

EAST COAST OVERVIEW

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The East Coast region of the Dominican Republic (DR) contains the most popular and fastest growing tourist area in the country – Punta Cana/Bavaro. One look at the surroundings and there is no question as to why. This is the place to be if tourists are seeking an all-inclusive vacation set on one of the most picturesque stretches of beach in the world.

Vacationers don't have to travel far for a change of scenery. Just south of this thriving area is environmentally-forward Bayahibe. Located on a Peninsula in the southeast corner of the DR, this town is an up-and-coming vacation spot. Not only does Bayahibe contain one of the most celebrated national parks, it also has received two international awards for its conservation efforts in tourism.

Another popular east coast destination is La Romana. Most people who know a thing or two about the DR instantly think of Casa de Campo when asked about this quaint area. While the luxurious resort frequented by many celebrities is a top attraction, the city of La Romana and neighboring San Pedro de Macoris are historically important, especially for baseball fans, and worth a visit.

Top Attractions

Casa de Campo

One of the DR's most celebrated luxury attractions, Casa de Campo is a walled compound featuring world-renowned championship golf courses, breathtaking villas, a polo field, marina, the Mediterranean village of Altos de Chavon and an all-inclusive resort, to name a few.

Isla Saona

Just off the southern shore of Bayahibe is the Robinson Crusoe-esque Isla Saona, a 45-square mile island of white coral sand beach and lagoons lined with mangroves.

Isla Catalina

Part of the Nacional Parque del Este, the petite island of Isla Catalina is six square miles and features pavilions and a restaurant and bar. (A few cruise lines include the island as a port-of-call.) One of the east coast's best coral reefs is found off the island. This is also the locale of "The Wall," a steep underwater drop-off popular with divers for its intact coral reef.

Playa Punta Cana/Bavaro

Considered one of the world's prettiest beaches, Playa Punta Cana/Bavaro is lined by swaying coconut palms and numerous all-inclusive resorts.

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BAYAHIBE

A small fishing village, Bayahibe is gaining recognition as a growing tourism destination and an environmental benchmark for the DR and the Caribbean.

There are several all-inclusive hotels in Bayahibe including Viva Resort by Wyndham and Canoa Coral by Hilton. The village is comprised of restaurants serving fresh seafood, dive shops, pastel-colored huts, and a few smaller hotels. Visitors can truly mingle with the locals as several rent-out their homes as guest lodging for under \$25 a night. This is especially attractive to backpackers who use the village as a base camp for exploring Parque Nacional del Este, a 172-square mile national park known for its 200 caves dating to pre-Columbian time.

The park has two entrances, one at the village of Boca del Yuma towards the east and the other at Bayahibe. (For additional information see the National Parks backgrounder.)

The hotels of Bayahibe have made a conscious decision to preserve their environment as it welcomes more tourists. They've banded together to create an area worthy of the "Green Globe Award," part of an international program which recognizes organizations that make a significant contribution to sustainable development. The award is monitored by the Caribbean Action for Sustainable Tourism (CAST) and supported by the Caribbean Hotel Association (CHA). Hoteliers receive the Green Globe when they have met international standards for waste prevention, reuse and recycling practices and preservation of the surroundings. Individually, the area's Sunscape Casa del Mar resort was awarded the "2005 Green Hotel of the Year Award" by the Caribbean Hotel Association (CHA) for its exceptional commitment to conservation.

Current environmental projects for the region's hotel association include: protecting the ocean floor, creating educational programs for hotel personnel and residents of Bayahibe, protection of endangered turtles and iguanas, and fostering children's awareness of environmental sensitivity through the group, Bayahibe Wardens.

The area holds a second environmental preservation award which stands proudly on the beach, the "Blue Flag." Governed by the Foundation for Environmental Education (FEE), the DR is one of only 33 countries whose beaches have been recognized for high water quality, progressive environmental education programs, environmental management, safety and other ecologically sound services.

Visitors looking for metropolitan flair will enjoy day trips to Santo Domingo and the Mediterranean village of Altos de Chavon. These can be arranged through their hotel or one of the several tour operators.

ISLA SAONA

A very popular area of Parque Nacional del Este, Isla Saona is a tranquil Caribbean island. In addition to

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three cave systems and a pristine stretch of beach, those visiting Isla Saona (by boat ferry) may want to make a stop at the neighboring Catalina Island before stepping onto Saona's shores. Less visited, Catalinita provides a snorkeling area where people have spotted manatee year-round and humpback whales and dolphin during the winter months.

Several tours depart for the islands from La Romana, Bayahibe and Punta Cana. (For more information visit the Eco and Adventure Tourism backgrounder.)

LA ROMANA AND SAN PEDRO DE MACORIS

Known for its sugar factories, the area of La Romana is one of the more industrialized in the DR. In fact, it's the sugar that makes La Romana and neighboring San Pedro de Macoris (home of Sammy Sosa) two of the leading Major League Baseball player-producing towns.

During the six months when sugar is not in high production, workers often compete in baseball games against other sugar mill workers. This has helped to brew the excitement and passion for baseball that has become synonymous with the DR. Baseball fans will want to take in a game at the Michelin Baseball Stadium located at La Romana's west end. The home team is the Azucareros, which translates to La Romana Sugar Bowls. Tickets range from \$50-\$150 and games against San Pedro de Macoris' Estrellas Orientals can be exceptionally entertaining.

To the northeast of the stadium is the Mercado Municipal, an open-air marketplace spanning several city blocks where tourists can purchase fresh produce and shop for crafts and souvenirs.

The Taino Indians were, at one time, a major influence in the area and held many of their religious ceremonies in the "Cave of Wonders" or Cuevas de las Maravillas. Located in the town of Rio Soco between San Pedro de Macoris and La Romana, the caves have some 500 petroglyphs etched into their walls by the ancient Tainos and feature an abundance of crystallized minerals. Easily accessible for children and seniors with an elevator and several ramps, the caves are open Tuesday to Sunday, 10 a.m. to 6 p.m.

Casa de Campo

Casa de Campo is considered one of the most complete and luxurious resort communities in the Caribbean. Many celebrities vacation at the complex, including George Hamilton, Bill Clinton, Shakira, Elizabeth Taylor, former President George H. Bush, and the DR's very own Sammy Sosa.

PGA golf greats, including Dana Quigley, Jim Thorpe, Ed Dougherty and Tom Wargo have all made their way to Casa de Campo to play Teeth of the Dog, the first course to open at the resort nearly 30 years ago. Since creating Teeth of the Dog, Pete Dye has designed Links and his newest course Dye Fore.

While this new course is receiving rave reviews from international golfers, Teeth of the Dog is still a

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favorite and for this reason the resort has invested in its extensive makeover, which was completed in October 2005. (See the Golf backgrounder for more information.)

In addition to golf, the resort also has a full-service marina capable of accommodating yachts up to 250-foot long. The full-service marina is encapsulated by international boutiques, jewelers, galleries and flavorful restaurants. (See the Marinas backgrounder for more information.)

The resort has a variety of accommodations, from spacious guestrooms with balconies overlooking the golf course to luxury suites brushed with Caribbean flair. Lavish villas ranging from two to six bedrooms provide an elite option for families and groups of friends. Villas come complete with private pool, personal touring car and dedicated maid and butler who will prepare and serve breakfast daily while catering to other requests.

Beyond golf, yachts and living the life of luxury, Casa de Campo also features a polo club, private beach, pool and spa area, horseback riding, sport shooting, tennis and meeting facilities. www.casadcampo.com.do.

Altos de Chavon Cultural Center

Built in 1976, Altos de Chavon is a cobblestone-lined replica of a quaint 16th century Tuscan hillside village. Set high above the Chavon River, this cultural center features shops, restaurants, artists' studios and galleries housed in stone and coral block buildings. The complex also features a school of design, an open-air amphitheater, archeology museum and art gallery.

The semi-circled 5,000 seat amphitheater practically turns back time thanks to its Grecian qualities. This limestone concert bowl was inaugurated by Frank Sinatra and Carlos Santana in 1982 and has since hosted dozens of concerts, symphonies, theatrical events and festivals. International recording artists Julio Iglesias, Dizzy Gillespie, Sting and Gloria Estefan have played under the stars to adoring fans at this one-of-a-kind amphitheater.

The DR's most famous fashion designer, Oscar de La Renta, is intimately involved in the Altos de Chavon School of Design. In addition to fashion design, the two-year Associate in Applied Science degree program has concentrations in graphic design, interior design and fine arts/illustration. The controlled curriculum was developed in conjunction with the world renowned Parsons School of Design, which accepts graduates to complete their four-year degree.

The Center also has an artist-in-residence program in which established and up-and-coming artists live and work in Altos de Chavon for three months. Painters, sculptors, photographers, writers, musicians and architects exchange knowledge in open studios throughout the village. Past artists have included author Julia Alvarez and artists Henry Koerner and Roberto Juarez. The Regional Museum of Archeology houses a collection of over 3,000 artifacts that were discovered at the site of the cultural center and along the Chavon River. Beyond the exhibits, the museum sponsors programs to educate teachers throughout the

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DR about its indigenous history. Another museum, also located at Altos de Chavon, is The Gallery. Dominican artists as well as students attending the School of Design are invited to show work here. www.altosdechavon.com

PUNTA CANA AND BAVARO

In Punta Cana, it's all about the beach. Punta Cana/Bavaro is undeniably breathtaking with tall swaying palms scattered along 21 miles of some of the whitest and finest coral sand beaches in the world. The area has become a haven for vacationers who are seeking a beach chair, a Cuba Libre and a good read.

Punta Cana is the perfect atmosphere for families, couples or friends who are looking for a resort-style vacation. Just about every tour embarks from this area so no one in the group can complain about being bored. (For more on tours and the companies that provide them, see the Eco and Adventure Tourism and Tour Operators backgrounders.)

The majority of the over 30 resorts in Punta Cana are all-inclusive, allowing for an easygoing vacation with plenty to do. As one of the fastest growing areas in the DR, more luxurious and bigger complexes opened in 2005 and several will open in 2006. A few of the new hotels that recently opened include Sunscape Beach and Grand Paradise Bavaro by AMResorts, Paradisus Palma Real by Sol Melia and Oceans Blue. The luxurious Puntacana Resort & Club, co-owned by Oscar de la Renta and Julio Iglesias, has opened its new boutique-style Tortuga Bay Hotel. Part of the large resort complex, it features exquisite rooms all personally designed by de la Renta. Also recently opened is the Sivory Punta Cana, a luxury boutique hotel that is the DR's second "Small Luxury Hotels of the World" member.

Beyond new accommodations, a 24-mile long boulevard is being built to easily move vacationers throughout the area. For those visitors looking to explore the culture and history of metropolitan Santo Domingo, the new Coral Highway (completed by winter of 2006) will essentially cut the travel time between the two areas in half.

Two new major developments currently under construction in the Punta Cana area are Roco Ki Beach & Golf Resort and Cap Cana. (See Golf and Marina backgrounders.) Roco Ki Beach & Golf Resort, located 20 miles west of Puerto Plata's airport, will be a luxurious resort on the same realm as Casa de Campo in La Romana. The complex will offer real estate options, a golf course designed by Nick Faldo, aquatic sports center with full-service marina, spa and hotel accommodations by Westin. The resort is scheduled to open in November 2006. For more information visit www.rocoki.com.

Cap Cana, just south of Punta Cana, is on similar grounds to Casa de Campo with real estate options and resort accommodations. However, Cap Cana will have the largest marina in the Caribbean with over 500 yacht slips and its three golf courses will be designed by Jack Nicklaus. The first golf course, Punta Espada, and the Sanctuary Hotel by Altabella are both scheduled to open in October, 2006. For more information visit www.capcana.com.

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