

# Panama Press

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continues to make  
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up 11.7%  
p. 13



Ms. Kimberly Thomson  
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# Panama Press

March 2009  
Vol. 1, No. 1

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# A Visit to Panama's Living Lab

by Andrea Sachs

At the Smithsonian Tropical Research Institute, on an island in the Panama Canal, the experiments were running wild. A giant anteater was lumbering up the trunk of a ceibo tree, playing hide to a scientist's seek. An agouti, a rabbit-size rodent, had evaded a trap -- and a researcher's clutches -- leaving the bait for an unsuspecting spiny rat. Army ants were halting foot traffic as they hauled larvae home, and, high in the trees, howler monkeys were making faces and tossing branches at interlopers below. How, I wondered while watching a light rainfall of sticks, does anyone get any work done here? Or, is this the work? "Barro Colorado is the longest-studied piece of tropical real estate in the world," said Beth King, the institute's science interpreter. "It's not a park; it's a research island. It's like walking through a living lab." (more) (Photo Credit: (Christian Ziegler -- Smithsonian Tropical Research Institute))

To be sure, the Smithsonian "lab" is neither sterile nor controlled. It occupies a 3,707-acre island, part of the Barro Colorado Natural Monument, and is an active petri dish of mammals (93 species), birds (366), plants (1,368), amphibians and reptiles (90) and visiting scientists (up to 300 a year). The humid tropical forest has been barely touched by Homo sapiens; the man-made constructions include a small dock, a weather to were and a smattering of simple buildings. In this barely adulterated environment, international scholars can pursue their life's devotions: the foamy nests of tungara frogs, the night vision of bees, the dreams of sloths. In addition, a limited number of tourists (10 on weekdays, 20 on weekends) may visit, to hike, lunch and observe the resident brains and beasts.

"It's one thing to read about science but another to see it," said James C. Nieh, an associate

professor of biology at the University of California at San Diego, who recently lived on the island while collecting data on the language of bees. "In this forest setting . . . you can understand better why it's interesting to study tropical biology."

In the early morning, I went to Gamboa Pier, 45 minutes north of Panama City, to catch the boat that carries workers and tour-takers to the institute. I shared the commute with tanned, fit men and women dressed in light khaki clothing, tall rubber boots and wide-brimmed hats. The workhorse vessel sped along Gatun Lake, passing vibrant green islands shaped like jigsaw-puzzle pieces. Where the land opened to the sea, I glimpsed massive cargo ships drifting by, their black hulks smudging the otherwise pristine landscape. About 30 minutes into the ride, Barro Colorado loomed into view, its dock and red-roofed structures making it look like a recluse's private sanctuary.

The Smithsonian's link to Barro Colorado dates to 1910, when President William Howard Taft asked the institute to assist in an environmental impact study concerning the construction of the Panama Canal. The island, which was designated a biological reserve in 1923, grew into a world-class field station for tropical research. Through the years, high-profile scientists have come to this ecologically diverse landmass to study evolution or disease-carrying mosquitoes, for example, or to test the resilience of certain materials, such as Kodak film, under extreme conditions. Congress designated the Smithsonian the administrator of the reserve in 1946, and when Panama gained control of the canal in 1999, the organization received permission to use the facility through at least 2019.

# A Visit to Panama's Living Lab (con't)

"For a century, this has been the central place where people studying the tropics go," King said. "A lot of guidebook information, like where do toucans make their home, was discovered on Barro Colorado."

My own biological training stopped after frog dissection. So I had to take King at her word when she said, "I smell howler monkeys," only minutes into our walk. However, with a little guidance, I could now clearly identify the monkeys' chorus: a deep, throaty baritone that reverberated through the forest. Yet, in this instance, scent plus sound did not add up to a sighting.

In many cases, it took a sharp eye to spot the animals. The thick forest, debris-strewn ground and pallid sunbeams create the perfect camouflage for creatures of varied shapes and hues. I nearly mistook an agouti tucking into lunch for a mound of dirt. Even the scientists sometimes struggle to locate their specimens.

"She's spent a lot of time sitting under trees looking for anteaters," King said as a young woman passed us, carrying a metal pole with a looped end and a determined expression.

"I can find them, but I can't catch them," the woman retorted, en route to a giant ceibo where an anteater recently had been detected.

Because the island is essentially an office, visitors are expected to respect the scientists and not interfere with their work or bombard them with questions. However, King said many of the researchers are eager to share their experiments with layfolk. A young Dutchman with an



overstuffed backpack let us follow him into the brush to check on a trap. Swishing through sharp branches, he explained that he was part of a team studying the role agoutis play in forestation. So far, the team has trapped 29 of the critters, but not this time. A guileless rat had fallen for the coconut bait instead.

Before lunch, we tagged along with Meg Crofoot, a postdoctoral fellow at the institute who specializes in capuchin monkeys. She took us off-trail, into a thicket of trees many stories high. In the upper levels, a handful of howler monkeys watched us watching them. It was unnerving, as when a child or a dog stares intently at you.

Crofoot said that was normal monkey behavior: We were in their domain, and they were simply checking us out. Forming a circle overhead, they scrunched their faces into ugly masks and started tossing sticks. "They are much less scared of you," Crofoot says. I could only imagine what they'd throw if they were frightened: an anteater?

On my way to the boat back to the mainland, I heard one last bellow from a howler monkey.

Maybe one day, because of the Smithsonian scientists, I will read in a guidebook or magazine what it was saying.

*Photo and Article by Andrea Sachs, March 14 2009, Washington Post*



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# Coffee Crop Industry Slashed in Half!

*By Ryan Pauer*

Most people in Panama start off their day with a cup of coffee or two with their breakfast. Some Panamanians even enjoy coffee several times throughout the day whether at home or at work. Fewer and fewer people are not going to high end coffee shops because the price of a cup of coffee is just too high. If you're wondering why the price of a cup of coffee was gone up so much, you can blame it on Mother Nature or the weather. Too much rain has caused the beans to catch diseases or fallen off the plants. When fewer beans are being harvested and produced, this means that Panama's coffee industry will have trouble. The unfavorable weather conditions have caused the coffee crop industry to be producing half as many beans as they would have produced under favorable weather conditions. To make matters worse, the lack of workers also works as a disadvantage against the coffee drop industry. Carlos



Iván Suárez, manager of some coffee farms in the province of Boquete commented that “there are no longer many people around that want to work in the harvest.” (Carlos Iván Suárez) As a result, many of the workers that once worked in Panama's coffee fields are now working in places such as other Panama provinces and in nearby Costa Rica.

# Editorial

## Issue of Child Labor

In Panama, there are serious issues with the labor laws. The labor laws are so awful that children have to work and scavenge through the landfills in Panama. The main reason that children are doing such things is that they need the rubbish to sell for profit and in worst cases, eat. Program manager Diana de Cabadas said that “These children come from dysfunctional homes and have serious behavioral problems,” De Cabadas said. “They are exposed to all kinds of wastes, including industrial, mechanical and even medical.” (Diana de Cabadas). The child labor circumstance got so bad in the District of Aguadulce that police were called in to help ease the situation. Police took the children working in the landfill and removed them. However, police are still working throughout Panama to resolve the problem and to prevent children from working long, hard hours.



## Editor's View

I think that it is terrible that the Panamanian children should have to go through and endure all this abuse. Kids should be kids and have the opportunity to play and relax while they are young enough to do so. Children should be able to eat real food and not have to scavenge from landfills and trash barrels. Having children work and eat food out of trash barrels will lead to more problems down the road. They will become extremely unhealthy and end up with health problems when they get older, if they live that long. I am also glad that the police are cracking down on this issue. More people in Panama should be thankful for what the police do. People considering living in Panama are going to see the child labor law problems as a big negative and decide to move to different countries. If enough people gather with differing opinions on this issue, a civil disturbance may break out in Panama as a result of the conflict. The Panamanian welfare system must be able to provide basic food and shelter to these children so that they can have basic nutrition and can continue in school.

*Feature Article:*

# Panama Canal Expansion – Major Improvements On Schedule!

*By: Ryan Pauer*

The well known Panama Canal has allowed ships to travel between the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans (see page 9). Since the year 1914, over 960,000 ships have traveled through the Panama Canal. The Panama Canal Authority (ACP) is in the process of constructing a new set of locks and expanding the canal in several areas. Locks are devices that aid ships when traveling between varying heights of water. The ACP hopes that the expanded locks and canal, started in 2007 and scheduled for completion in 2014, will continue to make the Panama Canal more efficient for ships traveling through. A little over a year into the project, everything is on schedule. Board member David Kuzniecky made the following comments about the Panama Canal. "The ACP has created an



airtight process, involving knowledgeable experts and external consultants to assess each proposal. The Canal management is firmly committed to an open, fair, rigorous and transparent bid process. This is Latin America's most significant infrastructure project, and with financing in place, expansion 7 continues to progress on time

# Panama Canal Expansion (con't)

and on budget - a testament to the exceptional leadership of the ACP, the viability and soundness of the Expansion Program, and the economic success of Panama." (Panama Canal Authority) The Panama Canal Authority is aiming towards setting up more efficient locks to increase the traffic capacity of the canal while also conserving water in Lake Gatun. A summary of the expansion project improvements are shown on page 10.



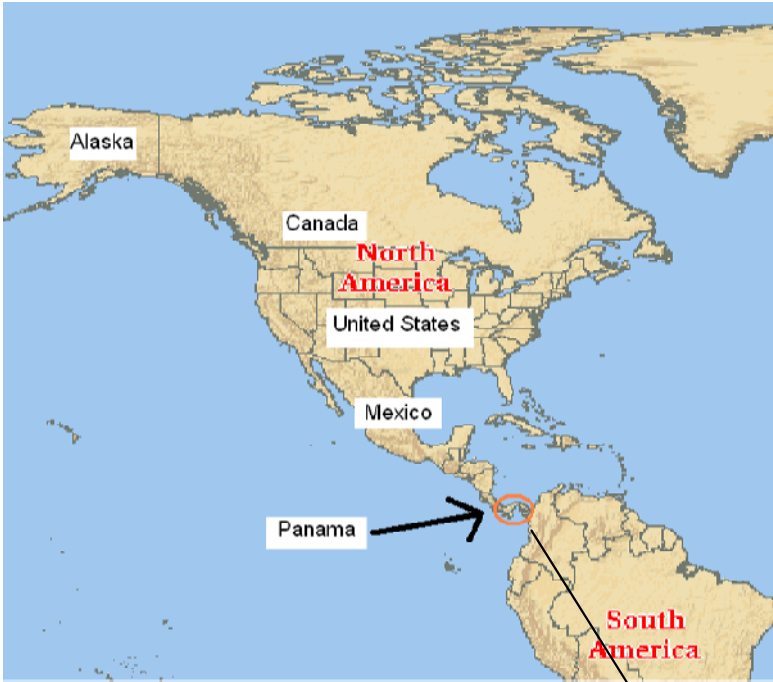
*Controlled explosions in Paraiso Hills that are part of the Panama Canal expansion.*



*The first explosions marking the beginning of the expansion project for the Panama Canal.*



# Panama and its Panama Canal – World and Regional Locations



Panama Canal



See Page 10 For Expansion Project Details

# Panama Expansion Project Details



# Visit Panama Now!



Millions of travelers can't be wrong – tourism in 2009 is up and for good reason. This is the best time to visit Panama. Take a cruise through the Panama Canal, or better yet, stay here for a week or longer. Your travel Dollar / Pound / Mark / Peso / Yen will never go further. Come see all that Panama has to offer in beauty. There will never be a better time. You are not getting any younger! Contact your travel agent, call 800-PANAMA4U, or visit [www.panamainfo.com](http://www.panamainfo.com) today. You will soon be on the vacation of your life!



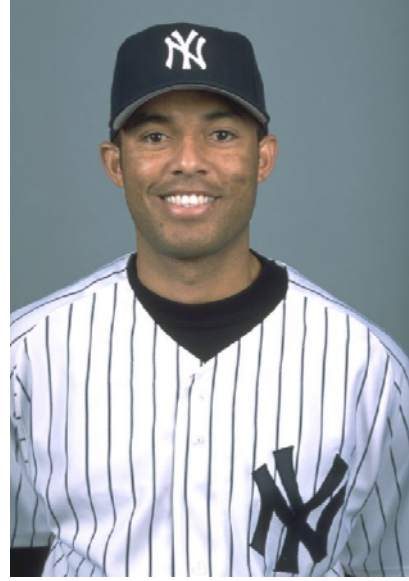
# Person in the Spotlight



## *Mariano Rivera Comes a Long Way*

*By: Ryan Pauer*

Only 14 years ago, Rivera born in the small city of Panama City, Panama, started out by assisting John Wetteland as a set up man. Today, Rivera is one of Panama's baseball players putting records into the MLB record book. Rivera has made similar accomplishments as Alex Rodriguez's of the New York Yankees, but with one major difference. Rivera has come a far way in baseball without the use of steroids. Steroids however, were used by a large number of sports players throughout Rivera's time. One of his best moments was when Rivera defeated the Boston Red Sox in 2003 by pitching three



*Mariano Rivera*

consecutive innings in game seven of the American League Championship Series. He has also been an important piece of the New York Yankees when they entered the championships in the late 1990's. As Panamanians, we all should be proud of Mariano Rivera's accomplishments. He represents our small country in such a large way.

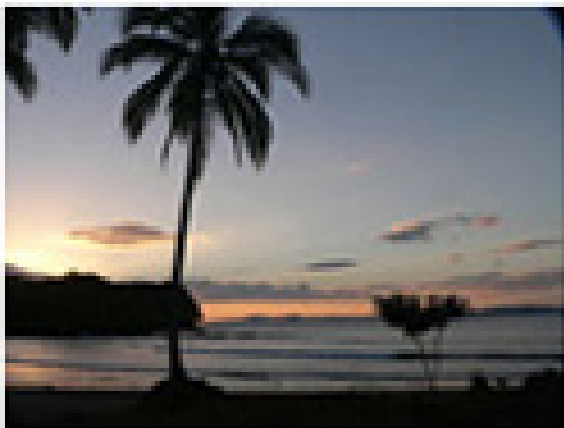


*Mariano Rivera comes in for another save.*

# Tourism Up 11.7% in Panama Despite Economic Crisis

by Don Winner

In spite of the global financial crisis, tourism grew in Panama 11.7% in January, said tourism Minister Ruben Blades today. He said both the number of visitors and the money spent in the country by tourists increased. According to the data from the Tourism Authority of Panama, in January 2009 - 162,099 tourists visited Panama, 11.7% more than during the same month in 2008, representing an increase of 15.9% in tourism spending, up to \$136.9 million dollars. Blades said the "traditional" tourists who arrive in Panama come from the United States, Canada, Costa Rica, and Colombia. Now, Panama is trying to focus efforts on attracting European tourists "because of the Euro" and because "they stay longer, between 15 to 28 days" said Blades. During January 2009 tourists from the United States (23,189), Colombia (19,340), Venezuela (14,941), Canada (5,636) and Argentina (4,707) visited Panama. The Spaniards are the



*Tourism Minister Ruben Blades*

European tourists who travel more to Panama. Nevertheless, the greatest increases of tourists came from increased numbers of visitors from Venezuela (486%), Argentina (134%), Mexico (51.5%) and the United States (25.3%). The new campaign presented by Blades to attract tourists tries to "elevate the self-esteem of the country" and to "eliminate the off seasons in Panama," as well as to diversify destinations so that the "wealth is distributed between the different zones of the country." One of the most elements of the project presented by Blades includes the possibility to vote for the "Ten Wonders of the Country" (three per province) through a system of voting on the Internet and cellular phones, besides the indigenous ethnic groups, who have been proclaimed as the tenth. The next advertising campaigns will be centered on those ten wonders.

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*Article and Photographs by Don Winner,  
March 17 2009, Panama-Guide.com*

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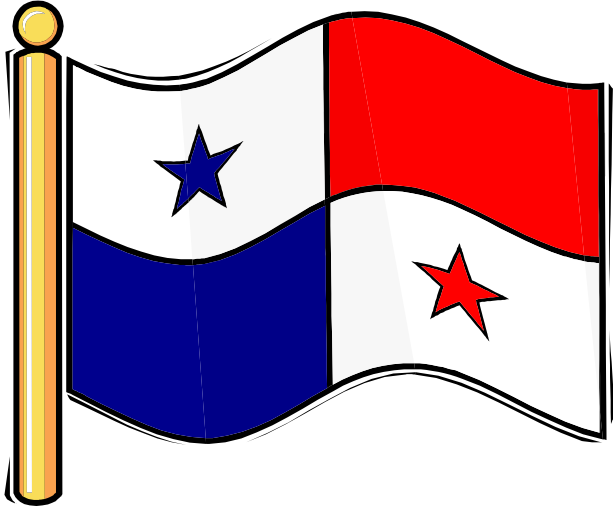
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### Did you know?

Mariano Rivera wears #42 and he is the last active Major League Baseball (MLB) player to wear this number. #42 was retired from all MLB teams in 1997 in honor of the first MLB African-American player, Jackie Robinson. No other players will ever wear #42.

# *Government and Economy Of Panama – Including 2009 Changes to the Executive And Judicial Branches*

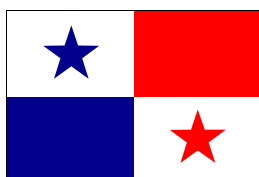


*By Ryan Pauer*

The government of Panama is a constitutional democracy, with a constitution approved in 1972. The government has three branches: executive branch with the president and two vice presidents, a unicameral legislative branch (called the National Assembly) with 78 members, and a judicial branch (Supreme Court). The president is the chief of state, and interestingly Panama voted to eliminate one vice president position and four legislative positions effective May 2009. Panama has nine provinces and five territories, with a universal voting age of 18. The major political parties include the Panamenista Party,

Democratic Change Party; National Liberal Republican Movement, Democratic Revolutionary Party, and Patriotic Union.

The economy has a gross domestic product (GDP) of \$23.4 million (2008) and a per capita income of \$11,900. Services make up 80% of the GDP, followed by manufacturing (12.7%), and agriculture and fishing (7.4%). The major natural resources are timber, copper, and gold. The services sector is well developed and helps provide Panama with a stable economy, anchored by the Panama Canal and more recently the 7-year expansion project for the canal (see feature article on page 7).



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