

## Panama Fact Sheet



### **Background:**

Explored and settled by the Spanish in the 16th century, Panama broke with Spain in 1821 and joined a union of Colombia, Ecuador, and Venezuela - named the Republic of Gran Colombia. When the latter dissolved in 1830, Panama remained part of Colombia. With US backing, Panama seceded from Colombia in 1903 and promptly signed a treaty with the US allowing for the construction of a canal and US sovereignty over a strip of land on either side of the structure (the Panama Canal Zone). The Panama Canal was built by the US Army Corps of Engineers between 1904 and 1914. In 1977, an agreement was signed for the complete transfer of the Canal from the US to Panama by the end of the century. Certain portions of the Zone and increasing responsibility over the Canal were turned over in the subsequent decades. With US help, dictator Manuel NORIEGA was deposed in 1989. The entire Panama Canal, the area supporting the Canal, and remaining US military bases were transferred to Panama by the end of 1999. In October 2006, Panamanians approved an ambitious plan (estimated to cost \$5.3 billion) to expand the Canal. The project, which began in 2007 and could double the Canal's capacity, is expected to be completed in 2014-15.

**Capital:** Panama City

**Population:** 3,510,045 (July 2012 est.)

**Official language:** Spanish (official), English 14%

**Ethnic Groups:** Mestizo (mixed Amerindian and white) 70%, Amerindian and mixed (West Indian) 14%, white 10%, Amerindian 6%

**Calling code:** +507

**Independence:** 3 November 1903 (from Colombia; became independent from Spain on 28 November 1821)

