

## **BEACHES**

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The Dominican Republic's (DR) beaches are widely celebrated as being among the world's best, and for good reason. Here, more than 1,000 miles of sugar-colored sand is gently lapped by warm waters so clear and blue one has to see to believe. Depending on location, the DR's beaches offer a gentle lullaby for an oceanside nap or enough wind to keep a Technicolor kiteboard adrift.

Super fine white sand sprinkled with coconut palm trees line the east coast while golden sand defines the beaches of the north coast. Adding a third color to the palette are the grey sand playas of Barahona in the west. Some of these areas are populated with resorts featuring a full array of watersports, food vendors, people watching and other activities. While others take visitors to another world of pristine tranquility with peaceful, uninhabited beaches. Here, the only intrusions are a towering coconut palm and the swaying breeze.

The DR boasts far too many prize-worthy beaches to mention. Some of the more popular sites include:

### **North Coast**

#### ***Playa Dorada***

Located just east of Puerto Plata at the foot of the largest all-inclusive resort complex in the world, Playa Dorada is protected by reefs and features golf sand and warm waters. While anyone can drive into the Playa Dorada complex, non-guests have to pay for a day pass.

#### ***Playa Cofresi***

Just a few minutes west of Puerto Plata lays one of the most breathtaking beaches in the DR named for the pirate Roberto Cofresi. While Playa Cofresi is wonderful for bathing in the sun, the waters provide excellent bodysurfing and boogie-boarding opportunities with its choppy waters. Two lodging options serve as the backdrop to the beach: Sun Village Resort & Spa and Hacienda Resort.

#### ***Cabarete***

On the DR's north coast, adventure seekers will fall in love with Cabarete. One of the top five kiteboarding and windsurfing beaches in the world, Cabarete's beach (often called "Kite Beach") annually hosts an array of international championships. On any given day, visitors to the area will see the sky filled with hundreds of colorful kites carrying amateur and pro riders through the surf.

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### ***Playa Grande***

At 1.5 miles long, Playa Grande, located near Luperon, is one of the longest beaches on the north coast. However, the beach is impressive not only for its size but also its breathtaking beauty. While the Occidental Allegro resort is now located at one end of the beach and food vendors sit at the other, the beach in between offers plenty of room to spread out.

### ***Playa Sosua***

Located on a crescent-shaped bay, Playa Sosua is a postcard perfect beach. Featuring a backdrop of towering cliffs, the waters here are calm, clear and a deep shade of turquoise. Playa Sosua is perhaps one of the Caribbean's most popular beaches, which may explain the crowds. However, with so much to do – shopping or eating in Sosua, snorkeling or even taking a glass bottom boat tour – the crowds are worth the visit.

### ***Playa Punta Rucia***

West of Puerto Plata and just off the beaten path, Playa Punta Rucia boasts white sand beaches and beautiful mountain views. Popular with snorkelers due to the presence of a large coral reef just off the shore, Playa Punta Rucia offers a small selection of restaurants/bars and a peaceful lagoon that is good for birdwatching.

### **Northeast Coast**

#### ***Cayo Levantado***

Cayo Levantado is a small island located a few miles offshore from the town of Samana. Because it gets busy, it is recommended that visitors take the ferry early. It departs from the main port in Samana. On the opposite side of the island, smaller beaches are less frequented.

#### ***Las Terrenas***

Located on the north coast of the Samana peninsula, Las Terrenas beach stretches one mile on either side of the town. Speckled with coconut palms, it's the perfect destination in which to enjoy a mix of sand, surf and shade. Casual restaurants are plentiful here, many of which are owned by experts from Europe (especially France) and North America.

#### ***Playa Bonita***

A quiet eight mile beach located on the north side of Samana peninsula, Playa Bonita looks like something out of a movie set. Featuring white sand beach and clear turquoise waters (see a pattern here?), the area is framed by a few beach houses that only add to its charm.

### ***Playa Las Flechas***

Continuing the Spanish lesson, Playa Las Flechas translates to “Beach of the Arrows.” Legend has it this beach, located on the southeast tip of Samana peninsula, is named after a battle between Christopher Columbus and the Taino Indians, who occupied the land. A fairly quiet destination, Playa Las Flechas looks out onto Cayo Levantado.

### ***Playa Rincon***

*Conde Nast Traveler* ranked this beach as one of the world’s 10 best. It’s so splendid, in fact, that many Dominicans refer to it as the most beautiful on the island. Over three miles long, Playa Rincon is surrounded by coconut palms and almond trees, not to mention a 2,000 foot mountain on one end. Again, the best way to get to this isolated beach is by boat; a ride that is definitely worth it. (Boat rides are available from Las Galeras.)

## **South Central Coast**

### ***Boca Chica***

The beach most popular with Santo Domingo residents, Boca Chica is busy and loaded with food stands and entrepreneurial Dominicans selling everything from food to personal tours. Despite this, the waters off the shore are shallow and therefore kid-friendly.

### ***Playa Juan Dolio***

While the waters at Playa Juan Dolio are not as ideal for swimming as neighboring Boca Chica, the beach is not as busy. Restaurants, bars and resorts line the beach and provide all-day entertainment.

### ***Playa Guayacanes***

Nestled between Juan Dolio and Boca Chic, this sandy beach is a local favorite for boogie-boarding.

## **Southwest Coast**

### ***Playa Pedernales***

Located near the Haitian border, this beach is close to the fishing village of Pedernales. While the beach is quite peaceful during the day, at night it comes alive with small fishing boats returning to shore.

### ***San Rafael***

Located south of Barahona, the beach at San Rafael is a hot spot for local Dominicans. Here visitors will find the best of both worlds – a strong ocean surf but also a natural swimming pool formed by a waterfall descending from the nearby mountains. A manmade barrier allows the water from the pool to gently pour into the ocean.

## **East Coast**

### ***Isla Catalina***

Only six square miles in size and located just off the shore from Bayahibe, Isla Catalina features the best coral reef in the area, a mangrove swamp and sand dunes. Crowds of tourists come for a day of scuba diving and relaxation.

### ***Isla Saona***

Located within Parque Nacional Del Este, Isla Saona is one of the southeast coast's most popular tourist destinations. In fact, this small island was recently named one of the Caribbean's "Eight Dream Beaches" by *Caribbean Travel & Life* magazine. Powder sugar beaches, towering palms, azure water and the occasional sand bar at low tide make this one of the DR's most romantic destinations.

### ***Playa Bavaro***

Just north of Punta Cana, the Bavaro resort area continues the long stretch of picture perfect white beach. While Playa Bavaro is considered a separate beach from Punta Cana, the area appears as one extend strip of fluffy white sand reaching over 30 miles along the coast. Like Punta Cana, Bavaro is bordered with numerous all-inclusive resorts, many with cool refreshing drinks served beach-side.

### ***Punta Cana***

Punta Cana beach is often referred to as the "coconut coast" due to its hundreds of swaying coconut palms scattered along the 30 miles of super fine white sand. This resort area is perhaps the DR's most popular vacation destination.

Punta Cana is outlined by a large concentration of all-inclusive resorts, each with their own garden of sun chairs and cabanas. However, despite the number of people who idle the day away here, the beach's size ensures visitors will never feel crowded. Those who don't want to spend their time simply baking in the sun can participate in an array of activities – from beach volleyball to parasailing.

### ***Playa Dominicus***

The first beach in the Caribbean to have "Blue Flag" status (an eco-label showing high honors in a beach's commitment to sustainable development), Playa Dominicus is popular with scuba divers due to the presence of a large reef. Located near Bayahibe, Playa Dominicus is bordered by several all inclusive resorts.

### ***Playa Minitas***

Playa Minitas is the private beach at the massive and luxurious Casa de Campo resort in La Romana. A variety of water sports are available at this exclusive stretch of sand as well as the resort's famous Minitas Beach pina colada served in a huge pineapple.