



# Dominican Republic Background

Text From National Geographic Atlas of the World, Eighth Edition, [DR1.com](http://DR1.com) and Other Sources Photos from Access DR

(Sources: [UNDP Human Development Report](#),  
[CIA World Fact Book](#))

# Dominican Republic Guide

**Overview:** Occupying the eastern two-thirds of Hispaniola, the Dominican Republic has varied topography including Pico Duarte, the highest point in the Caribbean. Colonized in 1493 by Spaniards, it offered the first chartered university, hospital, cathedral, and monastery in the Americas. Santo Domingo, founded in 1496, is the oldest European settlement in the Western Hemisphere. The nation became independent from Haiti on February 27, 1844, but endured political instability and repressive governments. Today it is a democracy, economically dependent on agriculture and tourism. **In 2018, Master Card called Punta Cana the top international destination for leisure travel.** Because of its outstanding beaches, great tourism infrastructure, strong nonprofit sector, vibrant culture, and openness to tourists, it is the **BEST** place to start the new BeachCorps volunteer vacation!

## Fast Facts

**Population:** 8,862,000

**Capital:** Santo Domingo; 1,865,000

**Area:** 48,442 square kilometers (18,704 square miles or about the size of Vermont and New Hampshire combined).

**Language:** Spanish

**Religion:** Roman Catholic, sizable Protestant community.

**Currency:** Dominican peso

**Life Expectancy:** 69

**Poverty Rate:** 30.5% (2016)

**GDP per Capita:** U.S. \$6,300

**Literacy as % of Population:** 85%



# Development

## UNDP Human Development Report for 2016, Dominican Republic

BeachCorps supports sustainable development in the Dominican Republic by helping empower local communities.

While significant poverty exists in the Dominican Republic, our focus will always be on empowering communities that are moving forward and taking control of their own development.

BeachCorps is placing a major emphasis on English learning to give underserved communities new opportunities. English Opens Doors!



### Industry

Tourism

Sugar

Ferronickel and

Gold mining

Textiles



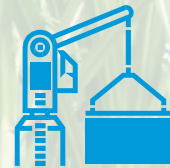
### Agriculture

Sugarcane

Coffee

Cotton

Cocoa



### Exports

Ferronickel

Sugar Gold

Silver

Coffee

Cattle

## Environmental Challenges

The Dominican Republic is blessed with some of the richest natural resources and abundant biodiversity. These blessings are under serious pressure, including from the rapidly expanding tourism industry.

The country's challenges "require immediate attention from the Dominican people in order to secure a future that is environmentally harmonious, socially just and economically viable, a future where the island's population can continue to benefit from the many goods and services that biodiversity and other natural resources have to offer." [Dominican Republic Encyclopedic Dictionary of the Environment.](#)



BeachCorps is promoting the [#SustainabilityPledge](#) to encourage travelers coming to Punta Cana to travel more sustainably, including with discounts for staying in more sustainable hotels and prizes for nonprofits in a photo contest.

HEY! GET WORKING!

## Plastic Pollution

The Dominican Republic, like so many countries, faces serious problems from plastic pollution. Many BeachCorps trips will include work to promote plastic recycling. The alternative is for plastic and other waste to increasingly contaminate the country's beautiful beaches and other natural resources! One of our main nonprofit partners, the Responsible Ecotourism Foundation ([FECOTUR](#)), is focused on promoting recycling and education in schools.

## Reforestation

Because of the Dominican Republic's deforested neighbor Haiti, the Dominican Republic is aware of the dangers of cutting down trees. It is estimated that throughout the 20th century, the Dominican Republic lost 75 to 85 percent of its forest coverage from deforestation. Legal changes in the late sixties has helped stop the logging of Dominican forest and promoted the recovery of degraded lands. In fact, through reforestation programs, the country's forested area more than doubled what it was in the mid-eighties. Ample opportunities for volunteer activities to support local communities in reforestation efforts. Stay tuned for BeachCorps options!



Watch the movie "[Death by a Thousand Cuts.](#)" Co-Directed and Produced by Jake Kheel of the Puntacana Ecological Foundation. The film tells the complex story behind the murder of a Dominican park ranger who fought illegal wood cutting.

## Mangrove Protection

Mangroves provide a critical cleansing and flood control function in coastal areas, helping to ensure that water entering the ocean doesn't damage coral reefs. Unfortunately, overdevelopment of coastal areas, particularly with large hotels near the coast, has destroyed large parts of mangroves. BeachCorps will work with partners to ensure that mangroves are protected as the Dominican Republic hotel industry continues to expand. Ample volunteer opportunities are scheduled on a regular basis.

Get involved! Leave your little grain of sand!



## The Dominican Tourism Industry

The tourism industry in the Dominican Republic, with its strong focus on all-inclusive hotels, has brought enormous economic benefits to the Dominican Republic, helping to create a solid and stable economy and some of the highest levels of growth in the hemisphere. At the same time, there is a growing recognition that the industry must change going forward to increase the economic and social benefits given to local populations and improve environmental protection. BeachCorps is committed to working with hotels to increase the sustainability of the sector and provide more benefits to local communities.



A scene from the [Westin Puntacana Resort and Club](#), one of the hotels of the Puntacana Group, a leader in sustainability and whose Puntacana Group Foundation is a key BeachCorps partner. Together BeachCorps and the Puntacana Group Foundation are working to support a Rotary club project to teach kids English.

## The Culture of “Dao”

The culture of “dao” (DAH-oh), is the culture of dependency that serious development experts try to avoid, particularly in voluntourism. Never give money or gifts to people on your volunteer vacation or you are advancing the “cultura del dao.” BeachCorps projects avoid this by ensuring that beneficiaries give back to their communities, as in our “Recycling for Education” program.



## CULTURE AND HISTORY



### Baseball

“A Brief History of Baseball and the Dominican Republic” from DR1.com. BeachCorps loves baseball and hopes to incorporate many baseball games into projects as means of promoting people-to-people engagement and supporting great causes. Who knows? Maybe you will meet a future “Big Papi” on your trip!

### [The Dominican Republic's Love Affair with Baseball](#) [slate.com](#)

Dominican baseball came from the US military interventions in the early 20th century. Dominican kids will play baseball anywhere and everywhere and with any kind of equipment. Fields often have animals and rocks in the middle. In the cities, Dominicans play “[vitilla](#),” a kind of baseball played with the top of a water jug and a stick.



## Pedro Mir, the DR's Great

### Poet Laureate

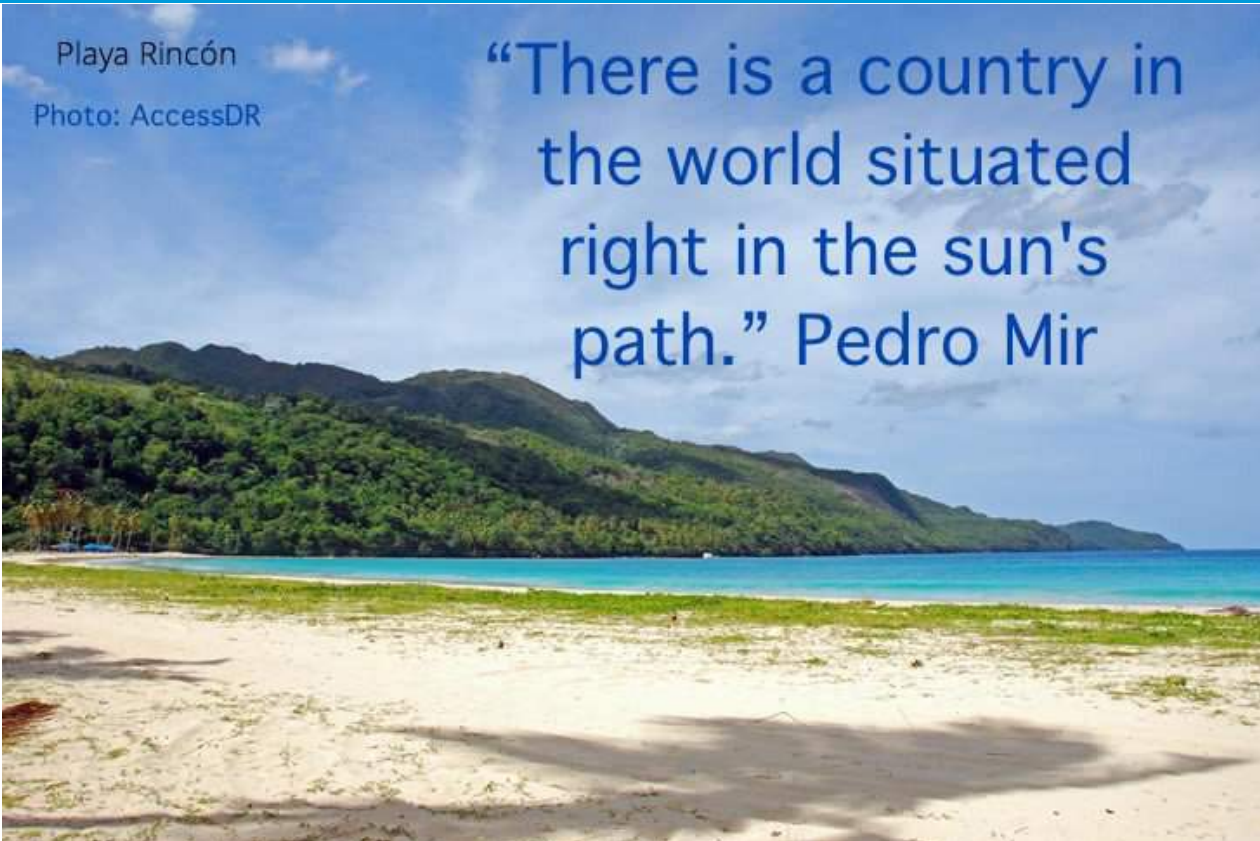


Pedro Julio Mir Valentín (3 June 1913, San Pedro de Macorís – 11 July 2000, Santo Domingo) was a Dominican poet and writer, named Poet Laureate of the Dominican Republic by Congress in 1984, and a member of the generation of "Independent poets of the 1940s." Mir fled the Trujillo dictatorship to Cuba in 1947. The exile would last sixteen years, until the regime fell in 1963. It was while living precariously in Cuba that he wrote his famous poem "Hay un país en el mundo" (There is a country in the world). Originally published in Spanish in 1949, it has been translated to dozens of languages.

Playa Rincón

Photo: AccessDR

“There is a country in the world situated right in the sun's path.” Pedro Mir



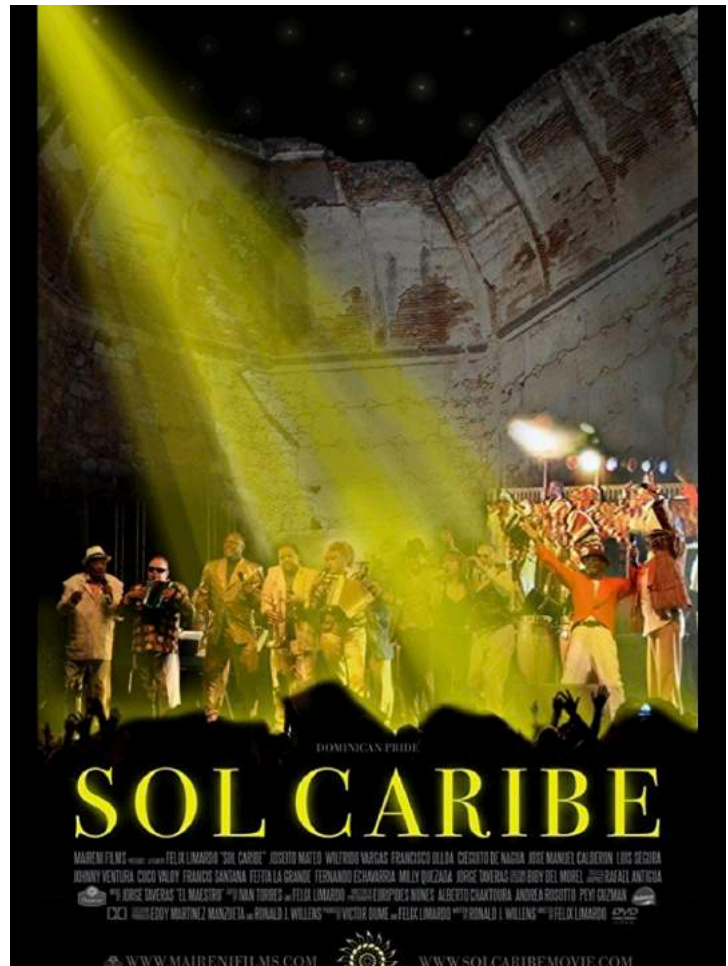


# Dominican Music



“Perico Ripaio” (literally "ripped parrot" in Spanish) is the traditional merengue. Up until the 1930s, the music was considered immoral. The name is said to have been the name of a house of ill repute in Santiago where the music was played. Moralists tried to ban the music and the provocative dance that accompanied it, but with little success. Dictator Rafael Leónidas Trujillo brought accordionists with him on the campaign trail, and once he took power, he ensured that merengue was embraced as a national music by all classes of Dominicans.

Learn about the great traditions of Dominican music by watching the classic movie “[Sol Caribe](#),” which takes you on a journey of an unprecedented tour of concerts with 12 icons of Dominican popular music who between them have sold more than 50 million records throughout the world. The documentary/musical extravaganza captures a national concert tour that celebrates the nation's four rhythms — Merengue, Bachata, Son and Merengue Típico (Perico Ripaio).



## Dominican Cigars

“...The Dominican is home to some of the best, and oldest cigars brands on the planet thanks to the consistent, tropical climate that’s ideal for growing tobacco. For years, if you asked an enthusiast which country produced the best cigars, chances are they would say the Dominican. The first popular location for producing cigars outside of Cuba, brands like La Aurora, Macanudo, Arturo Fuente, Montecristo, Romeo y Julieta, and a slew of others, continue to flourish here. And chances are, the first cigar you enjoyed came from this cigar hotspot. There’s no doubt the Dominican makes some of the best, most approachable cigars around. But be on the lookout, because the Dominican has been pumping out some excellent higher-octane blends too.”  
[www.cigarsinternational.com](http://www.cigarsinternational.com)



## Dominican Coffee

**Dominican Republic Coffee from [DR1.com](http://DR1.com).**

“Dominican coffee is short, very sweet and extremely strong. Short because it is served in a small, espresso-sized cup, sweet because it is made with generous enamel-stripping amounts of sugar, and strong enough to make your eyeballs pop out if you’re not used to it. It goes without saying that Dominican coffee is delicious, and a well-deserved source of intense national pride.”

Definitely bring some Dominican coffee home with you!





“It is said that rum is the essence of the Dominican spirit. The major competition rum here has is the beer. The rum made on the island is some of the best in the world. It is not that easily obtained in many parts of the world. Also remember if you buy that bottle of mamajuana it tastes best made with Dominican rum.” [www.colonialzone-dr.com](http://www.colonialzone-dr.com).

Mama Juana (or Mamajuana) is a drink from the Dominican Republic that is concocted by allowing rum, red wine, and honey to soak in a bottle with tree bark and herbs. The taste is similar to port wine and the color is a deep red. It is often said to have aphrodisiacal qualities. [Ultimate Rum Guide](#)

## Dominican Genetic History

**“Dominicans are 49% Black, 39% White, 4% Indian plus others... or are they?”**



Here are some Dominican foods you MUST try:

Sancocho (7-Meat Stew) ...

Mangú (Plantain Mash) ...

Arroz Blanco (White Rice) ...

Habichuelas Guisadas (Stewed Bean) ...

Pollo Guisado (Braised Chicken) ...

Ensalada Verde (Green Salad) ...

Tostones (Twice-Fried Plantains) ...

Habichuelas con Dulce (Sweet Cream of Beans)

## Dominican Food

**“Top Ten Dominican Republic Food. The BeachCorps personal favorites are tostones and sancocho. Feel free to try local foods during projects on your own risk! BeachCorps excursions bring along boxed lunches, but locals may offer you food because Dominicans are incredibly hospitable.**

Sancocho is  
our  
FAVORITE!





## Dominican Slang

“Dominican Slang” from [ThatsDominican](#). Two of the words you should know are 1) “aplatanado” (ah-plah-ta-NA-doh or “plaintained”) and refers to a foreigner who has become so Dominicanized that they are like a local plantain, and 2) Pariguayo, (pah-ree-GWA-yoh) which came into being during the US military occupations in the Dominican Republic. During these times American soldiers would attend parties, and when everyone was on the dance floor, dancing merengue, there was always someone who would not join in. Folks who did not dance became known as a “Party Watcher”, which when said by a Dominican actually sounded like “pariguayo”. [Here’s a great video on Dominican slang.](#)



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TFQzomd15ts>

## Dominican Carnivals

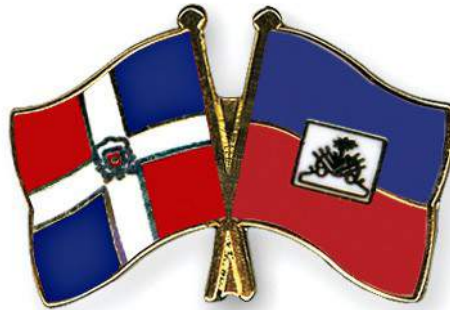
Gotta Love Dominican Carnival! In this video, actor and sociologist Dagoberto Tejada explains the significance of Dominican Carnival, the most important representation of popular Dominican culture and a source of national pride. Carnival is in its essence a symbol of a struggle between life and death (represented by the famous devils) where life wins. Carnival grew in popular importance after the death of the dictator Trujillo. Many towns have their own carnival traditions, with La Vega with its famous devils being the most famous and traditional, while other more modern versions like Punta Cana gain popularity also. Here's another video from BeachCorps on the Punta Cana Carnival, which brings together some of the best carnival costumes not just from Punta Cana but from the whole Caribbean! Video: <https://youtu.be/2jxKUvulMuo>



# Haiti and the Dominican Republic

## History, Peoples, Culture, Relations

The Dominican Republic and Haiti have had a long and often difficult relationship which continues to this day. Below is some background reading on the relationship from a variety of perspectives.



## Bibliography

[“Haiti and the Dominican Republic: One island, two worlds”](#) by DW Akademie, which describes itself as Germany's leading organization for international media development.”

[“The Life of Haitians in Dominican Republic - Migration Challenges Culture,”](#) by Educated Traveller and “Mr. T”. “MR.T “focuses on educating people about various topics related to travel, living abroad and different cultures.” This is an interesting look into the lives of Haitians in the Dominican Republic, with many similarities to the problems facing immigrants in other countries—including the USA.

[Op-Ed by the Dominican Ambassador to the United States José Tomás Pérez, “We are not trying to undo the past” in the Miami Herald, Jul y 13, 2015.](#)