

A Helping Hand Adoption Agency

International Adoption Program Description

Panama



GENERAL INFORMATION

The southernmost of the Central American nations, Panama is bordered by Costa Rica to the northwest, Colombia to the southeast, the Caribbean Sea to the north and the Pacific Ocean to the south. The capital is Panama City. Panama is party to the Hague Convention on Protection of Children and Co-operation in Respect of Intercountry Adoption (Hague Adoption Convention). Therefore, all intercountry adoptions between Panama and the United States must meet the requirements of the Convention and U.S. law implementing the Convention.

Panamanian adoptions are conducted through a collaborative effort of a Hague accredited adoption agency in the US, by the Panamanian Central Adoption Authority SENNI AF (Secretaría Nacional de Niñez, Adolescencia y Familia, National Secretary of Infants, Adolescents and Family), and an attorney approved by SENNI AF.

The following websites are a useful place to start for reading more about Panama adoption and the country:

- http://adoption.state.gov/country_information/country_specific_info.php?country-select=panama U.S. State Department page about Panama adoption
- <http://www.visitpanama.com/>: Panama Tourism

CHILDREN AVAILABLE

- Both boys and girls are available for adoption.
- Children as young as 4 years and as old as sixteen are available for adoption.
- Sibling groups are available.
- Children with Special Needs are available for adoption.

ELIGIBILITY TO ADOPT

Applicants must be at least 18 years older than the child they are adopting and must be between 25 and 55 years old with some exceptions. Panama requires that married couples must be married at least one year, and both married couples and single women may adopt from Panama. Applicants must be in good health and must have a positive net worth.

PROCESS

1. Make application to A Helping Hand Adoption Agency.
2. Begin your **adoption homestudy** and submit **form I-800A** to CIS.
3. Begin to assemble your **dossier**. We will give you detailed instructions.
4. Once CIS has approved your adoption homestudy, you will receive your **I-797C pre-approval notice**.
5. Once your CIS approval has been received your dossier is complete, you will be registered to adopt in Panama.
6. SENNI AF will add you to a list of waiting families and it can take 18 to 24 months to receive a referral.
7. You will then travel to Panama to meet and bond with your child (a minimum of 4 weeks for bonding).
8. If all parties agree to the adoption, AHH will begin processing the family's I-800.
9. You will attend court and after the ruling the attorney will obtain a new birth certificate and passport for your child.
10. The final step is to obtain the US visa for your child and returning home. Most families will remain in Panama for a minimum of 90 days for the adoption process to be completed.
11. In a case of adopting a child with special needs the time in the country may be significantly reduced.
12. The children reside in orphanages while awaiting adoption.
13. Panama adoptions can take on average from 24 to 48 months to complete.

TRAVEL & ADOPTION

You receive a referral of a child from A Helping Hand Adoption Agency through the SENNI AF. The referral will include a brief social history of the child the current health and development of the child. We highly recommend that you have this information reviewed by a doctor who specializes in international adoption before you make a decision. Once you decide to accept a referral, you will be considered “matched” with the child. You will then have up to 4 months to travel to Panama. Once you travel to Panama, you will remain in Panama a minimum of 90days to process the adoption. The first 4 weeks are spent bonding with your child. The first week you will visit the orphanage daily and if all goes well, the child will then be allowed to join you at your hotel or guest house. After 4 weeks, the attorney will file for a court date. Once your ruling is made, the attorney will obtain a new birth certificate and passport and begin the visa process. Both parents do not have to remain in Panama the entire time. Both parents must attend the initial one week bonding period and the court hearing.

POST ADOPTION

Within 30 days of your arrival home, you must have a home visit by your homestudy provider. Your homestudy provider will prepare post-placement reports and submit them to A Helping Hand every 6 months for the first 3 years after the adoption is finalized. These reports include your child’s developmental progress and pictures. This is a very serious commitment; AHH is committed to showing the SENNI AF and birth families that children adopted by US citizens are healthy and well cared for. Compliance with post adoption reports is also required by the Hague Convention. Therefore, AHH charges a fee to monitor and process these post placement reports and also requires families to pay for the cost of the post placement report in advance.

COSTS

The program fee for a Panama adoption is \$16,000. Additional estimated expenses of \$15,000 – 21,000 will bring the total cost to approximately \$31,000– 37,000. In addition, your out-of-pocket expenses may further be reduced if you receive scholarships or other employer-provided adoption benefits. For additional fee information, please see Exhibit A.

Please contact Lisa Prather, at lisa@worldadoptions.org or (859-263-9964) with any questions.

