

What Is The Panama Canal

Panama Canal

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The Panama Canal (Spanish: Canal de Panamá) is an artificial 82-kilometer (51-mile) waterway in Panama that connects the Caribbean Sea with the Pacific Ocean. It cuts across the narrowest point of the Isthmus of Panama, and is a conduit for maritime trade between the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans. Locks at each end lift ships up to Gatun Lake, an artificial fresh water lake 26 meters (85 ft) above sea level, created by damming the Chagres River and Lake Alajuela to reduce the amount of excavation work required for the canal. Locks then lower the ships at the other end. An average of 200 megalitres (52 million US gallons) of fresh water is used in a single passing of a ship. The canal is threatened by low water levels during droughts.

The Panama Canal shortcut greatly reduces the time for ships to travel between the Atlantic and Pacific oceans, enabling them to avoid the lengthy, hazardous route around the southernmost tip of South America via the Drake Passage, the Strait of Magellan or the Beagle Channel. Its construction was one of the largest and most difficult engineering projects ever undertaken. Since its inauguration on 15 August 1914, the canal has succeeded in shortening maritime communication in time and distance, invigorating maritime and economic transportation by providing a short and relatively inexpensive transit route between the two oceans, decisively influencing global trade patterns, boosting economic growth in developed and developing countries, as well as providing the basic impetus for economic expansion in many remote regions of the world.

Colombia, France, and later the United States controlled the territory surrounding the canal during construction. France began work on the canal in 1881, but stopped in 1889 because of a lack of investors' confidence due to engineering problems and a high worker mortality rate. The US took over the project in 1904 and opened the canal in 1914. The US continued to control the canal and surrounding Panama Canal Zone until the Torrijos–Carter Treaties provided for its handover to Panama in 1977. After a period of joint American–Panamanian control, the Panamanian government took control in 1999. It is now managed and operated by the Panamanian government-owned Panama Canal Authority.

The original locks are 33.5 meters (110 ft) wide and allow the passage of Panamax ships. A third, wider lane of locks was constructed between September 2007 and May 2016. The expanded waterway began commercial operation on 26 June 2016. The new locks allow for the transit of larger, Neopanamax ships.

Annual traffic has risen from about 1,000 ships in 1914, when the canal opened, to 14,702 vessels in 2008, for a total of 333.7 million Panama Canal/Universal Measurement System (PC/UMS) tons. By 2012, more than 815,000 vessels had passed through the canal. In that year, the top five users of the canal were the United States, China, Chile, Japan, and South Korea. In 2017, it took ships an average of 11.38 hours to pass between the canal's two outer locks. The American Society of Civil Engineers has ranked the Panama Canal one of the Seven Wonders of the Modern World.

Panama scandals

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constructing a Panama Canal. Close to half a billion francs were lost and members of the French government had taken bribes to keep quiet about the Panama Canal Company's financial troubles in what is regarded as the largest monetary corruption scandal of the 19th century.

Torrijos–Carter Treaties

superseded the Hay–Bunau-Varilla Treaty of 1903. The treaties guaranteed that Panama would gain control of the Panama Canal after 1999, ending the control

The Torrijos–Carter Treaties (Spanish: *Tratados Torrijos-Carter*) are two treaties signed by the United States and Panama in Washington, D.C., on September 7, 1977, which superseded the Hay–Bunau-Varilla Treaty of 1903. The treaties guaranteed that Panama would gain control of the Panama Canal after 1999, ending the control of the canal that the U.S. had exercised since 1903. The treaties are named after the two signatories, U.S. President Jimmy Carter and the Commander of Panama's National Guard, General Omar Torrijos.

This first treaty is officially titled *The Treaty Concerning the Permanent Neutrality and Operation of the Panama Canal* (Spanish: *Tratado Concerniente a la Neutralidad Permanente y Funcionamiento del Canal de Panamá*) and is commonly known as the "Neutrality Treaty". Under this treaty, the U.S. retained the permanent right to defend the canal from any threat that might interfere with its continued neutral service to ships of all nations. The second treaty is titled *The Panama Canal Treaty* (*Tratado del Canal de Panamá*), and provided that as from 12:00 on December 31, 1999, Panama would assume full control of canal operations and become primarily responsible for its defense.

Panama Canal locks

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The Panama Canal locks (Spanish: *Esclusas del Canal de Panamá*) are a lock system that lifts ships up 85 feet (26 metres) to the main elevation of the Panama Canal and lowers them down again. The original canal had a total of six steps (three up, three down) for a ship's passage. The total length of the lock structures, including the approach walls, is over 1.9 miles (3 km). The locks were one of the greatest engineering works ever to be undertaken when they opened in 1914. No other concrete construction of comparable size was undertaken until the Hoover Dam, in the 1930s.

There are two independent transit lanes, since each lock is built double. The size of the original locks limits the maximum size of ships that can transit the canal; this size is known as Panamax. Construction on the Panama Canal expansion project, which included a third set of locks, began in September 2007, finished by May 2016 and began commercial operation on June 26, 2016. The new locks allow transit of larger, New Panamax ships, which have a greater cargo capacity than the previous locks were capable of handling.

Panama

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Panama, officially the Republic of Panama, is a country located at the southern end of Central America, bordering South America. It is bordered by Costa Rica to the west, Colombia to the southeast, the Caribbean Sea to the north, and the Pacific Ocean to the south. Its capital and largest city is Panama City, whose metropolitan area is home to nearly half of the country's over 4 million inhabitants.

Before the arrival of Spanish colonists in the 16th century, Panama was inhabited by a number of different indigenous tribes. It broke away from Spain in 1821 and joined the Republic of Gran Colombia, a union of Nueva Granada, Ecuador, and Venezuela. After Gran Colombia dissolved in 1831, Panama and Nueva

Granada eventually became the Republic of Colombia. With the backing of the United States, Panama seceded from Colombia in 1903, allowing the construction of the Panama Canal to be completed by the United States Army Corps of Engineers between 1904 and 1914. The 1977 Torrijos–Carter Treaties agreed to transfer the canal from the United States to Panama on December 31, 1999. The surrounding territory was returned first, in 1979.

Revenue from canal tolls has continued to represent a significant portion of Panama's GDP, especially after the Panama Canal expansion project (finished in 2016) doubled its capacity. Commerce, banking, and tourism are major sectors. Panama is regarded as having a high-income economy. In 2019, Panama ranked 57th in the world in terms of the Human Development Index. In 2018, Panama was ranked the seventh-most competitive economy in Latin America, according to the World Economic Forum's Global Competitiveness Index. Panama was ranked 82nd in the Global Innovation Index in 2024. Covering around 40 percent of its land area, Panama's jungles are home to an abundance of tropical plants and animals – some of them found nowhere else on Earth.

Panama is a founding member of the United Nations and other international organizations such as the Organization of American States, Latin America Integration Association, Group of 77, World Health Organization, and Non-Aligned Movement.

Panama Canal Railway

The Panama Canal Railway (PCR, Spanish: Ferrocarril de Panamá) is a railway line linking the Atlantic Ocean to the Pacific Ocean in Central America. The

The Panama Canal Railway (PCR, Spanish: Ferrocarril de Panamá) is a railway line linking the Atlantic Ocean to the Pacific Ocean in Central America. The route stretches 47.6 miles (76.6 km) across the Isthmus of Panama from Colón (Atlantic) to Balboa (Pacific, near Panama City). Because of the difficult physical conditions of the route and state of technology, the construction was renowned as an international engineering achievement, one that cost US\$8 million and the lives of an estimated 5,000 to 10,000 workers. Opened in 1855, the railway preceded the Panama Canal by half a century; the railway was vital in assisting the construction of the canal in the early 1900s. With the opening of the canal, the railroad's route was changed as a result of the creation of Gatun Lake, which flooded part of the original route. Following World War II, the railroad's importance declined and much of it fell into a state of neglect until 1998, when a project to rebuild the railroad to haul intermodal traffic began; the new railroad opened in 2001.

The original line was built by the United States and the principal incentive was the vast increase in passenger and freight traffic from the Eastern United States to California following the 1849 California Gold Rush. The United States Congress had provided subsidies to companies to operate mail and passenger steamships on the coasts, and supported some funds for construction of the railroad, which began in 1850; the first revenue train ran over the full length on January 28, 1855. Referred to as an inter-oceanic railroad when it opened, it was later also described by some as representing a "transcontinental" railroad, despite traversing only the narrow isthmus connecting the North and South American continents. For a time the Panama Railroad also owned and operated ocean-going ships that provided mail and passenger service to a few major US East Coast and West Coast cities, respectively.

Known as the Panama Railroad Company when founded in the 19th century, today it is operated as Panama Canal Railway Company (reporting mark: PCRC). From 1998 to 2025, it was jointly owned by then Kansas City Southern, now Canadian Pacific Kansas City, and Mi-Jack Products and leased to the government of Panama. On April 2, 2025, Canadian Pacific Kansas City and Mi-Jack Products sold the railway to APM Terminals, which is owned by Maersk. The Panama Canal Railway is primarily dedicated to freight transport, but it has also operated a passenger service between Panama City and Colón.

History of the Panama Canal

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In 1513 the Spanish conquistador Vasco Núñez de Balboa first crossed the Isthmus of Panama. When the narrow nature of the Isthmus became generally known, European powers noticed the possibility to dig a water passage between the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans.

A number of proposals for a ship canal across Central America were made between the sixteenth and nineteenth centuries. The chief rival to Panama was a canal through Nicaragua.

By the late nineteenth century, technological advances and commercial pressure allowed construction to begin in earnest. French entrepreneur Ferdinand de Lesseps led the initial attempt (1880–1889) to build a sea-level canal, as he had previously achieved in the building of the Suez Canal (1859–1869). A concession to build the canal was obtained from the Colombian government, at that time the possessor of the Panama Isthmus. The canal was only partly completed, as a result of the severe underestimation of the difficulties in excavating the rugged terrain, heavy personnel losses to tropical diseases, and increasing difficulties in raising finances. The collapse of the French canal company (1889) was followed by a political scandal surrounding alleged corruption in the French government. In 1894, a second French company (the Compagnie Nouvelle du Canal de Panama) was formed to take over the assets of the original French company, with the intention of finding a prospective buyer.

Interest in a U.S.-led canal effort developed in the late 1890s, and was considered a priority by President Theodore Roosevelt (1901–1909). Roosevelt gained Congressional support to buy the French canal concession and equipment, despite a longstanding preference amongst political leaders and the public for the Nicaragua route. After encountering resistance from the Colombian government to what they considered unfair terms, Roosevelt gave his support to a group of Panamanians seeking to secede from Colombia. He then signed a treaty with the new Panamanian government enabling the project. The critical decisions by which the U.S. took over construction of the canal were heavily influenced by the lobbyists William Nelson Cromwell and Philippe Bunau-Varilla, acting on behalf of the Compagnie Nouvelle du Canal de Panama. The terms of the treaty between the U.S. and Panama heavily favored American interests, and remained a source of tension between Panama and the United States until the signing of the Torrijos–Carter Treaties in 1977.

The Americans' success in constructing the canal hinged on two factors. First was converting the original French sea-level plan to a more realistic lock-controlled canal. The second was controlling the diseases which had decimated workers and management alike under the original French attempt. The Americans' chief engineer John Frank Stevens (the second Chief Engineer of the American-led project) built much of the infrastructure necessary for later construction. Following his resignation, the new chief engineer was George Washington Goethals, whose tenure saw the completion and opening of the canal. Goethals divided the workload into three divisions: Atlantic, Central, and Pacific. The Central division, overseen by Major David du Bose Gaillard, was responsible for the most daunting task, the excavation of the Culebra Cut through the roughest terrain on the route. Almost as important as the engineering advances were the healthcare advances made during the construction, led by William C. Gorgas, an expert in controlling tropical diseases such as yellow fever and malaria. Gorgas was one of the first to recognize the role of mosquitoes in the spread of these diseases and, by focusing on controlling the mosquitoes, greatly improved worker conditions.

On 7 January 1914, the French crane boat Alexandre La Valley became the first to traverse the entire length of the canal, and on 1 April 1914 the construction was officially completed with the hand-over of the project from the construction company to the Panama Canal Zone government. The outbreak of World War I caused the cancellation of any official "grand opening" celebration, but the canal officially opened to commercial traffic on 15 August 1914 with the transit of the SS Ancon.

During World War II, the canal proved vital to American military strategy, allowing ships to transfer easily between the Atlantic and Pacific. Politically, the canal remained a territory of the United States until 1977, when the Torrijos–Carter Treaties began the process of transferring territorial control of the Panama Canal Zone to Panama, a process which was finally completed on 31 December 1999.

The Panama Canal continues to be a viable commercial venture and a vital link in world shipping, and is periodically upgraded. A Panama Canal expansion project started construction in 2007 and began commercial operation on 26 June 2016. The new locks allow the transit of larger Post-Panamax and New Panamax ships, which have greater cargo capacity than the original locks could accommodate.

American expansionism under Donald Trump

and the Panama Canal. He has also suggested invading Venezuela, annexing Mexico, taking over the Gaza Strip, and influencing the direction of the Catholic

President of the United States Donald Trump has proposed various plans and ideas that would expand the United States' political influence and territory. In his second inaugural address, Trump directly referenced potential territorial expansion, and became the first U.S. president to use the phrase manifest destiny during an inaugural address. The last territory acquired by the United States came in 1947 with the acquisition of the Northern Mariana Islands, Caroline, and Marshall Islands. Of these islands, only the Northern Mariana Islands would become a U.S. territory, with the others becoming independent in the 1980s and 1990s under Compacts of Free Association.

Trump first said he wanted to annex Greenland in 2019, during his first term. Since being elected to a second term in 2024, Trump has also shown a desire to annex Canada and the Panama Canal. He has also suggested invading Venezuela, annexing Mexico, taking over the Gaza Strip, and influencing the direction of the Catholic Church. Trump's determination to treat the Western Hemisphere as a U.S. sphere of influence has been characterized as a revival of the Monroe Doctrine.

According to a February 2025 poll by YouGov, only 4% of Americans support American expansion if it requires military force, 33% of Americans support expansion without the use of military or economic force, and 48% of Americans oppose expansion altogether.

The Tailor of Panama (film)

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The Tailor of Panama is a 2001 spy thriller film directed by John Boorman from a screenplay he co-wrote with John le Carré and Andrew Davies. Based on le Carré's 1996 novel of the same name, it stars Pierce Brosnan and Geoffrey Rush. Rush portrays the title character, a former convict turned tailor who is strong-armed by an amoral MI6 agent (Brosnan) into spying on the Panamanian government. Jamie Lee Curtis, Brendan Gleeson, Catherine McCormack, Leonor Varela and Harold Pinter co-star, along with Daniel Radcliffe in his film debut.

The film premiered at the Berlin International Film Festival on 11 February 2001, and was released theatrically in the United States by Columbia Pictures on 30 March. It received positive reviews, with praise for the performances of Brosnan and Rush, and grossed \$28 million on a \$21 million budget.

Omar Torrijos

December 31, 1999, the final phase of the treaty, the US relinquished control of the Panama Canal and all areas in what had been the Panama Canal Zone. His son

Omar Efraín Torrijos Herrera (February 13, 1929 – July 31, 1981) was the Panamanian military leader of Panama, as well as the Commander of the Panamanian National Guard from 1968 to his death in 1981. Torrijos was never officially the president of Panama, but instead held self-imposed and all-encompassing titles including "Maximum Leader of the Panamanian Revolution". Torrijos took power in a coup d'état and instituted a number of social reforms.

Torrijos is best known for negotiating the 1977 Torrijos–Carter Treaties that eventually gave Panama full sovereignty over the Panama Canal. The two treaties guaranteed that Panama would gain control of the Panama Canal after 1999, ending the control of the canal that the U.S. had exercised since 1903. On December 31, 1999, the final phase of the treaty, the US relinquished control of the Panama Canal and all areas in what had been the Panama Canal Zone.

His son Martín Torrijos was president from 2004 to 2009.

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