



Península de Samaná

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Best Places to Eat

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Best Places to Sleep

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Why Go?

This sliver 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 certain senses, more cosmopolitan, Samaná offers a European vibe as strong as espresso; it's where escape is the operative word, and where French and Italian are at least as useful as Spanish. The majority of visitors 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 for those who crave a lively social scene, and sleepy Las Galeras boasts several of the best and most secluded beaches in the Dominican Republic (DR).

When to Go

- ➔ North Atlantic humpback whales put on a show in the Bahía de Samaná from mid-January to late March. February is the best month.
- ➔ Crowds have thinned out by April, but weather remains pleasant.
- ➔ Enjoy drier days in early December after the autumn rains and before domestic holidaymakers descend.

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. At least six countries, including Haiti, France, Spain, the US and Germany, have 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. It was deemed a prize as early as 1807, during the brief French possession of Hispaniola. France's commander in Santo Domingo proposed building a city named Port Napoleon in Samaná, but France lost 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. (Haiti had been forced to pay restitution to France for land taken from French colonists in order to gain international recognition. Of course, France never paid restitution to former slaves for their ordeal.)



Península de Samaná Highlights

1 Whale watching (p127)

Taking in the spectacular sight of majestic humpbacks breaching and diving in Bahía de Samaná.

2 El Monte Azul (p135)

Dining precariously above a stupendous blue sea on the edge of the country in Las Galeras.

3 Playa Rincón (p133)

Losing yourself for hours on gorgeous sun-toasted sands.

4 Las Terrenas (p136)

Enjoying a sophisticated European atmosphere in cosmopolitan bars and restaurants.

5 Casa El Paraíso (p135)

Gawking at postcard-perfect views from your bed at this cliff-hugging B&B in Las Galeras.

6 Las Galeras (p132)

Lounging, snorkeling and lazing about isolated beaches in an end-of-the-road place,

one of the few independent-traveler-friendly locales in the DR.

7 Dominican Tree House Village (p129)

Channeling your inner Tarzan or Jane in lush jungle tree houses in Samaná.

8 Cascada El Limón (p140)

Navigating the rugged and wet mountain scenery of Samaná's interior on a trip to a 52m-high waterfall.