

Panama

This guide is compiled from the IAM Country Guide for reference only. Customs regulations change frequently; please consult your Seapoe relocation consultant for the latest requirements before shipping.

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Documents

Documents required for importing used household goods, personal effects, and related shipments.

Required Documents

Common to all visa types:

Returning Panamanian Citizens (additional documents):

Friendly Nations Visa:

Working Visa:

Self-Solvency Visa:

Pensionado (Retiree) Visa:

Investor Visa:

Diplomats and NGOs:

- Original or notarized copy of passport (all pages), including ID page and last entry stamp
- Rated Bill of Lading (OBL) or Express Release / Air Waybill -- the BL/AWB must show the freight cost. If already issued without cost, origin carrier must authorize their Panama representative to issue a freight rate certification.
- Detailed inventory in Spanish
- Copy of immigration admission receipt (stamped by the immigration office), to validate that the immigration process has started
- Notarized copy of Panamanian Cedula
- Copies of carnets and IDs from abroad
- Copies of utility bills from abroad dated more than 2 years before their arrival date in Panama (to confirm 2+ years of residency outside Panama)
- Copy of Visa Carnet, or original letter from attorney in Panama addressed to the Autoridad Nacional de Aduanas stating the visa is in process
- Original letter of employment addressed to the Autoridad Nacional de Aduanas
- Copy of Visa Carnet or work permit (if available), or original letter from attorney stating visa is in process
- For air shipments: immigration register stamp on passport and notarized work contract are mandatory; notarized copy of Visa ID (both sides) required
- For LCL shipments delivered to Colon Bonded Warehouse: notarized final Visa ID copy is mandatory (deliveries to Panama City Terminal are preferable to avoid this requirement)
- Copy of Visa Carnet, or original letter from attorney addressed to the Autoridad Nacional de Aduanas
- Original letter from bank in Panama addressed to the Autoridad Nacional de Aduanas (minimum five-figure account balance)
- Pensionado Carnet, or original letter from attorney addressed to the Autoridad Nacional de Aduanas
- Notarized copy of Visa Carnet, or original letter from attorney stating visa is in process

- Copy of Registro Publico document if a company has been opened in Panama, or copy of purchase documents if property has been purchased in Panama
- Rated Original OBL
- Copy of passport
- Rated Express Release
- Spanish inventory
- Original letter from the Embassy in Panama requesting Previous Permit, addressed to the Autoridad Nacional de Aduanas
- For NGOs: letter of employment by employer in Panama addressed to the Autoridad Nacional de Aduanas

Specific Information

All used household goods must show evidence of use. The owner must be in Panama when the shipment arrives. Personal effects must arrive no later than 6 months after the owner's last entry date stamped on their passport. Only two shipments are permitted within this 6-month window.

If the visa ID is not yet issued at the time of clearance, an original letter from the Panamanian attorney must be submitted to customs in its place. Once the visa carnet is ready, the attorney letter is no longer required.

All shipments are subject to mandatory physical inspection at the port of entry, carried out at the Customs bonded warehouse within Panama City limits. Inspection at the owner's residence is no longer available.

Quarantine personnel are entitled to cut the steamship line's container seals. All shipments containing wooden furniture must obtain an import quarantine permit; documents must reach the destination agent at least 1 week before shipment arrival. All wood packing materials must be heat treated and marked per ISPM 15; untreated materials may be subject to immediate re-export or local fumigation at the owner's expense.

For electronic items, the commercial invoice must include the serial number, brand, type, and material of each item. For antiques, artifacts, carpets, or artwork, a commercial invoice in Spanish is required. The weight of the shipment, number of pieces, and the owner's passport number must appear on the original bill of lading.

New furniture imported alongside used household goods is not subject to import duties and taxes, provided commercial invoices are submitted and the packing list separates new and used items. New furniture shipped independently is subject to duties assessed by the Customs Appraisal Department.

Duties and taxes apply if the required visa documents cannot be submitted to Customs at the time of clearance.

Customs clearance takes approximately 7-10 business days.

Duties & Taxes

Panama grants duty-free entry on used household goods and personal effects to several visa categories. The documents required vary by visa type; the core set is listed below, followed by visa-specific additions.

Prohibited & Restricted Items

Prohibited Items

- Firearms, ammunition, and weapons of any kind
- Psychotropic drugs and narcotics
- Pharmaceuticals and medicines (even personal prescription medications should not be included in the shipment; carry separately as personal baggage)

- Food items of any kind
- Live plants
- Fertilizers
- Toxic waste
- Right-hand drive vehicles
- Straw or hay packing in lift vans

Restricted / Dutiable Items

Alcohol: Up to 1-10 bottles per shipment may be imported for personal use. This is not freely permitted -- it requires a process through the Autoridad Nacional de Aduanas and the Autoridad Panameña de Seguridad de Alimentos (AUPSA). Conditions include: the product must have sanitary registration; AUPSA must be notified at least 48 hours before arrival via the Food Entry Notification Form (the importer must have a registered AUPSA account); and a letter from the shipper stating the product, purpose, AWB/BL number, quantity, and value is required. An administrative payment for the liquor import license applies, assessed based on alcohol content and commercial value. Given this process, alcohol is best excluded from household goods shipments unless specifically needed.

Perfume: Permitted in quantities for personal use.

Gifts: Up to PAB 50 in value (the Panamanian Balboa is pegged 1:1 to the USD).

New electronics: Subject to import duties even when shipped alongside used household goods if not accompanied by commercial invoices.

Vehicles, motorcycles, and boats: Dutiable; see Section 2 for vehicles.

Consignment Instructions

Recommended: Contact the destination agent to ensure all requirements have been met prior to import, especially for differences regarding air, sea, and road shipments.

Original documents should be sent by courier; regular mail is not acceptable. For wooden furniture shipments, the quarantine import permit must be arranged and documents received by the destination agent at least 1 week before the vessel arrives.

All BLs and AWBs must show the freight cost (be "rated"). If the cost was omitted at origin, coordinate with the shipping or airline to issue a freight rate certification before clearance begins.

The Spanish-language inventory is mandatory. Inventory must be detailed; electronic items must include serial numbers, brands, and specifications.

The owner must be in Panama when the shipment arrives. Shipments must arrive within 6 months of the owner's last entry date. Confirm with the destination agent that the correct visa category documents are assembled before the shipment is loaded, as missing visa documents can result in duties and taxes being assessed on arrival.

Inspect the packing list carefully: if new and used items are combined, two separate packing lists must be submitted to avoid duties on new goods being applied to the entire shipment.

Do not include food, pharmaceuticals, firearms, or alcohol (beyond the restricted allowance) in the shipment.