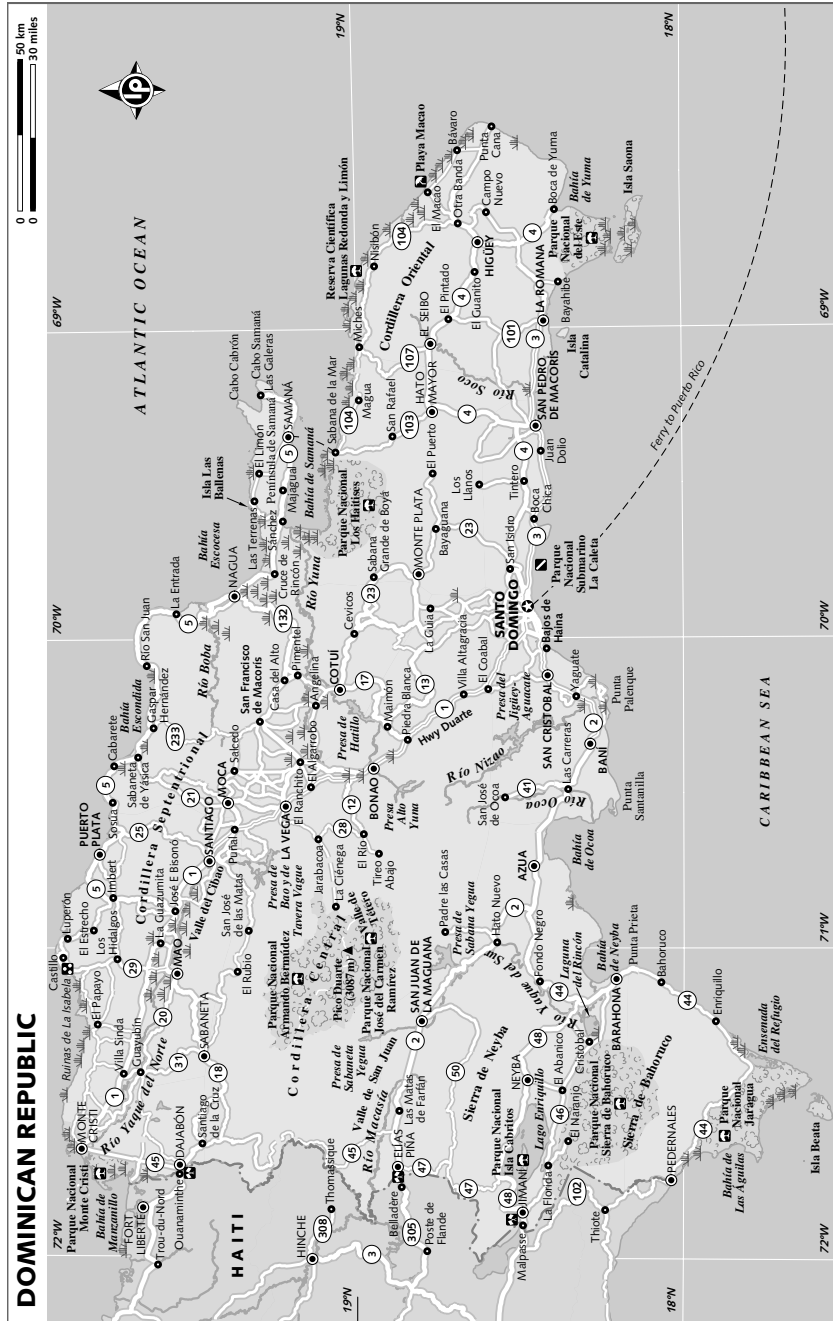


Dominican Republic





Dominican Republic History

One of the major if not most important strands winding its way through Dominican history, what has shaped its identity and self-understanding more than anything, is its relationship with Haiti, its neighbor sharing the island of Hispaniola.

SEPARATION ANXIETY

While France and Spain's power in Europe waxed and waned, so, too, did their imperialist ambitions. And conflict within the colonies became ways of waging proxy wars against their rivals. So when the enslaved African population of Saint-Domingue rose up in bloody revolt, Spain supported the revolution. However, once the French agreed to abolish slavery, the former slaves turned their attention to liberating the entire island – the Spanish colony had about 60,000 slaves of its own. Lacking an appetite, will and ability to forcefully oppose the uprising, Spain and France hagled over the details, one of which involved the injunction that Spanish colonists abdicate their lands in exchange for ones in Cuba.

In 1801, frustrated by the slow pace of negotiations, François Dominique Toussaint Louverture, a former slave and leader of the rebel forces, marched into Santo Domingo and, without French authority, declared that the abolition of slavery would be enforced throughout the island. At odds with French leaders, who now viewed him as a loose cannon, he was betrayed to the French who sent him in chains to France, where he died of neglect in a dungeon in April 1803. Jean-Jacques Dessalines, who had been one of Toussaint's chief lieutenants, crowned himself emperor of the Republic of Haiti with the clearly stated ambition of uniting Hispaniola under one flag.

For the Spanish colonists in Santo Domingo, this new imperialist threat compelled them to ask Spain to reincorporate them into the empire. But Spain completely bungled its administration of Santo Domingo and on November 30, 1821, the colony declared its independence once again. Colonial leaders intended to join the Republic of Gran Colombia (a country that included present-day Ecuador, Colombia, Panama and Venezuela) but never got the chance – Haiti invaded and finally achieved its goal of a united Hispaniola.

Dominicans chafed under Haitian rule for the next 22 years, and to this day both countries regard the other with disdain and suspicion. Resistance grew until February 27, 1844 – a day celebrated as Dominican Independence Day – when a separatist movement headed by Juan Pablo Duarte captured Santo Domingo in a bloodless coup. The Puerto del Conde in Santo Domingo

The *trinitaria*, a bougainvillea that blooms purple, red and magenta, also refers to Juan Pablo Duarte, Francisco de Rosario Sánchez and Ramón Mella, the three fathers of the republic, and to the secret cells of three that were organized in 1838 to struggle for independence from Haiti.

TIMELINE

1821–22

Colonists of Santo Domingo, known as Spanish Haiti, declare their independence from Spain in November 1821, only to be invaded by Haiti nine weeks later and incorporated into a united Hispaniola.

1844

A coalition of Santo Domingo intellectuals and rebel Haitian soldiers spark a largely bloodless coup and the Dominican Republic declares its independence from Haiti, after 22 years of occupation.

1849

Buenaventura Baez begins the first of his five terms – between 1849 and 1878 – as president of the Dominican Republic. One of his first acts was an attempt to have his country annexed by the USA.

marks the spot where Duarte entered the city. Despite the reversal of fortunes of the two countries in the 20th century, many Dominicans still view Haiti as an aggressive nation with territorial ambitions.

Fearing an invasion and still feeling threatened by Haiti in 1861, the Dominican Republic once again submitted to Spanish rule. But ordinary Dominicans did not support the move and, after four years of armed resistance, succeeded in expelling Spanish troops in what is known as the War of Restoration. (Restauración is a common street name throughout the DR, and there are a number of monuments to the war, including a prominent one in Santiago; see p208.) On March 3, 1865, the Queen of Spain signed a decree annulling the annexation and withdrew her soldiers from the island.

The zenith of the Haiti xenophobia was Trujillo's massacre of tens of thousands of Haitians in 1937. After hearing reports that Haitian peasants were crossing into the Dominican Republic, perhaps to steal cattle, Trujillo ordered all Haitians along the border to be tracked down and executed. Dominican soldiers used a simple test to separate Haitians from Dominicans – they would hold up a string of parsley (*perejil* in Spanish) and ask everyone they encountered to name it. French- and Creole-speaking Haitians could not properly trill the 'r' and were summarily murdered. Beginning on October 3 and lasting for several days, at least 15,000 – and some researchers say as 35,000 – Haitians were hacked to death with machetes and their bodies dumped into the ocean. (Guns would have too easily linked the massacre to the government, though there was never any doubt who had ordered it.) Trujillo never openly admitted a massacre had taken place, but in 1938, under international pressure, he and Haitian president Sténio Vicente agreed the Dominican Republic would pay a total of US\$750,000 as reparation for Haitians who had been killed (a paltry US\$50 per person). The Dominican Republic made an initial payment of US\$250,000 but it's unclear if it ever paid the rest. What is clear is that none of the money went to the families of those killed.

POWER FROM THE NORTH

With no strong central government, the newly independent Dominican Republic was a fractured nation, divided up among several dozen caudillos and their militias. From 1865 until 1879 there were more than 50 military uprisings or coups and 21 changes in government. In 1869 after Buenaventura Báez, the leader of a coalition of plantation owners, mahogany exporters and a significant portion of residents of Santo Domingo, was installed as president, he attempted to sell the country to the US for US\$150,000. Even though the treaty was signed by Báez and US president Ulysses S Grant, the agreement was defeated in the US Senate.

But the US was to involve itself once again in Dominican affairs, this time at the invitation of General Ulises Heureaux, who stabilized the musical chairs of political and military leadership from 1882 until his assassination in 1899.

Between 1844 and 1916, the Dominican Republic had 40 different governments.

Trujillo nicknames: Hot Balls, the Goat, the Chief, the Butcher.

Trujillo titles: Benefactor of the Fatherland, Founder and Supreme Chief of the Partido Dominicana, Restorer of Financial Independence, First Journalist of the Republic, Doctor Honoris Causa in the Economic Political Sciences

The general, known as Lili, borrowed heavily from American and European banks to finance the army, infrastructure and the sugar industry. But after a sharp drop-off in world sugar prices, Lili essentially mortgaged the country to the US-owned and -operated San Domingo Improvement Company just before his death. Because the Dominican government was bankrupt, the US government intervened in 1905 by taking control of the customs houses and guaranteeing repayment of all loans, stopping just short of ratifying President Theodore Roosevelt's plan to establish a protectorate over the DR.

Despite some economic growth, after the assassination of another president in 1911, Dominican politics mostly remained chaotic, corrupt and bloody. In 1916, under the pretext of quelling yet another coup, President Woodrow Wilson sent the marines to the DR – they remained for the next eight years. Though deeply imperialistic, the US occupation did succeed in stabilizing Dominican politics and the economy. Once the DR's strategic value to the US was no longer important, and a new strain of isolationism had entered American discourse, the occupation was ended and the troops sent home.

THE RISE OF THE CAUDILLO

Like the calm before the storm, the years from 1924 to 1930 were in many ways positive, led by a progressive president, Horacio Vásquez, whose administration built major roads and schools and initiated irrigation and sanitation programs. Vásquez did extend his four-year term to six, a constitutionally questionable move that was nevertheless approved by the Congress. When a revolution was proclaimed in Santiago, Rafael Leonidas Trujillo, chief of the former Dominican National Police (renamed the National Army in 1928), ordered in his troops to remain in their barracks, effectively forcing Vásquez and his vice president from office. After a sham election in which he was the sole candidate, Trujillo assumed the presidency. Within weeks, he organized a terrorist band, La 42, which roamed the country, killing everyone who posed any threat to him. An egomaniac of the first degree, he changed the names of various cities – Santo Domingo became Ciudad Trujillo, for example – and lavished support on San Cristobal, the small city west of the capital where he was born; a never-used palace Trujillo had built can still be visited (see p114).

Trujillo ruled the Dominican Republic with an iron fist from 1930 to 1961, lavishing over 21% of the national budget on the ever-expanding *Guardia Nacional* and creating a handful of intelligence agencies dedicated to suppressing any dissent. The torture and murder of political prisoners was a daily event in Trujillo's DR. Two of the more infamous incidents were the kidnapping and murder of a Spanish professor teaching in New York City, who had criticized his regime, and plotting to assassinate the Venezuelan president Rómulo Betancourt. Trujillo, in spite of being part black, was deeply racist and xenophobic; he sought to 'whiten' the Dominican population by

Life in Santo Domingo during the Trujillo regime was regimented: begging was only allowed on Saturdays, laborers were awakened with a siren at 7am while office workers were given an extra hour to sleep in; their siren was at 8am.

After losing power to revolutionaries led by Fidel Castro, Cuban dictator Fulgencio Batista fled to Trujillo City.

1861

Dominican president-cum-strong man Pedro Santana Familias, hoping to both defraud Spain and buttress its protection from Haitian military incursions, allows Spain to re-annex the Dominican Republic despite public protests.

1865

Two years after an initial uprising in Santiago, triggered by the Spanish authority's continual erosion of Dominican rights, the Dominican Republic gains independence by defeating Spanish troops in the War of Restoration.

1916–24

After years of civil wars, the US occupies the Dominican Republic under the pretence of securing debt payments owed by the defaulting Dominican government.

1930

After six years of relatively stable government, Rafael Trujillo, the chief of the Dominican National Police, declares himself president after an election in which he was the sole candidate.

1937

Perhaps the culmination of his xenophobia, paranoia, racism and tyranny, Dictator Rafael Trujillo orders the extermination of Haitians along the DR-Haiti border; from 15,000 to 20,000 are killed in a matter of days.

1945

Minerva Bernardino, the Dominican representative to the UN Charter in San Francisco and one of only four women present at the signing, would later be appointed to represent the country at the UN.

increasing European immigration and placing quotas on the number of Haitians allowed in the country. In 1937 he ordered the massacre of tens of thousands of Haitians living along the border.

During these years, Trujillo used his government to amass a personal fortune by establishing monopolies that he and his wife controlled. By 1934 he was the richest man on the island. Today there are many Dominicans who remember Trujillo's rule with a certain amount of fondness and nostalgia, in part because Trujillo did develop the economy. Factories were opened, a number of grandiose infrastructure and public works projects were carried out, bridges and highways were built, and peasants were given state land to cultivate.

FALSE STARTS

When Trujillo was assassinated by a group of Dominican dissidents with the help of the CIA on May 30, 1961, some hoped that the country would turn a corner. The promise of change however was short lived. Puppet President Joaquín Balaguer, merely a figurehead used by Trujillo, officially assumed the office – he did rename the capital Santo Domingo. After a groundswell of unrest and at the insistence of the USA, a seven-member Council of State, which included two of the men who'd taken part in Trujillo's deadly ambush, was to guide the country until elections were held in December 1962. The first free elections in many years in the DR was won by the scholar-poet Juan Bosch Gaviño.

Nine months later, after introducing liberal policies including the redistribution of land, the creation of a new constitution and guaranteeing civil and individual rights, Bosch was deposed by yet another military coup in September 1963. Wealthy landowners to whom democracy was a threat and a group of military leaders led by Generals Elías Wessin y Wessin and Antonio Imbert Barreras installed Donald Reid Cabral, a prominent businessman, as president. Bosch fled into exile but his supporters, calling themselves the Constitutionalists, took to the streets and seized the National Palace. Santo Domingo saw the stirrings of a civil war; the military launched tank assaults and bombing runs against civilian protesters.

The fighting continued until the USA intervened yet again. This time the Johnson administration, after losing Cuba, feared a left-wing or communist takeover of the Dominican Republic despite the fact that Bosch wasn't a communist and papers later revealed US intelligence had identified a grand total of 54 individuals that were part of the movement fighting the military junta. The official reason was that the US could no longer guarantee the safety of its nationals and so over 500 marines landed in Santo Domingo on April 27, 1965. A week later and only 40 years since the previous occupation, 14,000 American military personnel were stationed in the Dominican Republic.

In honor of the Mirabal sisters, Minerva, Patria and María Teresa, activists who were murdered by Trujillo's agents, the UN declared November 25, the day of their death, International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women.

The Dominican Republic: A National History by Frank Moya Pons is the most comprehensive book on the Dominican Republic's history.

Why the Cocks Fight by Michele Wucker examines Dominican-Haitian relations through the metaphor of cockfighting.

AN UNLIKELY MAN OF LETTERS

Balaguer was a writer as well as a strong-man ruler. He published over 50 works of writing, from poetry to biographies to criticism and one novel. Maybe his most infamous work was his autobiography *Memorias de un Cortesano de la Era de Trujillo* (Memoirs of a Courtisan in the Era of Trujillo; 1988). In it he includes a blank page, which refers to the murder of outspoken Dominican journalist Orlando Martínez Howley in 1975. Balaguer apparently meant the page as a memorial to Howley and assigned someone to reveal the details of the assassination – Balaguer denied he gave the orders – after his death. He died in 2002 and no one has come forward.

CAUDILLO REDUX

Elections were held in July 1966 – Bosch, the benevolent reformer against Balaguer, the Trujillo throwback. Balaguer won handily, in part because many voters feared a Bosch victory would lead to civil war since the right couldn't be expected to accept the results. Bosch would go on to contest elections in 1978, 1982, 1986, 1990 and 1994, always losing. Balaguer, meanwhile, would outlast every Latin American ruler except Fidel Castro. Not the typical authoritarian dictator, Balaguer was a writer and poet – in one book he argues against interracial marriage – who lived in the servant's quarters of his female-dominated home.

Taking a page from Trujillo's playbook, Balaguer curtailed opposition through bribes and intimidation and went on to win reelection in 1970 and 1974. Despite economic growth, in part fueled by investment and aid from the USA, who saw Balaguer as a staunch anticommunist ally, Balaguer lost the 1978 election to a wealthy cattle rancher named Silvestre Antonio Guzmán. The transfer of power wouldn't come easily, however; Balaguer ordered troops to destroy ballot boxes and declared himself the victor, standing down only after US president Jimmy Carter refused to recognize his victory.

As a result of plunging sugar prices and rising oil costs, the Dominican economy came to a standstill under Guzmán's corrupt administration; he committed suicide shortly after leaving office in 1982. His successor, Salvador Jorge Blanco, adhered to a fiscal austerity plan, measures that were far from popular with many ordinary Dominicans, but the economy slowly picked up and inflation was brought under control. But old dictators don't go easily and Balaguer, 80 years old and blind with glaucoma, returned to power, defeating Guzmán in the 1986 election.

For the next eight years Balaguer set about reversing every positive economic reform of the Blanco program; the result was five-fold devaluing of the Dominican peso and soaring annual inflation rates. With little chance of prospering at home, almost 900,000 Dominicans, or 12% of the country's population, had moved to New York by 1990. After rigging the 1990 and 1994 elections, the military had grown weary of Balaguer's rule and he agreed

The Dictator Next Door: The Good Neighbor Policy and the Trujillo Regime in the Dominican Republic, 1930-1945 by Eric Paul Roorda details the compromises the US government made with Trujillo's regime and its complicity in its survival.

The website of the US Library of Congress (<http://lcweb2.loc.gov/frd/cs/dotoc.html>) has in-depth historical, political and economic information about the DR that dates until 1989, as well as articles (somewhat dated but still useful for background) on its economy, society and environment.

1961

Despite the support he has received over the years from the US as a staunch anticommunist ally, Rafael Trujillo is assassinated by a group of CIA-trained Dominican dissidents.

1962–63

In the first democratic election in nearly 40 years, Juan Bosch, the leader of the left-leaning Dominican Revolutionary Party, is elected president and subsequently removed in a coup orchestrated by a three-person junta.

1965

In April Lyndon Johnson sends almost 23,000 US Army and Marines to invade the Dominican Republic, ostensibly to prevent a civil war. The troops remain until October 1966.

1982

Distraught over revelations of financial corruption and improprieties, incumbent President Silvestre Antonio Guzmán Fernández commits suicide, with just over a month left in his term of office.

1986

After an eight-year hiatus from power, Joaquín Balaguer, 80 years old and blind, is elected to his fifth term as president despite his previous administration's notorious corruption and dismal human rights record.

1996

After massive election fraud and widespread national and international pressure, Balaguer agrees to step down after two years and Leonel Fernández, a 42-year-old lawyer who grew up in New York City, is elected president.

to cut his last term short, hold elections and, most importantly, not be a candidate. But it wouldn't be his last campaign – he would run once more at the age of 92, winning 23% of the vote in the 2000 presidential election. Thousands would mourn his death two years later, despite the fact that he prolonged the Trujillo-style dictatorship for decades. His most lasting legacy may be the Faro a Colón (see p86), an enormously expensive monument to the discovery of the Americas that drained Santo Domingo of electricity whenever the lighthouse was turned on.

The Last Playboy: The High Life of Porfirio Rubirosa by Shawn Levy tells the life story of the DR's most famous womanizer and Trujillo intimate.

BREAKING WITH THE PAST

The Dominican people signaled their desire for change in electing Leonel Fernández, a 42-year-old lawyer who grew up in New York City, as president in the 1996 presidential election; he edged out three-time candidate José Francisco Peña Gómez in a runoff. But would too much change come too quickly? Shocking the nation, Fernández forcibly retired two dozen generals, encouraged his defense minister to submit to questioning by the civilian attorney general and fired the defense minister for insubordination – all in a single week. In the four years of his presidency, he presided over strong economic growth and privatization, and lowered inflation, unemployment and illiteracy – endemic corruption, however, remained pervasive.

Hipólito Mejía, a former tobacco farmer, succeeded Fernández in 2000 and immediately cut spending and increased fuel prices, not exactly the platform he ran on. The faltering US economy and September 11 attacks ate into Dominican exports, as well as cash remittances and foreign tourism. Corruption scandals involving civil service, unchecked spending, electricity shortages and several bank failures, which cost the government in the form of huge bailouts for depositors, all spelled doom for Mejía's reelection chances.

Familiar faces reappear again and again in Dominican politics and Fernández returned to the national stage by handily defeating Mejía in the 2004 presidential elections. Though he's widely considered competent and even forward thinking, it's not uncommon to hear people talk about him rather unenthusiastically as a typical politician beholden to special interests. The more cynical observers claim that the Fernández administration is allied with corrupt business and government officials that perpetuate a patronage system different from Trujillo's rule in name only. In May 2008, despite the challenges like the faltering US economy, the devastation wrought by Tropical Storm Noel, the threat of avian flu and continued tension with Haiti, Fernández was reelected for another presidential term.

Check <http://lanic.utexas.edu/la/ca/dr> for detailed information about past and current Dominican leaders and politicians as well as basic economic information.

An excellent website www.hispaniola.com has historical information and up-to-date travel listings.

2003–04

A growing financial crisis sparks widespread public unrest and protests, including a general strike in which several people are killed and scores injured by police.

2007

Tropical Storm Noel devastates much of the country, destroying roads and bridges, stranding communities for weeks and killing over 120 people. The government's response is questioned.

2008

In May Leonel Fernández convincingly wins reelection to his third presidential term; a 2002 constitutional amendment allows him to again run for office.

Dominican Republic Culture

THE NATIONAL PSYCHE

History is alive and well in the Dominican Republic. With a past filled by strong-man dictators and corrupt politicians, the average Dominican approaches the present with a healthy skepticism – why should things change now? Whether it's the Santo Domingo taxi driver's outspoken disbelief that the metro will ever function or the local fisherfolks' acceptance that the new resort marina is going to take away their livelihood, Dominicans have learned to live through hardships. What is extraordinary to the traveler is that despite this, there's a general equanimity, or at the very least an ability to look on the bright side of things. Sure, people complain, they know unfairness and exploitation when they see it, but on the whole they're able to appreciate the good things: family, togetherness, music and laughter. It's not a cliché to say that Dominicans are willing to hope for the best and expect the worst – with a fortitude and patience that isn't common.

In May 2008 President Leonel Fernández won reelection for a second consecutive term (his third in total) despite a challenge from Miguel Vargas Maldonado of the Dominican Revolutionary Party, amongst other opposition candidates. Fernández, widely considered competent, if not especially courageous or willing to disrupt the ensconced patronage system that rewards established elite politicians and businesspeople at the expense of the general welfare (not an uncommon complaint the world over), doesn't elicit strong passions. In general, he's seen as being better than the alternative.

Fernández won without having to face a runoff, despite mounting criticism in late 2007. This included questions about the logic of spending US\$700 million on Santo Domingo's subway system (see p103), rising gas prices, the fact that the DR still has one of the highest rates of income inequality in Latin America and the government's less than stellar response to the devastation wrought by Tropical Storm Noel in late October 2007 – all signs of Dominicans' comfort with the status quo.

The impact of Noel (Tropical Storm Olga in December 2007 only exacerbated the damage) is proving to be a particularly complicated and demanding challenge: over 66,000 people were displaced from their homes and around 100 communities were completely isolated, some for over two weeks, because of damaged roads and bridges and massive layoffs in the agricultural industry after crop production took a major hit.

So while over three million people, mostly foreign tourists, visited the country in 2007, more than any other island in the Caribbean, Dominicans continue to migrate in the other direction, seeking better lives abroad, mostly in the US. In 2006 the United States Coast Guard intercepted more than 1300 Dominicans attempting the crossing from the Mona passage to Puerto Rico; in the last several years alone dozens have lost their lives. The DR has also become a major transshipment hub for drugs; hundreds of flights and an even larger number of boats arrive yearly on the DR's shores, transporting mostly cocaine from elsewhere in South America, most notably Columbia, on its way to the US and Europe.

History in the DR can be foreshortened like an accordion to suit political arguments and buttress opinions. Some Dominicans still refer angrily to the Haitian occupation of their country over 160 years ago and many poor

The Devil Behind the Mirror: Globalization and Politics in the Dominican Republic by Stephen Gregory investigates the realities of the impact of global culture and capital on ordinary lives in the Dominican Republic, especially the towns of Boca Chica and Andrés.

Dominicans accuse Haitians of stealing jobs that are rightfully theirs. Like roommates with different lifestyles that share a too small space, Dominicans chafe when Haiti is in the news, looking to the past to explain current conflicts. Haitians are typically blamed for overburdened schools, insufficient health care and rising crime rates, especially guns, drugs and prostitution. If the country could just solve the 'Haiti problem' things would work out is not an unusual sentiment to hear. By the end of 2007 there were 200 UN soldiers, mostly from other Caribbean countries, to help buttress the DR army's attempts to stop the flow of drugs and arms across the Haitian border. In early 2008 there were increased tensions along the border over accusations of cattle rustling and reprisals, and Dominican chickens being turned away because of fears over avian flu.

Generally an accepting and welcoming culture, Dominicans' negative attitudes toward Haitian immigration have only become more pronounced as the country has received more and more international criticism over its treatment of the nearly one million Haitians in the DR. Ironically and sometimes tragically, both peoples tend to have more in common than not; both are from primarily poor countries with weak political legacies and share an origin story, not to mention an island. However, the average income in the DR is six times that of Haiti's and so Haitians risk losing all legal and civil rights, not to mention enduring terribly poor living conditions and the threat of violence, to earn more money working on the vast sugar plantations in the DR. Haitians have few legal protections; in 2005 the Dominican Supreme Court ruled that the children of visitors 'in transit' were not afforded citizenship. This ruling defines illegal immigrants, which virtually all Haitian workers are, as 'in transit', meaning that even those Haitians who were born in the DR and have lived their entire lives in the DR are denied citizenship.

Dominicans question the perspective of foreigners who focus exclusively on the plight of Haitians rather than on the welfare of poor Dominicans. And government officials are quick to claim that 30% of the DR's health-care budget goes toward caring for Haitians, even though they make up around 11% of the population; the DR provides jobs and income for Haitians, something the international community does not do; foreigners lecturing them about human rights abuses ignore the poor records of their own home countries; and finally that the DR has few resources to deal with border issues, let alone other pressing problems faced by all Dominicans. Nevertheless, in 2006 the government pledged to improve the living conditions on the *bateyes* (communities of Haitian sugarcane workers) and to provide labor contracts with a guaranteed minimum wage.

LIFESTYLE

Like any country, it's difficult to generalize about Dominicans' lifestyles. That said, there is a certain amount of cohesiveness and continuity experienced from one part of the country to the other. The real differences, unsurprisingly, are in terms of income and gender. After all, one out of eight Dominicans in 2006 lacked electricity, while the remainder experience regular blackouts. Nearly 40% of the population lives below the poverty line, the average per capita income is US\$2850, the unemployment rate is over 15% and the wealthiest 10% control 40% of the country's total economy.

Women make up less than one-third of the DR's paid workforce and the vast majority are employed as domestic workers or low-level office workers. Almost 30% of women are single mothers, and make up one of the largest groups of people living in poverty. Women are poorly represented in government and politics as well, making up just 10% to 15% of legislator and top- or middle-level cabinet officer positions.

The Sugar Babies: The Plight of the Children of Agricultural Workers in the Sugar Industry of the Dominican Republic, released in 2007, is a documentary depicting the plight of Haitian sugar-cane workers in the *bateyes* (communities of Haitian sugarcane workers) of the Dominican Republic.

Two companies are responsible for 85% of the DR's total sugar production, in addition to numerous other investments. Romana is owned by the Fanjuls who also own Casa de Campo resort; Vicini also has partial ownership in two newspapers, *El Caribe* and *Diario Libre*.

Almost a quarter of Dominicans live in Santo Domingo, which is without question the country's political, economic and social center. But beyond the capital, much of the DR is distinctly rural, and a large percentage of Dominicans still rely on agriculture for their livelihood (or by fishing along the coast). This is evident if you drive into the DR's vast fertile interior, where you'll see cows and horses grazing alongside the roads, tractors plowing large fields, and trucks and burros loaded down with produce.

Dominican families, typical of the stereotypical Latin American kind, are large and very close knit. Children are expected to stay close to home and help care for their parents as they grow older. That so many young Dominicans go to the US creates a unique stress in their families. While Americans and Europeans commonly leave home to live and work in another city, this is still troubling for many Dominicans, especially for the older generation – it's no surprise that Dominicans living abroad send so much money home.

The DR is a Catholic country, though not to the degree practiced in other Latin American countries – the churches are well maintained but often empty – and Dominicans have a liberal attitude toward premarital and recreational sex. This does not extend to homosexuality though, which is still fairly taboo. *Machismo* is strong here but, like in merengue dancing, many Dominicans experience the traditional roles of men and women as more complementary than confrontational, as naturally separate spheres of influence. And the physical, mainly in the way a woman looks or dances, is appreciated unashamedly by both sexes.

ECONOMY

The Dominican Republic earns more tourism dollars than any other country in Latin America – except Mexico and Brazil. Unsurprisingly, the service industry, primarily tourism but the newly exploding free-trade zone areas as well, is the largest employer and earner in the DR. Another major revenue source are remittances from Dominicans living abroad – more than one million people, principally in New York and the eastern US, collectively send over US\$1 billion to the DR yearly. Mining operations – gold, silver, ferronickel and bauxite – are another big chunk of GDP. In fact, in early 2008 a Canadian mining company made the largest investment in the country's history, agreeing to a US\$2.6 billion fee to reopen Pueblo Viejo, a formerly government-owned gold mine in the central DR. Agriculture, once the largest source of export dollars, is still significant. Sugar, coffee, cocoa, tobacco and tropical fruits are the primary crops.

Despite strong growth in many of these sectors, it would be difficult to call the Dominican economy healthy (for economic statistics, see opposite), but President Leonel Fernández's 2008 reelection can be interpreted as a vote of confidence on his administration's ability to steward the economy through a global economic downturn. With 72% of exports sold to the US, the US's own faltering economy, the devaluation of the dollar, rising oil prices and the impact of Tropical Storm Noel, the challenges ahead are significant.

POPULATION

The Dominican Republic has roughly 9.5 million residents. A little under three-quarters are of mixed ethnic or racial ancestry. Those who are of mixed European and African descent, the most common, are referred to as *Indio*, although this term popularized under the Trujillo administration intentionally elides their African heritage. The next largest group are *mestizo* or people of mixed European and indigenous descent. A minority of Dominicans are considered full Euro-Caucasian (16%) or of African (11%) ancestry.

Azucar! The Story of Sugar by Alan Cambeira is a fascinating novel that portrays the human toll of sugar production in the DR. Though the story is fictional, much of the information, descriptions and events are based on real events and detailed research by the author.

More than 20,000 Haitians cross into the Dominican Republic yearly to work on the sugar plantations.

All Dominican sugar that is exported from the country is sold to the US.

There is a sprinkling of other ethnic groups, including Chinese, Japanese, Arab and Jewish (of mostly European descent), the result of various waves of immigrants. In addition to Spanish colonists and enslaved Africans, groups that have settled here over the centuries include Sephardic Jews from Curaçao, Canary Islanders, Germans, Italians, Cubans, Puerto Ricans, Lebanese, Syrians, Palestinians, Jewish refugees from Germany, Japanese, Hungarians, freed slaves from the US, and Protestant workers from Great Britain, the Netherlands and Denmark. Mainland Chinese came in small numbers in the early 20th century, but by the 1980s Chinese immigrants were the second-fastest-growing immigrant group in the Dominican Republic.

SPORTS

A number of sports and pastimes are popular in the Dominican Republic, including volleyball, basketball, soccer and horseracing. But two sports – baseball and cockfighting – are far and away the most popular and both have long, rich traditions.

Baseball

Not just the USA's game, *beisbol* is part of the Dominican social and cultural landscape. So much so that ballplayers who have made good in the US major leagues are without doubt the most popular and revered figures in the country. Over 400 Dominicans have played in the major leagues (in 2007 there were 99 Dominicans, around 10% of all major leaguers), including active players like David Ortiz, Moises Alou, Julio Franco, Pedro Martinez, Albert Pujols and most famously Sama Sosa, who is likely one day to be inducted into the Hall of Fame in Cooperstown, New York. Two dozen major league teams have training facilities here.

The Dominican professional baseball league's season runs from October to January, and is known as the Liga de Invierno (Winter League; the winner of the DR league competes in the Caribbean World Series against other Latin-American countries). The country has six professional baseball teams: Licey and Escojido, both of Santo Domingo; the Águilas from Santiago; the Estrellas from San Pedro de Macoris; the Gigantes de San Francisco de Macoris; and the Azuqueros from La Romana. Because the US and Dominican seasons don't overlap, many Dominican players in the US major leagues and quite a few non-Dominicans play in the winter league in the DR as well (rookie teams play a second season from June to August). Needless to say, the quality of play is high, but even if you're not a fan of the sport, it's worth checking out a game or two. It's always a fun afternoon or evening. Fans are decked out in their respective team's colors waving pennants and flags, as rabidly partisan as the Yankees–Red Sox rivalry, and dancers in hot pants perform to loud merengue beats on top of the dugouts between innings.

Cockfighting

Cockfighting rings (*galleras*) look like mini sports arenas or ancient coliseums, which is appropriate since Dominicans approach these brutal contests between specially bred roosters as events worthy of the same enthusiasm. There are around 1500 official *galleras* throughout the country, but by far the most prestigious – and safe – is the Coliseo Gallístico Alberto Bonetti Burgos (p99), which regularly hosts international competitions. Gambling on fights is part of the sport, all conducted under a strict honor code. That said, some small-town rings are decidedly seedy and tourists should be alert for trouble.

It's said that fighting roosters first arrived on the island in 1492 with Columbus and that the sport is as much part of the Dominican culture as

bullfighting is in Spain, maybe even more so. Perhaps it's no surprise that cockfighting – specifically the roosters' intensity and willingness to fight to the death – would resonate in a country that has endured so much civil strife and outside manipulation. Indeed, the fighting rooster is the symbol of a number of political parties and social organizations. It is an institution with deep roots in Dominican culture, which is why many Dominicans responded with amused outrage when several Dominicans playing in the US baseball major leagues, most prominently Pedro Martínez of the Mets, were the focus of attention and criticism when it came to light that they frequented *galleras* when in the DR. For those reasons, many travelers see cockfighting as a window to Dominican culture. Others cannot reconcile a night at the *galleria* with the concept of responsible tourism. It is impossible to argue that cockfighting is not a form of cruelty to animals – after all, the point is for one animal to kill the other, sometimes slowly and agonizingly, for the sake of entertainment and monetary gain. Both are justifiable points of view.

MEDIA

Unsurprisingly, Santo Domingo is the unrivaled media capital of the country with seven daily papers. Countrywide, there are over 300 radio stations and 42 TV stations. And like many countries, especially ones of such a relatively small size, a handful of large companies with diverse interests have controlling or partial ownership in a number of media outlets, prompting critics to question their independence.

RELIGION

Around 95% of Dominicans profess to be Roman Catholic. For a large majority though, religious practice is limited and formalistic. Few actually attend Mass regularly. As in many Latin American countries, evangelical Protestant Christianity has gained a strong foothold in Dominican culture, attracting adherents with dramatic faith healings and fiery sermons. Many Haitian immigrants and their descendants are Catholic in name and identity, but continue to practice elements of traditional Vodou spiritualism. Such practices are generally done in secret, as the Dominican government, Catholic church and much of the public view Vodou as pagan or even evil.

ARTS

Music & Dance

From the minute you arrive in the DR until the minute you leave, merengue will be coming at you at full volume. At a restaurant, in public buses or taxis – it's there. At the beach or walking down the street – yet more merengue. Merengue is the dance music of the Dominican Republic, and if you attend a dance club here and take a shine to the music, you may want to pick up some cassettes or CDs before leaving the country. There are many merengue bands in the DR; the nation's favorites include Johnny Ventura, Coco Band, Wilfredo Vargas, Milly y Los Vecinos, Fernando Villalona, Joseito Mateo, Rubby Perez, Miriam Cruz, Milly Quezada and, perhaps the biggest name of all, Juan Luis Guerra.

Dominicans dance merengue with passion and flair. It follows a distinctive 2-2 and 2-4 beat pattern typically played with drums, an accordion-like instrument known as a melodeon, and a *güira*, a metal instrument that looks a little like a cheese grater and is scraped using a metal or plastic rod. If you have a chance, go to a nightclub or dance hall where merengue is played. Even if you don't dance – something Dominicans will find very peculiar – you can't help but be impressed by the sheer skill and artfulness of even amateur dancers.

The Tropic of Baseball: Baseball in the Dominican Republic by Rob Ruck gives a comprehensive look at the DR's national obsession, and the impact of Dominican players on the US major leagues.

The documentary *The Republic of Baseball: The Dominican Giants of the American Game* (2006) profiles the careers of the first great Dominican stars of Major League Baseball.

Sugar, a feature film about baseball in the DR, follows the eponymous hero as his fastball takes him from his beloved family and country to the minor leagues in Iowa. Eventually, his alienation leads him to seek out the Dominican community in New York City.

The 2007 documentary *The Price of Sugar* follows Father Christopher Hartley, a passionate advocate of the poor, as he confronts sugar-company authorities, politicians and ordinary Dominicans, pressing them to recognize the humanity of the Haitians who live and work in their midst in utterly deplorable conditions.

The website www.colonialzone-dr.com is not only an online guide to the Zona Colonial in Santo Domingo, but also a good source of information about Dominican art, history, myths, superstitions and language.

Since 1986 merengue and *bachata* superstar Juan Luis Guerra has won almost every major music award possible, including a Grammy, three more Grammy nominations, three Latin Grammys, five Billboard Latin Music Awards and two Premios Soberanos.

THE GÜIRA

The *güira* is a popular musical instrument that is used to infuse a song with a rhythmical rasping sound. It was originally used by Hispaniola's indigenous people – the Tainos – who used dried, hollowed-out gourds and a forked stick to produce music for their *areítos* (ceremonial songs). Today the *güira* has been modernized – but not by much. Instead of using vegetables, the modern *güira* is made of latten brass; it typically looks like a cylindrical cheese grater that is scraped with a long metal pick. The rasping sound is essentially the same – the modern-day instrument just lasts a little longer. The next time you hear a merengue or a *bachata* song, listen carefully – you're sure to hear this centuries-old sound.

Whereas merengue might be viewed as urban music, *bachata* is definitely the nation's 'country' music. This is the music of breaking up, of broken hearts, of one man's love for a woman or one woman's love for a man, of life in the country. The term initially referred to informal backyard parties in rural areas, finally emerging in Santo Domingo shanties. '*Bachata*' was meant as a slight by the urban elite, a reference to the music's supposed unsophistication. Among the big names of *bachata* are Raulín Rodríguez, Antony Santos, Joe Veras, Luis Vargas, Quico Rodríguez and Leo Valdez. *Bachata Roja* is a new compilation of classic *bachata* from the early 1960s to late '80s, the pre-electric era when the music was entirely guitar based and drew on a bunch of musical traditions, including Mexican *ranchera*, Puerto Rican *jíbaro*, Cuban bolero, guaracha and *son*. It includes legendary musicians like Edilio Paredes and Augusto Santos.

Salsa, like *bachata*, is heard on many Caribbean islands, and it's very popular in the DR. If you like the music, it may interest you to know that the following individuals and groups enjoy particularly favorable reputations in the DR: Tito Puente, Tito Rojas, Jerry Rivera, Tito Gómez, Grupo Niche, Gilberto Santa Rosa, Mimi Ibara, Marc Anthony and Leonardo Paniagua.

Reggaeton, a mix of American-style hip-hop and Latin rhythms, is increasingly popular; Wisin & Yandel is a well-known reggaeton duo. Other names to look out for are Pavel Nuñez, an established star whose music is a mix between folk and Latin, and Kat DeLuna, a 19-year-old up-and-coming singer, whose music is a hodge-podge of styles and rhythms.

Literature

The Dominican Republic's literary history dates to the Spanish colonial period (1492–1795). It was then that Bartolomé de Las Casas, a Spanish friar, recorded the early history of the Caribbean and pleaded for fair treatment of the Tainos in his famous *Historia de las Indias* (History of the Indies). During the same era Gabriel Téllez, a priest who helped to reorganize the convent of Our Lady of Mercy in Santo Domingo, wrote his impressive *Historia general de la Orden de la Merced* (General History of the Order of Mercy).

During the Haitian occupation of Santo Domingo (1822–44), French literary style became prominent, and many Dominican writers who emigrated to other Spanish-speaking countries made names for themselves there. With the first proclamation of independence in 1844, Félix María del Monte created the country's principal poetic form – a short patriotic poem based on local events of the day.

During the late 19th and early 20th centuries, three literary movements occurred in the DR: *indigenismo*, *criollismo* and *postuismo*. *Indigenismo* exposed the brutalities the Tainos experienced at the hands of the Spaniards. *Criollismo* focused on the local people and their customs. And *postuismo* dealt with the repression that Rafael Trujillo's iron-fist leader-

ship brought. Some writers, such as Manuel and Lupo Fernández Rueda, used clever metaphors to protest the regime. Juan Bosch Gaviño, writing from exile, penned numerous stories that openly attacked Trujillo.

Only a few Dominican novels have been translated into English. Viriato Sención's *They Forged the Signature of God*, winner of the DR's 1993 National Fiction award (after realizing that the book was critical of both Trujillo and himself, Balaguer rescinded the prize) and the country's all-time best seller, follows three seminary students suffering oppression at the hands of both the state and the church. Though slightly preachy, it provides another perspective on the Trujillo regime besides the exceptional *Fiesta del Chivo* (*Feast of the Goat*) by the Peruvian novelist Mario Vargas Llosa.

Ten years after publishing the short-story collection *Drown*, Junot Díaz received critical acclaim for his 2007 novel *The Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*, a stylistically inventive story of a self-professed Dominican nerd in New Jersey and the tragic history of his family in the DR. Less well known than Díaz's novel, but maybe a more devastating picture of the Dominican diaspora's rejection of the conventional American Dream, is Maritza Pérez's *Geographies of Home*. For Spanish readers, other recommended young Dominican authors are Pedro Antonio Valdés (*Bachata del ángel caído*, *Carnaval de Sodoma*), Rita Indiana Hernández (*La estrategia de Chochueca*, *Papi*) and Aurora Arias (*Inyi's Paradise*, *Fin del mundo*, *Emoticons*). In *The Time of the Butterflies* is an award-winning novel by Julia Álvarez about three sisters slain for their part in a plot to overthrow Trujillo. Also by Álvarez is *How the García Girls Lost Their Accents*, describing an emigrant Dominican family in New York. Other well-known contemporary Dominican writers include José Goudy Pratt, Jeannette Miller and Ivan García Guerra.

Painting

The Dominican art scene today is quite healthy, thanks in no small part to dictator Rafael Trujillo. Although his 31 years of authoritarian rule in many ways negated the essence of creative freedom, Trujillo had a warm place in his heart for paintings, and in 1942 he established the Escuela Nacional de Bellas Artes (National School of Fine Arts). Fine Dominican artwork predates the school, but it really wasn't until the institution's doors opened that Dominican art underwent its definitive development.

If the artwork looks distinctly Spanish, it's because the influence is undeniable. During the Spanish Civil War (1936–39), many artists fled Franco's fascist regime to start new lives in the Dominican Republic. Influential artists include Manolo Pascual, José Gausachs, José Vela-Zanetti, Eugenio Fernández Granell and José Fernández Corredor.

The Dominican Republic has also produced many accomplished painters; if you visit any of the art galleries in Santo Domingo (see p99) or Santiago (p207), keep an eye out for paintings by Adriana Billini Gautreau, who is famous for portraits that are rich in expressionist touches; the cubist forms of Jaime Colson emphasizing the social crises of his day; Luis Desangles, considered the forerunner of folklore in Dominican painting; Mariano Eckert, representing the realism of everyday life; Juan Bautista Gómez, whose paintings depict the sensuality of the landscape; and Guillo Pérez, whose works of oxen, carts and canefields convey a poetic vision of life at the sugar mill.

Also well represented is what's known as 'primitive art' – Dominican and Haitian paintings that convey rural Caribbean life with simple and colorful figures and landscapes. These paintings are created by amateur

Bachata: A Social History of Dominican Popular Music by Deborah Pacini Hernandez and *Merengue: Dominican Music and Dominican Identity* by Paul Austerlitz are academic examinations of the Dominican Republic's two most important musical contributions and obsessions.

Death in Paradise by JB Mackinnon is perhaps the best contemporary account of the DR. The author, the nephew of a Canadian priest murdered by agents of the Trujillo government, travels the country, from the barrios of Santo Domingo to rural villages, trying to unravel how and why his uncle was killed.

The Eduardo León Jimenes Art Contest in Santiago began in 1964 and is the longest-running privately sponsored art competition in Latin America.

DOMINICAN CINEMA

The Dominican Republic does not have a strong film industry of its own; only a handful of films made by Dominican directors have reached a wider audience. Two of the more interesting films of the past several years are *Sanky Panky* and *Yunior 2*.

But more than 60 films and TV shows ranging from *Miami Vice* to *The Godfather: Part II* have been shot in full or in part in the DR. Some of the famous river scenes in the 1979 classic *Apocalypse Now* by Francis Ford Coppola were filmed on the Río Chavón near La Romana. Several scenes from Steven Spielberg's 1993 *Jurassic Park* were shot at Salto Jimenoa Uno outside of Jarabacoa. The film, based on a Michael Crichton book about a scientist who extracts blood from a mosquito trapped in amber to clone dinosaurs, is credited with reviving interest in amber and amber jewelry across the world.

painters – some would say skilled craftsmen – who reproduce the same painting hundreds of times. They are sold everywhere there are tourists; you're sure to get an eyeful regardless of the length of your trip.

Architecture

The quality and variety of architecture found in the Dominican Republic has no equal in the Caribbean. In Santo Domingo and in Santiago you can see examples of Cuban Victorian, Caribbean gingerbread and Art Deco; in the Zona Colonial you'll also see plenty of the Gothic, which was popular in Europe during the colonial times. The buildings in Puerto Plata vary between the vernacular Antillean and the pure Victorian, sometimes English, sometimes North American. San Pedro de Macoris has late-Victorian style buildings that were created with concrete (in fact, it was the first city in the DR to use reinforced concrete in its construction). And rural clapboard homes have a charm all of their own: small, square, single story and more colorful than a handful of jelly beans, you'll find yourself slowing down to take a longer look.

Dominican Republic Outdoors

WATER SPORTS

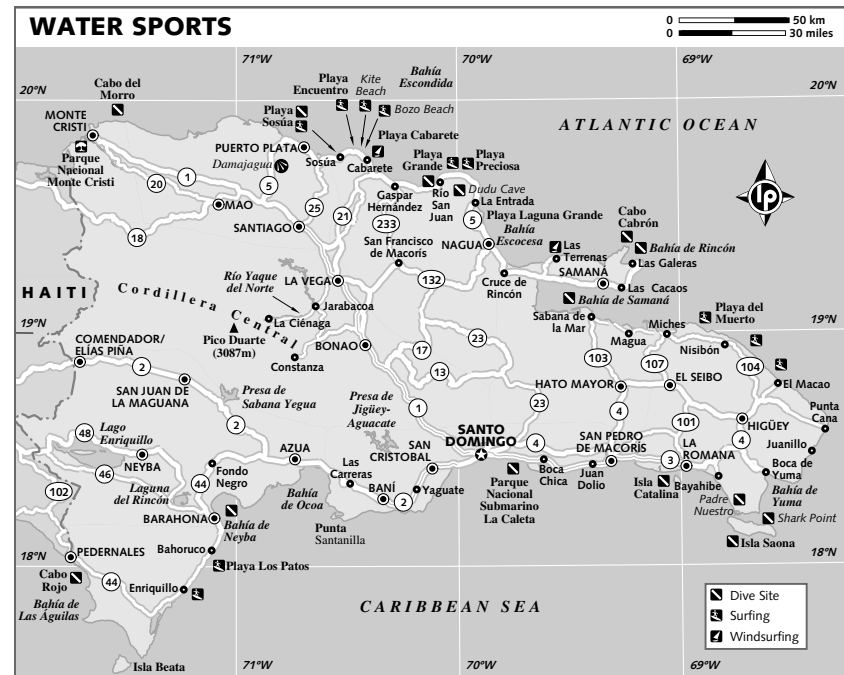
If it involves standing on a board, the Dominican Republic's got it in spades – here you'll find world-class windsurfing, kitesurfing, surfing and wakeboarding. While there's a few scattered spots across the island if you're adventurous, the undisputed water sports capital of the DR is Cabarete (p184), on the North Coast.

WINDSURFING

Cabarete's bay seems almost custom-made for windsurfing, and it's here that the sport is most popular – although you'll also find a small windsurfing school in Las Terrenas (p155). The best time to come is generally in winter, when the wind is strongest – in general, windsurfing requires stronger winds than kitesurfing does.

The beach at Cabarete is lined with outfits small and large, renting windsurf equipment and offering lessons for beginners. Renting a board and sail will cost about US\$35/65/300 per hour/day/week. Lessons range from just one hour (US\$50) to a complete four-session course (US\$200).

Bruce van Sant, the author of the boater's bible to finding the 'thornless path' from Florida through the islands, *The Gentleman's Guide to Passages South*, is something of a legend, and resides in Luperón, on the north coast of the DR.



In general, windsurfing is much easier to learn than kitesurfing, meaning you can be out on the water enjoying yourself within a few days' time. Lessons and equipment rentals are also significantly cheaper.

KITESURFING

Kitesurfing (also known as kiteboarding) is the sport *du jour*, and involves strapping a board to your feet and a powerful kite to your torso, which propels you through the waves at sometimes breakneck speeds.

The learning curve to get good enough to enjoy kitesurfing is quite steep – as much as a week's worth of lessons to go out solo, and weeks of practice to get comfortable at it. It's also an expensive sport – to make this a regular hobby, you'll end up investing at least US\$5000 in lessons and gear. No wonder, then, that around 90% of students who take lessons don't generally advance to become regular kiteboarders.

That said, if you've got the time and the money, and you relish a challenge, the DR is one of the world's leading kitesurfing destinations – so much so that the **International Kiteboarding Organization** (www.ikointl.com) has its headquarters in Cabarete.

Unlike surfing or windsurfing, where risk increases with ability – you have to be good to get out to the reefline – kitesurfing is risky from the very beginning. The kite leads, pulled taught by the wind, are diving, swooping knife blades, and it's important you learn from qualified instructors, for your safety and for that of others.

Plenty of kitesurfing schools offer instruction in Cabarete. Most people need a minimum of four days of lessons at a cost of around US\$350 to US\$450. Schools and instructors vary considerably in personality, so spend some time finding one where you feel comfortable.

There's also a few good kitesurfing spots in Las Terrenas (p155) in Samaná, although the wind is lighter and the water shallower.

SURFING

Cabarete is also the top spot in the country for surfing, although the intrepid surfer traveling with boardbag in tow could easily explore many of the lesser-visited beaches along both the north and south coast. The best season to surf is December through March, when the region can get waves up to 4m high.

Playa Encuentro (p185), 4km west of Cabarete, has the best waves on the island, where awesome tubes often pound into shore. Other popular places for surfing are Playa Grande (p193) and Playa Preciosa (p194), both near Río San Juan.

There are a number of surf shops in Cabarete and on Playa Encuentro itself where you can rent boards or take surfing lessons. Rentals cost US\$25 to US\$30 for half a day; courses vary from three-hour introductory sessions

SORRY KAYAKERS

The DR holds great potential for both sea and river kayaking, a potential that is largely unfulfilled. While a few scattered shops and hotels around the country can rent you a sea kayak for a paddle along the beach, the activity remains unpopular. Probably the best sea kayaking you'll find is a kayaking tour of the mangroves in Parque Nacional Los Haitises (p140) – a pleasant morning's saltwater paddle. The tour operators in Las Terrenas (p158) can organize this for you.

Gung-ho river kayakers looking for some crazy rapids (and who don't mind traveling with a kayak in their luggage) should head up to Jarabacoa (p213), where Class III, IV and V rapids surge past on the nearby Río Yaque del Norte.

www.cabaretekiteboarding.com and www.cabaretwindsurfing.com focus on kitesurfing and windsurfing respectively with listings of schools, rental and retail outfits, plus reports on conditions and upcoming events.

Kitesurfers perform tricks such as 'kite looping,' 'back-side handle passes,' 'mobius' and 'slim chance.'

www.activecabarete.com features listings, information and reviews about sporting activities in and around Cabarete.

WHITE-WATER RAFTING

The Dominican Republic has the only navigable white-water river in the Caribbean, the Río Yaque del Norte. It's mostly a Class II and III river, with a couple of serious rapids, and the rest consists of fun little holes and rolls. The river winds through hilly countryside and makes for a fun half-day tour. Be aware that the water is frigid – you'll be issued a wetsuit along with your life vest and helmet. While you can make this a day trip from the north coast or Santo Domingo, it's a long journey in a bus – you'll enjoy yourself a great deal more if you spend a couple of nights in Jarabacoa (p213). Trips cost around US\$50 per person.

(US\$45 to US\$50) to a full-blown five-day surf camp (US\$200 to US\$225 per person). You can also rent surf boards at Playa Grande.

Bodyboarding

For those not keen on hanging ten, the DR's beaches make ideal spots for this gentler pastime. Most resorts and larger hotels have a few bodyboards you can use for free, and on the more remote beaches you can sometimes find a beach-side shack where you can rent a board for a few bucks an hour.

WAKEBOARDING

Water skiing has gone the way of corduroy bellbottoms, and in its place is this new sport – the principle is the same but instead of 'water skis' you use a 'water board,' or 'wakeboard.' The sport has a small but passionate community of enthusiasts, and kiteboarders swear it's a great way to develop your board skills.

There's only one wakeboarding school in the country, at La Boca just outside Cabarete, where there's more than 2km of flat, straight river water to play with. The spot attracts devoted wakeboarders from around the world, and on windless days they are joined by kiteboarders looking to practice their bag of tricks.

DIVING & SNORKELING

The DR is not known as a diving destination, but it has some great places for underwater exploring all the same. The warm Caribbean waters on the southern coast have pretty fields of coral and myriad tropical fish that make for fun easy dives. Two national parks east of Santo Domingo – Parque Nacional Submarino La Caleta (p105) and Parque Nacional del Este (p124) – can be reached through dive shops in Boca Chica (p107) and Bayahibe (p124), respectively. La Caleta is an underwater preserve covering just 10 sq km but is one of the country's most popular dive destinations. The main attraction is the *Hickory*, a 39m salvage ship with an interesting past (see boxed text, p107) that was intentionally sunk in 1994. Parque Nacional del Este has a number of interesting dives, too, including another wreck – a massive 89m cargo ship – and a site ominously called Shark Point (p125).

The DR's north coast provides a very different diving experience. Facing the Atlantic, the water there is cooler and somewhat less transparent, but the underwater terrain is much more varied, making for challenging dives and unique profiles. Sosúa (p178) is the dive capital here, and from where excursions can be organized to all points along the coast. Las Galeras (p150) also has a few small dive shops.

Other off-the-beaten-track options are two diveable freshwater caves – Dudu Cave, near Río San Juan, and Padre Nuestró, near Bayahibe. Dudu, with two openings, three different tunnels and a spacious stalactite-filled chamber,

Divers exploring the waters near the Península de Samaná can sometimes hear humpback whales singing.

RESPONSIBLE DIVING

- Never use anchors on the reef and take care not to ground boats on coral.
- Avoid touching or standing on living marine organisms or dragging equipment across the reef. Polyps can be damaged by even the gentlest contact. If you must hold on to the reef, only touch exposed rock or dead coral.
- Be conscious of your fins. Even without contact, the surge from fin strokes near the reef can damage delicate organisms. Take care not to kick up clouds of sand, which can smother organisms.
- Practice and maintain proper buoyancy control. Major damage can be done by divers descending too fast and colliding with the reef.
- Take great care in underwater caves. Spend as little time within them as possible, as your air bubbles may be caught within the roof and thereby leave organisms high and dry. Take turns to inspect the interior of a small cave.
- Resist the temptation to collect or buy corals or shells or to loot marine archaeological sites (mainly shipwrecks).
- Ensure that you take home all your rubbish and any litter you may find as well. Plastics in particular are a serious threat to marine life.
- Do not feed fish.
- Minimize your disturbance of marine animals. *Never* ride on the backs of turtles.

is one of the most memorable cave dives in the Caribbean (although dive shops will want to see an Advanced Diver certificate, or at least 20 logged dives in order to take you out here). Located within the Parque Nacional del Este, Padre Nuestro is a challenging 290m tunnel that should be attempted only by trained cave divers. With the exception of the cave dives, most of the sites mentioned here also make for excellent snorkeling.

Dive prices vary from place to place, but average US\$30 to US\$40 for one tank, plus US\$5 to US\$10 for equipment rental (if you need it). Most people buy multiday packages, which can bring the per-dive price down to around US\$25. You must have an Open Water certificate to dive with any of the shops recommended in this book; if you're new to the sport, all the dive shops also offer the Discover Scuba and Open Water certification courses. For snorkeling, trips cost around US\$25 to US\$40 per person.

There are at least two functioning decompression chambers in the DR: the **Santo Domingo decompression chamber** (Map pp74-5; ☎ 809-593-5900; Base Naval, 27 de Febrero, San Souci Pier, Av España), located on the east side of Río Ozama, and the **Puerto Plata decompression chamber** (Map pp170-1; ☎ 809-586-2210; Hospital Dr Ricardo Limardo, cnr Av Manolo Taveres Busto 1 & Hugo Kundhart). The Santo Domingo chamber, though mainly used for military divers, is open to civilians and tourists in emergencies.

FISHING

Like most places in the Caribbean, there is good sport fishing to be had for those so inclined. Blue marlin peaks in the summer months, there's white marlin in springtime, and mahi-mahi, wahoo and sailfish in wintertime.

The best places to go deep-sea fishing are the north-coast region and Punta Cana. Expect to pay around US\$70 to US\$100 per person (US\$60 to US\$70 for watchers) for a group half-day excursion. Most captains will also gladly charter their boats for private use; expect to pay upwards of US\$700/900 for a half/full day.

The home page of the federal Department of the Environment, www.medioambiente.gov.do (in Spanish), has information on national parks.

BEHOLD LEVIATHAN

Between mid-January and mid-March more than 80% of the reproductively active humpback whales in the North Atlantic – some ten to twelve thousand in all – migrate to the waters around the Península de Samaná to mate. The Bahía de Samaná is a favorite haunt of the whales, and one of the best places in the world to observe these massive, curious creatures. Most tours depart from the town of Samaná (p147), and you are all but guaranteed to see numerous whales surfacing for air, lifting their fins or tail, jostling each other in competition, and even breaching – impressive jumps followed by an equally impressive splash. Whale-watching season coincides with Carnival (every weekend in February) and Independence Day (February 27) – major holidays here – so you should make reservations well in advance.

SWIMMING

When you tire of sunbathing, go in the water for a dip – the water's warm, and nearly all the beaches in the DR are ideal for swimming and bodysurfing. (A few spots do have riptides, and we've mentioned those throughout the book.)

LAND SPORTS**CASCADING & CANYONING**

Cascading – climbing up through a series of waterfalls, and then jumping and sliding down into the pools of water below – is hugely popular at the 27 waterfalls of Damajagua (see boxed text, p196), on the north coast. Lots of travelers told us it was their favorite thing in the DR – it was ours, too.

You'll be issued a life jacket and safety helmet, and guides will lead up, sometimes pulling you up bodily through the force of the water. Some of the jumps down are as much as 5m high.

The best way to visit the waterfalls is to go by yourself – foreigners pay only US\$10 per person, and while a guide is mandatory, there's no minimum group size. Alternatively, you can come with a tour group, but all the package 'jeep safari' tours go only to the 7th waterfall – disappointing. Only one tour agency offers the trip to the very top (see p188).

Canyoning – often referred to as 'canyoneering' in the US – is cascading's technical, older brother, which involves jumping, rappelling and sliding down a slippery river gorge with a cold mountain river raging around you. You'll be issued a safety helmet and usually a shorts-length wetsuit. Canyoning is not especially popular in the DR, but if you're craving an adrenaline rush, there are a few spots in which to indulge yourself near Cabarete (p184) on the north coast and Jarabacoa (p212) in the mountains.

HIKING**Pico Duarte**

The most famous hike in the DR is the ascent of Pico Duarte (3087m; p217), the tallest peak in the Caribbean. It's a tough multiday hike, but involves no technical climbing, and most people hire mules to carry their supplies and equipment up the mountain. About 3000 hikers make it to the top yearly. There are two main routes to the summit (see p218) and several side trips you can take along the way, including hikes through two beautiful alpine valleys and up the Caribbean's second-highest peak, La Pelona, just 100m lower than Pico Duarte.

The website www.godominicanrepublic.com has a variety of information on outdoor activities, golfing and beach activities.

Pico Duarte was first climbed in 1944 as part of the 100th anniversary celebration of the Dominican Republic's independence from Haiti.

KEEP IT CLEAN, FOLKS

If you're headed up Pico Duarte, remember the following:

- Carry out *all* your garbage. Don't overlook easily forgotten items, such as candy bar wrappers, orange peel and cigarette butts. Empty packaging should be stored in a dedicated rubbish bag. Make an effort to carry out rubbish left by others.
- Never bury your rubbish: digging disturbs soil and ground cover and encourages erosion. Buried rubbish is likely to be dug up by animals, who may be injured or poisoned by it. It may also take years to decompose.
- Minimize waste by taking minimal packaging and no more food than you will need. Take reusable containers or stuff sacks.
- Sanitary napkins, tampons, condoms and toilet paper should be carried out despite the inconvenience. They burn and decompose poorly.

While the destination – the peak itself and the views – is stunning, the well-traveled walker may be disappointed by the journey required to get there. You pass quickly through the ferns and moss-bound rainforest of the lower elevations, and once you hit 2200m all you see are burnt-out forests of Caribbean Pine, spaced at regular intervals, with no animals and only cawing crows for company. Still, if it's clear at the top when you get there – and you have time to linger at the summit – then the hard work to get there may be worth it. You'll also enjoy the trip more if you spend part or all of it on the back of a mule.

Shorter Hikes

The DR is not a world-class hiking destination. Still, if you're keen, there are a couple of shorter walks about the place to get the blood moving. The Peninsula de Samaná has some beautiful hikes near Las Galeras (p152), with picturesque deserted beaches as your reward at the end. In the southwest, there's some decent half-day and full-day hikes just outside Pariaiso, although they are best visited as part of a tour (p230). There are also a number of waterfalls around Jarabacoa (p213) that you can hike to.

No matter what hike you take, it's a good idea to have sturdy shoes. For Pico Duarte they are absolutely essential – boots are even better – while some of the coastal hikes can be managed in good sandals with heel straps.

MOUNTAIN BIKING

The Jarabacoa area (p215) is the best and most popular area for mountain-bike riding. Tucked into the mountains, there are a number of dirt roads and single-track trails offering challenging climbs and thrilling descents. The crisp air and cool climate make for ideal cycling, and thick forests and a number of waterfalls are within easy reach.

Cabarete (p189) also has a number of good rides and is home to the DR's best cycling tour operator, Iguana Mama (p188). It offers mountain-bike tours ranging from half-day downhill rides to 12-day cross-country excursions. It can also customize a trip to fit your interests, available time and experience level.

Tour prices vary widely depending on the length of the ride, but begin at around US\$45 per person for half-day trips.

HORSEBACK RIDING

Those equestrian-inclined will find good riding on beaches and in the mountains. You may be somewhat disappointed in the horses, however –

Dominicans themselves tend to use mules, and the few horses on the island are principally for tourists and rich Dominicans. Don't expect to ride a thoroughbred.

A number of stables offer their services through the many tour agencies and resorts listed in this book. Expect to pay roughly US\$50 to US\$70 per person for a half-day ride. You can also ride a mule to the top of Pico Duarte.

BIRD-WATCHING

The DR is a popular destination for gung-ho birders looking for the island's endemic bird species – 31 in all (depending on who you ask and how you count). The very best place to go birding is the southwest, especially the north slope of the Sierra de Bahoruco (p239), where you can spot nearly all the endemics, including the high-altitude La Selle's thrush, western chat tanager, white-winged warbler, rufous throated solitaire and Hispaniolan trogon.

The Jardín Botánico Nacional (National Botanic Gardens) in Santo Domingo (p86) are, surprisingly, also a good spot to look for birds, especially the palm chat, black-crowned palm tanagers, Hispaniolan woodpeckers, vervain hummingbirds and Antillean mangoes.

Parque Nacional Los Haitises (p140) is the only place you're likely to see the highly endangered Ridgway's hawk.

While numerous overseas birding groups brings enthusiasts here, there's only one birding tour company based in the DR (see p231).

GOLF

The DR's top courses all take advantage of the county's dramatic coastline, with holes hugging high cliffs and offering golfers incredible views of the deep-blue and turquoise seas, right along the fairway and greens. Two of the best courses include 'Teeth of the Dog' in La Romana (p121), designed by Pete Dye, and the Playa Grande Golf Course (p194), the last course designed by Robert Trent Jones Sr.

There are many more golf courses to choose from, scattered across the country. Green fees vary widely – from US\$195 at Teeth of the Dog down to just US\$25 for two laps around the hilly par 3 course at Jarabacoa Golf Club (p215), nestled among the pine trees in the central mountains. Most courses require either a caddie or a golf cart, typically US\$10 to US\$25 per round. All courses offer club rental.

Updated in 2006, *Birds of the Dominican Republic & Haiti*, by Steven Latta et al, is the most recent book on birds in the DR.

The 2003 birding manual *The Birds of the West Indies* by Herbert Raffaele et al covers birds across the West Indies, including migratory species you may see in the DR.

Although updated somewhat infrequently, www.golfguide-do.com provides golf-related listings for the Dominican Republic, including information on golf courses, clinics and convenient accommodations.

One of the opening scenes of Steven Spielberg's *Jurassic Park* was filmed in Salto Jimenoa Uno outside of Jarabacoa in the central highlands.

Dominican Republic Food & Drink

Though not known as a culinary capital, eating in the Dominican Republic has its own pleasures. There aren't the same regional variations as you have in Indian, Mexican or French cuisines, but as much as dancing, the act of eating and drinking is the social glue that binds people together. A hybrid of Spanish, African and indigenous staples, flavors and styles, it has several major starches, including rice, potatoes, bananas, yucca and cassava, usually served in large portions – leave your low-carb diet at home.

STAPLES & SPECIALTIES

Dinner is the biggest meal, though neither breakfast nor lunch are exactly light. All three meals usually consist of one main dish – eggs for breakfast, meat for lunch and dinner – served with one or more accompaniments, usually rice, beans, salad and/or boiled vegetables.

The most typically Dominican meal is known as *la bandera* (the flag); it consists of white rice, *habichuela* (red beans), stewed meat, salad and fried green plantains, and is usually accompanied by a fresh fruit juice. It's not hard to see why it's so popular – it's good, cheap, easy to prepare and nutritionally balanced. Red beans are sometimes swapped for small *moros* (black beans), *gandules* (small green beans) or *lentejas* (lentils).

Bananas (*guineos*) are a staple of Dominican cuisine and served in a variety of ways, including boiled, stewed and candied. But the main way Dominicans eat bananas is boiled and mashed, like mashed potatoes. Prepared the same way, but with plantains, the dish is called *mangú*; with pork rinds mixed in it is called *mofongo*. Both are very filling and can be served for breakfast, lunch or dinner, either as a side dish or as the main dish itself.

It should be no surprise that seafood is a central part of Dominican cuisine, especially along the coast where it is sure to be fresh. The most common plate is a fish fillet, usually *mero* (grouper) or *chillo* (red snapper), served in one of four ways: *al ajillo* (with garlic), *al coco* (in coconut sauce), *al criolla* (with a mild tomato sauce) or *a la diablo* (with a spicy tomato sauce). Other seafood like *cangrejo* (crab), *calamar* (octopus), *camarones* (shrimp), *pulp* (squid) and *lambí* (conch) are prepared in the same sauces, as well as *al vinagre* (in vinegar sauce), a variation on ceviche and for many people the tastiest of the lot.

Two other common dishes are *locrio*, the Dominican version of paella – rice is colored with achiote – with a number of different variations, and Dominican sweet bean soup – *habichuela con dulce*, a thick soup with root vegetables. Goat meat is also extremely popular and is presented in many different ways. Two of the best are *pierna de chivo asada con ron y cilantro* (roast leg of goat with rum and cilantro) and *chivo guisado en salsa de tomate* (goat stewed in tomato sauce).

DRINKS Nonalcoholic Drinks

One of the DR's favorite drinks, among locals and foreigners alike, is *batidas* (smoothies), made from crushed fruit, water, ice and several tablespoons of sugar. A *batida con leche* contains milk and is slightly more frothy. Though they can be made of just about any fruit, popular varieties include *piña* (pineapple), *papaya* (known as *lechoza*), *guineo* (banana) and *zapote* (sapote).

CASABE

From ancient Taino cooking fires to elegant presidential banquets, there is at least one common thread, a starchy bread known as *casabe*. High in carbs and low in fat – whatever would Dr Atkins say? – *casabe* is made from ground cassava roots (also known as manioc and a close relation to yucca). Cassava was one of the Taino's principal crops, as it was for numerous indigenous peoples throughout the Caribbean and South America. Easy to plant – just bury a piece of the root or stalk into the ground – it's also fast growing. Europeans brought the hardy plant from the Caribbean to their colonies in Africa and Asia, where it was quickly and widely adopted. *Casabe* is still popular today, especially at traditional meals with soups and stews where it's great for soaking up every last drop. Rather tasteless on its own, *casabe* is best topped with butter, salt, tomato or avocado. A modern variation is the *catibía*, fried cassava flour fritters stuffed with meat.

Some *batidas* have strange local names, such as *morir soñando* (literally, 'to die dreaming'), made of the refreshing and tasty combination of orange juice, milk, sugar and crushed ice.

Juices (*jugos* or sometimes *refrescos*, although the latter also means carbonated soda) are typically made fresh right in front of you and are a great pick-me-up on a hot day. Popular flavors include *chinola* (passionfruit), *piña* (pineapple peel) and *tamarindo* (tamarind). Orange juice is commonly called *jugo de china*, although most people will understand you if you ask for *jugo de naranja*.

Coco, coconut juice from a *cocotero* (a street vendor who hacks out an opening with a machete), is available everywhere from the downtown streets of Santo Domingo to the most isolated beach. *Jugo de caña* (sugarcane juice) is another drink sold from vendors, who are usually on tricycles with a grinder that mashes the cane to liquid; equally popular are the sticky pieces inside that people chew on.

Coffee, grown in six different regions by over 60,000 growers, is a staple of any menu and most Dominicans' diets. It's typically served black in an espresso cup with sugar; a *café con leche* is a coffee with hot milk.

Other popular nonalcoholic Dominican drinks include *ponche de frutas* (fruit punch), *limonada* (lemonade) and *mabí*, a delicious drink made from the bark of the tropical liana vine.

Alcoholic Drinks

When it comes to *ron* (rum), it's tough to beat the Dominican Republic for quality. It is known for its smoothness and its hearty taste, as well as for being less sweet than its Jamaican counterparts. The earliest form of rum was created by accident after colonists left molasses (a by-product of sugar production) in the sun for several days. Adding a little water, they realized that it fermented into a sweet drink with a kick. Homemade rum rapidly gained popularity in the New World and by the 1800s businessmen began perfecting its production. Today over four million cases of rum are produced in the Dominican Republic yearly.

Dozens of local brands are available, but the big three are Brugal, Barceló and Bermudez. Within these three brands, there are many varieties from which to choose, including *blanco* (clear), *dorado* (golden) and *añejo* (aged), which contains caramel and is aged in special wooden casks to mellow the taste. Bermudez, established in 1852, is the oldest of the distilleries.

Most travelers will recognize a *cuba libre* (rum and Coke) but may not have tried a *santo libre* (rum and Sprite), which is just as popular among Dominicans. *Ron ponche* (rum punch) is what you'd expect it to be – a blend of rum and sweet tropical juices – but is more often ordered by foreigners than by locals.

Oranges in the DR are sometimes referred to as *chinas*. That's because in the early to mid-17th century Chinese oranges were the most popular variety in Europe, and the original Spanish settlers in the DR decided it was an easy word to remember.

Road signs throughout the country are sponsored by the Brugal Rum company.

The website www.the.worldwidegourmet.com/countries/westindies/dominican-t/dominican-r.htm provides recipes as well as background on Dominican cooking, especially as it relates to other Caribbean cuisine.

The website www.cookingwithcaro.bizhosting.com provides an excellent resource for Dominican and Creole recipes.

Whiskey is popular in the Dominican Republic and a number of familiar brands, plus a few Dominican variations, are available at most bars – purists will want a *trago de etiqueta roja* (Johnny Walker Red Label) or *trago de etiqueta blanca* (Dewar's White Label). You can also always order Bloody Marys, margaritas, martinis and Tom Collins, and white and black Russians.

There are a handful of locally brewed beers, including Presidente, Quisqueya, Bohemia and Soberante. The best and most popular way to enjoy a beer is to share a *grande* (large) with a friend or two. A tall 1.1L beer is brought to your table in a sort of insulated sleeve, made from either wood or bamboo or from plastic and Styrofoam with a beer label emblazoned on the side, along with a small glass for each of you. There are few experiences more quintessentially Dominican than milking a couple of Presidente *grandes* at a plastic table on the sidewalk patio of a no-name restaurant.

Mamajuana, the DR's own homemade version of Viagra, is a mixture of herbs, dried bark, rum, wine and honey, which is then steeped for around a month. If you can keep it down, it's said to also cure various illnesses and, in general, is a substitute for vitamins.

CELEBRATIONS

There are a number of dishes usually reserved for special occasions, such as baptisms, birthdays and weddings: *puerco asado* (roast pork), *asopao de mariscos* (seafood) and the more modest *locro de pica-pica* (spicy sardines and rice). Dishes like *sancocho de siete carnes* (seven-meat soup), made with sausage, chicken, beef, goat and several pork parts, all combined with green plantains and avocado into a hearty stew, are sometimes found on restaurant menus.

Christmas time in the Dominican Republic is associated with a few specialties: *jengibre*, a drink made of cinnamon, fresh ginger root, water and sugar; *pastelitos* (pastries with meat, vegetable or seafood fillings); *moro de guandules* (rice with pigeon peas and coconut milk); and *ensalada rusa* (basically, potato salad).

WHERE TO EAT & DRINK

Restaurants are called just that – *restaurantes* – though more informal places may be called *comedores*. Most restaurants are open from 8am to 10pm daily, though a few are closed one day per week, typically Sunday, Monday or Tuesday. Reservations are rarely needed. There are very few places in the country where only tourists go, though certainly some cater more to foreigners (and their prices prove it). Most of the restaurants in this book are popular with locals and tourists alike, or even just locals.

Colmados, an institution in Dominican life, are combination corner stores, groceries and bars, and you can usually put together a meal here or, at the very least, grab a Presidente or two.

FOUR MOST ROMANTIC RESTAURANTS IN THE DOMINICAN REPUBLIC

- La Bricola (Santo Domingo; p94) – fine cuisine in an absolutely gorgeous setting on the patio of a mansion in the heart of the Zona Colonial
- Mare Nostrum (Bayahibe; p127) – a candlelit restaurant with water views and delicious, fresh seafood
- Camp David (Santiago; p210) – the balcony provides views of the twinkling city lights below and the food is equally enticing
- Hotel Atlantis (Playa Bonita; p163) – gourmet French food prepared by a master chef in beautiful and peaceful surroundings

Mujer 2000, a classic cookbook compiled by Silvia de Pou, a former television personality, remains one of the most popular in the DR and is now in its 24th edition.

Dominican Cookbook by Maria Ramirez de Carias is a comprehensive and beautifully presented book on the culinary delights of the Dominican Republic.

TAXES & TIPPING

Diners sometimes experience sticker shock after receiving the bill. A whopping 25% is typically added to menu prices. The federal government requires restaurants to add a 16% sales tax and 10% service tax to all bills. The latter is designed to go to the restaurant staff, though it's hard to gauge how much of that the workers actually see. Some restaurants already include taxes in the prices, so be sure to check before ordering if it's a concern. Some people decide to leave an additional 10% tip for their waiter if the service is exceptional. If you're paying with a credit card, leave the tip in cash to make sure that your waiter gets it right away.

Car washes in the DR are rarely just car washes. Combining the passions of many men – automobiles and beer – these facilities, common throughout much of the country, serve drinks throughout the afternoon and evening. Of course, one has to question the wisdom of encouraging drinking and driving.

Quick Eats

By far the most common snack in the DR – one served at nearly every celebration – is the *pastelito* or closely related empanada. Empanadas typically have ham or cheese in them, while *pastelitos* usually contain beef or chicken, which has first been stewed with onions, olives, tomatoes and a variety of seasonings, and then chopped up and mixed with peas, nuts and raisins. Whatever the filling, it's tucked into a patty of dough and fried in boiling oil. *Pastelitos* are a tradition enjoyed by generations of Dominicans, and are made at home as well as by street vendors whose carts are fitted with burners to keep the oil hot. Other traditional Dominican snacks include *frituras de batata* (sweet-potato fritters), *fritos maduros* (ripe plantain fritters), *tostones* (fried plantain slices) and *yaniqueques* (johnny cakes). Dessert snacks include *frio-frio* – shaved ice and syrup, the local snow cone; *agua de coco*, fruits like oranges, bananas and pineapples mixed with sliced coconuts and sugarcane juice; and *helados* (ice cream).

Because most Dominican street food is fried, you can be relatively confident it's safe to eat (your arteries may disagree, however.) A small step up from street vendors are tiny cafeteria-style eateries where food is kept in heated trays under glass. These places can be more risky than street vendors, as the food may have been prepared a long while ago, or have even been recycled from the previous day. If something looks like it's been out all day, it probably has and you're better off avoiding it. That said, some of these eateries are very conscientious about freshness and hygiene, and are a great budget alternative to sit-down restaurants. The truth of the matter is you're more likely to contract food poisoning eating every meal at the buffet in an all-inclusive resort than you are anywhere else.

VEGETARIANS & VEGANS

Vegetarianism is not widely practiced in the Dominican Republic, and there are certainly a large number of Dominicans who view it as downright strange. Still, there are enough nonmeat side dishes in Dominican cuisine – rice, salad, plantains, eggplant, yucca, okra and more – to ensure that vegetarians and even vegans shouldn't have too much problem finding something to eat. Beans are another tasty and easy-to-find staple, though they are often made using lard. Pizza and pasta restaurants are ubiquitous in the DR and there is always at least one vegetarian option on the menu (and if not, it's easy enough to request). Of course, for those vegetarians who make an exception for fish and seafood, there is no problem

A Taste of the Caribbean: Remembrances and Recipes of the Dominican Republic, by Valerie Grullon and Susan Pichardo, has quirky food facts and illustrations amid the recipes and memories.

whatsoever. There is at least one vegetarian restaurant in the DR – a place called Ananda, in the Gazcue neighborhood of Santo Domingo – but virtually all the restaurants listed in this book will have at least some nonmeat alternatives.

El Origen de la Cocina Dominicana: Historias y Recetas Típicas Dominicanas, by Juan B Nina, traces Dominican cooking from its early beginnings to contemporary influences and includes recipes reflecting the cuisine's evolution.

HABITS & CUSTOMS

Dominicans are essentially very polite, but observe relatively very few strict rules for dining and etiquette. Though formal restaurants certainly exist, a casual atmosphere with loud conversation and lively background music is the norm, especially during lunch, the most boisterous of Dominican mealtimes. It is not considered rude to call out or even hiss to get the waiter's attention. It is considered rude for a waiter to bring your bill before you've asked for it – the waiter isn't ignoring you, he's just being polite! This stems partly from the custom of lingering over meals, which are seen as much as a time to socialize as to fill one's stomach.

COOKING COURSES

Cooking classes are occasionally offered to students at Spanish-language schools (see p89). Ask about them when you sign up for a language course.

EAT YOUR WORDS

Food is one area of traveling where hand signals and a healthy sense of adventure usually suffice. Still, knowing just a few terms will prevent you from ordering *guinea* (guinea hen) when you meant *guineo* (banana) or *mangu* (mashed plantains) when you really wanted mango. For pronunciation guidelines, see p364.

Useful Phrases

The bill, please.

La cuenta, por favor.

la *kwen*-ta por fa-*vor*

Is the tip included?

¿La propina está incluida?

la pro-*pee*-na es-ta in-cloo-*wee*-da

Do you have a menu in English?

¿Tiene carta en inglés?

tye-ne *kar*-ta en een-*gle*

I'm vegetarian.

Soy vegetariano.

soy ve-*khe*-ta-*ree*-ya-no

May I have this dish without meat/chicken/ham?

¿Podría tener este plato sin carne/pollo/jamón?

po-*dree*-ya te-*ner* es-te *pla*-to seen *kar*-ne/po-*yo*/*kha*-mon

What does this dish contain?

¿Qué contiene este plato?

ke-con-*tye*-ne es-te *pla*-to

What do you have to drink?

¿Qué tiene de tomar?

que *tye*-ne de to-*mar*

What types of juice/soda/beer do you have?

¿Qué tipo de jugos/refrescos/cervezas hay?

ke *tee*-po de *khu*-gos/re-*fres*-cos/ser-*ve*-sas ai

We need more time.

Necesitamos más tiempo.

ne-se-*see*-ta-mos mas *tyem*-po

I haven't finished yet/I'm still eating.

Todavía no he terminado.

to-da-*vee*-ya no e ter-*mee*-na-do

Would you bring me another fork/spoon/knife/napkin, please?

¿Me trae otro tenedor/cuchara/cuchillo/servieta, por favor?

me *tra*-ye o-tro te-*ne*-dor/koo-*cha*-ra/ koo-*chee*-yo/ser-*vye*-ta por fa-*vor*

Very good/tasty.

Muy rico.

mooy *ree*-ko

www.dominicancooking.com is a user-friendly website providing the history as well as the classic recipes of Dominican cuisine. *Aunt Clara's Dominican Cookbook*, sold on the site, is an excellent collection of recipes and source material on Dominican cuisine.

Food Glossary

aguacate

a-gua-*ka*-te

avocado

ají

a-*hi*

pepper

arroz con leche

a-*ros* con *le*-che

rice pudding

arroz con pollo

a-*ros* con po-*yo*

steamed rice with chicken

asopao de camarones

para-*so*-o de ka-ma-*nes*

soupy rice with tomatoes and shrimp; also made with *lambí* (conch)

bacalao

ba-ca-*lao*

salted cod fish, usually broiled and served in a tuna salad-like form (sans mayo) with tomato and onion

bistek

bis-*tek*

thinly sliced steak

camarones al ajillo

ka-ma-*ro*-nes al ah-*hi*-lo

garlic shrimp

camarones mariposa

ka-ma-*ro*-nes ma-*ree*-po-*sa*

butterflied shrimp

carne molida

kar-ne mo-li-*da*

ground beef

cazuela de mariscos

ka-*swe*-la de ma-*rees*-kos

seafood casserole

cerdo

ser-*do*

pork

chicharrones de pollo

chi-*cha*-ro-nes de po-*yo*

chunks of deep-fried chicken, also done with pork

chillo al horno

chee-*yo* al or-*no*

oven-baked red snapper

chivo al vino

chee-*vo* al vee-*no*

goat cooked in wine

chuleta al carbon

chu-*le*-ta al car-*bone*

grilled pork chop

chuleta de res

chu-*le*-ta de race

prime rib

ensalada de camarones

en-*sa*-la-*da* de ka-ma-*ro*-nes

shrimp salad

ensalada verde

en-*sa*-la-*da* ver-*de*

green salad

filete a la parrilla

fee-*le*-te a la pa-*ree*-ya

broiled steak

guineas al vino

gee-*ne*-as al vee-*no*

guinea hen in wine

guisada

gui-*sa*-*da*

any stew

helados

hey-*la*-dos

ice cream

mangu

mahn-*gu*

mashed plantains

medallon de filete

me-*da*-yon de fee-*le*-te

beef medallions

mero a la plancha

me-*ro* a la *plan*-cha

grilled grouper

mondongo

mo-*don*-go

stew of entrails and tripe

mofongo

mo-*fon*-go

mashed plantains with pork rinds

parillada

pa-*ri*-yada

barbecue

pechuga de pollo

pe-*choo*-ga de po-*yo*

breast of chicken, usually oven baked

pica-pollo

pi-*ka* po-*yo*

breaded fried chicken

pulpo

pool-*po*

octopus

queso frito

ke-*so* free-*to*

pan-fried thick slices of white cheese, sometimes with tomato and onion, served for breakfast

revueltos

re-*buel*-tos

scrambled eggs

ropo vieja

ro-po bi-*eh*-ha

beef, fried and shredded and served with rice and salad

sofrito

so-*free*-to

mixture of spices and herbs used to season dishes

sopa de mariscos

so-*pa* de ma-*rees*-kos

seafood soup

sopa de pescado

so-*pa* de pes-*ka*-do

fish soup

sopa de vegetales

so-*pa* de ve-*khe*-ta-*les*

vegetable soup

tocino

tos-*ti*-no

bacon

tostones

tos-*tone*-es

plantain slices fried like potato chips

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