



# Central Highlands

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## Best Places to Stay

- » Rancho Baiguate (p182)
- » Alto Cerro (p188)
- » Gran Almirante (p172)

## Best Places to Eat

- » Camp David (p173)
- » Il Pasticcio (p173)
- » Hotel Gran Jimenoa (p183)

## 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

Some of the most raucous Carnival (Carnaval) celebrations in all the DR are held in Santiago and La Vega at the end of February and beginning of March. It tends to be dry from January to March and June to August in the area around Santiago in the center of this region. Rains can be torrential in May and again September to November. Meanwhile, the temperatures in the mountain towns like Jarabacoa and Constanza are cooler year-round and nighttime temperatures in the latter can even fall below freezing.

## **i** Getting There & Around

Santiago's **Aeropuerto Internacional del Cibao** (☎809-233-8000; [www.aeropuertocibao.com.do](http://www.aeropuertocibao.com.do)) is the third-largest airport in the country, and offers frequent international air service to major destinations. There's a good selection of car rental agencies at the airport too.

Santiago sits on the main trunk highway that runs north from Santo Domingo to Puerto Plata, and has plenty of efficient bus service to all points of the compass. There's regular, first-class bus service to all destinations listed in this chapter, except for Constanza – you'll need to hop on a *gua-gua* (local bus) to get up into the mountains. As always, renting



## Central Highlands Highlights

- 1** Go **white-water rafting** (p178) on the Caribbean's only raftable river, the turbulent Río Yaque del Norte near Jarabacoa
- 2** Party hearty with the locals in little La Vega in February, when it throws the country's biggest **Carnival celebrations** (p177)
- 3** Visit the **Centro León** (opposite) in Santiago, an exceptional museum with more than a century's worth of works by the very best Dominican artists
- 4** Watch the sunset as the mist descends into the valley in high-altitude **Constanza** (p187)
- 5** Dance merengue and party till the wee hours at one of the bars surrounding the Monument in **Santiago** (p174)
- 6** Linger at the top of **Pico Duarte** (p184), taking in the views of the Atlantic and the Caribbean