



United Nations Environment Programme
Regional Office for Latin America and the Caribbean

PROGRAMA DE LAS NACIONES UNIDAS PARA EL MEDIO AMBIENTE
PROGRAMME DES NATIONS UNIES POUR L'ENVIRONNEMENT
PROGRAMA DAS NAÇÕES UNIDAS PARA O MEIO AMBIENTE

**Fourteenth Meeting of the Forum of Ministers of
the Environment of Latin America and the Caribbean**

Panama City, Panama
20 to 25 November 2003

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Limited

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Information for Participants



Date, Location and Venue

1. The **Fourteenth Meeting of the Forum of Ministers of the Environment of Latin America and the Caribbean** will be held at Hotel El Panama on 20th to 25th of November 2003. The contact information for Hotel El Panama is:

HOTEL EL PANAMÁ

Vía España

Ave. Eusebio A. Morales

Apartado Postal 1753 - 1

Panama City 1, Panama

Tel.: (+507) 215-9000

Fax: (+507) 223-6080

E-mail: reservas@elpanama.com

Web site: www.elpanama.com/

Registration and Sessions Schedule

2. The registry of participants will start at 8:00 a.m. on Thursday 20th November 2003. The sessions of the meeting will be held in the following schedule:

9:00 a.m. - 1:30 p.m.

2:30 p.m. - 6:00 p.m.

3. The Order of the Day will be distributed on a daily basis.

Visas

4. Government, international organizations, non-governmental organizations and press representatives should hold a relevant visa granted by the Government of Panama after following the applicable procedure. Participants are required to apply to the nearest Embassy or Consulate of Panama in their countries.

In case that there is no Embassy or Consulate of Panama in your country, the Secretariat of the Forum of Ministers of the Environment of Latin America and the Caribbean could provide assistance. Please address your application to: deplac@pnuma.org

Airport

5. Participants are kindly asked to always use authorized taxis to travel from the International Airport of Panama to their hotel. Authorized taxis (tourism cars) charge around US \$25.00. Margo Tours will be offering transportation service to Hotel El Panama at US\$10.00 per person.

Hotels

6. The organizers have negotiated special rates for the participants to be accommodated at Hotel El Panama. The daily rate is US \$88.00.

Another lodging option is Hotel Torres de Alba, that is offering a daily rate of US \$45.00 + 10% taxes.

Ave. Eusebio A. Morales y Calle "L"
El Cangrejo
Panamá, Panamá
Tel.: (+507) 269-7770, 269-5180
Fax: (+507) 269-3924
C.E.: venta@torresdealba.com.pa
Sitio: www.torresdealba.com.pa

7. Participants are encouraged to make their own reservations and directly contact the Hotel of your preference **by Friday, 14 November 2003**, at the latest in order to secure the special rate, informing of your participation in the event.

Business Hours

8. Most offices open Monday thru Friday from 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. Most banks open Monday thru Friday from 9:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m., and Saturdays from 9:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m. Shops open Monday thru Saturday from 9:30 a.m. to 7:00 p.m., and Sundays from 11:00 a.m. to 7:00 p.m.

Communication

9. Long distance calls can be made from any public booth using telephone cards (US \$5.00, \$10.00 and \$20.00). International country code: 507.

Tipping

Hotels: Most hotels include tips with other charges in the invoice. However, waiters and other services (laundry, room service) are to be tipped when delivered.

Restaurants: Tips are customary, 10% being the norm.

Taxis: Tips are usually not expected, but most passengers round up to the next full amount when satisfied with the service.

Airport workers and hotel bellhops: US\$1.00 per piece of luggage.

Services

10. Participants will have access to international calls, fax, post office, photocopies, travel agency services, medical service, etc. All of these services are available at hotel rooms and at the Hotel Business Centre and will be charged to the participants' account.

Further General Information

- Main newspapers: La Prensa, El Panamá América, La Estrella.
- The Metric System is the only system used in Panama.
- Should you rent a car, we strongly advise you to park at fee parking lots.
- Panama City is very safe. However, we recommend that you do not wear jewelry or brandish computer equipment, cameras, expensive objects, or carry large amounts of money.

Panama: General Information

Origin of the name of the country: There are several theories about the origin of the name "Panama". Some believe that the country was named after a commonly found species of tree; others believe that the first settlers arrived in Panama in August, when butterflies abound, and that the name means "**many butterflies**" in indigenous tongue. The best known of these versions is that a village populated by fishermen originally bore the name PANAMÁ, after a beach nearby, and that this name meant "many fish".



Location: Panama is located in the center of the Western Hemisphere. It is bordered by the Caribbean Sea on the north, the Pacific Ocean on the south, Colombia on the east and Costa Rica to the west. It is the connecting link between Central and South America.

Area: 75,517 km² (29,208 square miles).

Topography: Varies from mountains toward the Caribbean coast to small hills and vast savannas toward the Pacific side.

Population: 2,839,177 in 2003.

Official language: Spanish.

Government: The Republic of Panama is a sovereign, independent state. Its government is unitary, republican, democratic and representative. The

Executive Branch is composed of a president, two vice-presidents and twelve ministers; the Legislative Assembly comprises 72 legislators, and the Judiciary includes 9 Judges.

- Current Administration:** President Mireya Moscoso.
- Religion:** 85% Catholic, 15% Protestant.
- Time Zone:** Panama time is the same as the United States Eastern Standard Time (GMT -5), and one hour ahead of the rest of Central America.
- Ethnic Groups:** 70% mestizo, 14% black, 10% white and 6% Amerindian.
- Weather:** Tropical with steady temperatures throughout the year. Average temperature: 27°C. Showers and rain are usually expected in November.
- Currency:** The U.S. dollar is legal tender in Panama. Local minted coins are called Balboas, and have the same value as the U.S. dollar, but can only be used in Panama.
- Economy:** 75% services, 15% industrial, 10% agriculture.
Inflation rate: 1.5%; Unemployment rate: 15%
- Major Trade Partners:** Exports: USA, Germany and Sweden.
- Electricity:** 110 and 220 w, 60 hz.