



Península de Samaná

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Best Places to Stay

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Why Go?

This small slither of land is the antithesis of the Dominican-Caribbean dream in the southeast, where resorts rule and patches of sand come at a first-class premium. Far more laid-back and, in a certain sense, more cosmopolitan, Samaná offers a European vibe as strong as *espresso*; it's where escape – both from the workaday, urban milieu of New York or Paris and from Santiago or Santo Domingo – is the operative word; and where French and Italian are at least as useful as Spanish. Of course, the majority come to gasp at the North Atlantic humpback whales doing their migratory song and dance from mid-January to mid-March, but the peninsula is no one-trick pony. Sophisticated Las Terrenas is the place to base yourself if you crave a lively social scene, and sleepy Las Galeras boasts several of the best beaches in the DR, their beauty enhanced by the effort it takes to get there.

When to Go

Over 10,000 North American humpback whales put on a show of monstrous proportions in the Bahía de Samaná – February is the best month to see them. Or bypass the crowds of whale-watching season and have the peninsula to yourself in April. In December, keep dry as winter sets in – and beat the holiday crowds.

History

Because of Bahía de Samaná's fortuitous geography – its deep channel, eastward orientation and easy-to-defend mouth, perfect for a naval installation – the Península de Samaná has been coveted, fought over and bought several times over. At least six different countries, including Haiti, France, Spain, the US and Germany, have either occupied the Samaná area or sought to do so.

Founded as a Spanish outpost in 1756, Samaná was first settled by émigrés from the Canary Islands, but the political turmoil of Hispaniola – the sale of the island to the French, a Haitian revolution and two British invasions – kept Samaná town's population growing and changing. It was deemed a prize even as early as 1807 during the brief French possession of Hispaniola. France's commander in Santo Domingo, an ambitious

leader no doubt, proposed building a city named Port Napoleon in Samaná, but France was dispossessed of the island before the plan could move forward.

After its independence from Spain, the DR was taken over by Haiti, which controlled Hispaniola from 1822 to 1844. During this period Haiti invited more than 5000 freed and escaped slaves from the US to settle on the island. About half moved to the Samaná area. Today, a community of their descendants still speaks a form of English.

During Haitian rule, France pressured its former colony to cede the Península de Samaná in return for a reduction in the debt Haiti owed it. Incredibly, Haiti had been forced to pay restitution to France for land taken from French colonists in order to gain international recognition. Of course, France



Península de Samaná Highlights

- 1 Scouring the Bahía de Samaná in search of majestic 30-ton humpbacks breaching and diving on a **whale-watching trip** (p112)
- 2 Dining precariously above crashing waves, quite literally on the edge of the Dominican Republic, at **Restaurant El Cabito** (p120) in Las Galeras
- 3 Taking a long, *long* walk on the gorgeous sand of **Playa Rincón** (p117)
- 4 Swimming with the fishes on a snorkeling trip through the best reefs the peninsula has to offer at **Playa Frontón** (p116)
- 5 Wining and dining amid sophisticated European flare in cosmopolitan **Las Terrenas** (p121)
- 6 Losing a few days at the end of the road in **Las Galeras** (p116), one of the few independent-traveler-friendly locales in the DR
- 7 Taking in the rugged mountain scenery of Samaná's interior on a trip to 52m-high **Cascada El Limón** (p123)