

NORTH COAST OVERVIEW

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It seems that each of the Dominican Republic's (DR) major regions has a nickname and the north coast is no exception. Featuring the popular towns of Puerto Plata, Cabarete and Sosua, the north coast has been referred to as the "Amber Coast," due its the prevalence of this semi-precious gem; the "Discovery Coast," thanks to Christopher Columbus' discovery of the island of Hispaniola at Cape Isabela; and the "Silver Coast," after Columbus named the area "Puerto Plata" or "silver port" because of the effect the sun made on the water as he approached.

Regardless of what visitors call it, the north coast brings together some of the DR's best features – lush jungle forests, rolling mountain ranges, ethereal blue waters and golden sand beaches. And it is because of these characteristics that this area is today considered the country's most versatile playground. Here vacationers can jump river beds on a mountain bike, fight the waves on a kiteboard, test their strength on a rock face or rub elbows with the rich and famous who come for the north coast's luxurious new accommodations. No matter what activity visitors choose to partake in, however, they'll find that everything here is done with legendary Dominican flair.

Top Attractions

Ocean World

A favorite with kids and adults alike, Ocean World allows visitors to get up close and personal with dolphins, sea lions and sharks. (More information can be found in the Family Activities backgrounder.)

Playa Grande and Playa Dorada Golf Courses

As one of the world's best golf destinations, the DR has a great course tucked into every corner of the country. The north coast's Playa Grande and Playa Dorada, both by Robert Trent Jones, are often on best course lists. (More information can be found in the Golf backgrounder.)

Brugal Factory Tour

The DR is famous for its rum and Brugal is the favorite of many Dominicans. Visitors to Puerto Plata can participate in a factory tour, complete with a refreshing cocktail finale. (More information can be found in the Food and Beverage backgrounder.)

Amber Museum

Located in one of Puerto Plata's famous Victorian houses, the Amber Museum takes visitors on a tour of some of the world's rarest pieces of amber. (More information can be found in the Museums and Archaeology backgrounder.)

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El Museo de Sosua

In the 1940's Puerto Plata became a refuge for several hundred Jews fleeing Nazi Germany. They established a small barrio called El Batey where today visitors can explore a small museum that tells their story. (More information can be found in the Museums and Archaeology backgrounder.)

Cable Car

From Puerto Plata visitors can take a suspended cable car 2,565 feet up to the top of Mount Isabela de Torres. From here, the views of Puerto Plata and the coast are magnificent. In addition, a statue of Christ the Redeemer, a slightly smaller replica of the Rio de Janeiro landmark, is found at the peak.

Jazz Festival

Puerto Plata's annual jazz festival is legendary worldwide and for good reason. Each year the event attracts the Caribbean's best musicians and often features American entertainers.

Adventure Activities Galore

The North Coast is an excellent staging area for numerous adventure activities including whitewater rafting, cascading, kiteboarding, mountain biking, surfing and windsurfing. (More information can be found in Eco and Adventure Activities backgrounder.)

CABARETE

Over the past few years Cabarete has grown to achieve international fame, especially with a younger audience. The reason may be found on the town's beach, ranked as one of the world's top five kiteboarding and windsurfing destinations. So good are the conditions here, in fact, that Cabarete is regularly a stop in international competitions.

Cabarete offers more than just kiteboarding and windsurfing, however. Adventure sports enthusiasts come here for a range of activities including mountain biking, rock climbing, hiking, whitewater rafting and the like. (Many of these activities can be organized by Iguana Mama, a local tour operator. See the Tour Operator backgrounder.)

Given Cabarete's popularity with the younger set, it's no wonder that the town's nightlife is as varied as its daytime activities. Carretera 5, the town's main road, and its boarding beach are jam packed with bars and dance clubs, many of which feature live music.

Insider's Tip: Blue Moon Retreat, just 15 minutes from Cabarete, offers a truly unique dining experience. Situated in a peaceful hilltop location, Blue Moon serves authentic Indian cuisine to guests seated on pillows beneath a thatched hut. After dinner, visitors are invited to enjoy the restaurant's pool. The catch is that a four-wheel drive and the dry season are needed to get to this little piece of heaven. www.bluemoonretreat.net

PLAYA DORADA

Widely known as the world's largest all-inclusive resort complex, Playa Dorada hosts 15 resorts, a mall, restaurants, golf and beaches. In fact, many guests spend their entire vacation within the complex walls.

Insider's Tip: For those who tire of hotel fare, visit Hemingway's for great burgers and ice cold Presidente.

Insider's Tip: Casa Colonial, the north coast's latest luxury boutique resort, is a must for those who want a more upscale vacation experience. Recent guests include Donatella Versace.

PUERTO PLATA

With 200,000 residents, Puerto Plata is the largest city on the DR's north coast. The center of the town is called "Old City" and it is here that Puerto Plata's famed Victorian houses and narrow streets can be found.

While Puerto Plata itself isn't a top tourist attraction, vacationers who want a more cultural experience will enjoy visiting its quaint Parque Central which features a two-story Victorian gazebo. This area also features an array of eclectic bars and restaurants.

SOSUA

By far one of the prettiest spots on the north coast, Sosua is situated on a breathtaking Caribbean bay spotted with white sand beaches, rock formations and luxurious homes and resorts. Featuring a mix of all-inclusives and luxury boutiques, the town offers a range of activities to fit any visitor. This once sleepy fishing village is now a top tourist destination as evidenced by the wealth of bars, restaurants and shops that line its streets. Despite this, Sosua has hung onto a small town charm that is all its own.

Insider's Tip: Victorian House, a former plantation home built by the United Fruit Company, is now a romantic getaway with rooms overlooking the turquoise blue bay.

Insider's Tip: The Sea Horse Ranch is a distinctive and luxurious oceanfront resort that provides a sense of tranquility with private villas and amenities found at many all-inclusive style properties.

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