



Central Highlands

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Best Places to Eat

- ➔ Aroma de la Montaña (p176)
- ➔ Il Pasticcio (p167)
- ➔ Camp David (p165)

Best Places to Stay

- ➔ Rancho Baiguatè (p175)
- ➔ Tubagua Plantation Eco-Village (p170)
- ➔ Alto Cerro (p180)
- ➔ Camp David (p165)

Why Go?

Even diehard beach fanatics will eventually overdose on sun and sand. When you do, the cool mountainous playground of the central highlands is the place to come; where else can you sit at dusk, huddled in a sweater, watching the mist descend into the valley as the sun sets behind the mountains? Popular retreats, roaring rivers, soaring peaks and the only white-water rafting in the Caribbean beckon. Below, on the plains in the Valle del Cibao, is where merengue spontaneously erupted onto the musical landscape, and where you'll find some of the best Carnival celebrations in the country. Economic life in the central highlands revolves around Santiago, the DR's second-largest city and the capital of a vast tobacco- and sugarcane-growing region.

When to Go

- ➔ **February to March** Some of the most raucous Carnival celebrations in all the DR are in Santiago and La Vega.
- ➔ **January to March & June to August** It tends to be dry during these times in the area around Santiago. Rains can be torrential in May and again September to November.
- ➔ **Year-round** Temperatures in mountain towns such as Jarabacoa and Constanza are cooler year-round and can fall below freezing at night.

Getting There & Around

Santiago's Aeropuerto Internacional del Cibao (p168) offers frequent international air service to major destinations. There's a good selection of car-rental agencies at the airport.

Santiago sits on the main trunk highway that runs north from Santo Domingo to Puerto Plata, with bus services to all points of the compass. First-class buses service all major destinations, except for Constanza – you'll need to hop on a *guagua* (local bus). As always, renting a car, preferably an SUV, will give you more freedom to explore the countryside.

SANTIAGO

POP 691,000

One of the oldest settlements in Spain's New World empire, Santiago is the country's second-largest city, spilling over its original border, the Río Yaque del Norte. This sprawling city churns out rum and cigars, feeding off the large-scale tobacco and sugarcane plantations that make up much

of the topography of the surrounding valley floor. The Cordillera Central to the west and Cordillera Septentrional to the north hem in the city, which is bifurcated by Highway Duarte, the country's primary north-south thoroughfare.

Overlooked by most travelers, Santiago is a good place to familiarize yourself with the ordinary Dominican's way of life. Typical of



Central Highlands Highlights

- 1** **White-water rafting** (p172) on the Caribbean's only raftable river, the turbulent Río Yaque del Norte near Jarabacoa
- 2** Watching the sunset as the mist descends into the valley in high-altitude **Constanza** (p179)
- 3** Lingering at the top of **Pico Duarte** (p177), taking in the views of the Atlantic and the Caribbean
- 4** Dancing merengue till the wee hours at one of the bars surrounding the Monument in **Santiago** (p167)
- 5** Partying with the locals in **La Vega** (p169) in February, when it throws the country's biggest Carnival celebrations
- 6** Visiting the **Centro León** (p163) in Santiago, an exceptional museum with more than a century's worth of works by the very best Dominican artists