

QUEER SIDELIGHTS ON THE PANAMA COUNTRY

Strange Fruits and Game—Medical Plants and Trees—
What it Costs to See the Isthmus—Hotels and Restaurants—The Cabs and Cars—Time Needed.

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Cristobal, Canal Zone, Panama.—Strange things at Panama! We have plenty of them, and some which make one's eyes bulge out like saucers. This is the heart of the tropics, and the sun works like a dynamo. Nevertheless I have here seen boys snowballing at noonday. They had real snow and were plugging away at each other under the coconut palms. Tropical plants were growing luxuriantly about them and orchids hung from the porches of a government building nearby. The snow came from the cold storage plant, and it was made up of the ice shavings of Uncle Sam's factory. The government is now making several thousand tons of ice every month, and it can turn out 400 gallons of ice cream a day. It sends out an icy cold storage train every morning, and ice cream is sold at such rates that every canal family can have it Sunday, and, if it will, several times during the week.

Streams Which Flow Oil.—Another strange thing is the streams which flow oil. We have hundreds of them on the zone. They are coated with scum, and the scum is petroleum. You look about in vain for derricks and flowing gas wells. There is nothing of the kind. The oil comes from the sanitary department, and it is supplied by an army which coats every stream. This is to kill the mosquitoes, and the means of furnishing it are various. In some places it leaks out of reservoirs from pipes which drip, drip, drip oil all day and all night. In others the oil is from machines which spray it over the vegetation and into the streams, and in still other places from great tin cans made for the purpose, which are hung over the ponds, dripping only so much at a time. All this is to fight the mosquito, the little beast being hunted as though he were a lion or a tiger on the banks of an East Indian river.

The Fruits of the Isthmus.—What would you think of a fruit which contains so much pepsin that it will digest buckwheat cakes, Welsh rarebit and greasy pork chops? We have it down here. It looks like a muskmelon and it grows at the top of a tree not unlike a small palm. This fruit is the papaya and you may have it any morning at almost any hotel. It is eaten with sugar or salt. I find it delicious.

And then we have alligator pears as big as your fist and as green as new peas. They have a hard outer shell, which, when cut through, shows a flesh of pale green or white as soft as butter and of an oleaginous taste. Dress this fruit with salt, pepper and vinegar, and it makes a delicious salad which melts in your mouth. You may buy alligator pears in New York at 50 cents or upward apiece, but they are not so good as those of the isthmus, which you can have almost for the asking.

And then our grapefruit? Those we eat here come from Jamaica, and are far better than any raised in the states. They are sweeter and juicier and their quinine-like flavor just suits the stomach. We have delicious bananas from Bocas del Toro and ripe pineapples from the Island of Taboga which you can eat with a spoon. We have mangoes fit for a queen and have fresh vegetables all the year round. Moreover, Uncle Sam is weekly shipping down apples, pears and all the products of the temperate zone, and we have also tropical vegetables such as yucca, chayotes and yams. Indeed, the average man's table at Panama has a greater variety than it could have at home.

A Land of Game.—One always thinks of cold countries as the only ones fit for hunting. Strange to say, Panama is a land of game and wild fowl. The country is as rough as the Alleghany mountains, and it is full of deer, wild hogs and one may now and then meet a tapir. The tapir is a kind of cross, as far as legs are concerned, between a hog, a horse and an elephant. It has a nose which is almost a trunk. It has hoofs like a horse, save that they end in sharp toes. Its tail is like that of a pig and it is often the size of a stocky pony, measuring about a yard and a half from the ground to its shoulder. One of Uncle Sam's zone judges who spends his vacations hunting tells me he shot a number of these beasts and that the meat is delicious. He has shot scores of deer, and as for wild ducks I see great flocks of them every time I pass the now fast rising lake of Gatun. Back from the Canal Zone, where the population is scanty, there is plenty of game, and venison is frequently served at the hotels of Colon and Panama.

One of the strange kinds of wild beasts seen in the markets is the iguana. What would you think of eating a lizard? Well, that is what the iguana is. It is a lizard as big as a cat with a coat of hard scales covering its back. Its flesh tastes like spring chicken. It is delicious and compares in some respects with the

diamond back terrapin from the waters of Chesapeake bay.

The Vegetation of Panama.—You have heard that Panama is a jungle and your idea of the isthmus is perhaps a mighty palm garden. There are plenty of palms, but there are also other trees of a hundred varieties. There are great forests of hardwoods, with palms here and there scattered through them. There are scores of plants the names of which are not known to the ordinary traveler and many of which are new to the botanists.

There are also plants and woods which the Indians use for medicinal purposes, some of which are practically unknown to our pharmacists. The cacique wood will stop blood, and the Indians use it for all kinds of cuts. They say that it will even stop hemorrhages if one takes hold of it, and that by dusting some powder from it over a cut the blood will cease running.

There is another tree here which is an antidote for snake poison, and a plant the juice of which is an emetic that will turn the strongest stomach inside out. I know a zone official who had heard of this plant and wished to test it. He was out hunting with a friend and the two agreed that they would each drink a cup of tea made of the juice. It was sweet and easily swallowed. A moment later, however, both men made a rush for the door, and, as the engineer said, they thought their boots were coming up through their throats.

A little farther south are trees from the bark of which the Indians make blankets and the straw which is woven into Panama hats.

Like the Cradle of Moses.—The Isthmus of Panama has the papyrus plant similar to that which formed the cradle of little Moses when he lay in the bulrushes, and to that of which the paper used by the ancient Egyptians was made. There are great beds of papyrus to be seen from the cars on the ride across the isthmus. It is a long reed with a tassel-like head which grows in the swamps. It is one of the chief plants of the upper Nile, and I have seen vast tracts of it in the lower parts of the Sudan.

Another queer thing, according to our American notions, is the grass of the isthmus. We usually look upon this country as nothing but jungle. The truth is, there are great pasture lands in the Panama republic, and within a mile's ride of the Tivoli Hotel at Ancon one may enter a landscape which is not unlike parts of Ohio and Indiana. These are the savannas, a rolling country covered with grass, upon which herds of cattle are feeding. The cattle are rounded up by the Panamanian cowboys on horseback, and the scenes are not unlike those of the Argentine pampas. The northern part of the Panama republic is largely of this nature and is devoted to grazing, having large herds of cattle.

Gorgeous Flowers of Sweet Perfume.—I have frequently seen it stated that the flowers of the isthmus do not smell. This is not true of the most of them. There are many which give forth a delicious perfume and load the air with their scent.

Indeed, Panama is a land of flowers. There are great trees of red, yellow and blue, which may be seen from the cars on the way across the isthmus, and orchids and other air plants by the thousands hang from the branches. They clothe the limbs and trunks of dead trees and make them alive.

Mr. Gudge, Uncle Sam's chief justice of the Canal Zone, has a vine covering the porch of his house near the Tivoli Hotel. This vine bears a yellow flower which looks like a rose. The justice calls it the Tivoli vine. Just below this place is a tree which bears leaves green on top and rust red beneath. When the sun strikes them the under sides of the leaves shine like burnished copper, and they look as though they were dusted with gold mixed with a copper alloy.

I have already written of the orchid collections of the ladies of the isthmus. Nearly every one of prominence has her veranda loaded with them, and many produce flowers of exquisite beauty. Others of the ladies run to ferns, having every variety from those whose fronds are as fine and silky as the hair of a baby to great trees, the branches of which extend out at the top like an umbrella and shade many square feet.

Queer Tourists at Panama.—Among the queer things of the Canal Zone are people who are rushing down here to see it. Some stay but a day and others go through on the rubber neck trains which give a panoramic view of each of the works in the space of two hours. The ignorance of some of these tourists to geographical matters is astounding. One woman who passed through last week was alarmed as to the probable effect the

cutting through of the canal might have on our hemisphere. She wanted to know what would become of South America, when it was let loose, and asked whether it would not drop off and be lost when the great gorge was cut through.

Another engineer gave me today a conversation which he had just overheard between two rival woman tourists. One had spent the day at Culebra cut and the other had been at the Gatun dam. Each was triumphantly boasting about the wonders she had beheld and trying to outdo the other. For a time it was nip and tuck until finally the first woman said:

"Well, I have seen something that you have not seen. I have seen Col. Goethals' car, called the Yellow Devil, in which he goes around the works, and I even saw Col. Goethals himself."

"Well, who is Col. Goethals?" asked the other woman.

"I don't know," replied the first, "but anyhow, he owns that car."

She Was From New England and Wanted to Know.

Another tourist of the feminine sex came here with a notebook and upon landing started in to take down everything she heard. She first drove to Cristobal, and there accosted Col. Eugene Wilson, who has charge of Uncle Sam's hotels and all the commissary arrangements, with this question:

"Where is the Isthmus of Panama? I have come all the way from New England, and I want to see it. I suppose it is that point over there." And with that she directed her umbrella toward the lighthouse on the Toro breakwater.

"No, madam," replied the genial colonel, that is not the whole Isthmus of Panama. It is only a part of it. The isthmus is the great neck of land which connects the two continents of North and South America."

"Oh, is that so?" replied the lady busily writing, "I thank you so much, but you see I come from New Hampshire and I want to know."

Seeing the Isthmus.

I do not know how many tourists the canal has had this year, but it has run high into the thousands. The Panama Herald, in a recent issue, says that a few years ago the tourists came in couples and a little later in scores, but they are now coming in hundreds and thousands. A single excursion boat with two or three hundred "Cookies" is not uncommon, and we are having parties of hundreds representing boards of trade, chambers of commerce and other business organizations. We have clubs of dentists, doctors and electrical engineers who swoop down without notice and load the hotels. Crowds are coming from England and Germany, and next winter the prospect is that the visitors will be far more than can be taken care of.

During my stay here the hotels have been crowded. There have often been a dozen men on cots in the room opposite mine, and at times the public parlors have been fenced off and guests have had to sleep on the floor. Uncle Sam has made some additions to the Tivoli during the past season, and the Panama Railway Company is putting up a four-hundred thousand-dollar hotel at Colon. Any one who thinks of visiting Panama should write and engage rooms beforehand, and that enough in advance to have some prospect of getting them. Otherwise he is liable to be forced to remain on his steamer and perhaps leave without visiting the places he most wants to see.

Points for Travelers.

I have recently received many letters as to the cost of seeing the canal and the time needed for the trip. As to the cost, it is comparatively little, outside the steamship passage from New York or New Orleans, and the steamship rates are not high. The trip from New York to Colon costs \$75 and from New Orleans the first-class fare is \$25 less. There are a number of good lines. Uncle Sam has the steamers of the Panama railway, which, I am told, are by no means the best. And then there is the Hamburg American Company and the Royal Mail, and last, but not least, are the ships of the United Fruit Company. All of these go from New York, and most of them stop at Cuba or Jamaica, giving you a taste of these islands on the way.

The United Fruit Company has also a line of steamers, two every week, from New Orleans to Colon. These ships make the trip in two days less than via New York to Colon, and the seas are more likely to be smooth. Moreover, one of the freight steamers each week calls at Puerto Barrios, Guatemala, and Port Lamon, Costa Rica and some even take in Bocas del Toro, the great banana port at the northern end of the Panama republic. The vessels of all the lines are fairly comfortable. They are ships of 5,000 tons or more and the meals are good.

The Hotels of the Isthmus.

Landing at Panama the average traveler will do well not to stop at Colon or Cristobal, but go direct across the isthmus by railroad to the Tivoli Hotel, at Ancon, or to some hotel at Panama. The Tivoli is by far the best, and, as it belongs to the United States government, it is managed on the principle of first come first served. The hotel is kept on the American plan—that is, there is one charge for both rooms and board. The price for a single room for one person is \$5 a day and upward, but by putting more than one in a room this rate is shaded, and it is possible

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to stop for \$3 a day or even less if one stays for some time. The ordinary rate, however, is \$5 and more, and a room with bath will cost at least that. The hotel has good bathing arrangements and baths are not charged extra.

In addition to this are the hotels in Panama city. There is the old Central which is miserably poor in comparison with the Tivoli. It is run on the Spanish plan, but so far it has had so much travel that there have been few inducements to put in improvements. There is now a new hotel near the station and others will probably be erected. The rates at these hotels are less than at the Tivoli.

Outside your hotel there is little to spend. The fares on the railroad are five cents a mile, but the distances are short. The cabs at Colon and Panama cost only 10 cents gold a trip or \$1 per hour. The carriages are second-hand victorias, with dinner bells at the front under the bed, which the drivers ring with their feet to keep the street traffic out of the way. The negro drivers are less impudent than our cabbies at home, although they will get all they can, irrespective of the tariff.

If you should be traveling along the line of the canal you can have your meals with employees at Uncle Sam's hotels at a cost of 50 cents each, and there are little restaurants at Colon and Panama where food is cheap.

One should allow at least three weeks from New York or New Orleans for the canal trip, with perhaps four less from New Orleans. It will take you ten days or two weeks to go from your port to Colon and return, one week each way. You will need at least a week for the isthmus. One whole day or two should be spent at the Gatun dam, and that is little enough. The mighty dam should be gone over from one end to the other and trips along the canal out to the Atlantic should be taken, and then there are the great locks and gates, which are worth a day. A second day should be devoted to the Culebra cut, watching the drillings for dynamite and the mighty explosions; the steam shovel and the air-compressing machines; and the endless rivers of earth and rock should be followed on the Lidgerwood cars down to the dumps. All of the above places can be visited on the rubber-neck trains, which are run for tourists at \$1 a trip.

A day should be spent on the water at the Pacific end of the canal, going out to the islands, where the fortifications are being erected, and another day can be devoted to Balboa. At that place they are building up the ground for a city, and the handling of the earth and rock may be seen. They are also constructing the dry dock and the terminals.

Then another day should be devoted to the locks and arrangements at Miraflores and Pedro Miguel. There is a great deal to be seen in the shops along the line of the canal and at the various places on the railroad in the Canal Zone. In addition to this, there is Panama, old and new; the Island of Taboga, and the old city of Porto Bello. You may also make trips off into the tropical jungle, and can, if you will, extend your visit to several weeks.

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