



# Understand Dominican Republic

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Road building projects continue, spending on social programs lag. How is the average Dominican coping?

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Taínos chiefdoms, Columbus, pirates, Hispaniola united and divided: how DR's roller coaster past shaped the nation.

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Merengue to *bachata* beats and salsa to political reggaeton and rap: the soundscape of the DR.

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Whether played in the streets or a stadium, baseball is a national obsession.

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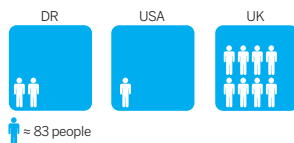
Poetry and painting thrive, despite or in response to politics; Spanish colonial architecture abounds.

## **DOMINICAN LANDSCAPES . . . . . 236**

High mountains, fertile valleys and long coastline provide diversity to the second-largest island in the Caribbean.



## population per sq mile



# Dominican Republic Today

## The Mood

Young and old alike groan equally about corruption and lack of opportunities, though those who are hopeful of reform can take heart in the fact that the current president, Leonel Fernandez, has announced he will not pursue the constitutional changes he had been seeking that would allow him to run for a fourth term in 2012. Reformists had argued that because the judiciary branch is fairly inactive, there is already little significant check on executive power.

» Gallon of gas: RD\$160

» First-class bus Santo Domingo to Puerto Plata: RD\$320

» Coconut from street vendor: RD\$20-25

» Unemployment rate: over 15%

## The Other Half

Many Dominicans still refer angrily to the Haitian occupation of their country over 160 years ago. Haitians are typically blamed for overburdened schools, insufficient healthcare and rising crime rates, especially guns, drugs and prostitution, and for taking Dominican jobs. In the aftermath of the devastating earthquake that struck Haiti in January 2010, the Dominican government provided medical and humanitarian assistance and much of the aid from other countries was shipped overland through the DR. However, the thaw in relations only lasted so long. Haiti's cholera epidemic that erupted the following year (as of April 2011, 650 people in the DR had been diagnosed with cholera and seven had died) led to the temporary closure of some border crossings, which ignited more conflict: several Haitians were killed and scores injured in protests. A rising number of incidents at the end of 2010 and beginning of 2011 left dozens of Haitians dead and hundreds injured in clashes in poor barrios around the country. Some Dominicans claiming they were trying to evict illegal Haitians say they were justified by the threat of cholera and crime. And in the beginning of February 2011, the Dominican government initiated a

## Top Books

- » *Dead Man in Paradise* – Canadian journalist JB Mackinnon, the nephew of a priest murdered during the Trujillo regime, tries to piece together the unsolved crime.
- » *Fiesta del Chivo (Feast of the Goat)* – Peruvian novelist Mario Vargas Llosa's imaginative

telling of dictator Rafael Trujillo's final days.

- » *The Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* – Junot Diaz's inventive story of a self-professed Dominican nerd in New Jersey and the tragic history of his family in the DR.

## Keep in Mind

- » *Colmados*, an institution in Dominican life, are combination corner stores, groceries and bars.
- » Car washes in the DR combine two typical local passions – automobiles and beer. These facilities serve drinks throughout the afternoon and evening.