



GENERAL INFORMATION



PREPARING FOR YOUR TRIP



LIFE ABOARD



IMMIGRATION



KUNA YALA



## GENERAL INFORMATION

The trip is around 5 nights in duration. Three days are spent island hopping around the San Blas Islands and two days (30-50 hours) on the open sea crossing. The length of the trip and the islands you visit will depend on weather conditions and the departure/arrival point of the trip.

From Colombia most of the boats depart in the late afternoon/evening of the first day and end the morning of the sixth. There are a couple boats that end the afternoon of the fifth day.

From Panama, boats that depart from El Porvenir start their trip in the morning of the first day and end in Cartagena on the fifth day (though it could be the sixth depending on the seas). Those departing from Puerto Lindo or Portobello usually depart in the evening of the first day and end in Cartagena on the sixth day but again arrival can be affected by the sea, wind and current.

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## BOOKING & PAYMENT

The price of the trip is set by the captains of each boat and are the same no matter where you book.

The trip costs between 500 and 700 USD per person. Most boats charge 550/600 USD per person. Prices may vary from boat to boat and seasonally. Please contact us for exact prices.

You can book directly with us in our office in Cartagena or via email.

## WHAT IS THE INCLUDED:

- All meals, drinking water, tea and coffee
- Accommodation on the boat
- Snorkeling gear
- Fishing equipment is available on most boats. Scuba diving and spearfishing is prohibited in Kuna Yala
- All boats are equipped with proper safety gear, life jackets, emergency life raft, multiple navigation devices (electronic and manual), VHF radio, SAT line and GPS spot device.
- All paperwork and standard immigration fees.

## NOT INCLUDED:

- Kuna Yala Congreso entrance tax \$20USD per person
  - Transport to/from arrival and departure port
  - Alcoholic drinks, mixers, and snacks
  - Entry visa/fees
  - Personal property insurance
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## KUNA YALA ENTRANCE TAX

The Kuna Yala Congreso charge an entrance fee of 20 USD per person. This applies to anyone entering by boat, land or plane. For passengers boarding a boat from El Porvenir, the fee will be collected at a checkpoint on the road to the coast before you arrive to the speedboat transfer dock.

**IT IS VERY IMPORTANT YOU COLLECT A RECEIPT**

For boats departing from Puerto Lindo/Portobello, your captain will collect the payments on the boat and pay at the local immigration office at the same time as completing immigration.

**THERE IS NO 100 USD ENTRANCE TAX FOR PANAMA**

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# DEPARTURE POINTS

## FROM COLOMBIA

The boats depart from Cartagena, Colombia. The point of departure is the Club Nautico marina in Manga. This is a 5-10 minute taxi ride from the center of town and should cost 7-8,000 pesos. Every once in a while (especially during rough season) some boats may depart from Sapzurro on the border of Panama in the Darien.



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## FROM PANAMA

Puerto Lindo/Portobello are where port captain and immigration are and an easy place to start the trip. Both are small seaside towns on the Caribbean coast of Panama, a short 20 minute drive from each other. To arrive there from Panama City you can take local buses which take 3-5 hours or we will arrange a shuttle van which takes around 2 hours and costs 25 USD per person.

El **Porvenir** is a popular departure/arrival port. Porvenir is an island in San Blas with an immigration office. Carti is located on the coast nearer to the mainland and also a popular port. Transport to both of these ports will be arranged for you through an external transport company. Each passenger will need 30 USD for the jeep



from Panama City to the coast, 2 USD for taxes and 15-20 USD for a speedboat to Porvenir or 5 USD to Carti. Please note, road access to the coast is restricted and not accessible with public transport.

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## PLEASE REMEMBER

We want to remind you as prospective passengers that when traveling by sailboat you need to be flexible.

The ocean and wind are unpredictable and captains reserve the right to change the departure date due to bad weather or for mechanical issues if necessary. If you are considering this trip but are concerned with a tight connecting flight, please inform us and we will work with you to the extent of our abilities, but you may want to consider other arrangements.

The trip is not a luxury tour, nor is it a guided tour. The main responsibility of your captain is to get you safely from departure to arrival point, but along with the crew will provide the tools for you to make the most of your trip.

Everyone normally helps out with cooking and cleaning and on some boats passengers will also be asked (not forced) to help out with night watch. A helping hand is always appreciated.

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## WINDY SEASON

Windy season is from mid-November to April. During this time the wind may be blowing strongly and seas are likely to be rough, more so for trips from Panama as you are traveling against the wind and waves. Boats may alter their routes and navigate closer to the coast. In heavy weather conditions, the captains are likely to use the engine to motor-sail if they deem it appropriate. In other seasons there may not be sufficient wind and boats may need to rely on the motor. Believe us the captains would rather sail but it simply depends on the wind. Safety and comfort of the passengers and boat is of utmost importance.

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## CANCELLATIONS & REFUNDS

For the most part, the boats depart and arrive on time. In the rare case that your trip is delayed due to bad weather conditions, mechanical issues, immigration, sickness of the crew or other

miscellaneous events, we will inform with as much anticipation as possible.

If your trip is delayed, it should not be more than 1 or 2 days. Please be flexible with onward travel plans in case the schedule of your trip is revised. The trip will go ahead with the new departure and arrival date, you will still receive the complete trip. There are no refunds of deposits or compensation for delays of less than 24 hours. If the delay is more than 24 hours, you will have the opportunity to cancel your reservation with a refund of any payment made. Deposits will not be refunded in the case of civil disobedience, or actions by government employees, or acts of God, they can be transferred to future bookings.

If you decide to cancel your reservation for any reason, please let us know with as much notice as possible. The deposit is non-refundable. If you need to change your trip to a later date, we can transfer the deposit up until two weeks before the date of your original booking.

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## TERMS & CONDITIONS

Please remember that the captains reserve the right to change or refuse passage at their discretion to ensure the safety and comfort of passengers.

We are a booking agency and DO NOT own the boats that we work with. Once you have boarded the boat it is then your captain's responsibility to carry on the level of service that we pride ourselves on.

We are not responsible for weather conditions, actions by government employees, civil disobedience, acts of God or other random events that may occur. We do our best to work around/avoid these events and will keep you informed of any changes that may occur to your trip.

Neither the crew, nor owner, no Blue Sailing is responsible for lost or damaged personal items. ALL passengers should have travelers insurance prior to the trip.

Adventure travel has an inherent risk involved. By booking and paying for your trip you are accepting said risk and Blue Sailing will not be held liable.





# PREPARING FOR YOUR TRIP

## PACKING

All of your luggage will go with you on the boat but you should pack a smaller bag with the items you will use for the trip. The smaller bag will stay with you and your larger backpack will be stowed in another cabin or bodega on the boat until final destination. This helps to keep the boat more organized.

Here is a list of items that we suggest you pack in your small bag:

- 5 days of light clothing (t shirts, shorts etc)
  - Bathing suit(s)
  - Towel and toiletries
  - Light sweater or raincoat
  - Sun protection
  - Flashlight
  - Bug repellent
  - Seasickness medication (Dramamine/Mareol)
  - Camera and charger
  - Reading material
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## SEA SICKNESS

We recommend that you purchase seasickness tablets and start taking them early on the day of departure for them to start working before you board the boat. Dramamine and Mareol are the common brands and can be found in most pharmacies. Ginger is a natural remedy for seasickness and though it's not as strong, it can be taken as an alternative to tablets.

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## PAYMENT & CHANGING MONEY

Please ensure you have all cash ready before the departure. It's recommended to leave time to withdraw cash as you may encounter a daily limit to the amount you can withdraw, depending on your bank and the ATM.

If departing from Colombia, you will need to change money to USD to take with you. Please allow additional time for this. You can change money in our office or in money exchange (casa de cambio). DO NOT change with people in the street.



## **LIFE ABOARD**

### **THE NAVIGATION**

The trip includes 30-50 hours of open sea navigation between Cartagena and San Blas and an additional 7-10 hours if your trip departs from/arrives to Puerto Lindo or Portobello.

These are sailboats and rely on the wind but they also have engines. If there is no wind, it's likely you will need to use the engine for at least part of the crossing. If there is a counter current or the wind is against you, the navigation can take longer so it's strongly recommend to leave yourself a flexible schedule. Please be patient with your captain and allow them to operate the navigation in the way they deem most appropriate. They are doing their best to get you to your destination as quickly and safely as possible.

During the time on the open sea, the boat does not generally stop. This is a good time to read a book, socialize, relax, hopefully see some dolphins and maybe do some fishing. Depending on sea conditions you may be able to move around and sit on deck but once the sun goes down the captain will restrict being on the fore deck.

The captain will ask that you keep hatches closed in the boat during the crossing. It may mean the cabins get a bit stuffy but please listen to your captain and understand that certain rules are in place for safety, not to inconvenience you.

If you are concerned about seasickness, you can take tablets, which serve as a preventative. It's similar to any motion sickness, some people feel it more than others. It is completely normal to feel a bit queasy. If you start feeling sick, get some fresh air, lie flat on your back and stay hydrated. You should feel much better during the three days of island hopping, as the sea is more sheltered.

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## FOOD

The trip includes three meals per day and the boats generally serve very good food but please do not expect 5-star dining. During the crossing meals are likely to be simple (sandwiches, pasta salads, soups) and in the islands the crew will provide a variety of dishes, including a fresh seafood meal when it is available. At certain times of year fishing is illegal because of breeding seasons for lobster and fish. The captain should also not purchase lobsters if they are undersized and may refuse to buy them even if available, please support this decision.

The crew do their best to accommodate to passengers who are vegetarian/pescatarian, vegan or celiac, but we will need to be informed of any special dietary needs in advance. It can be difficult to find gluten free and vegan alternatives, so please bring extra snacks with you.

If you have a genuine allergy to any specific foods or something in the environment, you should inform us and take appropriate measures.

Meals are served at scheduled times. If you sleep late or miss a meal for any reason and food has been cleared, please inform the crew. They are there to accommodate you but most cannot read minds, guest participation and assistance is appreciated.

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## ACCOMMODATION

For the entire trip your accommodation will be your designated berth on the boat, which may be a single or double bunk, in a shared dorm or private cabin. There is limited availability of private double cabins and you can book a specific bed based on availability. If you are not given the specific bed that you reserved, it is important to inform the crew. This is likely just a mix-up and can only be resolved at the start of the trip.

You will be sharing a relatively small space with people you may have just met, so please be flexible. Single travelers may be required to share a double bed with another passenger. If this is a concern for you, please advise us before finishing your booking.

Some boats use the salon area for additional sleeping, usually at a discounted price. Though it's not as private, the salon has good airflow and is a good option for those concerned with seasickness or claustrophobia.

It is normal that the crew sleeps outside on mattresses or in the common areas. They often prefer to be outside to keep an eye on the weather conditions and hear any changes to the wind. Please respect this as their sleeping area.

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## GENERAL COMFORT ON BOARD

Most boats are not equipped with proper showers and fresh water is limited so everyone needs to conserve it. You will have the opportunity to rinse off on deck with fresh water at the end of the day and a few islands offer shower facilities that you can use for 1 or 2 USD, a salty bath in crystal clear water is free.

The captain is in charge of the water supply and at any time may change the rules if deemed necessary. Your dishes will likely be washed with salt water. Fresh water is like gold on a sailing boat, once it runs out you cannot get more (unless it rains) so please be flexible and conscious of water consumption e.g. do not leave the water running as you brush your teeth.

If something has not first traveled through your body, it should not go in the toilet. Boat sanitation systems use salt water so you do not need to worry about how many times you flush, but contents will be re-circulated back into the sea. Please avoid putting inorganic items into the toilet; this includes toilet paper, tampons and sanitary napkins, and garbage. Traditional boat toilets have manual pumps that your captain and crew will explain how to use. Please pay attention and if in doubt, pump more times than you think necessary. If you have any problems, don't be embarrassed to let a crew member know, chances are they have dealt with it many times before.

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# THE CREW

The trip is not a guided tour but your crew is there to provide the tools you will need to make the most out of your time onboard. Safety is priority one and then comes your comfort. Please understand that the crew may not always be available to socialize or entertain as they have many duties they need to carry out. Each captain has their own way of doing things, but their main responsibility is to operate the boat and get you safely from place to place.

Many boats have hired captains and these are subject to change sometimes just like in any job. Please ask us if you are interested to know who your captain will be.

Many of the captains are local sailors while others are foreigners that have relocated here. There will be an English-speaking crewmember on board. You can read a bio of each captain here (linked).

It is extremely important to communicate with your crew if you have any concerns or questions during the trip. Passenger support and attitude go a long way. If everyone works together as a team and helps out the crew, the trips are much more enjoyable for everyone.



## IMMIGRATION

### DEPARTURES FROM COLOMBIA

We will collect the passports from all passengers in our office and arrange the paperwork for departure, including exit stamps.

Passports will then be delivered directly to the captain once stamped. Your captain will normally keep them together during the trip and arrange to get you stamped in once you arrive to Panama.

Panama authorities require that all passengers show proof of onward travel when entering the country. It will need to be printed on paper, electronic format will not be sufficient. If needed we can help you with this when you come by our office.

There is NO ENTRANCE TAX for tourists from most countries to stay up to 90 days in the country. Panamanian authorities have in the past made sudden changes to their rules without warning. If there are any changes to the standard rules, we will advise you.

The cost of the trip does not include fees additional to the normal immigration costs.

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## DEPARTURE FROM PANAMA

The captain will collect all passports at the start of the trip and arrange immigration for your exit from Panama. Your captain will hold onto the passports until your arrival to Colombia.

Immigration requires that each passenger brings a photocopy of their passport bio page and the page that contains your Panamanian entrance stamp. Please make sure you bring copies with you on the boat.

Your captain will deliver the passports to a maritime agent on arrival to Colombia, who completes all the paperwork for your entrance. The agent will return the passports to the captain or deliver them to our office with entrance stamps. This process normally takes several hours, but can be up to 24 hours, depending on the estimated wait time. In the meantime, you will be able to disembark the boat and check into your hostels. Your captain will confirm what time and where you can collect your passports.

Entering Colombia you do not be required to show proof of onward travel.

Please check if there are any special conditions of entry for your own passport (i.e. Canadian reciprocity tax).



## KUNA YALA

# SAN BLAS ISLANDS AND THE KUNA YALA PEOPLE

The Kuna Yala people live in three separate “comarcas” or reservations in Panama. The largest population of Kuna Yala inhabits the San Blas Islands. This archipelago on the northern Caribbean coast of Panama is made up of more than 370 islands (you could visit a different island everyday for a year and still have a few left over). They are a matrilineal society, meaning when they marry the couple will then live with the bride’s family and the groom will take her name.

Their economy subsists mainly on agriculture and fishing as well as international trade and tourism. A large part of their economy is based on their sale of coconuts. While in the islands, please do not remove any coconuts from the ground or trees, they are available for purchase and at 25 cents they are very reasonable. Sale of artisan goods such as bracelets and “molas” also provide additional income. Molas are lovely bright pieces of fabric with beautiful and intricate designs covering them. Though they may seem a little expensive to some backpackers, they are all hand stitched and extremely time consuming to make. A large mola averages around 15 to 20 USD and is available throughout the trip for purchase from the local people.

The Kuna Yala are strong people who hold great value in tradition and autonomy. In the past there have been many tragic bloody

battles between the Kuna Yala and outside cultures trying to colonize them or steal their natural resources. Because of this many of the leaders of the community are resistant to the pressures of globalization and “progress”. The younger Kuna people tend to be more open to change, wearing less traditional garments and opting for more western style clothing. They maintain their local dialect of Dulegaya but many also speak Spanish and some English. The Kuna Yala have refused many large hotels proposing investment in the Islands because they pride their autonomy and way of life. They are very progressive in their views of homosexuality and transgenders but still maintain their traditional values. They can be quite conservative and we ask that you please respect this and refrain from any risqué behavior or dress (no nudity). We understand that there are bound to be cultural differences and though you may feel free to express your opinion you may not be disrespectful.

Feel free to bring gifts for the kids on the islands; we encourage giving school supplies and small toys instead of sweets and candies. So get ready to experience one of the most beautiful and interesting cultures in the world on our San Blas tours!