

DREAMSCAPES

TRAVEL AND LIFESTYLE

Fall/Winter 2026

FOOD & DRINK ISSUE

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Savouring PANAMA CITY

The country's namesake capital delivers far more than its famous waterway

BY KERI BRIDGWATER

PANAMA CITY MAY BE KNOWN FOR ITS modern skyline and nearby engineering marvel, the Panama Canal, but its real character emerges in Casco Viejo, the UNESCO World Heritage-listed historic district, founded in 1673. In the capital's old quarter, restored colonial, neoclassical, and early 20th-century buildings now house artisan coffee studios, rooftop bars, and beautifully restored hotels set between elegant plazas and cobblestone streets.

HOTELS WITH HISTORY

Two of Casco Viejo's most compelling restorations are its standout hotels. Hotel La Compañía Casco Antiguo occupies a former 17th-century Jesuit monastery spread across an entire city block, where restaurants, bars, and a rooftop terrace are woven through restored courtyards and halls. A short walk away, Sofitel Legend Casco Viejo occupies the former Club Unión — once a gathering place for Panama's political and social elite. Today, its sea-facing terraces and Old World glamour give a nod to the neighbourhood's past.

PLAZAS & PASTEL FACADES

Part of Casco Viejo's appeal is how easily a short walk becomes an entire afternoon. Streets wind past grand plazas and landmarks

like the Palacio Presidencial and Catedral Basílica Santa María la Antigua, before opening onto the waterfront near Plaza de Francia, where the skyline of modern Panama City rises across the bay. Browse boutiques selling mola textiles and hand-woven animal masks crafted by women artisans from Panama's Darién region, then explore the atmospheric ruins of the Iglesia de la Compañía de Jesús, whose history lives on in neighbouring Hotel La Compañía.

PANAMA ON A PLATE

Located in Panama City's coastal Coco del Mar neighbourhood, Maito is regularly ranked among *Latin America's 50 Best Restaurants*, with Chef Mario Castrellón drawing on Afro-Caribbean, Indigenous, and Chinese influences. In Casco Viejo, Fonda Lo Que Hay reimagines Panamanian comfort food, elevating the hearty rice, seafood, yuca, and plantain-based dishes long served in small family-run *fondas* across the country. Villa Ana 1928 blends Panamanian and Asian flavours inside a beautifully restored 1920s-era mansion with richly layered dining rooms.

COFFEE AND COCKTAILS

At Geisha Experience Panama, inside La Concordia Boutique Hotel, the country's

famed floral coffee is spotlighted. Known as the "Champagne of coffees," this prized varietal is among the world's most expensive coffee beans. Nearby, artisanal producer Pedro Mandinga pours small-batch Panamanian rum in a lively bar popular with both locals and visitors.

By evening, rooftop terraces begin to fill. Head to Capella atop Hotel La Compañía for cocktails and 360-degree views across the old quarter, or join the crowds at Tántalo, the rooftop hotel bar that helped define Casco Viejo nightlife.

WHY GO THERE NOW

Panama is emerging as one of Latin America's most compelling ecotourism destinations, with wildlife and exceptional birding under an hour from the capital, from the jungle trails of Soberanía National Park to boat safaris on Gatun Lake. While, in Panama City, curious appetites find Geisha coffee, small-batch rum and plates with real Panamanian soul. **DS**

TRAVEL PLANNER

For more details about Panama City, visit tourismpanama.com

