

Academic Essay Source Texts

Title **The Panama Canal: describe its history, how ships travel through it and its economic significance.**

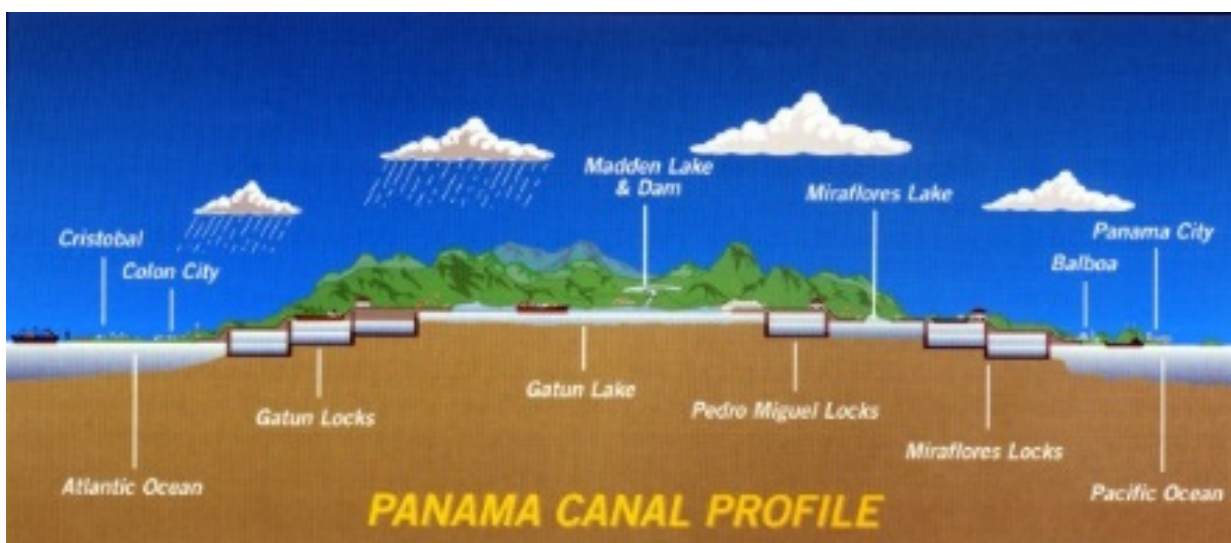
[Text 1] **Passage through the Canal**

There are 3 Lock Gates located at 3 different places over the length of the canal. Entering the canal from Pacific Ocean, these are:

- Miraflores lock gates,
- Pedro Miguel lock gates,
- Gatun lock gates.

The locks are in 6 steps. Three locks lifting the ship up and three locks dropping the ship back to sea level. Each lock has two lock chambers, thus enabling two way transit of ships, reducing the traffic at the canal. These lock gates lift the ship literally upto 26 meters above the sea level.

Looking at the picture, when entering the canal from Atlantic Ocean side, we have three Gatun locks, which lifts the ship up 26 meters in 3 steps. Once the ship is lifted up, it reaches the Gatun Lake. This is a fresh-water lake supplying water to the lock chambers. enabling the ships to be lifted up and dropping down. Then, the Pedro Miguel locks where it has one step, lowering the ship down. The ship transits through The Miraflores Lake, entering the Miraflores locks which again lowers the ship by two steps, thus reaching the Pacific Ocean.



Source: *The Panama Canal*. Retrieved February 2011, from <http://EngineeringFeats.com>

[Text 2] History of the Panama Canal

In 1882, the French government tried to build a canal across the Panama. However, due to severe tropical diseases, it lost nearly 20,000 of its workers. This made them stop the project. At that time, Panama was part of the federation and country of Colombia. At the beginning of the 20th century, the U.S proposed plans to build a canal across the Isthmus of Panama. Columbia rejected the idea and so the U.S. supported a revolution that led to the independence of Panama in 1903.

The new Panamanian government decided to negotiate a treaty with the United States. As a result of the treaty (the Hay-Bunau-Varilla Treaty), the U.S. was permitted to build the Panama Canal. The treaty also allowed the Americans to control a zone five-miles wide on either side of the canal. This was called the U.S. territory of the Canal Zone.

Construction on the canal was extremely difficult. The world had never known such a feat of engineering. Beginning in 1907, American civilians blasted through tons of mountain stone. Thanks to the work of Walter Reed and William Gargas, the threats of such tropical diseases as yellow fever and malaria were greatly diminished. When Theodore Roosevelt visited the construction area, he became the first sitting American President to travel outside the country. Finally, the canal was finished.

Source: Davidson, A. (2001). *Panama: A History*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

[Text 3] Operation of the Panama Canal

The canal makes the trip from the east coast to the west coast of the U.S. much shorter than in previous times. Prior to 1914, ships had to travel to the tip of South America to get from east to west. However, although traffic continues to increase through the canal, many oil supertankers, military battleships and aircraft carriers cannot fit through the canal. It takes approximately fifteen hours to traverse the canal through its three sets of locks (about half the time is spent waiting due to traffic).

The Panama Canal locks system is a necessary feature of the Panama Canal as the main section of the canal is higher than sea level. The locks system lifts a ship up 85 feet (26 metres) from sea level at one end of the Panama Canal and down again on the other end. It has a total of six steps (three up, three down) for a ship's journey through the Canal. The locks were one of the greatest engineering works ever to be undertaken when they opened in 1914. No other concrete construction of comparable size was undertaken until the Hoover Dam, in the 1930s.

Source: Hernandez, J. M. (2009). *Central America*. New York: Routledge.

[Text 4] **Economic Importance of the Panama Canal**

Not only is the Panama Canal important to Panama for income and jobs, but it is also considered to be vitally important to the United States economy. Many U.S. exports and imports travel through the Canal daily (over 10% of all U.S. shipping goes through the Canal). Exports represent jobs for U.S. citizens because the products were made by U.S. workers. Imports enable U.S. consumers to receive needed products.

Since the United States is a world superpower, it is interested in keeping the global economy running smoothly. If world trade is disrupted, it can lead to worldwide economic problems. Therefore, any disruption in the flow of goods through the Panama Canal could directly hurt the U.S. and global economies.

For instance, without the canal, ships would have to travel around South America. This would make products more expensive, and, as a result, some countries would not be able to afford to buy them. The amount of revenue, or money received from selling these products, would go down and there would be less money available to purchase goods from other countries, such as the United States. This would create a “domino effect” as other countries could experience problems with their imports and exports.

Source: Hudson, P. (2008). The Economic Importance of the Panama Canal. *Journal of Geo-Political Economics*. Vol 12, pp. 206-214.

[Text 5] **Panama finally owns the Panama Canal**

Once the canal was complete, it meant that the U.S. controlled land running the approximately 50 miles across the Isthmus of Panama. The country of Panama was now divided into two parts by the U.S. territory of the Canal Zone. This caused tension between Panama and the US for many years. One of the problems was that the Canal Zone (the official name for the U.S. territory in Panama) contributed little to the economy of Panama. In other words, the people of Panama were not profiting from having the canal run through their country.

In the 1960s, there were anti-American riots, as anger grew amongst the Panamanian people. The U.S. and Panamanian governments began to work together to solve the territorial issue, and in 1977 U.S. President Jimmy Carter signed a treaty which agreed to return 60% of the Canal Zone to Panama in 1979. The canal and remaining territory, known as the Canal Area, was returned to Panama on December 31, 1999.

The 1977 treaty established the canal as a neutral international waterway and even in times of war any ship is guaranteed a safe journey. After the 1999 hand-over, the U.S. and Panama jointly shared duties in defending the canal.

Source: *Central American Trade*. (2008). Retrieved from <http://www.HistoryToday.org>.

[Text 6] Global Economic Significance

If one considers the thousands of ships full of goods that pass through the Canal every year and the impact that closing the Canal would have on the world economy, one can understand the economic importance of the Canal. Therefore, keeping the Canal open is directly and indirectly important to the United States and to the global economy.

The Panama Canal is one of the major shipping lanes in the world because it saves so much time and distance over the route previously required. A ship traveling from New York to San Francisco before the canal opening had to sail all the way beyond the tip of the South America, rounding Cape Horn, and then travel the entire distance back north to the Northern California coast, despite the fact that the two cities are on similar latitudinal lines. By using the Panama Canal, ships save 7,872 miles by bypassing the trip around South America.

If conditions are exactly right and everything goes smoothly, the time it takes to get through the canal is about 15 hours, whereas normally, with some delays, it takes anywhere from 24 to 30 hours. If there is a heavy backup of waiting ships, the average time is more like 44 hours. Using the Panama Canal means ships can cross from the Atlantic to the Pacific Oceans in less than a day, instead of a journey of several thousand miles taking over a week

Source: *Global Shipping Trade*. Retrieved from <http://www.economist.com>.

Citations

Source references, formatted to APA citations

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