

Secrets of Central America

From **5/3/2026**
to **15/3/2026**

Ship: **LE CHAMPLAIN**

From **Colón**
to **Puntarenas**



PONANT takes you to discover **Panama** and **Costa Rica** with an **11-day expedition cruise**. A circuit of extraordinary 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, you will experience dream islands, natural reserves and encounters with the fascinating local communities.

San Lorenzo's Fort is the first port of call on your cruise aboard *Le Champlain*. Admire this unusual fortress built by the Spanish Crown to protect transatlantic trade. Now **classified as a UNESCO World Heritage Site**, it is an exceptional example of military architecture from the 17th and 18th centuries.

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.

After **crossing the legendary Panama Canal** that connects the Atlantic to the Pacific, *Le Champlain* will sail to the heart of the **Pearl Islands**, nestling in the Gulf of Panama. There, our naturalists will offer to take you on an outing in a zodiac dinghy.

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 an opportunity to meet the astonishing semi-nomadic **Emberas** community.

During the final stop in Panama, in front of **Cébaco Island**, you will have the possibility to enjoy the beach or to take walks nearby.

Your ship will then take you to Costa Rica. The next stage of your cruise: **Rio Esquinas**. You will ride aboard one of our zodiac dinghies to observe this lush environment where monumental mangroves and emblematic species reign supreme.

After a day spent discovering **Drake Bay**, your final visit will be the stunning **Curú nature reserve**. Deep inside the tropical rainforest you may be lucky enough to see multicoloured birds, monkeys, iguanas and sloths.

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



The information in this document is valid as of 9/10/2024

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YOUR STOPOVERS :

COLÓN

Embarkation 5/3/2026 From 4:00 pm to 5:00 pm

Departure 6/3/2026 at 7:00 am

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.

FORT SAN LORENZO (COLÓN)

Arrival 6/3/2026

Departure 6/3/2026

In the Colón District, Fort San Lorenzo faces the sea, its canons pointing towards the horizon as they used to under the Spanish Crown. This construction is part of a group of buildings exemplifying the military architecture of the 17th and 18th centuries along the Caribbean coast of Panama, hence its status as a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Wander along the fort's alleyways accompanied by the melodious singing of the birds that have made the surrounding forest their home. Enjoy an unforgettable port of call combining history and walking in nature.

SAN BLAS ISLANDS

Arrival 7/3/2026

Departure 7/3/2026

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.

CROSSING THE PANAMA CANAL

Arrival 8/3/2026

Departure 8/3/2026

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 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.

PEARLS ISLANDS

Arrival 9/3/2026

Departure 9/3/2026

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.

PACHECA ISLAND

Arrival 9/3/2026

Departure 9/3/2026

Isla Pacheca lies in the far north of the maze of more than two hundred islands composing the **Pearl Islands**. This small piece of uninhabited land is a special place for the numerous bird species that have taken up residence there. Among these is the unusual-looking blue-footed booby, which you might spot wandering along one of the island's beaches. The shore visit in a Zodiac dinghy holds the promise of an unforgettable moment spent in lush nature between white-sand beaches and verdant rainforest.

PLAYA MUERTO, DARIEN NATIONAL PARK

Arrival 10/3/2026

Departure 10/3/2026

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.

CÉBACO ISLAND

Arrival 11/3/2026

Departure 11/3/2026

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.

RIO ESQUINAS

Arrival 12/3/2026

Departure 12/3/2026

The beauty of **Costa Rica** and the richness of its biodiversity reveal themselves at this port of call in the heart of the mangrove. In the meanders of **Rio Esquinas**, a tropical corner of paradise, you will discover an incredibly dense ecosystem. Aboard your Zodiac dinghy, you will brush past the tangled arms formed by the roots of the mangrove trees. This green and lush **gallery forest** and its inhabitants welcome you. Watch closely: common squirrel monkeys, white ibis, Eurasian whimbrels, ospreys, toucans, snowy egrets and great blue herons can be found hiding here.

DRAKE BAY

Arrival 13/3/2026

Departure 13/3/2026

Located on Costa Rica's remote Osa Peninsula, **Corcovado National Park** covers 164 square miles, making it the country's largest national park, the largest primary forest on the American Pacific coast, and one of the few remaining large areas of lowland tropical rain forests in the world.

CURÚ WILDLIFE REFUGE

Arrival 14/3/2026

Departure 14/3/2026

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.

PUNTARENAS

Arrival 15/3/2026

Disembarkation 15/3/2026 at 8:00 am

The capital of the eponymous province, **Puntarenas** is sometimes called "the pearl of the Pacific", for its unique charm. It sits on the Pacific coast of Costa Rica, along the **Gulf of Nicoya**, lined with long expanses of wild natural environments. 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.