



Punta Cana & the Southeast

Includes ➔

Juan Dolio.....	79
La Romana.....	84
Bayahibe & Dominicanus	88
Higüey	95
Bávaro & Punta Cana...	96
Playa Limón.....	104
Miches.....	105
Sabana de la Mar	106

Best Places to Eat

- ➔ Passion by Martín Berasategui (p102)
- ➔ Restaurante Playa Blanca (p102)
- ➔ Ñam Ñam (p102)
- ➔ Ristorante El Sueño (p83)
- ➔ Balicana (p102)

Best Places to Stay

- ➔ Paraíso Caño Hondo (p107)
- ➔ Paradisus Punta Cana (p100)
- ➔ Tortuga Bay (p101)
- ➔ Casa de Campo (p85)
- ➔ Bávaro Hostel (p100)

Why Go?

A Caribbean workhorse of sun and sand, the southeast is synonymous with go-big-or-go-home tourism and carries the weight of the Dominican Republic's most dramatic beaches and turquoise seas on its deeply-tanned shoulders. Sprawling resort developments, some like city-states unto themselves, line much of the beachfront from Punta Cana to Bávaro, offering families, couples and the young and restless alike a hassle-free Caribbean holiday on some of the most idyllic environs in the region. But there is life beyond Punta Cana. Less-crowded beach towns such as Bayahibe and Juan Dolio offer only slightly less dramatic seascapes but sands that go unshared with the masses; and isolated getaways such as Playa Limón, beyond the sugar plantations and inland mountains to the north, showcase a different and worthwhile side of the southeast if you can tear yourself away from the buffets long enough to take the rewarding journeys required to make their acquaintance.

When to Go

- ➔ **January & February** If you can hold off just past the winter holidays, January and February offer the same sun and sand as Christmas and New Year's Eve – but a whole lot less people.
- ➔ **March** If you're looking for a fiesta, join North American Spring Breakers descending upon Punta Cana. If you're not on Spring Break, this is probably a bad time for that leisurely family vacation.
- ➔ **October** For those pinching pesos, October bridges the gap between hurricane season and the preholiday onslaught. ¡Salud!

History

Before sugar, it was cattle ranching and the cutting and exporting of hardwoods that drove the region's economy. But Cuban planters, fleeing war in their country, began to arrive in the southeast in the 1870s and established sugar mills with the Dominican government's assistance (this migration also explains baseball's popularity and importance in the region). Rail lines were built and La Romana and San Pedro de Macorís, formerly sleepy backwaters, began to prosper as busy ports almost immediately when world sugar prices soared. Hundreds of families from the interior migrated to the area in search of jobs. In 1920, after peasants were dispossessed of their land during the US occupation, many fought a guerrilla war against the marines in the area around Hato Mayor and El Seibo. Until the 1960s, the economy in the southeast was still strictly driven by sugar, despite fluctuations in the world market and agriculture in general. However, when the US company Gulf & Western Industries bought La Romana's sugar mill, invested heavily in the cattle and cement industries and, perhaps most importantly, built the Casa de Campo resort, tourism became the financial engine of the southeast, and remains so today.

Getting There & Around

The majority of international visitors to this region fly directly to the airport in Punta Cana and then are whisked away in private vehicles to their respective resorts. Otherwise, it's anywhere from a two- to four-hour drive, depending on your destination, from Aeropuerto Internacional Las Américas in Santo Domingo. La Romana has an airport as well, though it mostly handles charter flights.

Traffic between the resort centers can be surprisingly heavy and it's difficult to navigate much of the road system, which is being revamped and expanded. Though the distances aren't great, travel in the region, especially along the coast north of Bávaro all the way to Sabana de la Mar, can be slow and unreliable because of the poor condition of the roads. It's now possible to fly between Punta Cana and the Península de Samaná.

EAST OF SANTO DOMINGO

Cross Río Ozama, the eastern border of the Zona Colonial in Santo Domingo, and the claustrophobia fades, the horizon opens

and you remember that you're in the Caribbean. The highway hugs the coast for some time with promising views but then retreats inland once again, passing service stations and shops hugging the roadside until the turnoff for the beach resorts of Boca Chica and Juan Dolio a little further on.

Juan Dolio


The recession hasn't been kind to parts of Juan Dolio, a tranquil beach town about 20km east of rambunctious Boca Chica. Once tipped as the Caribbean's next hot spot, real estate speculation and investors flocked here since development began in earnest in the late 1980s, but these days, you'll see more 'For Sale' signs and half-finished condos on the west side than smiles and sunshine. Of course, the news isn't all bad: Juan Dolio is one of the few beach towns in the area that caters somewhat to independent budget travelers and the laid-back feel around town makes losing a few days here far from difficult.

The public beach itself on the west side of town is fairly small and cramped (especially on weekends), but the area in front of the resorts to the more prosperous east side of town is wider and softer than in nearby Boca Chica. Most tourists stay at one of the several all-inclusive resorts on the east side, however there's enough of a trickle of guests, independent travelers, loyal expats (mainly retired Germans and Italians) and Dominicans to keep a handful of bars and restaurants on the more free-spirited west side of town in business.

Sights & Activities


Los Delfines Water & Entertainment Park

WATER PARK

( 809-476-0477; www.losdelfinespark.com; Autovia del Este; adult/child US\$49/39; ☀ 10am-6pm Wed-Sun; ♿) This new water park between Boca Chica and Juan Dolio claims to be the Caribbean's biggest. With its 17 water slides and nine pools, it's easy to get lost in here.

Cigua Tours

ADVENTURE, CULTURAL TOUR

( 809-396-8441; www.erika-cigua-tours.com; Playa Real; ☀ 9am-11pm) This small travel agency is located just east of Talanquera Beach Resort on the old Decameron Resort property. It organizes day trips to Santo Domingo (per person US\$35), Isla Saona (per person US\$55), Isla Catalina (per person US\$55), Parque Nacional Los Haitises (per person US\$70)