

Welcome to the Dominican Republic

The DR is one of the Caribbean's most geographically diverse countries, with stunning mountain scenery, desert scrublands, evocative colonial architecture and beaches galore.

Coastal Country

Hundreds of miles of coastline define the Dominican Republic (DR) – some of it white-sand beaches shaded by rows of palm trees, other parts lined dramatically with rocky cliffs, wind-swept dunes or serene mangrove lagoons. Whether it's fishing villages where the shoreline is used for mooring boats or indulgent tourist playgrounds with aquamarine waters, the sea is the common denominator. Some of the bays and coves where pirates once roamed are the temporary home of thousands of migrating humpback whales, and part of an extensive network of parks and preserves safeguarding the country's natural patrimony.

Peaks & Valleys

Beyond the capital, much of the DR is rural: driving through the vast fertile interior you'll see cows and horses grazing alongside the roads and trucks and burros loaded down with produce. Further inland you'll encounter vistas reminiscent of the European Alps, rivers carving their way through lush jungle and stunning waterfalls. Four of the five highest peaks in the Caribbean rise above the fertile lowlands surrounding Santiago and remote deserts extend through the southwest, giving the DR a physical and cultural complexity not found on other islands.

Past & Present

The country's roller-coaster past is writ large in the physical design of its towns and cities. Santo Domingo's Zona Colonial exudes romance with its beautifully restored monasteries and cobblestone streets where conquistadors once roamed. The crumbling gingerbread homes of Puerto Plata and Santiago remain from more prosperous eras, and scars from decades of misrule are marked by monuments where today people gather to celebrate. New communities have arisen only a few kilometers from the ruins where Christopher Columbus strode and where the indigenous Taíno people left physical traces of their presence carved onto rock walls.

People & Culture

The social glue of the DR is the all-night merengue that blasts from modest corner stores – this is true everywhere from cities such as Santo Domingo, to crumbling San Pedro de Macoris or Puerto Plata where waves crash over the Malecón. Dominicans appreciate their down time and really know how to party, as can be seen at Carnival celebrations held throughout the country and each town's own distinctive fiesta. These events are great windows into the culture, so take the chance to join the fun and elaborate feasts.



Why I Love the Dominican Republic

By Michael Grosberg, Author

Driving along the DR's rural byways, past coconut sellers and men playing dominoes, thick jungly brush often gives way to the idyllic ocean vistas the country is known for. But for me, the country's distinctive appeal lies in everyday village scenes, when Dominicans' informal hospitality can be appreciated. What keeps me going back are the afternoons at beachfront seafood shacks or mountainside-hugging *colmados* (combined corner stores and bars), when the pace slows down and the natural beauty of the surroundings become almost secondary to the warm welcome of locals.

For more about our authors, see p256.