



Panama



Country Overview:

Location: Central America, bordering both the Caribbean Sea and the North Pacific Ocean, between Colombia and Costa Rica

Size: 75,420 sq km

Population: 3,559,408 (July 2013 est.)

Capital: Panama City

Export-commodities: bananas, shrimp, sugar, coffee, clothing

Import-commodities: capital goods, foodstuffs, consumer goods, chemicals

Currency: Balboas (PAB)

Religion: Roman Catholic 85%, Protestant 15%

Ethnic groups: mestizo (mixed Amerindian and white) 70%, Amerindian and mixed (West Indian) 14%, white 10%, Amerindian 6%

Government type: constitutional democracy

Chief of State: President Ricardo Martinelli Berrocal (since 1 July 2009); Vice President Juan Carlos Varela Rodriguez (since 1 July 2009); note - the president and vice president are both the chief of state and head of government

Language: Spanish (official), English 14%; note - many Panamanians bilingual



Republic of Panama/República de Panama

Meetings and Negotiations

-Although **punctuality** is not important in social situations, Panamanian businesses run on a time schedule.

-**Hand shakes** are important upon meeting and departing. Direct **eye contact** is also expected.

-**Titles** are important. Address a person directly by using his or her title **only**. Panamanian professionals prefer to be referred to as "Don" (for men) and "Dona" (for women) in a business setting; Licenciado (university degree); Ingeniero (male engineer), and Doctor (lawyer, or someone with an advanced degree).

-**First names** are not used to address colleagues. Always wait until you are invited, before moving to a first name basis.

-**Oldest** people should be addressed first.

Business Tips continued

Conversation

-Persons who do not have professional titles should be addressed as **Mr.=Señor, Mrs.=Señora, or Miss=Señorita**, plus their surnames.

-Most Hispanics have two surnames: one from their father, which is listed first, followed by

-In business, conversations begin with **small talk**.

-Business appointments are scheduled a few weeks in **advance** through **direct** contact, not through an intermediary.

-**Patience** is key when negotiating since discussions can be quite lengthy.

-After initial, more formal introductions, many meetings can be held **informally** away from the office setting. Business can be discussed **over a meal**.

Business Attire

-Men should wear a suit and tie.

-Women may wear a suit, dress, or a skirt with a blouse, but it is **inappropriate** to reveal an excess of skin.

Behavior

-Panamanians are generally considered **relaxed** and informal by Latin American standards, although they nevertheless have a

regard for formal dignity and hierarchical and class distinctions.

-Authority is rather narrowly concentrated, and actual decisions are almost always made at a high level.

-Hands are kept **above** the table and conversation while eating is kept to "light" topics.

-**Do not point** your index finger as this is considered **rude** and vulgar. Use your full hand to indicate.

-**International** food is very popular among Panamanian business people.

Gift Giving

Appropriate Gifts:

-An inexpensive company gift, thoughtful, personal gifts are valued more than expensive ones

Gifts to Avoid:

-Do not give gifts when going to a business dinner.

one from their mother. Only the **father's surname** is used when addressing someone.

-At initial meetings, Panamanians spend the time indulging in conversation unrelated to business.

-**Do not** use slang or profanity.

-Many Panamanians are bilingual but knowing some Spanish can be

flattering.

-**Do not** be too loud or wild when conversing with Panamanians. Allow them take the lead.

Topics to Discuss:

-food, sports, weather, and hobbies

Topics to Avoid:

-Canal Zone, race problems, politics, invasions and local issues