Colonial Panama

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Spain colonized Panama in 1520. For most of the colonial period Panama was important as a transit point for goods from Spain to Peru. The most important settlements were located on the Pacific and Caribbean coast of the Isthmus.
On the Pacific Coast was Panama City. The city occupied two sites during the colonial period. The ruins of the first site of the city, destroyed by the pirate Morgan in the 1680s, are still preserved as a national historic site.
Map of Panama Viejo c. 1609
Cathedral on Main Square
Ruins in Panama Viejo
Ruins in Panama Viejo
Ruins of one of the Monasteries in Panama Viejo
Following the destruction of the first site, the Spaniards relocated the city several miles away. The modern Panama City has grown around the Casco Viejo, but colonial structures still survive.
1779 map of the new Panama City
Defensive Wall that Once Surrounded the Colonial City
Colonial Church: La Merced
Cathedral
Ruins of Dominican Monastery
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Ruins of Dominican Monastery. The arch in the church ruins convinced early canal builders that Panama did not suffer strong earthquakes, and was thus a suitable location for a canal.
Ruins of Dominican Monastery