



Panama

CAPITAL

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OFFICIAL LANGUAGE

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CURRENCY

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Guide version: V2 draft**Disclaimer**

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Overview

Duty-Free Eligibility

Panama grants duty-free entry on used household goods and personal effects to several visa categories. The documents required vary by visa type; the core set is listed below, followed by visa-specific additions.

Documents

Required Documents

- **Original or notarized copy of passport (all pages), including ID page and last entry stamp**
- **Rated Bill of Lading (OBL) or Express Release / Air Waybill -- the BL/AWB must show the freight cost. If already issued without cost, origin carrier must authorize their Panama representative to issue a freight rate certification.**
- **Detailed inventory in Spanish**

- **Copy of immigration admission receipt (stamped by the immigration office), to validate that the immigration process has started**
- **Notarized copy of Panamanian Cedula**
- **Copies of carnets and IDs from abroad**
- **Copies of utility bills from abroad dated more than 2 years before their arrival date in Panama (to confirm 2+ years of residency outside Panama)**
- **Copy of Visa Carnet, or original letter from attorney in Panama addressed to the Autoridad Nacional de Aduanas stating the visa is in process**
- **Original letter of employment addressed to the Autoridad Nacional de Aduanas**
- **Copy of Visa Carnet or work permit (if available), or original letter from attorney stating visa is in process**
- **For air shipments: immigration register stamp on passport and notarized work contract are mandatory; notarized copy of Visa ID (both sides) required**
- **For LCL shipments delivered to Colon Bonded Warehouse: notarized final Visa ID copy is mandatory (deliveries to Panama City Terminal are preferable to avoid this requirement)**
- **Copy of Visa Carnet, or original letter from attorney addressed to the Autoridad Nacional de Aduanas**
- **Original letter from bank in Panama addressed to the Autoridad Nacional de Aduanas (minimum five-figure account balance)**
- **Pensionado Carnet, or original letter from attorney addressed to the Autoridad Nacional de Aduanas**
- **Notarized copy of Visa Carnet, or original letter from attorney stating visa is in process**
- **Copy of Registro Publico document if a company has been opened in Panama, or copy of purchase documents if property has been purchased in Panama**
- **Rated Original OBL**
- **Copy of passport**
- **Rated Express Release**
- **Spanish inventory**
- **Original letter from the Embassy in Panama requesting Previous Permit, addressed to the Autoridad Nacional de Aduanas**

- **For NGOs: letter of employment by employer in Panama addressed to the Autoridad Nacional de Aduanas**

Household Goods — Specific Information

All used household goods must show evidence of use. The owner must be in Panama when the shipment arrives. Personal effects must arrive no later than 6 months after the owner's last entry date stamped on their passport. Only two shipments are permitted within this 6-month window.

If the visa ID is not yet issued at the time of clearance, an original letter from the Panamanian attorney must be submitted to customs in its place. Once the visa carnet is ready, the attorney letter is no longer required.

All shipments are subject to mandatory physical inspection at the port of entry, carried out at the Customs bonded warehouse within Panama City limits. Inspection at the owner's residence is no longer available.

Quarantine personnel are entitled to cut the steamship line's container seals. All shipments containing wooden furniture must obtain an import quarantine permit; documents must reach the destination agent at least 1 week before shipment arrival. All wood packing materials must be heat treated and marked per ISPM 15; untreated materials may be subject to immediate re-export or local fumigation at the owner's expense.

For electronic items, the commercial invoice must include the serial number, brand, type, and material of each item. For antiques, artifacts, carpets, or artwork, a commercial invoice in Spanish is required. The weight of the shipment, number of pieces, and the owner's passport number must appear on the original bill of lading.

New furniture imported alongside used household goods is not subject to import duties and taxes, provided commercial invoices are submitted and the packing list separates new and used items. New furniture shipped independently is subject to duties assessed by the Customs Appraisal Department.

Duties and taxes apply if the required visa documents cannot be submitted to Customs at the time of clearance.

Customs clearance takes approximately 7-10 business days.

Prohibited / Restricted Items

Prohibited Items

- Firearms, ammunition, and weapons of any kind
- Psychotropic drugs and narcotics
- Pharmaceuticals and medicines (even personal prescription medications should not be included in the shipment; carry separately as personal baggage)
- Food items of any kind
- Live plants
- Fertilizers
- Toxic waste
- Right-hand drive vehicles
- Straw or hay packing in lift vans

Restricted / Dutiable Items

Alcohol: Up to 1-10 bottles per shipment may be imported for personal use. This is not freely permitted -- it requires a process through the Autoridad Nacional de Aduanas and the Autoridad Panameña de Seguridad de Alimentos (AUPSA). Conditions include: the product must have sanitary registration; AUPSA must be notified at least 48 hours before arrival via the Food Entry Notification Form (the importer must have a registered AUPSA account); and a letter from the shipper stating the product, purpose, AWB/BL number, quantity, and value is required. An administrative payment for the liquor import license applies, assessed based on alcohol content and commercial value. Given this process, alcohol is best excluded from household goods shipments unless specifically needed.

Perfume: Permitted in quantities for personal use.

Gifts: Up to PAB 50 in value (the Panamanian Balboa is pegged 1:1 to the USD).

New electronics: Subject to import duties even when shipped alongside used household goods if not accompanied by commercial invoices.

Vehicles, motorcycles, and boats: Dutiable; see Section 2 for vehicles.

Vehicles

Vehicle Documents

- **Original owner's certificate and title of the vehicle**
For all importers:
- **Commercial or purchase invoice**
For all importers:
- **Copy of passport**
For all importers:
- **Rated Original OBL or Express Release**
For all importers:
- **Completed vehicle questionnaire (provided by destination agent)**
For all importers:
- **Notarized copy of Pensionado ID card**
For Pensionado visa holders applying for tax exemption:
- **Notarized copy of passport (ID page and last entry stamp)**
For Pensionado visa holders applying for tax exemption:
- **Original "Carta de Pension" in Spanish or authenticated by Relaciones Exteriores (monthly income letter from social security exceeding USD 500)**
For Pensionado visa holders applying for tax exemption:
- **"Paz y Salvo" certification from the Ministry of Incomes**
For Pensionado visa holders applying for tax exemption:
- **Commercial invoice and vehicle details**
For Pensionado visa holders applying for tax exemption:
- **Rated Express Release BL**
For Pensionado visa holders applying for tax exemption:

Specific Information

Only left-hand drive vehicles are permitted. Right-hand drive vehicles cannot be imported under any circumstances.

All vehicles are subject to import duties and taxes based on Panama Customs appraisal, approximately 35% of CIF value. Pensionado visa holders may apply for a partial duty exemption on one vehicle only, provided the permanent Pensionado carnet is in hand at the time of clearance; if the carnet has not been obtained, full duties and taxes apply and cannot be retroactively refunded. Diplomats, members of accredited international organizations, and US

contractors are exempt from duties and taxes on one vehicle.

A gas inspection is conducted at the bonded warehouse during the customs clearance process. If the engine number is unknown, the vehicle must be taken to a workshop before clearance to obtain it, as it is required for the license plate process. Vehicle clearance can take up to five months. Temporary vehicle permits are not available in Panama.

Pets

Requirements

- **Original veterinary health certificate, legalized at the Panamanian Consulate in the country of origin (must include vaccination records)**
- **Original vaccine carnet, updated (verify with the Consulate whether legalization is also required)**
- **Copy of owner's passport**
- **Quarantine application form (provided by the destination agent)**

Specific Information

A domiciliary quarantine application must be submitted 3 days before the pet's arrival.

Pets must arrive at the Panama airport before 5:00 pm, Monday through Friday. Pets arriving later will be held until the next business day; limited arrangements may be possible with the airport veterinarian for flights arriving after 2:00 pm on weekdays, at an additional cost.

Confirm current species and breed requirements with the destination agent and the Ministry of Agricultural Development (MIDA) prior to shipping.

Consignment Instructions

Recommended: Contact the destination agent to ensure all requirements have been met prior to import, especially for differences regarding air, sea, and road shipments.

Original documents should be sent by courier; regular mail is not acceptable. For wooden furniture shipments, the quarantine import permit must be arranged and documents received by the destination agent at least 1 week before the vessel arrives.

All BLs and AWBs must show the freight cost (be "rated"). If the cost was omitted at origin, coordinate with the shipping or airline to issue a freight rate certification before clearance begins.

The Spanish-language inventory is mandatory. Inventory must be detailed; electronic items must include serial numbers, brands, and specifications.

The owner must be in Panama when the shipment arrives. Shipments must arrive within 6 months of the owner's last entry date. Confirm with the destination agent that the correct visa category documents are assembled before the shipment is loaded, as missing visa documents can result in duties and taxes being assessed on arrival.

Inspect the packing list carefully: if new and used items are combined, two separate packing lists must be submitted to avoid duties on new goods being applied to the entire shipment.

Do not include food, pharmaceuticals, firearms, or alcohol (beyond the restricted allowance) in the shipment.

Cultural & Other Information

Panama (officially the Republic of Panama) occupies the narrow isthmus connecting Central and South America, bordered by Costa Rica and Colombia. Panama City is the capital and main commercial hub. Spanish is the official language; English is widely spoken in business and in the Panama Canal Zone. The currency is the Panamanian Balboa (PAB), which is pegged 1:1 to the US dollar; US dollars circulate freely and are accepted everywhere.

Panama is one of Latin America's most stable and prosperous economies, driven by the Panama Canal, financial services, logistics, and a large free trade zone in Colon. It attracts a significant expatriate population, particularly retirees (pensionados), investors, and professionals. The pensionado visa program offers one of the region's most comprehensive retirement residency packages, including discounts on a wide range of goods and services.

Panama is Roman Catholic-majority but religiously diverse. The country operates on a generally business-friendly regulatory framework and has a dollarized economy, which simplifies financial planning for incoming expats.

Key Resources:

- [OpenFactBook -- Panama](#)
- [Wikipedia -- Panama](#)
- [Autoridad Nacional de Aduanas \(ana.gob.pa\)](#)
- [Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores \(mire.gob.pa\)](#)
- [Ministerio de Desarrollo Agropecuario / MIDA -- Quarantine Authority \(mida.gob.pa\)](#)
- [FIDI Import Customs Guide -- Panama \(September 2024\)](#)

Quick Links & Resources

- [Find Movers in Panama](#)

<https://iamovers.mobilityex.com/index.html#/search?loc=Panama&lat=8.99&lng=-79.52&range=50&assocs=800&fvw=c&ctry=Panama>

- [Foreign Embassies in Panama](#)

<https://www.embassypages.com/panama>

- [Panama's Embassies Abroad](#)

<https://mire.gob.pa/>

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