PRODUCTIVE HERITAGE AND SUSTAINABLE TOURISM: IMPROVING LIVES IN PANAMA

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WHY PANAMA?

PANAMA–IDB: A LONG-STANDING PARTNERSHIP

Promoting productive heritage and sustainable tourism

$700M+

in strategic investments in Panama's heritage and tourism sectors, over more than a decade.

A national priority

Panama's national development plans have placed heritage and tourism at the heart of the country's agenda.

A strategic focus for the IDB

In response, the IDB's Country Strategy has prioritized heritage and tourism, with support from both its public and private sector arms.

First-hand experience

As IDB Lead Specialist based in Panama and Regional Coordinator of the Living Heritage Program, with Panama as a pilot country.



WHICH VISION?

PRODUCTIVE HERITAGE AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

A strategic partnership for inclusive, equitable and resilient development

A mutually beneficial partnership

Heritage and tourism strengthen each other's potential to drive sustainable, inclusive, and resilient development across Latin America and the Caribbean.

A catalyst for inclusive local development

Turning heritage into a source of livelihoods, entrepreneurship, and shared prosperity, while safeguarding cultural identity and ensuring that local communities and vulnerable groups benefit fairly.

A driver of local resilience

Reducing vulnerability and disaster risk while supporting climate change mitigation and adaptation, and strengthening the sector's environmental sustainability.

A platform for participatory governance

Bringing public, private, and community stakeholders together to ensure effective management, financing, and long-term sustainability.



WHAT PROSPECTS?

PRODUCTIVE HERITAGE AND SUSTAINABLE TOURISM

Challenges and opportunities

Geographic concentration and neglected heritage

Tourism is concentrated in Panama City, yet **80% of cultural and natural heritage with tourism potential** lies outside the capital, much of it deteriorating and underused.

Inadequate tourism infrastructure and access

Gaps in transport, basic services, visitor facilities, and connectivity limit access to destinations and constrain local economic opportunities across provinces and Indigenous territories.

Insufficient diversification of tourism offerings

Overreliance on business and shopping tourism, uneven product quality, and underused cultural and natural heritage limit destinations' appeal and competitiveness.

Weak services and governance in host communities

Inadequate urban services, amenities, and local governance in host cities and towns undermine residents' quality of life, economic opportunities, and tourism's long-term sustainability.



BUILDING FOUNDATIONS

Support Program for the 'Conservation and Management of Cultural and Natural Heritage'

US$107 MILLION

THE REQUEST

Restore two World Heritage Sites in Danger and three iconic historic buildings

All currently **deteriorated and underused**, under the responsibility of Panama's National Institute of Culture



Portobelo and San Lorenzo Fortifications
Colón Province



Portobelo Customs House
Portobelo, Colón



National Theater
Casco Antiguo, Panama City



Metropolitan Cathedral
Casco Antiguo, Panama City



Anthropology Museum
Panama City

THE STRATEGY

Turning heritage from an expense into an investment

Securing project **viability and delivery**

Secure institutional and financial backing

Engage the Ministry of Economy and Finance in strategic dialogue to build support for the program.

Leverage environmental priorities

Bring the newly established Ministry of Environment on board as a co-beneficiary, using its political weight to broaden the program's scope and integrate cultural and natural heritage.

Partner with the Panama Tourism Authority

Reframe heritage as a **productive asset** and strategic driver of tourism by promoting productive uses for restored properties.

Strengthen delivery capacity

Support the establishment of the Ministry of Culture and reinforce project management to ensure effective implementation throughout the institutional transition.

THE STRATEGY

Turning heritage from an expense into an investment

Securing project **success and sustainability**

Unlock heritage's territorial potential

Define the asset's territory and assess it in context, to **(1)** map needs, challenges, opportunities and their link to the asset, **(2)** identify productive uses of all assets in the territory, and **(3)** define territorial benefits and impacts in relation to the asset.

Put communities at the center

Identify local needs, priorities, risks, and opportunities, and engage communities in project design and delivery.

Ensure investment feasibility and sustainability

Align with regulatory and institutional frameworks, UNESCO requirements, and the country's international climate and biodiversity commitments.

Identify and engage key stakeholders

Identify public and private partners, align priorities, and mobilize resources.

OBJECTIVES · CULTURAL AND NATURAL HERITAGE PROGRAM

Contribute to the preservation and enhancement of Panama's cultural and natural heritage

With a focus on its **heritage sites and assets**



01 Increase public access to cultural assets

By improving their management and rehabilitating cultural heritage sites.



02 Preserve protected areas

By improving their management and increasing their financial sustainability.

CONCEPTUAL DESIGN

A cultural and natural heritage program in five components

01

Heritage recovery

- Restoration projects
- Emergency protection measures
- Actions to enhance and activate sites

02

Heritage management

- Management and protection plans
- Training for local management units
- Co-management schemes

03

Urban and tourism infrastructure

- Signage and visitor facilities
- Safety programs
- Solid waste management
- Access roads
- Tourism promotion

04

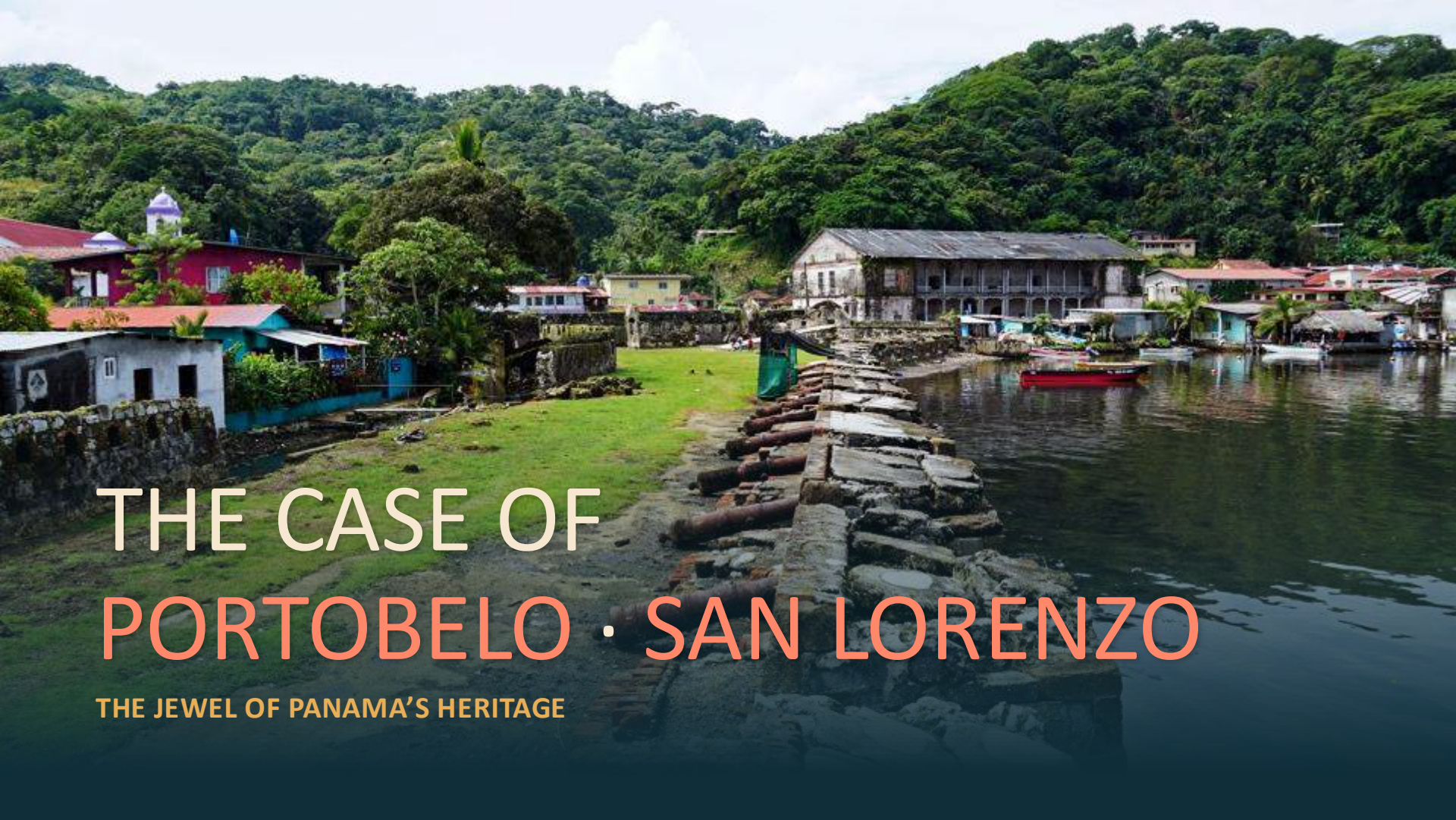
Productive communities

- Training for local communities
- Heritage-based jobs and entrepreneurship

05

Climate change

- Management plans that include climate scenarios
- Mitigation and adaptation works
- Natural disaster prevention



THE CASE OF PORTOBELO · SAN LORENZO

THE JEWEL OF PANAMA'S HERITAGE

PORTOBELO · SAN LORENZO



Tangible heritage

- **Portobelo and San Lorenzo Fortifications**
  UNESCO World Heritage
- **Portobelo Customs House**
  UNESCO World Heritage



Intangible heritage

- **The Black Christ**
  National Heritage
- **The Black Christ Festival**
  One of Central America's most important traditions
- **Ritual and festive expressions of Congo culture**
  UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage



Natural heritage

- **Portobelo National Park**
  National Heritage
- **San Lorenzo Protected Forest**
  National Heritage


SAN LORENZO
FORTIFICATIONS
SAN LORENZO PROTECTED
FOREST
PORTOBELO NATIONAL
PARK
PORTOBELO
FORTIFICATIONS

PORTOBELO

Design and retaining works for the fortifications

US$2.0M



Rehabilitation of the Old Customs House

US$3.8M



Environmental management and planning strategies (protected areas)

US$0.1M



Restoration of Forts San Fernando, Santiago and San Jerónimo

US$20.3M



Trail improvements

US$0.6M



Invasive species assessment (protected areas)

US$0.1M



Management plan and institutional strengthening for the fortifications

US$0.6M



Restoration of San Felipe Church and emergency works on the San Juan de Dios chapel

US$1.2M




San Lorenzo
Visitor Center
US$6.8M
Management plan and strategies for the San Lorenzo fortifications
US$ 0.6M
San Lorenzo checkpoint and administrative offices
US$0.8M
Restoration of Fort San Lorenzo
US$ 4.9M
Trail improvements in San Lorenzo Protected Forest
US$0.9M
Additional rehabilitation of San Lorenzo Castle
US$1.0M
Invasive species assessment (protected areas)
US$0.1M
Institutional strengthening plan for the San Lorenzo Patronato
US$ 0.1M
SAN

INVESTMENT

US$38M vs US$64M



The active participation of beneficiary communities in co-creating the projects has generated cultural relevance and social buy-in

Participatory workshop for the
Portobelo Land Use Plan



PORTOBELO · SAN LORENZO

Media coverage



LA ESTRELLA DE PANAMÁ 175

ECONOMÍA

Orden de proceder para el proyecto de movilidad turística de Boquete es entregada por la ATP

FOTOS

La obra busca crear espacios con calidad y accesibilidad que conecte las orillas del Río Caldera y rutas caminables de la zona para generar actividades económicas y culturales



LA ESTRELLA DE PANAMÁ 175

ECONOMÍA

ATP abre licitación del centro turístico en Volcán ¿cómo será el proyecto?

FOTOS

La obra comprenden la rehabilitación del parque central de Volcán, construcción y equipamiento de un Centro de Visitantes, y mejoras viales, aceras y ciclovías



Boquete tendrá malecón en el Río Caldera



SUPPORTING BLOCK:
LIVING HERITAGE PROGRAM

PANAMA CITY'S HISTORIC CENTER



Alcaldía de Panamá
Gobierno Municipal

Oficina del Casco Antiguo
Ciudad de Panamá

Gobierno Nacional
Ministerio de Cultura

BID
Mejorando vidas

aecid

INTERVENTI

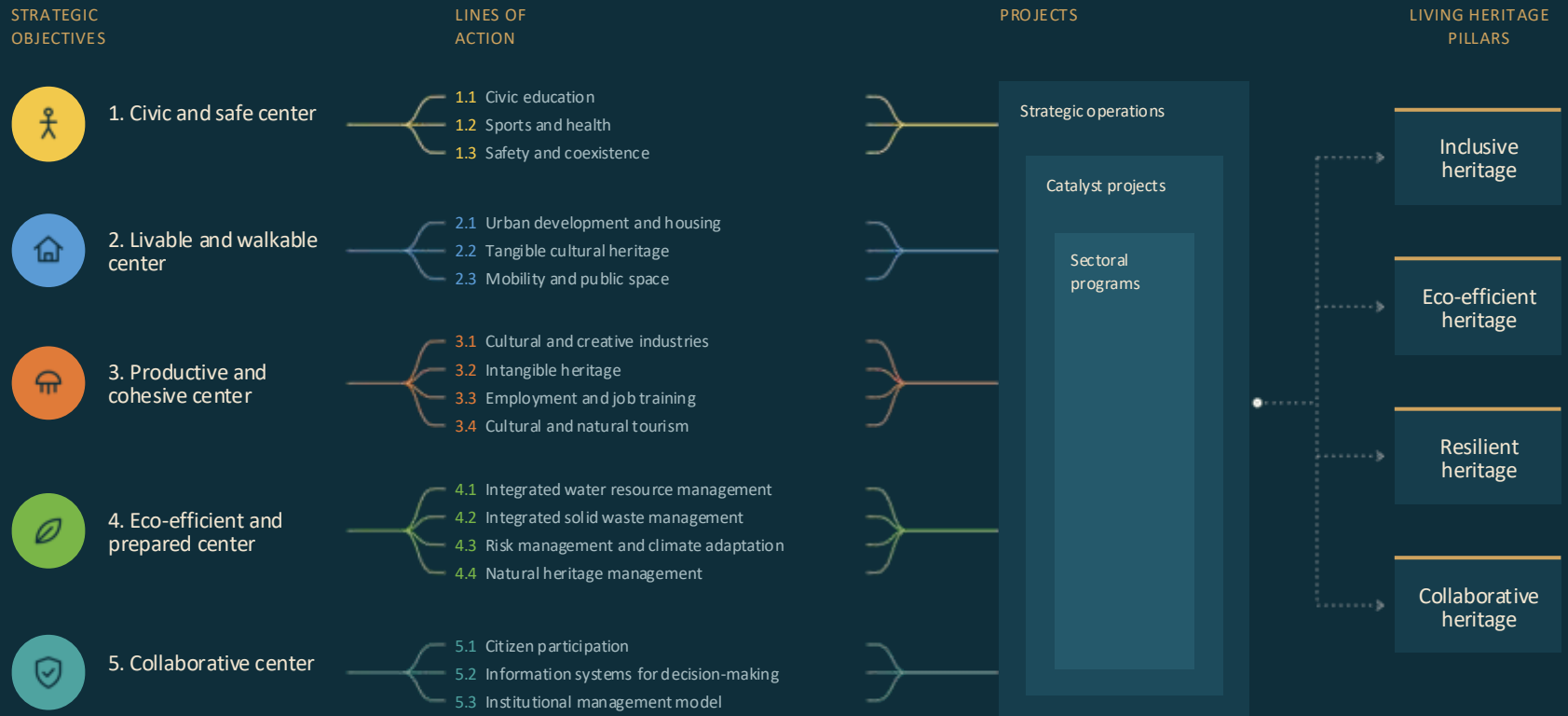


HERITAGE OPPORTUNITIES



Ilustraciones: Stephanie Sanz, Fotografía Aérea: Municipio de Panamá, DPU

STRETEGIC PLAN



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STRETEGIC PLAN

Multisector strategic projects

1. Comprehensive housing improvement in El Chorrillo
2. Historic Center Creative District
3. Environmental corridor (from the hill to the beach)
4. Smart Historic Center
5. Servicio 100
6. Historic Center food corridor
7. Restructuring of the Casco Antiguo Office

- Universal accessibility
- Renewable energy
- Vulnerable groups
- Tourism



SCALING IMPACT

Support Program for the 'Integrated Development of Cities with a Tourism Vocation'

US$100 MILLION

THE REQUEST

Diversify Panama's tourism beyond the capital

Expanding tourism into the interior through **six priority sites**, in line with the recently approved Sustainable Tourism Master Plan



Volcán Barú
Panama's highest peak · Mountain ecotourism



Santa Catalina
Gateway to Coiba · UNESCO World Heritage



Isla Colón
Marine national park · Biosphere reserve



Casco Antiguo and Taboga
Cultural and beach tourism



Boquete
Geisha coffee and mountain ecotourism



Pedasí
Ecotourism and beaches

THE STRATEGY

Making heritage a driver of sustainable tourism

Securing project **viability and delivery**

Establish the Panama Tourism Authority leadership

Align the program with the recently approved **Sustainable Tourism Master Plan** and other national priority plans and strategies.

Partner with the Ministries of Culture and Environment

Ensure effective delivery and sustainable investment that **protects and enhances** cultural and natural heritage.

Identify stakeholders and secure their support

Align public and private actors' priorities to build partnerships and mobilize additional funding, expertise, and resources.

Strengthen governance and multisectoral coordination

Establish Panama's **Tourism Cabinet** with direct links to the country's highest authorities.

THE STRATEGY

Making heritage a driver of sustainable tourism

Securing project **success and sustainability**

Unlock heritage's territorial potential

Define the asset's territory and assess it in context to **(1)** map needs, challenges, opportunities and their link to the asset, **(2)** identify productive uses of all assets in the territory, and **(3)** define territorial benefits and impacts in relation to the asset.

Identify heritage that drives visitation

Assess cultural and natural assets in their local context to define core attractions and **productive uses** beyond restoration.

Understand stakeholders

Identify needs, priorities, risks, and opportunities for the private sector, and promote **active participation** in project design and implementation.

Ensure regulatory and investment feasibility

Review local, national, and international frameworks to identify opportunities, ensure compliance, and strengthen sustainability.

Integrate social and community development

Combine urban improvements, jobs, economic opportunities, and participatory management to support effective delivery, community ownership, and lasting benefits.

OBJECTIVES · TOURISM CITIES PROGRAM

Contribute to the urban and socioeconomic development of Panama's tourism cities

Focusing on its **small and intermediate cities with tourism potential**



01 Improve urban services and infrastructure

Increasing access to and the quality of services, infrastructure and urban management.



02 Boost tourism development

By upgrading facilities and amenities and strengthening productive community development.



03 Strengthen planning, management and promotion

Of sustainable and resilient tourism cities, at national and local levels.

CONCEPTUAL DESIGN

A tourism cities program in five components

01



Tourism facilities and heritage recovery

- Visitor centers
- Piers
- Viewpoints
- Signage
- Restoration of heritage buildings

02



Tourism governance

- Strengthening local businesses: networks, training and technical assistance
- Marketing strategies

03



Urban infrastructure

- Water and drainage
- Solid waste
- Mobility
- Public spaces
- Streetscape improvements
- Climate adaptation

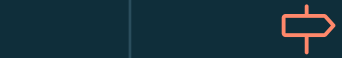
04



Urban management

- Land use plans and climate scenario studies
- Smart service management (security, internet)

05



Productive communities

- Tourism entrepreneurship with gender equity
- Cultural identity and social cohesion
- Community development

PARTICIPATING SITES & CITIES

Six priority destinations



KEY LEARNINGS

What Panama taught us

01 **Secure strong political commitment**
Build high-level institutional support and diverse partnerships to ensure ownership and continuity.

02 **Align the program with national priorities**
Match the program to national plans and partners' objectives to strengthen ownership and delivery.

03 **Anchor the asset in its territory**
Consider productive uses beyond the asset and its wider impact on the territory — its area of influence and its socioeconomic and environmental context.

04 **Ensure meaningful community participation**
Incorporate local needs and priorities for relevance, legitimacy and long-term sustainability.

05 **Promote multisectoral coordination**
Integrate investments across sectors and partners to generate synergies and multiply impact.

06 **Set effective governance mechanisms**
Define responsibilities, coordination and accountability throughout implementation

07 **Leverage additional financing**
Use program resources to mobilize public, private and multilateral funding to expand scope and impact.

08 **Communicate proactively and continuously**
Share objectives, progress and results to strengthen transparency and sustain public support.

THE IDB GROUP AND PANAMA

A partnership for productive heritage and sustainable tourism

US$708M

in **public** and **private** financing

PUBLIC SECTOR PROGRAMS — US$357M



US$100M

Integrated urban development of tourism cities



US$107M

Conservation and management of cultural and natural heritage



US$150M

Competitiveness, sustainability, inclusion and resilience of the tourism sector

PRIVATE SECTOR FINANCING — US$351.5M



US$300M

Risk mitigation facility for the tourism sector



US$37.2 M

Hotel Viceroy, Bocas del Toro



US$14.3 M

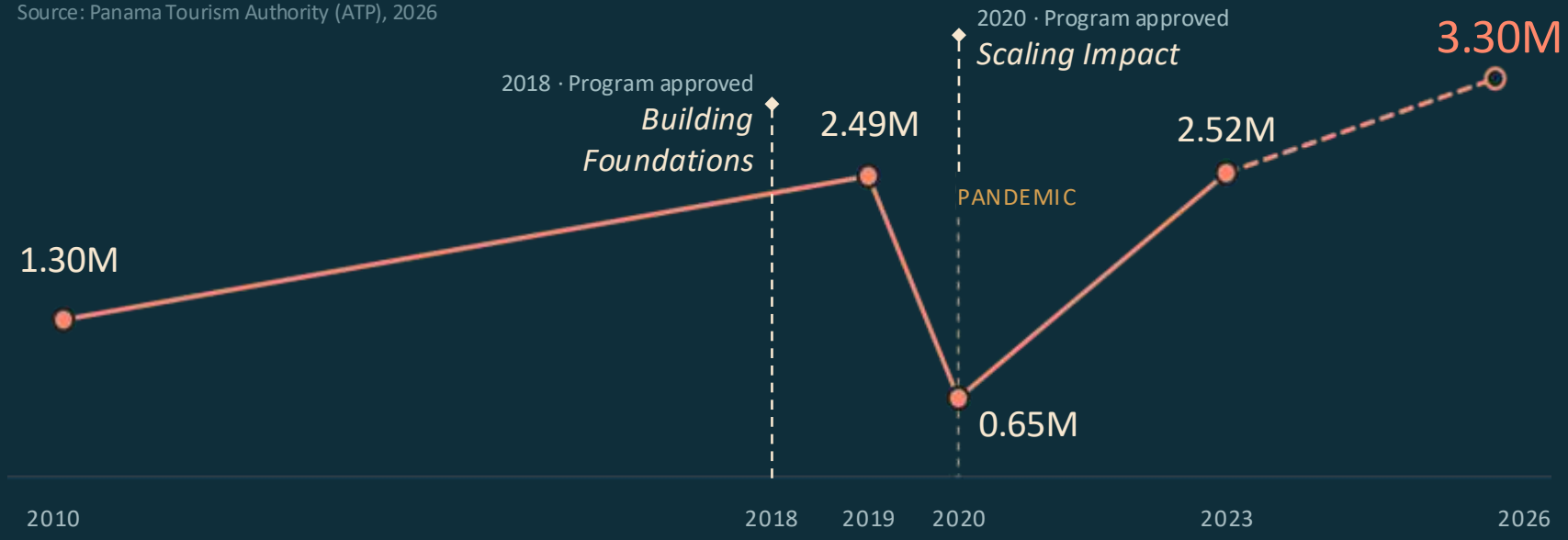
Hotel La Compañía, Casco Antiguo

PANAMA · TOURISM GROWTH

Visitor arrivals nearly tripled since 2010

From 1.3 million visitors in 2010 to a projected 3.3 million in 2026, with the **highest visitor spending per capita in Central America.**

Source: Panama Tourism Authority (ATP), 2026



PANAMA · TOURISM GROWTH AND DIVERSIFICATION

Key drivers of growth

Tocumen Airport: Hub of the Americas

Copa Airlines connects 93 destinations across 30 countries, positioning Panama as a leading regional aviation hub.

Improved air connectivity

Expanded access to priority tourism destinations, facilitating tourism growth beyond Panama City.

Copa Stopover Program

Converted over 200,000 transit passengers into multi-day visitors in 2025.

Investment incentives

Tax exemptions of up to 15 years encourage hotel development in the Caribbean region and priority tourism destinations.

Tourism diversification

Expansion beyond Panama City's traditional attractions, supported by investments in preserving and enhancing **cultural and natural heritage**, infrastructure, connectivity, and tourism services.

Beach destinations

Bocas del Toro, Santa Catalina, Pedasí

Ecotourism

Boquete, Volcán

Cultural heritage

Casco Antiguo, Portobelo, San Lorenzo



THANK YOU

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Living
Heritage

An asset for sustainable territorial development

Jesus Navarrete, PhD
Urbanist and heritage specialist



Heritage

A set of cultural and natural assets that represent the history, traditions and identity of a territory, with **recognized historical, symbolic and identity value**, whether by institutions or by its own inhabitants.

Four kinds of *heritage*



Tangible



Intangible



Natural



Memory

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Tangible

Cultural Heritage

Physical things inherited from the past **that we can touch**.

Buildings, monuments, artifacts, archaeological sites, artworks.



Teotihuacán, Mexico

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Intangible

Cultural Heritage

Non-physical things inherited from the past **that we live and practice**.

Knowledge, skills, rituals, music, dance, food, oral traditions, and ceremonies.



Carnival in Rio, Brazil

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Natural
Heritage

Its outstanding value comes **from nature itself**: geology, biodiversity, ecosystems or natural beauty.

Not created by people, though they can be shaped, managed or protected by them.



Agua Azul Cascades, Chiapas, Mexico

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Memory

Heritage

Tangible places preserved not for beauty but to **remember human pain, atrocity and trauma**, to mourn victims and warn future generations.



Hiroshima Peace Memorial (Genbaku Dome), Japan

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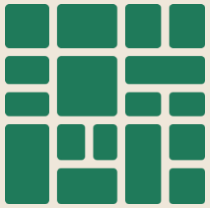


Typologies by scale and character

Living heritage

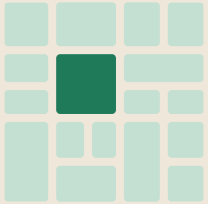
Tangible

Cultural Heritage



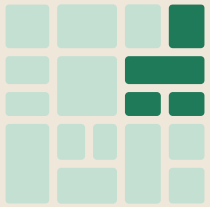
Historic cities

Cities or towns formed entirely by movable and immovable property and living social and cultural practices of urban, aesthetic and historical value, with high potential to contribute to their sustainable development.



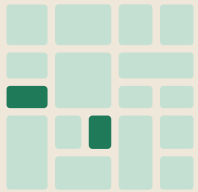
Historic centers

The **originally planned and built urban centers of a city**, holding the tangible and intangible assets linked to its history and the culture that gave rise to it.



Patrimonial quarters

City areas with a vast set of buildings, urban spaces and social and cultural practices recognized as historical elements and key heritage in the construction of local identity.



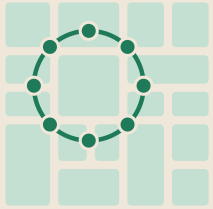
Monumental ensembles

Groups of public and private buildings whose recognized heritage, architectural and historical value creates special economic, social and cultural dynamics, with high potential for the development of their cities.

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Intangible

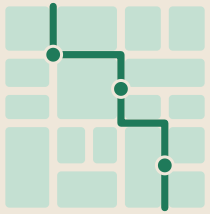
Cultural Heritage



Living memory elements

High potential for **social and territorial cohesion**.

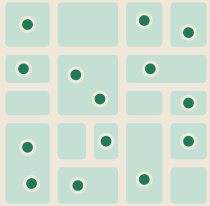
→ **oral narratives, languages, and collective memories**



Social practices and festivities

Key heritage in the **construction of territorial identity.**

→ **festive events, music, dance**



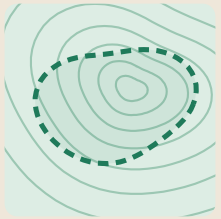
Living know-how systems

High potential for **sustainable and resilient development**.

→ **traditional crafts, gastronomy, productive and constructive know-how**

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Natural
Heritage



Protected areas

Great potential to contribute to **climate resilience** and **sustainable development**.

→ territories of exceptional natural, ecological or biodiversity value



Natural monuments

Their natural, aesthetic and scientific value brings **special symbolic and ecological dynamics** to their territory.

→ natural elements: geological formations, caves, waterfalls



Cultural landscapes

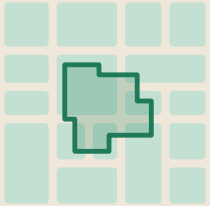
Human interaction with nature over time forms **landscapes of historical, aesthetic and ecological value**.

→ combined works of nature and people

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Memory

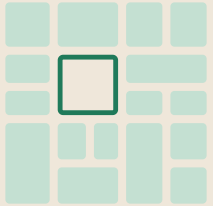
Heritage



In situ memorial

A memorial located on the exact ground where the tragic event happened. **The place itself is the evidence**.

→ authenticity of the place: buildings, ruins, open grounds



Ex situ memorial

A memorial built later, in a different place from where the event happened. **The place does not contain the event, it represents it**.

→ design and symbolism: monuments, museums

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Why *prioritize* heritage?



An *opportunity* for territorial sustainability

- Compact city
- Mixed use
- Innovation labs



Madero Street, Mexico City

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A *space* to foster social inclusion

- **Cultural identity**
- **Social cohesion**
- **Minority integration**



Plaza Santa Ana, Panamá

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A *commitment* to tackling global challenges

HABITAT III

UN World Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction 2015 Sendai Japan

COP21 · CMP11 PARIS 2015 UN CLIMATE CHANGE CONFERENCE

OBJETIVOS DE DESENVOLVIMENTO SUSTENTÁVEL

Organización Mundial de la Salud



Ciclovía, Bogotá, Colombia

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An *asset* for productive territorial development

- Sustainable tourism
- Cultural and creative industries
- City rebranding

01 02 03 04



Xochimilco, Mexico City

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Heritage and tourism are *mutually reinforcing* drivers of territorial development

Productive heritage
Provides the **assets, identity and distinctive value** that underpin sustainable tourism



Sustainable tourism
Creates **economic opportunities and resources** for conservation, productive use and long-term viability

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Living heritage

An asset for sustainable territorial development



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Productive

Heritage

Sustainable tourism + **Productive and business development** + **Local culture and creativity**

Tourism



Promotes **planned, sustainable heritage tourism** that respects local traditions.

Prosperity



Fosters **local economic development** by attracting investment and talent, and creating jobs.

Enterprise



Leverages heritage to drive **entrepreneurship and jobs** in the cultural and creative industries.

Innovation



Drives **innovation and technology** in managing heritage, protecting sites and their surroundings.

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Inclusive
Heritage

Shared cultural identity + **Inclusion and social cohesion** + **Equitable spatial integration**

Rootedness



Helps **vulnerable residents remain** in their own neighborhoods.

Accessibility



Promotes **universal access to urban heritage,** for residents and visitors alike.

Gathering



Enables **interaction among diverse groups** through the recovery of quality public spaces.

Diversity



Promotes **inclusion across gender, race and ethnicity** through a shared cultural identity.

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Eco-efficient

Heritage

Resources

Enables **sound and efficient management** of natural resources.

Smart cities

Develops **historic urban areas as smart cities**.

Efficient natural resource management

+

Smart urban management

+

Infrastructure reuse

Reuse

Promotes the **reuse and recycling** of heritage infrastructure and buildings.

Mobility

Connects heritage with the rest of the city through **green, accessible mobility**.

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Resilient
Heritage

Vulnerability reduction + **Enhanced adaptive capacity**

Preparedness



Develops capacities and strategies for **disaster risk management and climate adaptation**.

Protection



Draws on **tangible and intangible heritage** to withstand natural and human-made shocks.

Knowledge



Strengthens and draws on **local knowledge** to boost response and adaptive capacity.

Planning



Builds adaptive capacity through **robust planning instruments.**

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Collaborative

Heritage

Transparent, participatory governance

+

Self-sustaining financing

Co-creation



Brings diverse stakeholders together in a **collective, binding and inclusive process**.

Partnerships



Promotes **public-private institutional arrangements** that also include civil society.

Financing



Supports sustainable, well-governed success through **diversified financing and private sector participation**

Open planning



Uses **integrated, flexible and transparent planning instruments**.

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Integrated
Management Instruments

Strategic planning

Diagnoses needs, identifies opportunities and proposes **strategic solutions**.



Sustainable funding

Seeks **public and private funding** to implement plans and programs.

Governance and monitoring

Designs the **operational instruments** to implement plans effectively, and to monitor and evaluate them.

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Thank you

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ADB SUSTAINABLE TOURISM FORUM

Hands-On Group Exercise:

Applying Heritage-Based Development Approaches

Presented by

Jesus Navarrete, PhD

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Hands-on group exercise:

Applying heritage-based development approaches

DURATION:
35 minutes

FORMAT:
Group work
(three 10-minute sessions and a 5-minute wrap-up)

SCOPE:

- This exercise will provide participants with an opportunity to apply the concepts and methodological tools introduced in Modules 1 and 2 to a real-world case.
- Working in mixed groups of ADB specialists and government officials and technical staff, participants will assess the development potential of a preselected cultural or natural heritage asset and identify opportunities and key conditions for leveraging its contribution to productive, inclusive, resilient, and sustainable development, with particular emphasis on tourism.
- Each group will use a simple, one-page flipchar structured around three consecutive sessions.

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Session 1:

Heritage asset and development opportunity (10 min.)

OBJECTIVE:
Identify the heritage asset, its development potential, and possible interventions.

EXPECTED OUTPUT:
A brief definition of the heritage asset, its main development opportunity, and up to three potential interventions.

KEY QUESTIONS:

1. What heritage asset are we considering?
   - Type: Cultural (tangible or intangible, including historic heritage), natural, or mixed.
   - Main characteristics, significance, and current condition.
2. What development opportunities does it offer?
   - Potential uses and opportunities for tourism, local economic development, and community benefits.
   - Main challenges or constraints limiting its potential.
3. What interventions could unlock its potential?
   - Identify up to three priority interventions, including heritage conservation, adaptive reuse, tourism facilities, public space improvements, or complementary economic activities.
   - Consider alignment with existing development plans and priorities.

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Session 2:

Expected development benefits (10 min.)

OBJECTIVE:
Identify the main contributions of the proposed interventions to sustainable development.

EXPECTED OUTPUT:
Identify the three most significant expected development benefits, considering economic, social, and environmental dimensions.

KEY QUESTIONS:

1. What economic and productive benefits could be generated?
   - Tourism development, local businesses, cultural industries, employment, and investment opportunities.
2. What social and territorial benefits could be achieved?
   - Community participation, cultural identity, social inclusion, improved public spaces, infrastructure, and services.
3. What environmental and resilience benefits could be generated?
   - Heritage and environmental conservation, sustainable resource use, climate resilience, and disaster risk reduction.

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Session 3:

Implementation feasibility and sustainability (10 min.)

OBJECTIVE:
Identify the critical conditions required for successful implementation and long-term sustainability.

EXPECTED OUTPUT:
Identify the three most critical conditions for successful implementation and long-term sustainability.

KEY QUESTIONS:

1. Who would lead and implement the interventions?
   - Identify potential lead institutions and key partners.
   - Consider institutional capacity, political support, and coordination requirements.
2. How could the interventions be financed?
   - Identify potential public, private, and multilateral financing sources.
   - Consider opportunities for private sector participation and partnerships.
3. What would ensure long-term sustainability?
   - Identify essential arrangements for heritage conservation, management, operation, and maintenance.
   - Consider community support, social risks, and opportunities for generating financial resources to sustain operations.

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Wrap-up:
Key conclusions (5 min.)

Each group will summarize its findings in the worksheet, highlighting:

1.
DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITY:
The main opportunity and priority intervention.

2.
EXPECTED BENEFITS:
The most significant contributions to sustainable development.

3.
CRITICAL SUCCESS FACTORS:
The key conditions for successful implementation and long-term sustainability.

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