

# Secrets of Central America

From **07/03/2023**  
to **17/03/2023**

Ship: **LE BELLOT**

From **Puerto Caldera**  
to **Colón**



**PONANT** takes you to discover **Costa Rica** and **Panama** with an **11-day expedition cruise**. A circuit of great beauty around the isthmus of Panama, a link between two continents, which concentrates a biodiversity that is unique in the world, from the Atlantic Ocean to the Pacific Ocean between dream islands, natural reserves and encounters with the fascinating local communities.

Your journey in **Central America** will begin with a visit to the **Curú Wildlife Refuge**. Deep inside the tropical rainforest you may be lucky enough to see multicoloured birds, monkeys, iguanas and sloths.

In **Casa Orquideas**, in the heart of a region that is home to Costa Rica's most beautiful beaches, you will have the chance to visit a botanical garden with a sublime collection of tropical flowers.

Your ship will then head for the magnificent **Darien National Park** in Panama. This little corner of paradise is a UNESCO World Heritage site and home to remarkable plants and wildlife. Sandy beaches, rocky coastlines, mangroves, swamps and tropical rainforests vie with each other for beauty and offer a feast for photographers. This will also be the occasion for meeting the astonishing semi-nomadic **Emberas** community.

Your ship will stop in the **Pearl Islands**, which nestle in the Gulf of Panama, before sailing through the world-famous **Panama Canal**.

You will then discover the golden sand and crystal-clear waters of the coral islets of the **San Blas Islands**. The **Kuna** live among the palm trees and pirogues; this people perpetuates, among other things, the **traditional craft of molas**, weaved textiles in sparkling colours.

You will finally be able to enjoy a visit with an all-new port of call in the magnificent **Portobelo Bay**, between mangroves, tropical forest and discovery of the Congo culture. The fortifications of this former gateway to the New World are a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

*The encounters with the wildlife described above illustrate possible experiences only and cannot be guaranteed.*



The information in this document is valid as of 27/01/2022

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## YOUR STOPOVERS :

### PUERTO CALDERA

Embarkation 07/03/2023 from 21:30 to 22:30

Departure 07/03/2023 at 23:30

The port of Puerto Caldera lies on the Pacific coast, in the Puntarenas region, at the mouth of the Gulf of Nicoya. Areas of wilderness stretch along the coast. Further inland, among the countless natural wonders to be found in the generous **rainforest** of the **Costa Rica's national parks, Poas and Arena volcanoes** towers up in all their majestic glory. In this luxuriant natural setting, **Costa Rica** protects one of the planet's richest biodiversity: monkeys, sloths, tropical birds, iguanas, crocodiles, waterfalls, canyons, and more than ten thousand species of tropical plants.

### CURÚ WILDLIFE REFUGE

Arrival 08/03/2023

Departure 08/03/2023

On the southern part of the Nicoya Peninsula, the small **Curú Wildlife Refuge** is the oldest protected park in **Costa Rica**. This refuge is an exemplary site in terms of **ecotourism** as well as a **research centre** for scientists from all over the world. It has been at the heart of an original conservation and **sustainable development** project since the 1930s. After a short Zodiac® trip, you will discover, via the paths that criss-cross the tropical forest and lead to magnificent beaches, the most emblematic species of Costa Rica: monkeys, iguanas and over 200 bird species. Since their recent reintroduction, the **scarlet macaw** and the **spider monkey** have thrived in this preserved environment.

### CASA ORQUIDEAS

Arrival 09/03/2023

Departure 09/03/2023

Your ship will sail across the gulf of Dulce in direction of the **splendid botanical garden of Casa Orquideas** that you will reach by Zodiac®. Golfo Dulce is one of the most intense rainforest landscapes in the world, unfolding and exposing what has been described by National Geographic as "**the most biologically intense place on earth**". More than 400 species of tropical birds, over 500 species of vascular plants, 140 species of tropical mammals, hundreds of butterfly species and many more tropical organisms call this place home.

### CÉBACO ISLAND

Arrival 10/03/2023

Departure 10/03/2023

Off the **Pacific coast of Panama**, at the entrance to the Gulf of Montijo, Cebaco Island conjures visions of paradise lost. Covered in tropical rainforest, edged by **white sandy beaches**, home to exceptionally rich plant and wildlife, the island

offers a number of **hiking routes** along which to discover its pristine natural environment. Its magnificent coral reefs, located in the outlying regions of the Coiba National Park, a **UNESCO World Heritage site**, are the refuge for many marine species and offer stunning underwater landscapes.

## PLAYA MUERTO, DARIEN NATIONAL PARK

Arrival 11/03/2023

Departure 11/03/2023

The most remote and least developed region of Panama, the province of Darien is an unspoilt land with an extremely rich variety of flora and fauna. Listed by UNESCO as World Heritage, **Darien National Park** offers its extraordinary scenery of rocky coastlines, mountain ranges, mangroves, rivers and creeks. Discover **Playa Muerto**, a tiny coastal village home to the Emberas Amerindian community. You will visit the village, attend traditional songs and dances of the locals, and admire beautiful local craft.

## VIVEROS, PEARL ISLANDS

Arrival 12/03/2023

Departure 12/03/2023

**The Pearl Islands archipelago**, formed by over 220 islands and islets, is named in memory of the pearl oysters present in **the Gulf of Panama**. In colonial times, the pearls were extracted and used as ornaments or currency. **“La Peregrina”** was discovered in this archipelago: **this pearl is famous for its perfection** and for belonging to several royals and, more recently, Elizabeth Taylor. While the pearls have now disappeared from the azure waters of this paradise with its history of adventures and piracy, you can still swim from the **sandy white beaches** and observe shoals of multi-coloured fish performing their gracious ballet.

## SAILING AROUND PACHECA ISLAND

Arrival 12/03/2023

Departure 12/03/2023

Pacheca is a small uninhabited island in the far north of the **Pearl Islands**, home to numerous birds that our naturalist guides will help you to observe and recognise from the ship's deck. The Pearl Islands archipelago, **formed by over 220 islands and islets, is named in memory of the pearl oysters present in the Gulf of Panama. In colonial times, the pearls were extracted and used as ornaments or currency.** **“La Peregrina” was discovered in this archipelago:** this pearl is famous for its perfection **and for belonging to several royals and, more recently, Elizabeth Taylor.**

## CROSSING THE PANAMA CANAL

Arrival 13/03/2023

Departure 13/03/2023

Aboard your ship, experience something unique, that has inspired the imagination of numerous adventurers in the 20th century: **sailing the Panama Canal**. Its construction started in 1880 under the direction of **Ferdinand de Lesseps**. Abandoned then resumed, this marvel of engineering was completed by the United States in 1887 and opened in 1914. The canal crosses the Isthmus of Panama and links the Atlantic to the Pacific. Including **three levels of locks** and

by raising ships to the level of Lake Gatun, almost as if the water was a lift, it allows them to avoid having to round Cape Horn.

## SAN BLAS ISLANDS

Arrival 14/03/2023

Departure 15/03/2023

Located on the north-east coast of **Panama**, the **San Blas archipelago** is a string of coral islands in the heart of the Caribbean Sea. More than 300 islands and cays cover an area of 300 square kilometres offering travellers a multitude of treasures. Sheltered behind a long coral reef, **the San Blas Islands** are full of enchanting anchorages. The long sandy white beaches bound by crystal-clear waters will allow you to relax and enjoy incredible marine fauna before engaging with **the Kunas Indian community**. Still subsisting on hunting and fishing, they will welcome you in their villages of bamboo houses gathered near the beaches.

## PORTOBELO

Arrival 16/03/2023

Departure 16/03/2023

In the **province of Colón**, along the magnificent Caribbean coast of **Panama**, **Portobelo** is located not far from the famous **canal**. Given its name of “**beautiful port**” by **Christopher Columbus**, who discovered it in 1502, this charming and peaceful bay was one of the most important ports for the shipping of **precious metals** from the **New World** to Spain. Don't miss a visit to its **fortifications**, listed as a **UNESCO World Heritage Site**. The town has preserved the strong religious and cultural traditions of its colonial past, such as the veneration of the **Black Christ** and a strongly-rooted **Afro-Caribbean culture**. The **Congo** ceremonies retrace the story of **Spanish domination** over black slaves through traditional dances and music.

## COLÓN

Arrival 17/03/2023 early morning

Disembarkation 17/03/2023 at 07:00

**Colón** is the second largest city in **Panama**, at the Caribbean entrance of the **Panama Canal**. Colón is today an important port, and the free trade zone created in 1953 contributed greatly to the development of the city. Colón was founded in 1850 by Americans working on the Panama railroad connecting the Atlantic and Pacific coasts through the isthmus of Panama; the city rapidly overshadowed the older **Caribbean** ports of Panama when the canal opened.