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**DOMINICAN
REPUBLIC**



DOMINICAN REPUBLIC

PRE-FIELD BRIEFING PACKET

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ABOUT THIS PACKET

This packet has been created to serve as a resource for the Dominican Republic Medical and Dental Team.

This packet is information about the country and can be read at your leisure or on the airplane. The first section of this booklet is specific to the areas we will be working near (however, not the actual clinic locations) and contains information you may want to know before the trip.

The contents herein are not for distributional purposes and are intended for the use of the team and their families. Sources of the information all come from public record and documentation. You may access any of the information and more updates directly from the World Wide Web and other public sources.



BACKGROUND

The Dominican Republic is on the island of Hispaniola. The country borders the Atlantic Ocean to the north and the Caribbean Sea in south. Hispaniola is home to the independent nations of Haiti in the west while the Dominican Republic occupies 2/3rds of the eastern part of the island. Nearby to Hispaniola island are the Caribbean Turks and Caicos Islands to the north, Puerto Rico to the east, Cuba and Jamaica in the west.

The nation covers an area of 48,310 km² making the Dominican Republic slightly smaller than Slovakia or about the size of the U.S. states of Vermont and New Hampshire combined.

The most current census (2015) shows a population of 9.9 million people. The Capital and largest city is Santo Domingo. The official language is Spanish, but English is commonly spoken in the major cities of Santo Domingo and Punta Cana. Today the Dominican Republic is inhabited mostly by people of mixed European and African origins. The African heritage is reflected most noticeably in the music, especially the merengue beat. The country is a main tourist destination in the Caribbean.

In pre-Columbian times the island was inhabited by the Taino, an Arawak-speaking people. In 1492 Christopher Columbus discovered the island and claimed it immediately for the Spanish Crown. It was then occupied by the usual ruling forces of that time, the Spanish and the French. The not so friendly colonizers reduced the Taino population from about 1 million to about 500 within 50 years.



PUBLIC HEALTH OVERVIEW

OVERVIEW

The Dominican Republic's health care system is two-tiered. At the bottom, the poorest in society are guaranteed access to free, socialized care.

The reality, however, is that most still end up paying out-of-pocket expenditures for medical supplies and various services. This can be explained by the fact that the government only devotes around 1% of GDP to health care, resulting in over half of all health expenses being funded by the people themselves.

Those who earn less than RD \$4,000 per month are also covered automatically. This coverage, however, only extends to the worker and not their family, although it does include maternity care for a spouse.

Those who do not fall into either of these categories must pay their own medical fees. You may work for a company which provides an *igualá*, which means medical coverage at a private, local clinic at no additional cost. There are limitations however - if your clinic does not have the specialist you require, you'll be forced to visit another clinic where you aren't covered, thus incurring the costs yourself.

BASIC STATISTICS

	Dominican Republic	Latin America & The Caribbean	United States
Life Expectancy at Birth	73.4 years	74.4 years	78.5 years
Maternal Mortality Ratio (maternal deaths per 100,000 live births)	100	80	24
Under-5 Mortality Ratio (child deaths per 1,000 live births)	32	22	8
Adolescent Fertility Ratio (Number of births per 1,000 women ages 15–19)	108.7	73.7	41.2
Percent of One-Year Olds Lacking Immunization Against Measles	21%	7%	8%
Contraceptive Prevalence Rate (% of married women, ages 15-49, using any form of contraception)	73%	74.8%	73%
Population Under 5 suffering from Stunting/Wasting	10.1%/3.4%	15.8%/4.4%	3.9%/1.3%

CAUSES OF DEATH

DOMINICAN REPUBLIC TOTAL DEATHS BY CAUSE PERCENT TOP 50 CAUSES					
	Deaths	%		Deaths	%
1. Coronary Heart Disease	11,460	19.85	26. Oral Cancer	407	0.70
2. Stroke	6,150	10.65	27. Diarrhoeal diseases	403	0.70
3. Violence	3,179	5.51	28. Asthma	380	0.66
4. HIV/AIDS	3,144	5.45	29. Inflammatory/Heart	370	0.64
5. Road Traffic Accidents	2,928	5.07	30. Leukemia	355	0.61
6. Influenza and Pneumonia	2,317	4.01	31. Pancreas Cancer	325	0.56
7. Diabetes Mellitus	2,271	3.93	32. Other Neoplasms	309	0.54
8. Prostate Cancer	2,063	3.57	33. Peptic Ulcer Disease	273	0.47
9. Kidney Disease	1,827	3.16	34. Endocrine Disorders	260	0.45
10. Low Birth Weight	1,814	3.14	35. Lymphomas	246	0.43
11. Alzheimers/Dementia	1,774	3.07	36. Malnutrition	214	0.37
12. Liver Disease	1,536	2.66	37. Drownings	211	0.37
13. Hypertension	1,291	2.24	38. Skin Cancers	163	0.28
14. Congenital Anomalies	1,289	2.23	39. Rheumatic Heart Disease	163	0.28
15. Lung Cancers	1,174	2.03	40. Oesophagus Cancer	140	0.24
16. Birth Trauma	1,025	1.78	41. Meningitis	139	0.24
17. Lung Disease	1,008	1.75	42. Falls	135	0.23
18. Other Injuries	897	1.55	43. Epilepsy	122	0.21
19. Liver Cancer	893	1.55	44. Alcohol	120	0.21
20. Suicide	720	1.25	45. Fires	118	0.20
21. Colon-Rectum Cancers	701	1.21	46. Maternal Conditions	110	0.19
22. Breast Cancer	686	1.19	47. Dengue	99	0.17
23. Stomach Cancer	655	1.13	48. Parkinson's Disease	99	0.17
24. Cervical Cancer	649	1.12	49. Hepatitis B	68	0.12
25. Tuberculosis	493	0.85	50. Ovary Cancer	63	0.11

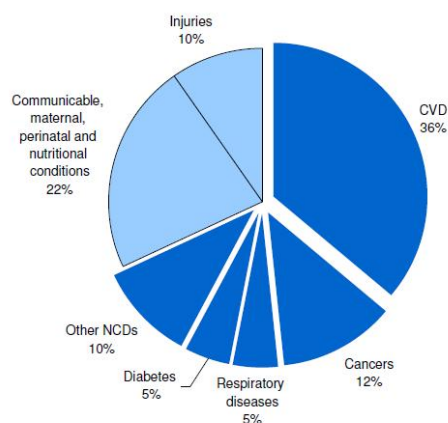
BURDEN OF DISEASE

NCD mortality			
<i>2008 estimates</i>			
Total NCD deaths (000s)	males	females	
	21.7	22.4	
NCD deaths under age 60 (percent of all NCD deaths)	22.7	20.8	
<i>Age-standardized death rate per 100 000</i>			
All NCDs	545.6	530.5	
Cancers	108.9	96.4	
Chronic respiratory diseases	36.0	36.0	
Cardiovascular diseases and diabetes	312.3	328.7	

Behavioural risk factors			
<i>2008 estimated prevalence (%)</i>			
Current daily tobacco smoking	males	females	total
	13.6	10.2	11.9
Physical inactivity	56.1	62.1	59.1

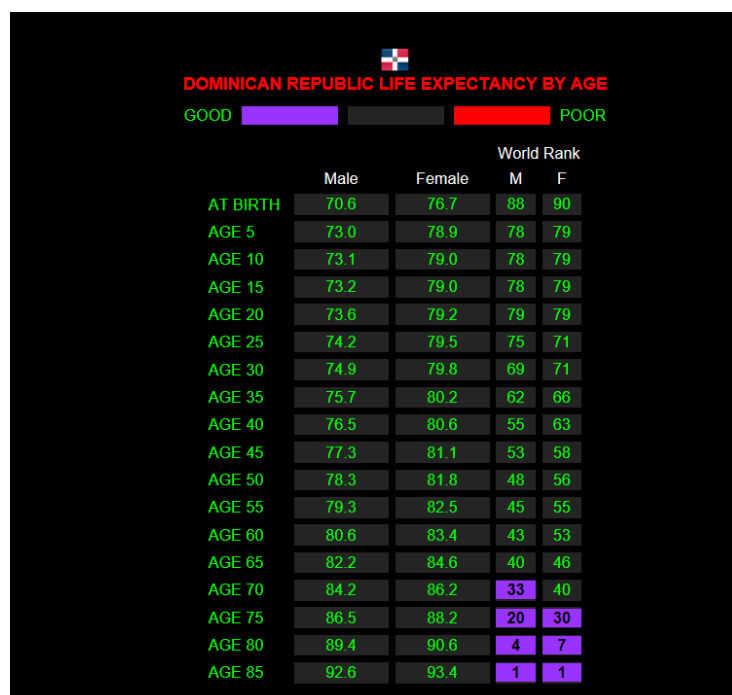
Metabolic risk factors			
<i>2008 estimated prevalence (%)</i>			
Raised blood pressure	males	females	total
	41.9	36.0	39.0
Raised blood glucose	7.4	8.3	7.8
Overweight	48.8	59.8	54.3
Obesity	14.0	28.3	21.2
Raised cholesterol	27.5	34.5	31.1

Proportional mortality (% of total deaths, all ages)



NCDs are estimated to account for 68% of all deaths.

LIFE EXPECTANCY



DEMOGRAPHICS

The Dominican Republic's population was 10,648,791 in 2016. In 2010 31.2% of the population was under 15 years of age, with 6% of the population over 65 years of age. There were 103 males for every 100 females in 2007. The annual population growth rate for 2006–2007 was 1.5%, with the projected population for the year 2015 being 10,121,000.

The population density in 2007 was 192 per km² (498 per sq mi), and 63% of the population lived in urban areas. The southern coastal plains and the Cibao Valley are the most densely populated areas of the country. The capital city Santo Domingo had a population of 2,907,100 in 2010.

	Total population (x 1000)	Proportion aged 0–14 (%)	Proportion aged 15–64 (%)	Proportion aged 65+ (%)
1950	2 380	45.5	51.7	2.7
1955	2 796	46.3	51.1	2.6
1960	3 312	48.2	49.2	2.6
1965	3 900	48.9	48.5	2.6
1970	4 524	47.7	49.7	2.7
1975	5 169	45.3	51.9	2.8
1980	5 826	42.6	54.4	3.1
1985	6 524	40.4	56.2	3.4
1990	7 245	38.5	57.6	3.9
1995	7 978	37.0	58.5	4.5
2000	8 663	34.9	59.9	5.1
2005	9 343	33.1	61.3	5.7
2010	10 017	31.2	62.8	6.0
2015	10 528	30.0	63.4	6.7
2020	11 107	28.3	62.8	7.6

STRUCTURE OF HEALTHCARE IN DOMINICAN REPUBLIC

The Dominican Republic health care services have a wide gap between public and private care. While basic care is very affordable, the standards can be poor, although overall health care in the Dominican Republic is improving. In some areas, such as laser surgery, the country is well-ahead of its neighbors and attracts a sizeable number of health tourists. Dental services are also considered as very good value, with good service at reasonable prices.

Public Facilities

Health Care services In the Dominican Republic Service are two-tiered, with government-sponsored free care available to all, including non-residents. These free, or public, services are below “First World” standards. These government facilities are under-staffed, under-equipped, and often provide sub-standard (albeit free) care. In public hospitals, patients will often need to provide their own supplies (such as bedding) and friends and family tend to look after them when it comes to food and basic comfort services.

Private Facilities

Santo Domingo has first-rate private hospitals and clinics with top-notch technology and amenities serving both Dominicans that can afford the care and “expats”, usually Americans or Canadians. This is also true for the Dominican Republic’s other major city, Santiago. Their staff is mostly bilingual and highly educated (mainly in the United States). These hospitals will perform organ transplants and other major surgeries. They also have psychiatric care. Many key tourist areas are also home to high-class facilities. The Zona Colonial in Santo Domingo, Puerto Plata, Punta Cana, and Sosúa are prime examples. These clinics offer some of the best health care in the Dominican Republic for “expats”. These facilities are not as large as those in Santo Domingo and Santiago, nor do they have all of the amenities and technology. They do however, provide quality care and staff will most likely speak English. There are limited emergency services and it is often faster to call a taxi than to wait for an ambulance or for emergency medical personnel to arrive.

Healthcare in the Regions

Outside the major cities and tourist areas, the quality of public health care drops considerably. Once you leave the capital, even emergency services can range from limited to non-existent. There is one public facility in each province of the country. These are average at best and often suggested only for emergencies. It is rare that the staff will speak English at these facilities.

Health Insurance in the Dominican Republic

People who work in the Dominican Republic and earn less than RD\$4,000 a month make social security contributions through their paychecks. They are automatically entitled to government health care services. Also, many employers provide an “Iguala” for their employees. The employee pays a small fee for a monthly subscription to use the services of a specific clinic at no cost.

Local health insurance is available and comes in various types. Some plans reimburse for expenses, including certain medications, and after-the-fact. They ask for their service in cash at the time of implementation. Others are a co-payment style system. Patients pay a certain amount out-of-pocket and the physician or clinic will bill insurance for the remainder. Many of the policies available through employers’ work on an individual basis at virtually the same cost. The premium is usually paid a year in advance instead of monthly, making the system unavailable to most workers. Foreign insurance carriers (like the U.S.) are also available to residents of the Dominican Republic.

STATISTICS

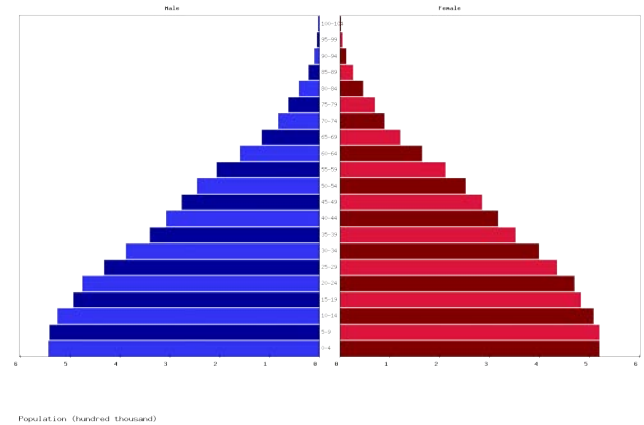
POPULATION:

Dominican Republic Population Clock

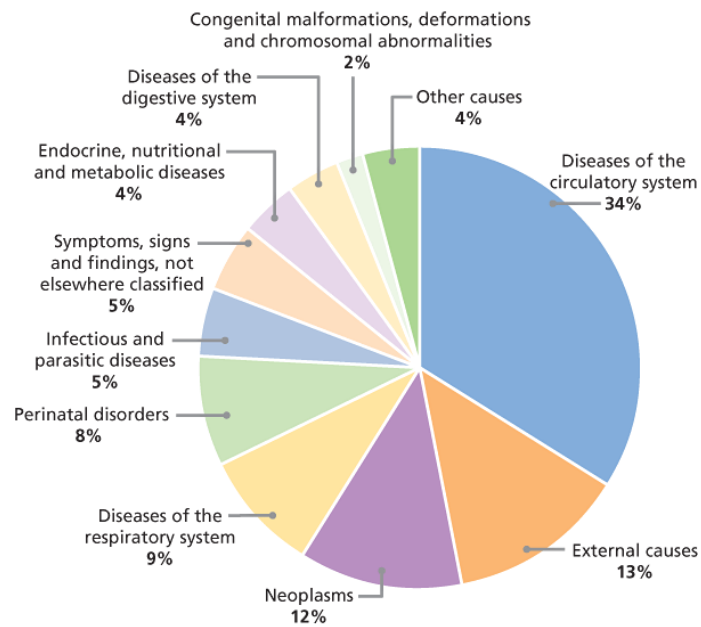
The population of Dominican Republic (as of 12/29/2018)?	10,940,690
Last UN Estimate (July 1, 2018)	10,882,996
Births Per Day	582
Deaths Per Day	182
Net Migrations Per Day ?	-83
Net Change Per Day ?	317
Population Change Since January 1st	115,071

Net Increase of 1 person every 5 minutes

AGE STRUCTURE:



MORTALITY:



SOCIAL DETERMINANTS:

- In 2014, there was significant income inequality, reflected in a Gini coefficient of 0.463.
- Almost 80% of the income-receiving population earns less than twice the minimum wage from its primary occupation. It is estimated that the extreme poverty rate declined from 8.4% in 2014 to 7.0% in 2015.
- In 2014, mean schooling was 7.7 years.
- Between 85% and 87% of households (90.6% in urban areas and 75.7% in rural areas) use an improved water source for drinking.
- An estimated 1 to 1.5 million Dominicans reside abroad. According to the National Immigrant Survey of 2012, the foreign immigrant population is equivalent to 5.55% of the total national population. The survey did not determine the number of people living in the country without the proper documentation.
- The majority of disasters are caused by hurricanes and earthquakes, which have major economic and health consequences. Drought is also a critical concern.

Health Situation and The Health System:

OVERVIEW:

- The health system is defined as a social security model guided by the principles of universal coverage, compulsory enrollment, solidarity, comprehensive care, a unified system, free choice, and gradual implementation, among other legally recognized principles.
- In 2014, the country adopted a model of care based on the primary health care strategy and the Integrated Health Services Network.
- The Ministry of Public Health has a governance role and includes the National Health Service.
- In 2015, 65% of the population was enrolled in the Family Health Insurance system. Of this group, 47.5% were covered by the subsidized regimen and 52.5% by the contributory regimen.
- Health expenditure currently represents 4.1% of gross domestic product (GDP), public funding schemes 2.7%, and private funding 1.4%.
- In 2011, there were an estimated 21.2 physicians and 3.8 nurses per 10,000 population.
- The National Health Service has 1,450 primary care centers, 1,774 primary care units (UNAPs), and 189 specialized health care centers (CEAS), including 13 regional hospitals, 35 provincial hospitals, 122 municipal hospitals, and 19 referral hospitals.
- These facilities have the necessary capacity to provide the care stipulated in the Basic Health Plan (PBS), which includes a package of services covered by the Family Health Insurance system for members of the Dominican Social Security System's contributory regimen.
- In 2015, the basic list of essential medicines was updated, based on the World Health Organization's Model List of Essential Medicines.

CONCERNS:

- In 2015, the **maternal mortality ratio** was estimated at 92 deaths per 100,000 live births. Maternal mortality was concentrated mainly in four provinces: Santo Domingo, the National District, Santiago, and San Cristóbal. That same year, 68.6% of births were attended by trained personnel.
- **Risk of pregnancy in adolescents:**
 - Adolescent girls who are less educated, poor, and live in rural areas are at greater risk of pregnancy and have higher pregnancy rates.

- The adolescent pregnancy rate is twice as high in regions with higher female unemployment as in other regions of the country. Adolescent pregnancy is also associated with lack of access to reproductive health services among women aged 15-19.
- In 2015, **mortality in children** under 1 year was 22.9 deaths per 1,000 live births (31 in urban areas and 28 in rural areas). In 2012, disorders originating in the perinatal period accounted for 65% of deaths in children under 1. **Sepsis** was one of the five leading causes of death in children under 5, with an even higher risk in children under 1.
- In 2012, **traffic injuries** were among the five leading causes of death in the population aged 5-44. The two leading causes of overall mortality for the over-45 age group were the same as for the general population: ischemic heart disease and cerebrovascular disease.
- **Transmittable Diseases:**
 - Between 2012 and 2015, BCG vaccine coverage was over 95%, and DPT3 coverage ranged from 82% to 90% in the under-1 population.
 - In 2015, one case of diphtheria was reported (none were reported in 2012-2014). Whooping cough prevalence increased, with 69 cases in 2015.
 - A cholera epidemic occurred in 2011–2012. In 2013, 539,000 cases of chikungunya virus infection were estimated.
 - In 2015, the incidence of malaria was 1.9 per 100,000 population. The populations at greatest risk of malaria are temporary migrant workers in the agriculture and construction sectors.
 - Canine-transmitted human rabies has not been eliminated; in 2015, two deaths from this disease were confirmed.
 - Lymphatic filariasis is in the process of elimination, as is leprosy, which has yet to reach a target indicator of less than 1 case per 10,000 population in all municipalities.
- **Chronic Non-Communicable Diseases:**
 - In 2010, the prevalence of **hypertension** was 34.7% and the prevalence of type 2 diabetes mellitus was 9.9%.
 - In 2013, **chronic malnutrition** in children under 5 was 7.1% and childhood obesity was 7.6%.
 - In 2014, 56.3% of adults were overweight.

ACHIEVEMENTS, CHALLENGES, AND PERSPECTIVES:

- Between 1990 and 2015, the country made great progress in health and overall development. It is worth noting that infant mortality plummeted 50.3% in this period. Pending challenges include continuing with maternal and child strategies and programs to reduce under-5 and maternal mortality.
- Health insurance coverage in the country has increased substantially in the past five years, from 43% in 2011 to 65% in 2015. However, there is still a major gap for a significant portion of the population.
- A significant challenge is updating the list of benefits that should be covered by the Dominican health system. This list should be based on disease prioritization and must be financially sustainable.
- The country's health profile suggests that the main health determinants, such as poverty, inequity, education, gender-based inequality, and migration, should be taken into account in the design of prevention programs.
- The country also seeks to provide effective vaccination coverage in all territories and communities. Another priority is increasing access to antiretroviral therapy for the population living with HIV.
- Preventing and reducing non-communicable diseases require an intersectoral approach for the adoption of standards and action in areas such as smoking and food labeling to address the major risk factors in the population.

- Some of the social and health determinants that affect adolescents indicate the need for State policies to address underage marriage, therapeutic abortion, and the lack of sex education.
- Outbreaks of cholera and drug-resistant tuberculosis are among the challenges that require joint efforts with other countries in the Region.
- The treatment of injuries from external causes, substance use disorders, social violence, and the prevention of femicide have become major public health concerns.
- It is critical to improve the birth certification structure and registration systems, specifically in areas with higher levels of poverty and in border regions. An estimated 20.8% of the population aged 0-5 lack a birth certificate, which impedes the delivery of basic services and health planning.

COUNTRY OVERVIEW



HISTORY OVERVIEW

The recorded history of the Dominican Republic began when the Genoa-born navigator Christopher Columbus, working for the Spanish Crown, happened upon a large island in the region of the western Atlantic Ocean that later came to be known as the Caribbean. It was inhabited by the Taíno, an Arawakan people, who variously called their island Ayiti, Bohio, or Quisqueya (Kiskeya). Columbus promptly claimed the island for the Spanish Crown, naming it La Isla Española ("the Spanish Island"), later Latinized to Hispaniola. What would become the Dominican Republic was the Spanish Captaincy General of Santo Domingo until 1821 except for a time as a French colony from 1795 to 1809. It was then part of a unified Hispaniola with Haiti from 1822 until 1844. In 1844, Dominican independence was proclaimed and the republic, which was often known as Santo Domingo until the early 20th century, maintained its independence except for a short Spanish occupation from 1861 to 1865 and occupation by the United States from 1916 to 1924.

The Taíno and beyond. The Taíno were the native people of the Dominican Republic who greeted Columbus upon his arrival. They were a peaceful subgroup of Arawak's who had their origins in the tropical forests of South America. Columbus encountered an island populated by at least 500,000 Taínos' living in permanent villages and subsisting on agriculture. The houses were made of wood with thatch roofs, and several families lived together in the same house. Most people used

hammocks to sleep in, and goods were stored in baskets hung from the roof and walls. The houses were irregularly arranged around a central plaza, where the larger home of the chief was situated. Villages were arranged into districts, each ruled by one chief, and in turn the districts were grouped into regional chiefdoms headed by the most prominent district chief. There were only two classes of villagers, which chroniclers equated with nobility and commoners. There were no slaves. Instead of simply slashing and burning the forest to make a clearing for agriculture as is common in the Amazon, the Taino's made permanent fields to cultivate root crops. They retarded erosion and improved the drainage, which permitted more lengthy storage of mature tubers. The Taino's also mined gold and beat the nuggets into small plates, which was then either inlaid in wooden objects or overlaid on clothing or ornaments. Columbus took special notice of the Taino's gold work, believing it offered him a chance to repay his debt to the king and queen of Spain. Because nearly all the Taino died within about three decades of Columbus's arrival, the culture and traditions of these gentle people are not as clearly present in everyday life as, for example, the Maya culture in Mexico today. A more nomadic and warlike group of Arawak's, called Caribs, was also present on a small portion of the island and are said to have shot arrows at Columbus upon his arrival.

In 1492, when Columbus first landed, he named the island La Isla Española, which later changed to Hispaniola. Although Columbus was a superb navigator, neither he nor his brother Bartholomé could rule the new colony. Both alienated the Spanish by demanding that they work, and they also disrupted the native agriculture by forcing each Indian to dig up a set amount of gold instead of allowing farming. By 1496 many natives had died, and those that rebelled were harshly punished. Food was in short supply and the population of natives was greatly diminished. It was then that Bartholomé transferred the capital from Isabella to the new city of Santo Domingo, located in a more productive region with a good harbor. It was a natural destination for ships following the easterly trade winds from Europe and the Lesser Antilles and remained the Spanish capital of the New World for the next fifty years, when a change in sailing routes made Havana the preferred port.

When Columbus returned to Santo Domingo for the third time, he was faced with a revolt by the colonists. To placate the rebels, he distributed not only land but also native communities. Spanish settlers could legally force their Indians to work without wages in a kind of semi-slavery called *encomienda*, a system that rapidly caused the demise of the Taino Indians because of the harsh forced-labor practices and the diseases the Spanish brought with them. The Spanish then imported African slaves to work in the mines and established a strict two-class social system based on race and state domination.

The Spanish abandoned Hispaniola for more economically promising areas such as Cuba and Mexico, but the Spanish institutions of government, economy, and society have persisted in the Dominican Republic. The island became the hiding place for many pirates and was captured for ransom by British admiral Sir Francis Drake. For nearly two hundred years Hispaniola remained in a state of disorganization and depression. In 1697 Spain handed over the western third of Hispaniola to the French, and that portion began to prosper by producing sugar and cotton in an economy based on slavery. By 1795 Spain gave the rest of the island, where most people were barely surviving on subsistence farming, to the French. This lasted for less than 10 years and in 1809 the eastern part of Hispaniola reverted back to Spanish rule. In 1822 the black armies of Haiti invaded and gained control of the entire island, which they maintained until 1844.

On 27 February 1844, Juan Pablo Duarte, the leader of the Dominican independence movement, entered Santo Domingo and declared the eastern two-thirds of Hispaniola an independent nation. He named it the Dominican Republic. The first of the strong-armed leaders called *caudillos*, Pedro Santana, became President of the new nation. The emerging nation struggled, going in and out of political and economic chaos. The United States, using the Monroe Doctrine to counter what the United States considered potential European intervention, invaded the Dominican Republic in 1916 and occupied it until 1924.

During the period of U.S. occupation, a new class of large landowners resulted from changes made in land-tenure. A new military security force, the *Guardia Nacional*, was trained by the U.S. Marines to be a counterinsurgency force. In 1930, Rafael Trujillo, who had risen to a position of leadership in the *Guardia*, used it to acquire and consolidate power. From 1930 to 1961, Trujillo ran the Dominican Republic as his own personal possession, in what has been called “the first truly totalitarian state in the hemisphere.” He and his friends held nearly 60 percent of the country's assets and controlled its labor force while they abolished personal and political freedoms. He typified the *caudillismo* that has shaped Dominican society.

After Trujillo was assassinated in 1961, his son fled the country and a democratic election was held. Ultimately, the Dominican military, with the help of twenty-three thousand U.S. troops, defeated the constitutionalists in 1965. The Dominican economic elite, having been reinstalled by the U.S. military, achieved the election of Joaquín Balaguer, one of Trujillo's puppet presidents. Until the early 1970s the Dominican Republic went through a period of economic growth and development arising mainly from public-works projects, foreign investments, increased tourism, and skyrocketing sugar prices. Most of the benefits went to the already wealthy while the unemployment rate, illiteracy, malnutrition, and infant mortality rates were dangerously high. With the mid-1970s surge in oil prices, a crash in the price of sugar, and increases in unemployment and inflation, the Balaguer government was destabilized, and human rights and political freedom were better observed. The country, however, incurred enormous foreign debt, and the International Monetary Fund required drastic austerity measures, such as a government wage freeze, a decrease of funding, an increase in prices of staple goods, and restricted credit. These policies resulted in social unrest and Balaguer, nearly eighty years old and legally blind, regained control of the country. He once again turned to massive public-works projects in an attempt to revitalize the economy, but this time was unsuccessful. Balaguer was forced to step down in 1996 and Leonel Fernández Reyna was elected.

GEOGRAPHY

The Dominican Republic, the second largest country in the Antilles, after Cuba, is located on the eastern two-thirds of the island of Hispaniola, the second largest island in the Greater Antilles. It is 18,816 square miles (48,734 square kilometers), about twice the size of New Hampshire. The western portion of the island is occupied by the republic of Haiti, roughly at a 2:1 ratio. Hispaniola is near the center of the West Indies, a group of islands that extend from Florida to Venezuela. To the north of Hispaniola is the Atlantic Ocean, to the south the Caribbean Sea, to the east Puerto Rico, and to the west Cuba. Hispaniola, Puerto Rico, Cuba, and Jamaica are referred to as the Greater Antilles. The Dominican Republic's capital and largest metropolitan area, Santo Domingo, is on the southern coast.

The mountains of the Dominican Republic divide the country into northern, central, and southwestern regions. The northern region includes the Cordillera Septentrional (northern mountain range), the Cibao Valley, which is the country's major agricultural area; and the tropical Samaná Peninsula with its coconut plantations and bay, where humpback whales breed.

There are four important mountain ranges. The most northerly is the Cordillera Septentrional ("Northern Mountain Range"), which extends from the northwestern coastal town of Monte Cristi, near the Haitian border, to the Samaná Peninsula in the east, running parallel to the Atlantic coast. The highest range in the Dominican Republic – indeed, in the whole of the West Indies – is the Cordillera Central ("Central Mountain Range"). It gradually bends southwards and finishes near the town of Azua, on the Caribbean coast.

In the Cordillera Central are the four highest peaks in the Caribbean: Pico Duarte (3,098 meters or 10,164 feet above sea level), La Pelona (3,094 meters or 10,151 feet), La Rucilla (3,049 meters or 10,003 feet), and Pico Yaque (2,760 meters or 9,055 feet). In the southwest corner of the country, south of the Cordillera Central, there are two other ranges. The more northerly of the two is the Sierra de Neiba, while in the south the Sierra de Bahoruco is a continuation of the Massif de la Selle in Haiti. There are other, minor mountain ranges, such as the Cordillera Oriental ("Eastern Mountain Range"), Sierra Martín García, Sierra de Yamasá, and Sierra de Samaná.

Between the Central and Northern mountain ranges lies the rich and fertile Cibao valley. This major valley is home to the cities of Santiago and La Vega and most of the farming areas in the nation. Rather less productive are the semi-arid San Juan Valley, south of the Central Cordillera, and the Neiba Valley, tucked between the Sierra de Neiba and the Sierra de Bahoruco. Much of the land in the Enriquillo Basin is below sea level, with a hot, arid, desert-like environment. There are other smaller valleys in the mountains, such as the Constanza, Jarabacoa, Villa Altagracia, and Bonao valleys.

The Llano Costero del Caribe ("Caribbean Coastal Plain") is the largest of the plains in the Dominican Republic. Stretching north and east of Santo Domingo, it contains many sugar plantations in the savannahs that are common there. West of Santo Domingo its width is reduced to 10 kilometers (6.2 mi) as it hugs the coast, finishing at the mouth of the Ocoa River. Another large plain is the Plana de Azua ("Azua Plain"), a very arid region in Azua Province. A few other small coastal plains are in the northern coast and in the Pedernales Peninsula.

The southwestern region lies south of the Valle de San Juan and encompasses the Sierra de Neiba. Much of the region is a desert and it includes Lake Enriquillo, the island's largest lake. Lake Enriquillo is a saltwater lake that lies 150 feet (46 meters) below sea level and is inhabited by unique fauna, including crocodiles, huge iguanas, and flamingos. The diverse geography of the country includes 800 miles (1,288 kilometers) of coastline with beautiful white-sand beaches and rocky cliffs and warm water, all of which are attractive to tourists. The most significant river in the country, with a drainage basin of 2,720 square miles (7,044 square kilometers), is Yaque del Norte, which starts at Pico Duarte and empties into the Bahía de Monte Cristi on the northwest coast.

The weather is mostly tropical, especially along the southern and eastern coasts. The time and magnitude of the rainy season varies in different parts of the country, but generally occurs in late spring and early fall. In the west and southwestern regions the climate is dry and desertlike because of low rainfall and/or deforestation.

The capital, Santo Domingo, was the first permanent European settlement in the New World and was established by Spain in 1496. The Colonial Zone of Santo Domingo is one of the great treasures of Spanish America today, with many original buildings intact and restored.

There are many small offshore islands and cays that are part of the Dominican territory. The two largest islands near shore are Saona, in the southeast, and Beata, in the southwest. To the north, at distances of 100–200 kilometers (62–124 mi), are three extensive, largely submerged banks, which geographically are a southeast continuation of the Bahamas: Navidad Bank, Silver Bank, and Mouchoir Bank. Navidad Bank and Silver Bank have been officially claimed by the Dominican Republic.

Four major rivers drain the numerous mountains of the Dominican Republic. The Yaque del Norte is the longest and most important Dominican river. It carries excess water down from the Cibao Valley and empties into Monte Cristi Bay, in the northwest. Likewise, the Yuna River serves the Vega Real and empties into Samaná Bay, in the northeast. Drainage of the San Juan Valley is provided by the San Juan River, tributary of the Yaque del Sur, which empties into the Caribbean, in the south. The Artibonito is the longest river of Hispaniola and flows westward into Haiti.

There are many lakes and coastal lagoons. The largest lake is Enriquillo, a salt lake at 45 meters (148 ft) below sea level, the lowest point in the Caribbean. Other important lakes are Laguna de Rincón or Cabral, with fresh water, and Laguna de Oviedo, a lagoon with brackish water.

The Dominican Republic is located near fault action in the Caribbean. In 1946 it suffered a magnitude 8.1 earthquake off the northeast coast. This triggered a tsunami that killed about 1,800 people, mostly in coastal communities. The wave was also recorded at Daytona Beach, Florida, and Atlantic City, New Jersey. The area remains at risk. Caribbean countries and the United States have collaborated to create tsunami warning systems and are mapping risk in low-lying areas.

CLIMATE AND WEATHER

The Dominican Republic has a tropical rainforest climate in the coastal and lowland areas. Due to its diverse topography, Dominican Republic's climate shows considerable variation over short distances and is the most varied of all the Antilles. The annual average temperature is 25 °C (77 °F). At higher elevations the temperature averages 18 °C (64.4 °F) while near sea level the average temperature is 28 °C (82.4 °F). Low temperatures of 0 °C (32 °F) are possible in the mountains while high temperatures of 40 °C (104 °F) are possible in protected valleys. January and February are the coolest months of the year while August is the hottest month. Snowfall can be seen in rare occasions on the summit of Pico Duarte. The wet season along the northern coast lasts from November through January. Elsewhere, the wet season stretches from May through November, with May being the wettest month. Average annual rainfall is 1,500 millimeters (59.1 in) countrywide, with individual locations in the Valle de Neiba seeing averages as low as 350 millimeters (13.8 in) while the Cordillera Oriental averages 2,740 millimeters (107.9 in). The driest part of the country lies in the west.

Tropical cyclones strike the Dominican Republic every couple of years, with 65% of the impacts along the southern coast. Hurricanes are most likely between August and October. The last major hurricane that struck the country was Hurricane Georges in 1998.

DEMOGRAPHICS

The Dominican Republic's population was 10,648,791 in 2016. In 2010 31.2% of the population was under 15 years of age, with 6% of the population over 65 years of age. There were 103 males for every 100 females in 2007. The annual population growth rate for 2006–2007 was 1.5%, with the projected population for the year 2015 being 10,121,000.

The population density in 2007 was 192 per km² (498 per sq mi), and 63% of the population lived in urban areas. The southern coastal plains and the Cibao Valley are the most densely populated areas of the country. The capital city, Santo Domingo, had a population of 2,907,100 in 2010.

Other important cities are Santiago de los Caballeros (pop. 745,293), La Romana (pop. 214,109), San Pedro de Macorís (pop. 185,255), Higüey (153,174), San Francisco de Macorís (pop. 132,725), Puerto Plata (pop. 118,282), and La Vega (pop. 104,536). Per the United Nations, the urban population growth rate for 2000–2005 was 2.3%.

ECONOMY

Overview: The Dominican Republic is among the fastest-growing economies in Latin America. Even though the gross domestic product (GDP) tripled in the last generation, 70 percent of the people are affected by poverty and unemployment is high. Throughout history, the economy has been based on the production and export of sugar. Sugarcane is still a big cash crop, along with rice, plantains (starchy green bananas), and bananas. Fluctuating world prices make the market volatile.

The Dominican Republic has the ninth largest economy in Latin America and is the largest in the Caribbean and Central region. It is an upper middle-income developing country primarily dependent on mining, agriculture, trade, and services. Although the service sector has recently overtaken agriculture as the leading employer of Dominicans (due principally to growth in tourism and free-trade zones), agriculture remains the most important sector in terms of domestic consumption and is in second place (behind mining) in terms of export earnings. Tourism accounts for more than \$1 billion in annual earnings and free-trade zone earnings and tourism are the fastest-growing export sectors. According to a 1999 International Monetary Fund report, remittances from Dominican Americans are estimated to be about \$1.5 billion per year. Most of these funds are used to cover basic household needs such as shelter, food, clothing, health care and education. Secondly, remittances have financed small businesses and other productive activities.

The Dominican Republic's most important trading partner is the United States (about 40% of total commercial exchange). Other major trade partners are China, Haiti, Canada, Mexico, India, Spain, Brazil, Germany, the United Kingdom and Japan, in that quantitative order. The country exports free-trade-zone manufactured products (garments, medical devices, and so on), gold, nickel, protection equipment, bananas, liquor, cocoa beans, silver, and sauces and seasonings. It imports petroleum, industrial raw materials, capital goods, and foodstuffs. On 5 September 2005, the Congress of the Dominican Republic ratified a free trade agreement with the U.S. and five Central American countries, the Dominican Republic – Central America Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA-DR). CAFTA-DR entered into force for the Dominican Republic on 1 March 2007. The total stock of U.S. foreign direct investment (FDI) in Dominican Republic as of 2006 was U.S. \$3.3 billion, much of it directed to the energy and tourism sectors, to free trade zones, and to the telecommunications sector. Remittances were close to \$2.7 billion in 2006.

An important aspect of the Dominican economy is the Free Trade Zone industry (FTZ), which made up U.S. \$4.55 billion in Dominican exports for 2006 (70% of total exports). Reports show, however, that it suffered a 4% decrease in total exports in 2006. The textiles sector experienced an approximate 17% drop in exports due in part to the appreciation of the Dominican peso against the dollar, Asian competition following expiration of the quotas of the Multi-Fiber Arrangement, and a government-mandated increase in salaries, which should have occurred in 2005 but was postponed to January 2006. Lost Dominican business was captured by firms in Central America and Asia. The tobacco, jewelry, medical, and pharmaceutical sectors in the FTZs all reported increases for 2006, which somewhat offset textile and garment losses. Industry experts from the FTZs expected that entry into force of the CAFTA-DR agreement will promote substantial growth in the FTZ sector for 2007.

An ongoing concern in the Dominican Republic is the inability of participants in the electricity sector to establish financial viability for the system. Three regional electricity distribution systems were privatized in 1998 via sale of 50% of shares to foreign operators; the Mejía administration repurchased all foreign-owned shares in two of these systems in late 2003. The third, serving the eastern provinces, is operated by U.S. concerns and is 50% U.S.-owned. The World Bank records that electricity distribution losses for 2005 totaled about 38.2%, a rate of losses exceeded in only three other countries. Industry experts estimate distribution losses for 2006 will surpass 40%, primarily due to low collection rates, theft, infrastructure

problems and corruption. At the close of 2006, the government had exceeded its budget for electricity subsidies, spending close to U.S. \$650 million. The government plans to continue providing subsidies. Congress passed a law in 2007 that criminalizes the act of stealing electricity, but it has not yet been fully implemented. The electricity sector is a highly politicized sector and the prospect of further effective reforms of the electricity sector is poor. Debts in the sector, including government debt, amount to more than U.S. \$500 million. Some generating companies are under-capitalized and at times unable to purchase adequate fuel supplies.

EDUCATION

Primary education is regulated by the Ministry of Education, with education being a right of all citizens and youth in the Dominican Republic.

Preschool education is organized in different cycles and serves the 2–4 age group and the 4–6 age group. Preschool education is not mandatory except for the last year. Basic education is compulsory and serves the population of the 6–14 age group. Secondary education is not compulsory, although it is the duty of the state to offer it for free. It caters to the 14–18 age group and is organized in a common core of four years and three modes of two years of study that are offered in three different options: general or academic, vocational (industrial, agricultural, and services), and artistic.

The higher education system consists of institutes and universities. The institutes offer courses of a higher technical level. The universities offer technical careers, undergraduate and graduate; these are regulated by the Ministry of Higher Education, Science and Technology.



RELIGION

About 95% of the population is Roman Catholic, even if not all of these people attend church regularly. Catholicism was introduced by Columbus and the Spanish missionaries and even today is an important force in shaping society.

Although many Dominicans are fairly secular, children are often taught to ask for a blessing from their parents and other relatives when greeting them. For example, a child might say "Bless me, aunt," and the response is "May God bless you." The dominance of the Catholic Church was diminishing at the end of the twentieth century, due to a decrease in funding, a shortage of priests, and a lack of social programs for the people. Although some Protestants are descendants of non-Spanish immigrants who came to

the island in the early 1800s, the Protestant evangelical movement has been gaining more support. The style of worship is much less formal than that of the Catholic Church and emphasizes family rejuvenation, biblical teachings, and economic independence. Despite differences in belief and opinion, there is little conflict between religious groups.

During World War II (1939–1945) the small town of Sosúa was built by a group of European Jews who escaped persecution, and is still the center for the tiny Jewish population of the island.

Voodoo is practiced secretly, primarily along the border with Haiti, and originated with the African slaves, particularly those from the Dahomey region. Practitioners believe in one God and many lesser spirits. They believe that each individual has a protector spirit who rewards that person with wealth and punishes him or her with illness. Nature spirits oversee the external world. Ancestral spirits are the souls of dead ancestors and will protect the living if properly remembered with funerals and memorials. Because the early colonists forbade the practice of voodoo, people learned to disguise the spirits as Roman Catholic saints. For example, the Madonna, who in this culture represents motherhood, beauty, love, and sex, is referred to as “Erzulie.” Children with painted faces and costumes participate in the Festival of Cabral, which takes place on Good Friday. Although many voodoo products are for sale in markets, voodoo is unpopular with most Dominicans.

Folk Practitioners. Roman Catholicism has been combined with traditional folk religion, particularly in rural areas. It is quite common for devout Catholics to consult a folk practitioner for spiritual advice or to prevent some calamity. The *ensalmo* is a healing chant that is usually performed by an elderly woman, and is among the most respected folk practices. Folk healers work through the saints and ask for special help for those in need. A few people are skilled in the use of herbs and other natural objects for healing and are called *witch doctors*. They are also believed to have the power to banish evil spirits.

POVERTY

More than a third of the Dominican Republic lives on less than \$1.25 a day and over 20 percent of the country lives in extreme poverty. Most of the poverty in the Dominican Republic is concentrated in the rural areas. The rural poverty rate is about three times as high as the urban poverty rate.

Causes of Poverty in the Dominican Republic

Though the economy has been growing since 1996, economic inequality remains a major problem. Only 4 percent of GDP is spent on education and only 30 percent of children finish primary school. In a system where education is the road to the middle class, creating economic barriers to education perpetuates a system of institutional inequality.

Other issues include clean water and sanitation, with only half of the country having access to clean water and less than half of the country has access to sanitary toilets. Healthcare is expensive and hard to find in rural areas.

Since the main industry of the Dominican Republic is tourism, rural areas are often overlooked when it comes to government investment. Though rural communities depend on the farming industry, the government has not done much to address the low agricultural productivity. Farmers often do not own enough land to manage subsistence farming, making income-generating agriculture impossible. Although there is technology available to increase crop production, rural farmers simply do not have access to these resources due to financial circumstances.

Natural disasters, including hurricanes, tsunamis, earthquakes, and mudslides, constantly threaten rural areas. Much of the rural infrastructure has collapsed due to natural disasters

Though President Danilo Medina has promised to spend more on education, he has said little about his plans to increase agricultural production, increase access to healthcare, and provide aid to rural communities. With a strong focus on tourism, the majority of the nine million people who call the Dominican Republic home are stuck in poverty.



NATIONAL FLAG

The flag of the Dominican Republic represents the Dominican Republic and, together with the coat of arms and the national anthem, has the status of national symbol. The blue on the flag stands for liberty, the white for salvation, and the red for the blood of heroes. The civil ensign follows the same design, but without the charge in the center. The flag was designed by Juan Pablo Duarte. As described by Article 21 of the Dominican Constitution, the flag features a centered white cross that extends to the edges and divides the flag into four rectangles; the top ones are blue (hoist side) and red, and the bottom ones are red (hoist side) and blue. The national coat of arms, featuring a shield with the flag design and supported by a bay laurel branch (left) and a palm frond (right), is at the center of the cross. Above the shield, a blue ribbon displays the national motto Dios, Patria, Libertad (English: God, Fatherland, Liberty). Below the shield, the words *República Dominicana* appear on a red ribbon (this red ribbon is depicted in more recent versions as having its tips pointing upward). In the center of the shield, flanked by three spears (two of them holding Dominican banners) on each side, is a Bible with a small cross above it and said to be opened to the Gospel of John, chapter 8, verse 32, which reads *Y la verdad os hará libres* (And the truth shall make you free). The flag of the Dominican Republic is similar to the flag of Perm Krai, a federal subject of Russia.



SURVIVAL GUIDE

Politeness is a very important aspect of social interaction. When you enter a room or begin a conversation, it is polite to make a general greeting such as *buenos días*, which means "good day." Handshakes are another friendly gesture. Personal appearance is important to Dominicans and they do their best to look neat and clean. They like the latest in New York fashions. Men wear long pants and stylish shirts except when at the beach or doing manual labor. Professional men wear business suits or the traditional *chacabana*, a white shirt worn over dark trousers. Rural women wear skirts or dresses, but in urban areas jeans and short skirts are acceptable. Bright colors and shiny fabrics are favored. Children are often dressed up, especially for church or visiting. Short pants are not allowed in government buildings and shorts and tank tops are not worn in church.

Formal introductions are rare, but professional titles are used to address respected persons. Older and more prominent people may be addressed as *Don* (for men) or *Doña* (for women), with or without their first names. Most women ride sidesaddle while on the backs of motorcycles, because sitting with the legs apart is considered unladylike. Personal space is limited, touching is normal, and crowding, particularly on public transportation, is common.

Dominicans are animated and often make gestures and use body language. "Come here" is indicated with the palm down and fingers together waving inward. To hail a taxi or bus, one wags a finger or fingers depending on the number of passengers in need of a ride. Dominicans point with puckered lips instead of a finger. Men shake hands firmly when they greet each other, and close friends embrace. Most women kiss each other on both cheeks, and a man who trusts a woman will also kiss her.

Appropriate Dress: In Dominican society, appearance is very important. People are extremely fashion conscious and believe that clothes indicate social standing and success. They take great pride in wearing good fabrics and clothes of the best standard they can afford. Designer labels, particularly those from the USA, are looked upon favorably.

Greetings: A handshake, with direct eye contact and a welcoming smile is standard.

Maintaining eye contact is crucial as it indicates interest. When shaking hands, use the appropriate greeting for the time of day - "buenos días", "buenas noches", or "buenas tardes".

Courtesy and hospitality: Dominicans pride themselves on their hospitality. When someone visits, Dominicans go out of their way to make guests feel welcome and comfortable. House guests are treated royally, and Dominicans attempt to cater to their every desire.

TRANSPORTATION

Trunk Highways: The country has three national trunk highways, which connect every major town. These are DR-1, DR-2, and DR-3, which depart from Santo Domingo toward the northern (Cibao), southwestern (Sur), and eastern (El Este) parts of the country respectively. These highways have been consistently improved with the expansion and reconstruction of many sections. Two other national highways serve as spur (DR-5) or alternative routes (DR-4).

In addition to the national highways, the government has embarked on an expansive reconstruction of spur secondary routes, which connect smaller towns to the trunk routes. In the last few years the government constructed a 106-kilometer toll road that connects Santo Domingo with the country's northeastern peninsula. Travelers may now arrive in the Samaná

Peninsula in less than two hours. Other additions are the reconstruction of the DR-28 (Jarabacoa – Constanza) and DR-12 (Constanza – Bonao). Despite these efforts, many secondary routes still remain either unpaved or in need of maintenance. There is currently a nationwide program to pave these and other commonly used routes. Also, the Santiago light rail system is in planning stages but currently on hold.

Bus service: There are two main bus transportation services in the Dominican Republic: one controlled by the government, through the Oficina Técnica de Transito Terrestre (OTTT) and the Oficina Metropolitana de Servicios de Autobuses (OMSA), and the other controlled by private business, among them, Federación Nacional de Transporte La Nueva Opción (FENATRANO) and the Confederación Nacional de Transporte (CONATRA). The government transportation system covers large routes in metropolitan areas such as Santo Domingo and Santiago.

There are many privately owned bus companies, such as Metro Servicios Turísticos and Caribe Tours, that run daily routes. Santo Domingo Metro

Santo Domingo Metro: The Dominican Republic has a rapid transit system in Santo Domingo, the country's capital. It is the most extensive metro system in the insular Caribbean and Central American region by length and number of stations. The Santo Domingo Metro is part of a major "National Master Plan" to improve transportation in Santo Domingo as well as the rest of the nation. The first line was planned to relieve traffic congestion in the Máximo Gómez and Hermanas Mirabal Avenue. The second line, which opened in April 2013, is meant to relieve the congestion along the Duarte-Kennedy-Centenario Corridor in the city from west to east. The current length of the Metro, with the sections of the two lines open as of August 2013, is 27.35 kilometers (16.99 mi). Before the opening of the second line, 30,856,515 passengers rode the Santo Domingo Metro in 2012. With both lines opened, ridership increased to 61,270,054 passengers in 2014.

CULTURE

IDENTIFICATION

The Dominicans consider themselves more Latin American than Caribbean. In addition, they retain close ties with the United States, which occupied the island in the early twentieth century. The national community is struggling to build a democracy against a corrupt and authoritarian political elite.

Linguistic Affiliation: Spanish is the official language and is universally spoken. Dominicans pride themselves on the purity of their Spanish and it is considered by some to be the most classical Castilian spoken in Latin America. Nevertheless, Dominican Spanish has a distinctive accent and incorporates numerous African and Taino (native) expressions. For example, small rural houses are now called bohios, after the rectangular houses of the Tainos. A large number of place-names as well as social and cultural terms are inherited from the Tainos. Some English is spoken in Santo Domingo, particularly within the tourist industry. Some Creole is spoken near the Haitian border and in the sugarcane villages, where many Haitian workers live.

National Identity: A large factor that influences Dominican national Spanish heritage and early independence. The native population was decimated or assimilated within decades of the arrival of Columbus, and the island was repopulated with Spanish colonists and their African slaves. Spanish is the national language, universally spoken today. Light skin color, which is considered to reflect European ancestry, is valued, while dark skin tones reflect the West African slave ancestry. The Roman Catholic cathedrals still dominate the landscape, and the majority of the population is Roman Catholic.

A proud aggressive attitude is admired in sports, business, and politics. Machismo permeates society, especially among rural and low-income groups, with males enjoying privileges not accorded to females.

The common expression, *Si Dios quiere* (If God wishes), expresses the belief that personal power is intertwined with one's place in the family, the community, and the grand design of the Deity. People have been forced to accept the strong class system begun by the Spanish and maintained by the strongman leaders where only a few historically prominent families hold a great deal of the wealth and power. Some of the few surviving traits of the gentle Taino people may account for acceptance of the system with relatively few revolts.

The family unit is of primary importance. Relationships among people are more important than schedules and being late for appointments, and people often spend time socializing rather than working. Dominicans are warm, friendly, outgoing, and gregarious. They are very curious about others and forthright in asking personal questions. Children are rarely shy. *Confianza* (trust) is highly valued and not quickly or easily gained by outsiders, perhaps as a result of the human rights and economic abuses the people have suffered at the hands of the powerful.

Ethnic Relations: The Dominican Republic was the port of entry for the first African slaves, only nine years after Columbus arrived. Blacks and mulattoes make up almost 90 percent of the population. There has been a longstanding tension with Haiti, particularly over the Haitian desire to migrate there. In the early fall of 1937 Trujillo's soldiers used machetes, knives, picks, and shovels to slaughter somewhere between ten thousand and thirty-five thousand Haitian civilians, claiming it was

a Dominican peasant uprising. Even loyal personal servants and Haitian spouses of Dominicans were killed by the soldiers. Today there is still great disdain for Haitians.

FOOD AND ECONOMY

Food in Daily Life: The main meal is served at midday and can last up to two hours. *La bandera* (the flag) is a popular national dish; the white rice and red beans remind people of the flag colors, hence the name. The third ingredient is stewed meat, and it is usually served with fried plantain and a salad. Another favorite dish is *sancocho*, a meat, plantain, and vegetable stew. On the coast, fish and conch are enjoyed, and coconut is used to sweeten many seafood dishes. Root vegetables include sweet potatoes, yams, cassava, and potatoes. Small quantities of chicken, beef, pork, or goat are eaten with a meal. Food is generally not spicy.

Dining out is popular and restaurants in Santo Domingo are superior and reasonably priced. The Hotel Lina has been voted one of the ten best restaurants in the world. Even the food sold by street vendors, such as grilled meat or *tostones* (fried plantain patties), is delicious.

SOCIAL STRATIFICATION

Classes and Castes: Dominican social stratification is influenced by racial and economic issues. The upper class is historically descended from European ancestry and is light skinned. The lower class is most often black, descendants of the African slave population or Haitians. The mulattoes are people of mixed African and European ancestry and make up the majority of the population; they have created a growing middle class. This middle class is divided into *indio claro*, who have lighter skin, and *indio oscuro*, who are darker skinned. The term *indio* (Indian) is used because many Dominicans do not yet acknowledge their African roots.

Symbols of Social Stratification: The symbols of social stratification are similar to those in Western cultures. Many of the growing middle-class population own homes and cars and enjoy updating them with the latest electronic appliances. Their children graduate from high school and may go on to college. People take pride in their personal appearance and prefer New York fashions and jewelry. However, there is still a large segment of the population which lives in urban slums and poor rural areas without electricity or running water.

GENDER ROLES AND STATUSES

Division of Labor by Gender: About one-quarter of the lower-class people are unemployed. Among this group, women tend to find jobs more easily than men, especially in rural areas, and are paid less. Women often support their households, but do not make enough to bring them out of poverty.

The Relative Status of Women and Men: In middle-class and upper-class families the structure is patriarchal, and the dominant father-figure is the norm. As women gain control over the number of children they bear, they have been able to gain greater educational and employment opportunities. Among the lower-class families, the structure is often matriarchal because the father is often separated from the family.

MARRIAGE, FAMILY, AND KINSHIP

Marriage: There are three different types of marital unions: church marriages, civil marriages, and consensual or common-law unions. Church and civil marriages are most prevalent among the upper classes and the ceremonies can be costly, whereas consensual unions predominate among the poor. These patterns can be traced back to the Spanish colonial and slave periods. The Spanish settlers brought with them a strong ethic of family solidarity, and the father was the dominant

figure. Slave families were broken up and marriages were often not allowed. Informal unions between the Spanish settlers and African slave women were encouraged, and the present-day range of skin tones and marriage reflects this.

Domestic Unit: The extended family, composed of three or more generations, is prevalent among the Dominican elite. The oldest man holds authority, makes public decisions, and is responsible for the welfare of the family. The oldest married woman commands her household, delivers the more private decisions, and nurtures the family. Married brothers and their wives and children are part of the extended family and have a strong allegiance to their father. Married daughters become part of their husbands' families.

Consensual unions create a more loosely structured family, and responsibilities fall to the mother. The result is a lower-class household which often becomes an extended matriarchy with the oldest woman at the head and her unmarried children, married daughters, and grandchildren constituting the household. Some men have more than one wife and family and are often absent from a particular household.

Inheritance: Among the two-parent families, land, money, and personal possessions are usually left to the surviving spouse and children. When the household is headed by a woman or when there is a consensual union, inheritance policies are more loosely structured.

Kin Groups: Family loyalty is a virtue ingrained from early childhood when individuals learn that relatives can be trusted and relied on. At every level of society, a person looks to family and kin for both social identity and succor. A needy relative might receive the loan of a piece of land, some wage labor, or gifts of food. More affluent relatives may adopt a child from needy relatives and help out the parents of that child as well.

Formal organizations succeed best when they are able to mesh with pre-existing ties of kinship. Until the 1960s and 1970s, most community activities were kin-based and consisted of a few related extended families joined together for endeavors. Families with relatively equal resources shared and cooperated.

When kinship is lacking and where families wish to establish a trusting relationship with other families, they can become *compadres*. Strong emotional bonds link *compadres* or co-parents, and they use the formal "*usted*" instead of "*tu*" when addressing one another. *Compadres* are chosen at baptism and marriage, and the relationship extends to the two couples and their offspring.

SOCIALIZATION

Child Rearing and Education: Public education is provided through the high-school level at no cost except for the school uniform and books. Attendance is mandatory to sixth grade, although many children, particularly girls, drop out before then. Over one thousand schools were destroyed by Hurricane Georges in 1998. Scarce funding before and after the hurricane has resulted in limited resources and understaffed facilities. Many urban families send their children to private schools. Considering the lack of enforcement of education laws, the adult literacy rate of 83 percent is quite high, nearly double that of neighboring Haiti.



Higher Education: The oldest public university in the New World was built by the Spanish in 1588, and the University of Santo Domingo is its descendant. Most of the twenty-eight Dominican universities are privately owned and offer student loans. Total enrollment for all colleges and universities in 1998 topped 100,000. Some students also go abroad to attend schools and universities.

MEDICINE AND HEALTHCARE

Public clinics and hospitals provide free care, but people who can afford it prefer to go to private doctors. Public institutions tend to

be poorly equipped and understaffed, and the focus is on curative rather than preventive care. There are about one thousand people to each doctor, with over eight hundred people per each hospital bed. There is a separate system for members of the armed forces. Private health care is also available, primarily in urban centers. Many people still consult native healers, including witch doctors, voodoo practitioners, and herbalists. Parasites and infectious diseases are common. Contaminated water must be boiled in rural areas. Malaria and rabies are still a problem. In spite of this, the life expectancy is sixty-eight for men and seventy-two for women.

SECULAR CELEBRATIONS

Secular holidays include New Year's Day on 1 January; Juan Pablo Duarte's Birthday on 26 January; Independence Day from Haiti, celebrated with a carnival featuring parades, costumes and parties on 27 February; Pan-American Day on 14 April; Labor Day on 1 May; the Foundation of Sociedad la Trinitaria on 16 July; the Santo Domingo Merengue Festival, in late July; the founding of Santo Domingo on 5 August; Restoration Day on 16 August; Columbus Day on 12 October; and United Nations Day on 24 October.

LANGUAGE

The population of the Dominican Republic is mostly Spanish-speaking. The local variant of Spanish is called Dominican Spanish, which closely resembles other Spanish vernaculars in the Caribbean. In addition, it has influences from African languages and borrowed words from indigenous Caribbean languages particular to the island of Hispaniola. Schools are based on a Spanish educational model; English and French are mandatory foreign languages in both private and public schools, although the quality of foreign languages teaching is poor. Some private educational institutes provide teaching on other languages, notably Italian, Japanese, and Mandarin.

Haitian Creole is the largest minority language in the Dominican Republic and is spoken by Haitian immigrants and their descendants. There is a community of a few thousand people whose ancestors spoke Samaná English in the Samaná Peninsula. They are the descendants of formerly enslaved African Americans who arrived in the nineteenth century, but only a few elders speak the language today. Tourism, American pop culture, the influence of Dominican Americans, and the country's economic ties with the United States motivate other Dominicans to learn English. The Dominican Republic is ranked 2nd in Latin America and 23rd in the World on English proficiency.

USEFUL PHRASES

Key to abbreviations: sg = singular (said to one person), pl = plural (said to more than one person)

English	Spanish
Welcome	Bienvenido
Hello (General greeting)	Hola
How are you?	Como esta usted?
Reply to 'How are you?'	Y usted?
What's your name?	Como se llama?
My name is ...	Me llamo es
Where are you from?	¿De dónde eres?
I'm from ...	Soy de
Pleased to meet you	Me gusta
Good morning(Morning greeting)	Buenos días
Good afternoon(Afternoon greeting)	Buenos tardes
Good evening(Evening greeting)	Buenos noches
Good night	Buenos noches
Goodbye(Parting phrases)	Adios
Good luck	Bueno suerte
Cheers!(Toasts used when drinking)	Salud!
Have a nice day	Que tengas un buen día
Bon appetit /Have a nice meal	Tener una buena comida
Bon voyage /Have a good journey	Tener un buen viaje
I understand	Yo entiendo
I don't understand	No comprendo
I don't know	No se.
Please speak more slowly	Habla ____ por favor.
Please write it down	Escribe por favor.
Do you speak English?	Habla Ingles?
Do you speak Swahili?	Habla Espanol?

Yes, a little(<i>reply to 'Do you speak ...?'</i>)	Si, un poco.
How do you say ... in Spanish?	Como se dice ____ en espanol?
Excuse me	Pardon
How much is this?	Cuanta questa?
Sorry	Lo siento.
Please	Por favor
Thank you	Gracias
Reply to thank you	Denada
No thanks	No, gracias.
Where's the toilet?	Donde esta el bano?
This gentleman/lady will pay for everything	Este caballero pagará por todo
Would you like to dance with me?	¿te gustaría bailar conmigo?
I love you	Te amo.
Get well soon	Recupérate pronto
Help!	Ayudame
Fire!	¡Fuego!
Stop!	Parada
Go away!	Vete
Leave me alone!	Déjame en paz
Call the police!	Llama a la policía

SAFETY

These tips, from the U.S. State Department, pertain to all countries and are not necessarily specific to the Dominican Republic.

Traveling to a foreign country such as the Dominican Republic can offer the experience of a lifetime. However, in the midst of all this excitement you must also be cognizant of your surroundings and take certain precautions to ensure your safety. Like many countries around the world, the Dominican Republic has certain neighborhoods you might be wise to avoid, and the country is currently experiencing a higher than average crime rate due to an increase in gang activity in certain regions of the country.

To help you safely enjoy all that the Dominican Republic has to offer, below we have outlined a few travel safety tips you may want to keep in mind while visiting the country.

Travel in Groups: As the old saying goes, “there is safety in numbers.” Truer words have never been spoken. As you make your way through the beautiful Dominican, en route to the various sites and attractions you’ve mapped out on your itinerary, always try to travel with at least one other person (even more if you can). Research shows that criminals are less likely to approach you when they feel outnumbered.

Make Copies of all Your Important Documents: Documents can easily be misplaced or even stolen in the hustle and bustle of foreign travel, creating a nightmarish situation you just don’t need. This is why you should make copies of all your important papers. This includes copies of your passport, visa, driver’s license, social security card and medical insurance card. Travel experts suggest you keep one copy of these documents on your person at all times, and at least one other copy locked in the hotel safe.

Beware of the Night: Sightseeing is an activity that should be limited to the daylight hours, as unsavory types tend to be hard at work during the nighttime, often preying on unsuspecting tourists. Enjoy your hotel during the nighttime hours, and if you must go out, try to stay in well populated areas.

Watch the Strays: The Dominican Republic has many stray dogs and cats roaming the streets, many of which are feral and quite dangerous. Even if the animal looks friendly, resist the temptation to pet him/her, as many of these strays are infected with diseases, including rabies.

Get Vaccinated: Although only people who have traveled to certain regions of the world are legally required to be vaccinated (for yellow fever) prior to entering the Dominican, you may want to be on the safe side and receive certain vaccinations anyway. Check with your doctor regarding the vaccinations that would be appropriate when traveling to the Dominican Republic and don’t let a serious illness of some type ruin your long-awaited getaway.

The Dominican Republic is, overall, a very safe country to visit. All the more so if your visit is primarily an organized trip. Many tourists visit the Dominican Republic every year and most visits are trouble-free. Unfortunately, terrorism has become part of life and it is very difficult, if not impossible, to safeguard against it. Fortunately, incidents are very rare and the chance of being a random victim is almost negligent. Theft and muggings are relatively common, but most incidents are in cities.

The following are general safety tips for traveling anywhere in the world, including the Dominican Republic:

- Don't wear valuables like jewelry, expensive watches or money belts visibly.
- Buy good travel and health insurance and check that all activities on your trip are covered.
- Check the entry requirements for the country you are visiting, including: number of empty pages and months left before your passport expires, visa requirements, if holding a return ticket is required, etc.
- Get all the required vaccinations, preventive malaria medication and insect repellent. Insect repellent should contain at least 20-30% DEET.
- Lock all bags before handing them over at check-in at the airport. Keep all valuables in your hand luggage or money belt, including your passport and bank cards.
- Make photocopies of important documents like tickets, insurance papers, passport, and visa and keep them separate. It is also recommended to scan these documents and email a copy to yourself and somebody at home, along with your flight other travel details. If you don't have a scanner, you can leave photocopies with somebody at home.
- Put your valuables in the safety deposit box of the hotel and make sure to take at least one bag that you can lock.
- Check with your tour operator what to pack for your trip. It is important to be protected against the sun and have suitable clothing for wildlife watching, if required.
- When small charter flights are part of your trip, check the luggage weight limits, since weight requirements are enforced.
- Don't drive at night as it is harder to see the road conditions. They are often poor and people frequently walk on the road, sometimes drunk.
- When driving in areas known for car hijackings you should lock all doors and keep your windows closed. Don't stop at hijacking hotspots, like empty parking lots or the emergency lane of highways. The risk is significantly higher after dark.
- Don't offend or irritate police officers. Always show respect. Police officers might try their luck getting a bribe. If so, don't get aggressive, but also don't give in and stand your ground. A light attitude and a joke might well get you off the hook.
- Don't take photos of government or military buildings and constructions.
- Keep a small stash of cash at hand separately so you don't have to reveal where you keep the rest of your money when paying for small things on the street.
- It's always safer to walk in the city with at least two or more people.
- Don't walk around at night; take a licensed taxi.
- When taking a taxi without a meter, always get information about the trip price up front, before you get in.
- Try not to look too much like a typical tourist by wearing special safari clothing, a money belt, a camera, etc. It will make you look like an inexperienced traveler who can easily be tricked.
- Reading a guidebook or looking at a map on a street often attracts unwanted attention from people who offer transport or want something else from you.
- Don't be afraid to be firm with people who sell things on the street. An effective approach is not to look at their merchandise at all, say 'no' once or twice and ignore them after that.
- Without being paranoid, be skeptical of people outside the hospitality industry approaching you out of a normal context. Especially if they have a sad story that plays on your emotions. These stories usually aren't true and, in most cases, end in asking for money.
- It is always good to be aware of people around you or following you (Again, without being too paranoid about it).

- Be very careful when drawing money from an ATM. Go elsewhere if suspect people hang around. Don't let anybody help you or talk with you at the ATM. Always cover the number keys with one hand while entering your personal code with the other.
- Keep any bags safely grasped under your arm and don't put anything down at any point. When having a meal or a drink you can tie your bag to your chair or secure it by putting the bag handle under a chair leg while sitting on the chair.
- In busses, don't put your bag under your seat, since the person behind you can grab it, take valuables out of it, and put it back without you noticing.
- When traveling with all your luggage and belongings, always carry your passport and bank cards on you using a money belt and make sure you wear it underneath your clothes, not visible to outsiders. This way, in case your bags get lost or stolen, you'll still have what's most important. Traveling this way is also recommended for domestic and international flights, since luggage can get lost.
- Always lock your car doors and close windows when driving in busy towns. Never leave a car unattended with valuables or luggage visible. If somebody walks up to your car unexpectedly and wants to talk to you, open your window just enough to be able to communicate, but not far enough for them to put their hand in.
- Ask the hotel if it is safe to walk along the beach and only bring the valuables you need for the day.
- Don't engage with any beach boys.

GOVERNMENT

The Dominican Republic is a representative democracy or democratic republic, with three branches of power: executive, legislative, and judicial. The president of the Dominican Republic heads the executive branch and executes laws passed by the congress, appoints the cabinet, and is commander in chief of the armed forces. The president and vice-president run for office on the same ticket and are elected by direct vote for 4-year terms. The national legislature is bicameral, composed of a senate, which has 32 members, and the Chamber of Deputies, with 178 members.

Judicial authority rests with the Supreme Court of Justice's 16 members. They are appointed by a council composed of the president, the leaders of both houses of congress, the President of the Supreme Court, and an opposition or non-governing-party member. The court "alone hears actions against the president, designated members of his Cabinet, and members of Congress when the legislature is in session."

The Dominican Republic has a multi-party political system. Elections are held every two years, alternating between the presidential elections, which are held in years evenly divisible by four, and the congressional and municipal elections, which are held in even-numbered years not divisible by four. "International observers have found that presidential and congressional elections since 1996 have been generally free and fair." The Central Elections Board (JCE) of nine members supervises elections, and its decisions are unappealable. Starting from 2016, elections will be held jointly, after a constitutional reform.

Currency

Currency & CURRENT CONVERSATION RATE

The Dominican peso (abbreviated \$ or RD\$) is the national currency, with the United States dollar, the Euro, the Canadian dollar and the Swiss franc also accepted at most tourist sites. The exchange rate to the U.S. dollar, liberalized by 1985, stood at 2.70 pesos per dollar in August 1986, 14.00 pesos in 1993, and 16.00 pesos in 2000.

As of September 2018, the rate was 50.08 pesos per dollar.

Bringing cash: If you are bringing cash, U.S. dollars should be "big head" dollars dated 2006 or later. Larger denomination notes (50s or 100s) give you a better exchange rate than 20s or below.

Credit and debit cards: The Dominican Republic predominately uses VISA. Several ATM machines now take cards with a Mastercard logo and some hotels take American Express. If you are depending on your Mastercard ATM or credit card, this may be a problem unless you use Orient Bank or Barclay's Bank in country for a fee. The fee is also based on what your bank may charge and at Barclays ATMS it informs you of the fee and asks you to confirm you understand the fee will be deducted before it dishes out the money.



IMR RECOMMENDATIONS ON PERSONAL FUNDS

- Please bring the amount that you are comfortable spending on gifts or small personal articles, including snacks.
- To determine if the currency of the country you are visiting is traded in the United States, please visit www.travelex.com. Travelex has offices in all major airports and cities and you may change money before the trip for a small fee.
 - Trading in the United States is the easiest way for you to trade money.
- If the currency is not traded in the United States, you will usually be able to trade in the airport upon arrival or the team leader will arrange to change money for the team once during the trip. We do not guarantee that you will be able to change money in small towns or during clinic.
- You must bring currency newer than 2006 and in perfect condition - no tears, folds, old bills. Your team leader will not be able to change old or worn bills for you.
- New bills are preferred by the international banks, as are denominations larger than \$20. The best rate is obtained trading \$100 bills.
- If you are joining us from another country, please check the trading rules of your home currency.
- Credit cards may not be accepted outside of major cities, hotels, and large restaurants.
- IMR does not pay for alcohol. If you intend to purchase alcohol, you are required to obtain and pay with a separate bill at the time of purchase. Please have local currency for these transactions.

TIME in the Dominican Republic

Atlantic Standard Time

3 hours ahead of Denver, Colorado

1 hour ahead of New York City, New York

Coordinated Universal Time: -4:00 h

EMBASSY INFORMATION

EMBASSY OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

U. S. Embassy

Av. Republica de Colombia #57

Santo Domingo

Dominican Republic

Phone: (809) 567-7775

U.S. Citizens with emergencies, please call (809) 567-7775

EMBASSY OF DOMINICAN REPUBLIC IN THE UNITED STATES

Ambassador: Sr. Jose Tomas Perez

Hours: 9:00am – 4:00pm

1715 22nd Street, NW

Washington, D.C. 20008

Email: embassydominicanrepublic@gmail.com

Tel. (202) 332-6280, (202) 660-2263

Fax. (202) 265-8057

NOTE: For your safety, this information is also available on the back of your IMR badge.

WEBSITES

The following websites provide information on the country you are visiting. IMR highly recommends and encourages you to view these sites prior to departure. They are frequently updated and are a tremendous resource:

- ❖ Embassy of the United States for Dominican Republic: <https://do.usembassy.gov>
- ❖ State Department Travel Warnings: <https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/traveladvisories/traveladvisories/dominican-republic-travel-advisory.html>
- ❖ CIA publication: <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/dr.html>
- ❖ Travel Health online: <http://www.tripprep.com/>
- ❖ World Health Organization: <http://www.who.int/>
- ❖ Center for Disease Control: <http://www.cdc.gov/travel/>
- ❖ CDC Travel Medicine for Dominican Republic: <https://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel/destinations/traveler/none/dominican-republic/>
- ❖ CNN Weather Report: <http://www.cnn.com/WEATHER>
- ❖ Official Dominican Republic Tourism Site: <http://www.godominicanrepublic.com/>
- ❖ Lonely Planet: <https://www.lonelyplanet.com/dominican-republic>
- ❖ Wikipedia Dominican Republic: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dominican_Republic

