

## **A QUICK LOOK AT CULTURE**

Dominican culture is as varied and colorful as the land itself, created from the legacy that came together in the country's development, forming the basis of the cultural and social identity of the people.

Different ethnic groups merged in the fascinating development of the history of the Dominican Republic to give life to its unique and vibrant culture. The influence by European, African and indigenous Taino and many others is interwoven and expressed in the country's art, music, gastronomy, sport and religion, resulting in unique expressions that shaped the identity of the Dominican people.

### **ART & CULTURE**

When it comes to craftsmanship, the country practices a rich array of artistic expressions. Among Dominican jewelry, we find creations made with amber, larimar, bone, horn and coconut shell. Clay, porcelain, wood, leather, hemp and guano also serves as a basis to create the most diverse articles and figures for decorative, jewelry and religious use.

As the first city founded in the Americas and the capital city of the country (also named the Cultural Capital of the Americas in 2010), Santo Domingo has an impressive collection of museums, historical sites, monuments, art galleries, cultural and musical spaces and more. The Colonial City (or "La Zona" as referred to by locals), located in Santo Domingo is a World Heritage Site of UNESCO and the first city of the Americas. It has the first street, the first hospital, the first university, first monastery and the first cathedral in the Americas, along with old buildings, parks and sites where the Spanish conquistadors once lived and frequented.

The museums located throughout the Colonial City showcase part of the Dominican identity reflected in ancient objects, documents, canvases, sculptures, costumes and furniture from the different centuries and religions. Among these are the Alcázar de Colón (Columbus Palace), the Catedral Primada de América (the First Cathedral in the Americas), the Convento de los Dominicos, the Casa de la Moneda (the House of Coins), the Casa de Nicolás de Ovando (the House of Nicolás de Ovando), the Casa del Tostado (the House of Tostado), the Casa de Bastidas (the House of Bastidas), the Museo de las Casas Reales (the Museums of the Royal Houses) and the Panteón Nacional (National Pantheon).

Other important museums or historic buildings include the Altar de la Patria (the Homeland Altar), the Casa de Juan Pablo Duarte (the House of Juan Pablo Duarte), the Palacio Consistorial (the City Hall), el Palacio de Borgellá (the Borgellá Palace), the Parque Colón (Columbus Park), as well as religious sites such as: Iglesia del Carmen (DelCarmen Church), the Iglesia y Convento Santa Clara (St. Claire Church and Convent), the Iglesia de Las Mercedes (Las Mercedes Church), the Regina Angelorum and San Miguel y Santa Bárbara churches.

### **MUSIC**

Merengue is the national dance and music of Dominican Republic, with such recognition worldwide that in 2016 it was declared an Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity by UNESCO. However, the country's musical culture boasts a great wealth and diversity of harmony,

instrumentation and rhythm like bachata, son, and perico ripiao – the former responsible for creating the peculiar rhythms of merengue, mangulina or carabiné.

It is also possible to observe a great African influence that is impregnated in the musical culture with the use of sticks (*palos*) or *atabales*, where more than fifty modalities of this rhythm are found throughout the Dominican territory. Its practice is associated with the celebrations of almost all the great Dominican saints.

## **GASTRONOMY**

The country possesses a rich and multifaceted culinary history, having been influenced by Europe, Africa, Taino Indians and other cultures, giving rise to Dominican food with delicious tastes and aromas.

The use of tubers such as cassava, potatoes and Caribbean sweet potatoes, among others, was inherited from the Taino culture. The most elaborate dish prepared by the indigenous people, still practiced in the Dominican culture, is the *cazabe* – a round disk made of the cassava flour and baked in great *burenes* (clay dish). The loquat, maize, bija, peanut, jagua, sapote, fish and seafood, among other delicacies, are also part of the culinary legacy of the Taino culture.

Cooking food by boiling them in water (*salocochar* or *sancochar*), is a tradition gained from the Spanish and African cultures. They also introduced livestock, bringing from Spain the cattle and pig. In addition, they added spices imported from India like pepper, oregano, saffron and turmeric, among others.

The gastronomic legacy of the Africans is also seen in the way some foods are prepared – the meats and provisions are seasoned with garlic, a rich tradition that is still practiced in everyday life.

Among the typical and emblematic dishes of the Dominican Republic is the *la bandera* (the flag), a rich presentation of white rice, beans, chicken or beef and salad (lettuce and tomato). Other favorites are the *sancocho* – a 7-meat stew – *mangú* (green plantains, boiled and mashed), *pastel en hojas* (a plantain-based dough wrapped in a plantain leaf, and boiled) pork or chicken *chicharrones*, and the emblematic *tostones*, double-fried plantains.

Over time, the mixture of these and other cultures has given a delicious gastronomic result, making Dominican Republic's flavors unique to the rest of the world. By 2017, the capital city of Santo Domingo was declared the Capital of the Gastronomic Culture of the Caribbean by the Ibero-American Academies of Gastronomy and the Royal Spanish Academy of Gastronomy.

## **SPORTS**

Baseball is by far the favorite sport, not only as a game or pastime, but as a major source of national pride and identity. *Pelota* (ball), as it is popularly called, arrived in the country in the late 1800s. Since 1955, the Professional Baseball League of Dominican Republic (LIDOM) has hosted competitive and exciting local games across the country. Dominican Republic has also formed the most Major League Baseball (MLB) players outside of the United States, including famous stars such as Manny Ramírez, Vladimir Guerrero, Sammy Sosa, Albert Pujols, David Ortiz,

Robinson Canó, Juan Marichal and Pedro Martínez; Marichal and Martinez are, for the moment, the only Dominicans inducted in the National Baseball Hall of Fame and Museum, in Cooperstown, New York, United States.

Other popular sports include volleyball, basketball, boxing, soccer, football and various water sports.

### **RELIGION**

The majority of the population is Christian, principally Catholic, followed by the Evangelists and others who belong to various beliefs. The country ensures freedom of worship for all.

### **NATIONAL HOLIDAYS**

- January 1 – New Year's Day
- January 6 – Three Kings Day
- January 21 – Our Lady of Altagracia Day
- January 26 – Juan Pablo Duarte Birthday
- February 27 – Independence Day
- March-April – Holy Week
- May 1 – International Work Day
- June – Corpus Christi
- August 16 – Restoration of the Republic Day
- September 24 – Our Lady of Mercedes Day
- November 6 – Constitution Day
- December 25 – Christmas Day

These national holidays are in addition to numerous popular religious festivals in each region of the land. The most important of these in popular Dominican culture is the carnival, a celebration recreating liberty, integration and identity. The carnival is celebrated in nearly all the towns of the country on Sundays during February, and the first week of March.