LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND POLITICS

Each of the nine provinces of Panama is divided into municipal districts. The president appoints the provincial governors for indefinite terms, while the people elect the mayors and councils of the municipal districts. Citizens 20 years old may vote in national and local elections. The chief political party is the National Patriotic Coalition.

THE CANAL ZONE GOVERNMENT

The Canal Zone government, an independent agency of the United States government, administers the civil affairs of the Canal Zone. The President of the United States appoints the governor of the Zone for a four-year term. In time of war, the highest-ranking United States Army officer in the Canal Zone assumes charge of both the Zone and the Canal.

Live herons grace the main entrance to the Palace of the Herons, the residence of the president of the Republic. In Panama, the president is elected by direct popular vote for a four-year term, and at the same time a first and second vice-president are chosen.

The National Assembly meets in the Legislative Palace in Panama City. Each of the 53 deputies who sit in the Assembly represents about 15,000 people, and is elected for a four-year term.
The Governor's Residence is at Balboa Heights.

The Canal Zone government administers the Zone's police and fire departments, and its health and sanitation facilities. It also operates free schools for the children of the Zone. The schools provide two sets of courses: one designed to meet the needs of United States children, the other following the Panamanian teaching curriculum, with instruction in Spanish.

The Congress and the President of the United States appoint all the officials who administer the Canal Zone. The people living in the Zone send no representatives to Congress and, therefore, many United States citizens in the Zone vote by absentee ballot.

DEFENSE

International law requires that the United States allow commercial and military vessels of all nations to pass through the Canal in peacetime. If the United States goes to war, or is in danger of going to war, it can restrict the use of the Canal. The United States maintains Army, Navy and Air Force bases throughout the Canal Zone for the defense of the waterway.

The Official Seal of the Canal Zone fancifully shows a Spanish galleon plying the Canal.
free West Indians who came to build the Panama Railroad and the Panama Canal.

Spanish is the official language of the country, but many Panamanians also speak English, especially those who work in the American-governed Canal Zone. The various Indian tribes have their own languages.

DAILY LIFE AND RECREATION

In the country, most farmers live in one-storey houses with thatched roofs, walls of bamboo or dried sugar cane, dirt floors and bamboo ceilings. Most farmers are poor and have little furniture—they sleep on wooden cots and often use boxes or tree stumps for tables or chairs. City people live in houses and apartment buildings made of wood or concrete, with roofs of clay tile or corrugated iron.

Most Panamanians wear light, loose clothing similar to that worn in the United Kingdom and the United States during the summer. The people dress in their national costume on fiestas (feast days) and other special occasions. The women’s costume, or pollera, is a long, full dress made of many folds of fine white cotton, decorated with delicate lace and embroidery. Men wear the montuno, a costume made of coarse white cotton. It includes a loose, long-sleeved embroidered shirt worn over short, fringed trousers.

Panamanians enjoy relaxing under the many “bohios,” or shelters thatched with palm leaves, which can be seen scattered over the Panamanian countryside.
Posing beside a vendor’s stall, a woman displays the beautiful national costume of Panama, called the pollera.

Unlike these pure-blooded Indians, most Panamanians are of mixed white, Indian and Negro ancestry.

The houses of a Panamanian village usually flank a single dusty street or are grouped around a grass-covered plaza.
The life of the Indians on the San Blas Islands goes on much as it did when Columbus sailed into the Bocas del Toro area 465 years ago. Even little San Blas Indian girls wear the traditional pure-gold nose rings and picturesque "mola" costumes.

Hundreds of families now living in makeshift quarters in Panama City are being helped to re-establish themselves in new, legally owned homes under a project being carried out by the Republic of Panama with the assistance of the United Nations. These children live in the ramshackle houses edging their playground.
Performers dance amid the ruins of Old Panama City, once the greatest city in the Americas, but destroyed by the Pirate Henry Morgan in 1671. The men's costumes, called "montunos," complement the polleras of the women.

This young man has been selected as "Rey Momo," or King Momus of the annual Carnival, held from February 8 to 11. He celebrates by dancing with one of his many "Queens." Momus was the Greek god of ridicule.

Panama is very sports-minded, and one of the most popular sports is horse racing, which is conducted virtually every weekend of the year at the President Remón Track.
Panama's chief sports include baseball, horse racing, boxing, swimming, fishing and hunting. About 93 out of every 100 persons in the Republic are Roman Catholic. Almost every town and village holds a gay fiesta every year to venerate its patron saint. City people celebrate Carnival during the four days preceding Ash Wednesday, during which they take part in dances, parties and parades.

Of Panama's several daily newspapers, the three most important ones print both English and Spanish editions.

Religious processions take place during Holy Week in Panama's small towns and villages.