



# Dominican Republic



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CABARETE P143

# Itineraries



2  
WEEKS

## Dominican Circuit

Start with a couple of days exploring **Santo Domingo**, hitting the Zona Colonial and enjoying the essential Dominican experiences of baseball and dancing to merengue. On day three head to **Jarabacoa**. Visit the waterfalls in the afternoon, with white-water rafting or canyoning the next day. Head 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 several days. Next you're off to **Península de Samaná**. If it's mid-January to mid-March, go whale-watching. Otherwise take a boat trip to **Parque Nacional Los Haitises** to see the mangroves and cave paintings, or visit the waterfall near **El Limón**. Spend another two days hiking or boating to the beaches around **Las Galeras**. For more nightlife, base yourself in **Las Terrenas**. Allow for some relaxing beach time. The southeast is perfect – go for either deserted **Playa Limón** or perennially popular **Bávaro** and **Punta Cana**. Return to Santo Domingo. To the southwest is a spectacular drive to **Barahona**, and crocodiles in **Lago Enriquillo**. Spend a night or two before returning to Santo Domingo.

1  
WEEK

## East Coast

Whether you fly into Santo Domingo or directly to the airport outside Punta Cana, allow a full day to explore the old colonial center of **Santo Domingo**.

Base yourself in the southeast at the deservedly popular beaches of **Bávaro** and **Punta Cana**, the hub of Dominican tourism. All-inclusive resorts are tailor-made for families; if all you want to do is splash about in the water, you could do worse than book at the resorts here. Many are particularly child-friendly, and activities include go-karts, bowling, sailing trips and parasailing. Resorts also offer tours to local sights; for more independence, rent a car and head out on your own.

Singles, couples and those seeking nightlife can certainly find their own Shangri-La here as well.

Not far south is **Bayahibe**, a tiny town on the edge of a national park, with the best scuba diving in the DR and a number of excursions, including catamaran tours to an island beach and snorkeling trips. For more privacy head to deserted **Playa Limón** further up the coast.

5  
DAYS

## Península de Samaná

If you can, fly directly into Aeropuerto Internacional El Catey, the closest airport to the peninsula. Otherwise, get in a puddle jumper from another DR airport or consider taking a bus or driving from Santo Domingo – the new highway makes it a painless transfer.

If possible, plan your trip for mid-January to mid-March, when humpback whales migrate to the Bahía de Samaná and boat-based **whale-watching** tours are in full steam.

Otherwise, base yourself either in Las Terrenas or Las Galeras. **Las Terrenas** has a cosmopolitan mix and a relatively sophisticated European vibe. Kitesurfing and other water sports are deservedly popular here and you can choose from day-trips like horseback riding to the waterfall near **El Limón** or a boat trip to **Parque Nacional Los Haitises** to see the mangroves and cave paintings.

**Las Galeras** is a small laid-back town at the far eastern tip of the peninsula. The beaches around here rival any in the DR and there are chances to really get to the proverbial end of the road.

1  
WEEK

## North Coast

Fly into the Aeropuerto Internacional Gregorio Luperón, basically the geographic center of the north coast. From here, choose your base for the week, but allow yourself at least an afternoon in **Puerto Plata**, either at the beginning or end of your trip. Wander the city's downtown streets lined with dilapidated 19th-century homes, educate yourself at one of the city's museums and settle in for a drink at a seafront restaurant.

Active types will want to stay in or around the water-sports mecca of **Cabarete**, east of Puerto Plata; it also has a happening bar and restaurant scene. Carve out several hours or days learning the ropes from the best of kitesurfing, windsurfing or just plain surfing. Of course, the beaches are equally alluring for doing absolutely nothing but sipping cocktails and making headway in a good book.

Scuba divers and those looking for a more raucous nightlife should look into staying in **Sosúa**. Further east near the quiet town of **Río San Juan** are several terrific beaches and snorkeling and diving opportunities nearby. If you have a big group, renting a villa around **Cabrera** is a good choice.

1  
WEEK

## Central Highlands

Fly into the airport outside **Santiago** and spend a day exploring downtown and taking in Dominican painting at the Centro Leon. Don't miss a bar crawl around the Monument, the center of the city's nightlife, and a baseball game at the stadium just north of downtown if you're here during the winter season.

On the following day, head to **Jarabacoa**, gateway to **Parques Nacionales Armando Bermúdez** and **José del Carmen Ramírez**. The two parks cover much of the DR's central mountain range, including **Pico Duarte**, the highest peak (3087m) in the Caribbean. Visit the waterfalls in the afternoon, with white-water rafting, or canyoning and mountain biking for the next day or two. Or arrange your trip around climbing Pico Duarte. The standard trip is three days, but consider arranging a side trip to beautiful **Valle del Tétero**, which adds two days.

Unwind in the mountain town of **Constanza**, only a short drive from Jarabacoa, where you'll find cooler temperatures and stunning views. Rent a 4WD and off-road it through mountain passes to remote valleys and waterfalls.



STEVE GOLL / GETTY IMAGES ©



Top: Cascada  
El Limón (p122)  
Right: Playa Sosúa  
(p138)

ALFREDO MANQUEZ / GETTY IMAGES ©



## Off the Beaten Track: Dominican Republic

**PUNTA RUSIA**

This north coast beachfront village has a real end-of-the-road feel. A sandy offshore island and mangroves are easily reachable and seafood shacks line a small, calm bay. (p157)

**ROUTE 16**

Take this road that snakes through rolling, green hills from San José de las Matas to the border at Dajabón. Detour south to Loma Nalga de Maco for mountain streams and tropical forests. (p169)

**RESERVO CIENTIFICA VALLE NUEVO**

You'll need a 4WD to access this remote park with the coldest temps in the country. Situated on a high plain, fresh mountain air and beautiful vistas await. (p180)

**CACHÓTE**

Bathed in cloud forest – rare for a sun-drenched tropical island – these remote cabins are reached by 25km of impressively bad road that fords the same river a dozen times. (p193)

**BAHÍA DE LAS ÁGUILAS**

Reached via a near-deserted one-lane highway, a pot-holed secondary road and a spectacular boat ride, the DR's most beautiful beach is as much about the journey as the destination. (p194)

**LOS PATOS**

Stock up with gas and cash before you set out south of Barahona on the stunning drive to Paraíso. You'll probably find this *balneario* (swimming hole) and polished-stone beach free of other tourists. (p193)





## CORDILLERA SEPTENTRIONAL

In this dramatic mountain range, Rtes 25 and 233 wind past coursing rivers, jungle-clad escarpments and placid rural settlements. Stop in a village to appreciate Dominican warmth and hospitality. (p170)

## CABRERA

This low-key village is a good base to explore a handful of gorgeous beaches and a freshwater lagoon off the highway between the tourist enclaves of the central North Coast and Peninsula de Samana. (p155)



## EL CABITO

This rustic restaurant literally hangs over the northeastern edge of the country. Consider the jaw-dropping views your just rewards for tackling the wicked unpaved road that leads here. (p118)

## PLAYA LIMÓN

North of Punta Cana, this far-flung beach is the antithesis of the resorts. Pass colorful *colonias* (settlements) and sugar plantations to discover these coconut tree-lined sands. (p104)



## OUR STORY

A beat-up old car, a few dollars in the pocket and a sense of adventure. In 1972 that's all Tony and Maureen Wheeler needed for the trip of a lifetime – across Europe and Asia overland to Australia. It took several months, and at the end – broke but inspired – they sat at their kitchen table writing and stapling together their first travel guide, *Across Asia on the Cheap*. Within a week they'd sold 1500 copies. Lonely Planet was born.

Today, Lonely Planet has offices in Franklin, London, Melbourne, Oakland, Beijing and Delhi, with more than 600 staff and writers. We share Tony's belief that 'a great guidebook should do three things: inform, educate and amuse'.

## OUR WRITERS



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