 5% tax (ITBM) on all purchases made in Panama. This, however, does not apply to medicines, food and school supplies.

Currency: The Balboa (Balboas in plural) is the official currency. However, the US dollar is accepted everywhere at a rate of 1 USD=1 Balboa

Electricity: 120V and 240V

Tips: These are not included in the prices at restaurants. It is standard practice to give between 10 and 15 percent of the total bill as a tip.

Drivers License: Visitors with a foreign license are allowed to drive up to 90 days with the same. However, you must present it with your passport upon request.

Business hours: These are from 9:30 to 19:00. Businesses are also open these times on Sundays as well. Banks are opened from 8:30 to 14:30, but ATMs work 24 hours daily. Public offices work from 7:30 to 15:30.

Territorial Boundaries: Panama shares boundaries with Columbia and Costa Rica on the east and west respectively. North there is the Caribbean Sea and south there is the Atlantic Ocean. It claims a territorial sea of 200 nautical miles.

Population (2000 census): 2,839,177

Population Density: 81 per square mile

Religions: There are more than 93% Roman Catholics and 6% protestants. The national constitution establishes the right to freely practice all religions and cults as well with the proviso that this is done respecting Christian morals and public order.

Economic Profile: Panama is a service-oriented country where the Colon free trade zone, the Panama Canal and Tourism are the most important economic activities. The exportation of manufactured goods is insignificant to the economy when compared to the contribution of the service sector. Tourism has increased in recent times and the policy of the government is to make this a central pillar of the national economy, while ensuring the sustainable use of the country's abundant tourism resources. There is a favourable climate for foreign investment in Panama. This can be seen from the various very attractive factories for businesses in such places as the Panama Canal and the Colon free trade zone. Apart from this, there is the validity of the dollar as legal tender. The investor would find many advantages for his investment in our country.

Emergency Numbers:

Police:	104
Tourist Police:	211-3811
Fire	103
Civil Protection	316-0080

Ambulances

Social Security	229-1133
Red Cross	228-2187
Santo Tomás	227-4122
Special Clinic	264-1739
SEMM	264-4122
ALERTA	269-1111

Hospitals And Clinics

Children's Hospital	225-1547
Hospital San Miguel Arcángel	230-2830
National Hospital	207-8136
Hospital San Judas Tadeo	277-7600
Hospital Santa Fe	227-4733
Clínica Hospital San Fernando	278-6300
Paitilla Medical Centre	265-8800

Entry Requirements

Visas and Immigration / Necessary Documents

- ▶ Valid passport. All tourists must have a valid passport
- ▶ Return ticket and documents allowing entry into the other country of destination
- ▶ Financial support
- ▶ Visa or tourist card

A tourist visa can be obtained from Panamanian consulates abroad. A tourist card is valid for 30 days and can usually be obtained from the airline, when one checks in his bags at the airport of departure. The cost is USD 5.00. If you forget to buy it, then it can be bought on arrival at the airport in Panama from the immigration authorities. One can prolong his stay with this card for an additional two months at the central immigration office once the request is made 7 days before the expiration of the first 30 days. In some cases, there is no need for a tourist visa, which allows you to stay in Panama for 90 days. If you want to extend your stay beyond 90 days, then you must visit the offices of Migration and Naturalisation before the 90-day period expires.

The citizens of the following countries do not need a tourist card: Argentina, Austria, Belgium, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Costa Rica, Cyprus, Denmark, El Salvador, El Vaticano (Holy See), Egypt, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Guatemala, Holland, Honduras, Hungary, Israel, Italia, Luxemburg, Nicaragua, Northern Ireland, Paraguay, Poland, Portugal, Singapore, Spain, Switzerland, United Kingdom, Uruguay.

List of countries requiring visas: Chad, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Filipinas, Peru, Russia, Thailand.

List of countries which can enter with a visa or tourist card: Antigua y Barbuda, Aruba, Australia, Bahamas, Barbados, Belize, Bermuda, Bolivia, Canada, Colombia, Curacao, Granada, Guyana, Ice Land, Jamaica, Japan, Malta, Mexico, Monaco, Norway, New Zealand, Paraguay, Samoa Occidental, St. Kitts/ Nevis, San Marino, St. Vincent and the Grenadines, Santa Lucia, San Tome y Principe, South Korea, Sweden, Suriname, Taiwan, Trinidad y Tobago, USA, Venezuela.

List of countries that need an authorised visa for entry: Afghanistan, Albania, Andorra, Angola, Anguilla, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Bahrain, Bangladesh, Belarus, Benin, Bhutan, Bosnia Herzegovina, Brunei, Bulgaria, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Cambodia, Cameroon, Cape Verde, Comoros, Croatia, Cuba, Eritrea, Estonia, Ethiopia, Fiji, Gabon, Gambia, Georgia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Equatorial Guinea, Haiti, North Korea, Saudi Arabia, Slovakia, Slovenia, United Arab Emirates.

Arrival in Panama

- ▶ It is important to know the special feature of the Tocumen airport on arrival in Panama. Arriving passengers have access to a magnificent duty free zone open 24 hours a day. This is located on the upper level and easily accessible for shopping before proceeding through the immigration and customs, which are on the lower level. The government tourism agency (IPAT) information office is located in the customs area and is opened from 8:00 to 12:00.

- ▶ There is a taxi stand at the exit area just after the customs. A trip from the airport to Panama City costs approximately USD 20. If four persons are sharing a taxi, the official tariff is USD 10 per person. For two persons sharing the taxi, the tariff is USD 14. Private taxis cost USD 25.

- ▶ There are public buses, but it is not recommended to take these, as the bus terminal is some distance away from the airport and is therefore a long walk.

Airport Departure Tax

- ▶ There is a departure tax of USD 20 for passengers departing on international flights.

- ▶ For more information on Panama, please visit the web site of the Panamanian Institute of Tourism at <http://www.ipat.gob.pa>

Embassies in Panama

If you would like to know if your country has an embassy in Panama, please visit: <http://www.embajada-online.com/Panama-P141.htm>