

Understand Dominican Republic

DOMINICAN REPUBLIC TODAY268

Despite stubborn economic prosperity, the Dominican Republic is still plagued with endemic corruption, bad weather and trouble with Haiti.

HISTORY270

Taino chiefdoms, Columbus, pirates, Hispaniola united and divided: how the Dominican Republic's roller-coaster past shaped the nation.

MUSIC & DANCE281

The soundscape of the Dominican Republic, from merengue to *bachata*, reggaeton to rap.

BASEBALL: A DOMINICAN PASSION284

In the streets or at a national stadium, baseball is a national obsession in the DR.

ARTS & ARCHITECTURE286

Spanish colonial architecture abounds; poetry and painting thrives despite, or in response to, politics.

DOMINICAN LANDSCAPES289

Sky-high mountains, fertile valleys and expansive coastline provide diversity to the Caribbean's second-largest island.

Dominican Republic Today

The Dominican Republic has enjoyed an economic heyday of late, with tourism booming and free-trade zones flourishing, but stubborn problems have lingered, namely corrupt politicians and trouble with Haiti. Add to that some pretty bad weather and you can bet that average Dominicans, who are no strangers to hardship, approach the present with a healthy dose of skepticism. Regardless, they certainly know how to celebrate and appreciate the good stuff: music, dancing, baseball, and, above all, family.

Best on Film

La Hija Natural (Love Child; 2011) A teenager's anguished attempt to find and get to know her estranged father. Dominican entry for Best Foreign Film at 2011 Academy Awards.

Sugar (2009) Story of a Dominican baseball prospect's journey to minor leagues in middle America.

Ladrones a Domicilio (Robbers of the House; 2008) A political satire and slapstick comedy involving a robbery and kidnapping, and corruption in everyday life.

Best in Print

Dead Man in Paradise (JB Mackinnon; 2009) 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; Mario Vargas Llosa; 2000) Peruvian novelist Mario Vargas Llosa's imaginative telling of dictator Rafael Trujillo's final days.

The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao (Junot Díaz; 2007) Inventive story of a self-professed Dominican nerd in New Jersey and the tragic history of his family in the DR.

The Farming of Bones (Edwidge Danticat; 1998) Danticat's novel movingly recreates the events around the 1937 massacre of Haitians in the DR.

Politics & Economy

In true Dominican fashion, let's start with what's working. In 2015, a constitutional reform allowed presidents to run for a second consecutive term, and the sitting president Danilo Medina unsurprisingly seized the opportunity. He was reelected in 2016 in a landslide, which probably had a lot to do with the fact that during his first term, social services were expanded and the economy grew rapidly.

In 2015, GDP was growing at 7 percent, the fastest rate of any country in Latin America, thanks to healthy tourism, construction and mining industries. Inflation was relatively low, and around \$1 billion was coming in via remittances from more than a million Dominicans living abroad. Although sugar, coffee and tobacco had for decades been the country's largest employers, the service sector overtook agriculture both in the number of jobs it provided and the revenue it brought in. In 2016, more than 6 million tourists are predicted to have visited the DR, which will generate more than \$6.5 billion in revenue.

Corruption & Drugs

Corruption has long been a problem in the Dominican Republic, at all levels of government and within the private sector. The most recent example is the Odebrecht scandal, in which a Brazilian construction company paid US\$92 million in bribes to DR government officials to secure public contracts, which in turn allowed the company to collect US\$163 million in profit, according to US Justice Department documents. The DR wasn't the only place Odebrecht bribed, but it was one of the big ones.

In 2015, the alleged dirty dealings of DR Senator Felix Bautista were voted the worst corruption in the world by Transparency International's Unmask the Corrupt