

FAMILY ACTIVITIES

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Although the Dominican Republic (DR) boasts an assortment of spectacular beaches, the island is much more than white sand, turquoise water and tropical weather. While the mountain paths and rapid waves of the northern coast allow for a more adventurous experience, the relatively secluded areas of the south make for a low-key retreat. Children of all ages will be entertained by the many activities the island has to offer. From nature excursions and water sports to horseback riding and mountain biking, the diversity of the land and overall affordability makes the DR a fantastic destination for a family getaway.

ANIMAL PARKS & AQUARIUMS

Acuario Nacional, Santo Domingo

Phone: (809) 766-1709

Bordering the Caribbean Sea, the national aquarium offers visitors a glimpse of the Caribbean's diverse, colorful sea life. The aquarium's Plexiglas tunnel surrounds spectators with water, sharks, rays and conger eels. A variety of colorful fish swim throughout the tunnel, while exhibits explain different types of marine environments.

Ocean World, Puerto Plata

Phone: (809) 291-1000 / www.oceanworld.net

This large, new marine theme park offers interactive experiences such as swimming with bottlenose dolphins in the world's largest dolphin lagoon, feeding stingrays, exploring an artificial reef, getting close to sharks in the world's first shark interaction pool and swimming just inches from tigers. Parents need not worry, as children and tigers are safely separated by glass. Guests have the opportunity to experience a rainforest complete with waterfalls, beaches, lagoons and wildlife. Birds, iguanas, lizards, frogs, snakes, fish and tigers will captivate park visitors.

Manati Park, Bavaro, Punta Cana

Phone: (809) 221-9444 / www.manatipark.com

Manati Theme Park focuses on nature, animals and the history of the DR. Located in Bavaro-Punta Cana, the park is centered on an incredible landscape of magnificent gardens abundant with orchids and tropical plants. This park is a huge hit with kids as it encourages them, with the assistance of professionals, to hold non-poisonous snakes and play in a pool with dolphins.

Parque Zoologico Nacional, Santo Domingo

Phone: (809) 562-3149

ago in North America. Whether discovering creatures in the large landscaped grounds or going for a ride on the shuttle train, children are sure to enjoy their visit.

MORE



TOURS

Islabon Jungle River Tour

Phone: (809) 248-2818

Located about three miles east of Cabarete, the Islabon Jungle River Tour allows kids to explore the Islabon river area by boat and walk through jungle trails to a mini zoo that includes iguanas, snakes, turtles, ravens and North American crocodiles. The tour includes an informative chat about the nature found in the area.

Monster Truck Safari

Phone: (809) 244-4060

This full-day adventure tour allows participants to experience the diversity and beauty of the Dominican countryside in a fun, comfortable and safe environment. Holding approximately 30 people, the large eight-wheel drive safari jeeps are driven by professionals on a variety of terrain. Participants are seated up high to ensure an exceptional view of the countryside and will be covered in case of rain. Various stops throughout the day offer a glimpse of true Dominican culture and life.

***Insider's Tip:**

Many tourists enjoy bringing small gifts with them on the Monster Truck Safari for distribution to Dominican children in remote villages. These gifts may include pens, crayons, clothing and small toys.

WATER PARKS

Aqua Center, Puerto Plata

Phone: (809) 571-3690, Ext. 3118 / Website: <http://www.aqua-center.com/uk/nonsub3.asp>

Located less than a mile from Sosua's Marine Park, this water sport and diving center has a variety of trained instructors who can meet the needs of divers or snorkelers at any level. The Discovery Scuba program allows families to explore the underwater world together, while an Aqua Center professional takes pictures. Children must be at least 10 years old to become a certified diver.

HORSEBACK RIDING

One of the most popular vacation excursions for families in the DR is horseback riding. Many of the horseback riding operators offer Creole horses, known for their tameness and trained specifically to go slowly for children's safety. Ranches are located all over the island, offering rides along the beach, on flat field areas, or in the more mountainous terrain of the DR. Almost every all-inclusive beach resort will be able to recommend, if not provide, horseback riding facilities.

- Rancho Marabel (809-253-0954), \$60/adults; \$30/kids up to 12 years; \$6.50/ young kids riding on the same horse as an adult
- Iguana Mama (809-571-0908), Various rides: \$35 – \$65

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MOUNTAIN BIKING

Mountain biking can be done all over the island, with the majority of rides taking place in the northern mountain range (Cordillera Septentrional) and the central mountain range (Cordillera Central). Trails vary from beginner to challenging all-day or overnight advanced levels through rolling hills and rugged mountain areas. With its countless unpaved roads and mule trails, the country is a fantastic setting for mountain biking. Enthusiasts will find that most of the larger cities in the country have a mountain biking club that welcomes foreigners for participation in their weekly rides. Regardless of the location on the island, a breathtaking setting is guaranteed.

- Iguana Mama (809-571-0908), Various one-day tours: \$40 – \$85/adult, \$20 – \$50/child under 12 accompanied by parent, Various multi-day tours: \$800 – \$1,950, Bike Rentals

WHALE WATCHING

Between January and April each year, thousands of humpback whales of the North Atlantic population migrate to the Samana Bay region, located on the east coast of the DR. Boat tour operators provide excursions deep into the bay so visitors may witness these large, warm blooded mammals as they play in the sea. Despite their incredible size, humpbacks are the most active and acrobatic of whales. Many tour operators also provide educational commentary about the whales during each excursion.

- Whale Samana (809-538-2494)
- Iguana Mama (809-571-0908), \$100/adult, \$80/17-12yrs, \$60/child under 12 with a parent

WHITEWATER RAFTING & KAYAKING

Home to the Caribbean's highest mountains and longest rivers, the DR is a great place to take the family for some adventurous fun. It is recommended that rafting be done during the fall and winter, as this is just after the island's rainy season. Located near the mountain resort of Jarabacoa, the Rio Yaque is the longest river in the Caribbean and offers both challenging and easy stretches. It includes amusing features such as "Mike Tyson," a 12-foot vertical drop and "The Cemetery," a great stretch of rocks sticking up like tombstones, but also offers winding curves of calmer water for easy drifting.

- Rancho Baiguarte (809-574-4940), rafting and kayaking \$95/day, waterfall \$65/day, mountain trek \$400/person for three days.
- Franz Lang Adventures (809-574-2669), rafting & kayaking \$65/day, waterfall \$45/day, mountain trek \$300/person for three days.
- Colonial Tour Rafting (809-688-5285), rafting \$95/day, waterfall \$45/day.
- Iguana Mama (809-571-0908), rafting and kayaking \$85/day, waterfall \$55/day.
- Rancho Jarabacoa