

SOUVENIRS

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Finding the perfect beach spot might be a number one priority on a sunny vacation morning. But, after a day at the beach, shopping can be a fun and adventurous way to spend the afternoon. The following are top unique Dominican Republic-produced items to seek while visiting. While most of these trinkets can be found at just about every stop, searching for others can become a treasure hunt.

Amber

There are three reasons why amber from the DR is considered the most valuable. First, Dominican amber is 90 percent more transparent than amber found in the Baltic and other parts of the world. Second, the chances of finding an ancient insect in the hardened tree sap are 10 percent more likely than in types found in other countries. The third reason involves color. While yellow amber is common in the DR, additional colors can be found, including deep red and extremely rare smoky green and blue. Amber can be purchased as a collectable piece or in a variety of jewelry designs.

Larimar

The DR is the only place on earth where the opaque blue semiprecious gem of larimar can be found. The result of ancient volcanic activity in the western region, the stone is mainly blue with hints of green and white, while shades of brown, grey or red can be woven throughout. Larimar jewelry makes a wonderful and lasting souvenir.

Rum

While rum can be found throughout the Caribbean, the rum produced in the DR is sweeter and heartier. This is a result of a natural distillation and aging process using special American white oak kegs. The top three brands produced in the DR are Bermudez, Brugal and Barcelo.

Cigars

The DR is the largest producer of cigars in the world and its varieties are superior in quality, even to Cubans. Dominicans take exceptional pride in the careful cultivation and management of its tobacco plants, thereby producing distinctive tastes. Well known cigar brands include Arturo Fuente, Romeo y Julieta, Leon Jimenez, Cojimar and Montecristo.

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Mamajuana

For half a century, Dominicans have turned to Mamajuana as a liquid cure-all from flu and other ailments, in addition to serving as an aphrodisiac. Only a few families still create the concoction of natural herbs, spices, tree leaves and exotic tree stems mixed with honey, molasses, lemon juice and various alcohols such as rum and wine. Taking home a bottle of Mamajuana will definitely add color to travel stories.

Art

Colorful art in a variety of sizes and mediums can be found all over the DR. The paintings often depict the Taino petroglyphs found in the hundreds of DR caves and the countryside views of mountains, sugarcane and coastline.

Presidente Beer

The ice cold taste of Santo Domingo-brewed Presidente beer is a memorable experience. While it's possible to find the refreshing pilsner brew back in the United States, the DR version contains a higher alcohol content (six instead of five percent) and therefore, a different taste. Presidente is very popular with Dominicans and can be found in every part of the country.

Coffee

Dominican coffee grows in six regions of the country, resulting in several different levels of acidity, or taste. All coffee is 100 percent Arabica species. The beans are hand-picked and processed within 24 hours, ensuring freshness. Dominicans typically serve coffee black with a large pour of sugar in an espresso cup. Several brands of coffee can be found at resorts and shops.

Merengue Music

Throughout the country, the vibrant beats of merengue can be heard through the streets. This is the DR's national music and dance and gets the hips shaking and the feet moving. Tourists like to take the music home with them as it is difficult to forget the melodies once back on U.S. soil.

Bachata Music

When merengue isn't played, the rhythmic sound of bachata fills in the gaps. A few artists to seek out include the Aventura and Juan Luis Guerra.

Carnival Masks

The elaborate papier-mâché masks worn by Dominicans during their numerous festivals, celebrations and Carnival make a one-of-a-kind souvenir. Finding the masks can be more of a challenge outside of the Carnival towns of Santo Domingo, La Vega or Cabral, but they are definitely worth the hunt.

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