



Dominican Republic

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Why Go?

The Dominican Republic is defined by its hundreds of miles of coastline – some with picturesque white-sand beaches shaded by rows of palm trees, other parts lined dramatically with rocky cliffs. Symbolizing both limits and escapes, the sea is the common denominator across fishing villages, where the shoreline is used for mooring boats, indulgent tourist playgrounds, small towns, and cities like Santo Domingo – the Caribbean's largest and the site of New World firsts.

Beyond the capital, much of the DR is distinctly rural. Further inland are vistas reminiscent of the European alps: four of the Caribbean's five highest peaks rise above the fertile lowlands surrounding Santiago. Remote deserts extend through the southwest, giving the DR a complexity not found on other islands. The country's roller-coaster past is writ large in the diversity of its ethnicities, not to mention the physical design of its towns and cities.

Best Beaches

- » Playa Rincón (p427)
- » Bahía de las Águilas (p419)
- » Bávaro (p420)
- » Playa Limón (p420)
- » Playa Encuentro (p433)

Best Places to Stay

- » Sofitel Nicolás de Ovando (p415)
- » Lomita Maravilla (p431)
- » Natura Cabañas (p435)
- » Peninsula House (p432)
- » Rancho Baiguate (p439)

When to Go

Except in the central mountains, temperatures don't vary much, averaging a summery 28°C (81°F) to 31°C (87°F). The rainy season is May to October, though in Samaná and on the north coast it can last until December. August and September constitute hurricane season. The main tourist seasons are December to February, July to August, and Semana Santa (the week before Easter). Expect higher prices and more-crowded beaches at these times. February has great weather and you can enjoy Carnaval and the whales in Samaná. November is good, too – you'll miss the whales but catch baseball season.

Itineraries

ONE WEEK

Spend a full day exploring Santo Domingo's old colonial center; then make your base at the deservedly popular beaches of Bávaro and Punta Cana. Not far south of here is Bayahibe, with the DR's best scuba diving and a number of excursion options. Allow for some relaxing beach time – for more privacy head to deserted Playa Limón further up the coast.

TWO WEEKS

With two weeks, spend a couple of days in Santo Domingo. Visit the waterfalls of Jarabacoa on day three, with white-water rafting or canyoning the next day. Then go north to Cabarete, which has world-class water sports and mountain biking. There's great diving and beaches in nearby Sosúa and Río San Juan – enough to keep you happy for two or three days.

Next you're off to the Península de Samaná. If it's mid-January to mid-March, go whale-watching. Otherwise, visit the waterfall near El Limón. Spend another two days hiking or boating around Las Galeras. For a bit more nightlife, base yourself in Las Terrenas instead.

GETTING TO NEIGHBORING ISLANDS

There is a ferry from Santo Domingo to Puerto Rico. Airlines connect the DR to Cuba, Puerto Rico, and Turks and Caicos.

Essential Food & Drink

» **La Bandera (the flag)** The most typically Dominican meal. Consists of white rice, *habichuela* (red beans), stewed meat, salad and fried green plantains.

» **Bananas (guineos)** A staple served stewed, candied or boiled and mashed. With plantains, the dish is called *mangú*; with pork rinds mixed in it is called *mofongo*.

» **Fish** Central to the Dominican diet – usually served in one of four ways: *al ajillo* (with garlic), *al coco* (in coconut sauce), *al criolla* (with a mild tomato sauce) or *a la diablo* (with a spicy tomato sauce).

» **Pastelitos** By far the most common snack in the DR – fried dough containing beef or chicken, which has been stewed with onions, olives, tomatoes and then chopped and mixed with peas, nuts and raisins.

» **Dominican ron (rum)** Known for its smoothness and hearty taste. Dozens of local brands are available, but the big three are Brugal, Barceló and Bermúdez.

AT A GLANCE

» **Currency** Dominican Republic peso (RD\$); US dollars (US\$) also accepted some places

» **Language** Spanish

» **Money** ATMs widely available; only dispense Dominican Republic pesos

» **Visas** Generally not required for stays up to 30 days; see p446

Fast Facts

» **Area** 48,717 sq km

» **Population** 9 million

» **Capital** Santo Domingo

» **Telephone country code** ☎809

» **Emergency** ☎911

Set Your Budget

» **Budget hotel room** RD\$800

» **Two-course evening meal** RD\$600

» **Museum entrance** RD\$60

» **Beer** RD\$60

» **City bus ticket** RD\$12

Resources

» **Dominican Republic One** (www.dr1.com) Daily news, travel information and a busy forum

» **Dominican Today** (www.dominicantoday.com) News from the DR in English

» **Go Dominican Republic** (www.godominicanrepublic.com) Official site of DR tourism authority; good overview of destinations and practical information