



Route around the Paradise Island

EXOTIC

From: Cork, Shannon, Dublin

Travel details

● DAY 1 · CITY OF ORIGIN - SANTO DOMINGO

Flight departure from the city of origin to Santo Domingo. After the necessary arrivals and customs formalities, you can pick up your rental car and start discovering the pleasures of the capital of this Caribbean country. Santo Domingo is one of the liveliest cities in Latin America. The welcoming character of its population will make you feel at home in just a few minutes. Its great treasure is the Ciudad Colonial (Colonial City), a UNESCO World Heritage Site. This neighbourhood, which is sheltered from the sea by the city walls, boasts a network of paved streets lined with buildings from the 16th to the 20th centuries. A medley of styles and hidden corners full of history. In the colonial district, you'll come across a host of places that pay homage to Columbus, discoverer of the Americas. At the Alcázar de Colón, you can learn more about how his family lived in this country. Diego, the son of Columbus, was Viceroy and Governor of the Indies and resided with his wife in this palace, making it the seat of the first Spanish Court in the New World. Nearby is the Puerta de San Diego, which was one of the gateways to the city from the harbour. Make sure you take a stroll around Plaza España, the largest colonial-style square in the city and a hub of activities and concerts. There are a host of pavement terraces where you can sit back and savour one of the famous piña coladas. One of its surrounding streets, Calle "Las Damas", is also well worth a visit. It's said to be one of the most romantic in the whole of Santo Domingo. The first cobblestoned street in the Americas, it is the oldest in the New World and used to be the haunt of Diego Columbus's wife and noble ladies of the time. It stretches from Plaza España to the Fortaleza Ozama - the first to be built in this style in America- and is home to such emblematic buildings as the Casas Reales (Royal Houses), the Panteón Nacional and the Capilla de los Remedios... It's well worth heading over to the invincible fort (Ozama), one of the twenty bastions in the city walls. It has a dozen gun ports for cannons that would defend the city from the pirates landing at its port. The Ciudad Colonial also boasts plenty of shops, museums, bars and restaurants. Make sure you try some sancocho, a meat stew with vegetables, plantains, yams and cassava. Delicious! For shopping, we recommend making a beeline to the Mercado Modelo. This market has many different areas where you can find everything from food to local handicrafts such as carved wood figures or local jewellery with stones like amber or larimar. If you have time, head over to the Parque Los Tres Ojos de Agua, a park located on the outskirts of Santo Domingo. It's a beautiful crater pool in the middle of a rocky mountain. Take care on the often-slippery steps that take you down to the water. Before going to bed, you must go and see the Faro Colón (Columbus Lighthouse), one of the most important landmarks in the country and which was unveiled in 1992 to celebrate the 500th anniversary of the Discovery of the Americas. Overnight stay in Santo Domingo.

● DAY 2 · SANTO DOMINGO - JUAN DOLIO - LA ROMANA - ALTOS DE CHAVÓN - BAYAHIBE

We'll say adios to the capital this morning and head down the Carretera 3 road for an hour to Juan Dolio. You can stop off en route to admire the beautiful beach of Boca Chica. It's not the typical Caribbean beach lined with hotels. You'll find Dominican families here and some truly authentic chiringuitos (beach bars). You'll see how a reef protrudes out above the water's surface, forming a natural swimming pool with crystal-clear shallow waters. Perfect for children to have a dip and cool down. The natural, unspoilt beach of Juan Dolio is spectacular. Stretch out under a coconut tree and admire its white sand and turquoise waters. They're perfect for scuba diving and snorkelling. Just 20 minutes' drive away is San Pedro de Macorís. This is an interesting stop if you're a fan of rum. There are several excellent distilleries in the Dominican Republic and one of the most popular brands is Barceló. You'll find the Centro Histórico Ron Barceló in this town. Here, you'll be able to see the whole process of making a high-end rum extracted from sugar cane. And the best way to round off the tour is with a tasting session. Without doubt, this is the best place to buy a few bottles of rum to take home as a souvenir. Then onward to La Romana. Take the Autovía del Este first and then the Carretera 3. In about 20 minutes, you'll arrive at the Parque Nacional Cueva de las Maravillas, just west of La Romana. Park up the car and venture into this cave located 25 metres underground. Inside, you'll see samples of Taino rock art (designed by the indigenous people before the Spaniards arrived) in the form of 500 engravings and paintings. (Note: The tours are guided, so we recommend you book in advance. The guide will take you through the most beautiful parts of this cave full of stalactites and stalagmites. Remember that photography is prohibited). Now it's time to discover another icon of La Romana. We'll head over to Altos de Chavón, which is about forty minutes away by car. When you arrive, you'll think that you're no longer in the Caribbean, as this is a replica of a 16th-century Mediterranean village. A journey into the past and another continent that will leave you speechless. And even more so if you admire the wonderful views of the River Chavón and the Caribbean from the church of San Estanislao. After this moment of contemplation, take a stroll through its cobbled streets to see artisans' workshops, the Greek-style amphitheatre with capacity for 5,000 people and even an archaeological museum. And believe or not, in La Romana there's yet another surprise waiting to be discovered. If you fancy learning how to make cigars in the traditional way, you can see torcedores (cigar rollers) hard at work at the La Flor Dominicana tobacco factory. It's about 25 minutes away, first on the Autopista del Corral and then on the Carretera 3. You'll see the entire production process from harvesting tobacco in the field to packaging the cigars, and at the end you'll have the chance to visit the Caribbean's largest cigar store. After such a busy day, the best way to round it off is at the seaside resort of Bayahibe, which lies inside the Parque Nacional del Este. Lay your towel down on the sand, cool down a bit and take the opportunity to taste some exquisite tropical fruits, such as mango or papaya. Overnight stay in Bayahibe.

● DAY 3 · BAYAHIBE - ISLA SAONA - BAYAHIBE

For today, we suggest spending the whole day visiting Isla Saona, considered the most beautiful island in the entire Caribbean and part of one of the country's largest ecological reserves. There are several ways to get to the island. One of them is on a taxi-boat that sets off from Bayahibe. The skippers are regulated by a union, so you can agree on the price and how many hours you'll be staying on the island. Another option is to take one of the forty-seat catamarans that also leave from Bayahibe. (Note: Transfer to the island not included). Most of them can be reserved at local hotels. You'll probably be accompanied on the trip over by dolphins and whales. On arrival, you'll see that the island is undoubtedly the closest to the paradise you've always dreamt about. Sixty-eight kilometres of virgin beaches lapped by crystal-clear waters and under the shade of the characteristic Caribbean coconut trees. This is a protected island where any further construction is prohibited. Therefore, you won't find any hotels or accommodations here, just two small settlements: Catuano and Mano Juan. One of the most popular walking trails passes through them, which is the one you'll need if you want to visit Cotubanama Cave. If instead you're a lover of diving, just off the island is a beautiful reef and an eighteenth-century galleon submerged in its waters. Wherever you go, this is nature at its very best. There are more than 280 different animal species. So, the chances are you'll see green parrots -in danger of extinction-, manatees or rhinoceros iguanas, to name just a few. Remember that for everything to look so pristine, we must all respect the flora and fauna. Don't forget that it's a protected area! Whenever you're ready, take the boat back over to Bayahibe. Overnight stay in Bayahibe.

● DAY 4 · BAYAHIBE - HIGÜEY - PUNTA CANA

Bid farewell to the East National Park. Today, we'll drive up to Higüey, which is approximately one hour away. This diverse city is famous for the Basilica de Nuestra Señora de Altagracia, the most important church in the Dominican Republic. Inside, you'll find a 16th/17th-century canvas of Our Lady of Altagracia, the patron saint of the Dominican Republic, and therefore the most sacred image for Dominicans. They say that if you want to come back to this country, you should place your right hand on the screen that protects the saint's picture and ask her for a wish. As soon as you reach this cathedral designed by two French architects, you'll be captivated by its incredible door, especially when you realise that it has 24-carat gold plating. Try to spot all of the church's 45 bronze bells and take as many photos as possible. As you drive through Higüey, you'll definitely notice the so-called motoconchos. They're motorbike taxis used by locals to whizz around the city. After a fifty-minute drive, first on the Autovía Coral and then on the Carretera 3, you'll arrive in Punta Cana. This area is perfectly geared towards tourists and you'll have no problem finding a great restaurant where you can try some traditional food. Today you can take advantage to taste 'la bandera', a dish made from rice, beans, meat and fried plantain. After lunch, you can head down to the waterfront to take a well-deserved siesta. There's an array of stunning beaches and all with easy access thanks to your rental car. Playa Blanca is a beautiful white-sand one with a small reef ideal for snorkelling and viewing the fauna and flora of the Caribbean Sea. As there tend to be decent breezes in this area, it's also a great place for kitesurfing or windsurfing fans. But if you want to sail through the waves of the Caribbean, it's best to head over to Playa Macao. There are no hotels here and it's less crowded than other beaches. You can buy handicrafts right on the beach and at local prices. You'll have to drive to get there. That's why there are more Dominicans and less tourists. Another very quiet and tourist-free beach is Playa Juanillo, south of Punta Cana, in Cap Cana. There aren't any reefs here, but you can rent a kayak to explore its waters. A magical hideaway to spend the entire day. In Cap Cana, you'll also have the chance to swim in a crater pool at the foot of a cliff. A unique experience! For diving, though, it's better to take one of the trips over to Isla Catalina, a small island of less than 15 square kilometres that forms part of a natural park. (Note: Tour not included). This is the only place in the Dominican Republic where you'll see raccoons and hares. Once underwater, head to the wall that descends to a depth of over 100 metres and discover the host of sponges, corals and multicoloured fish down there. A magical universe right before your eyes! Well, with your snorkel mask in between. If you prefer something else, no worries, as in Punta Cana you can take part in all kinds of activities. There are so many things to do. Anything from ziplining to sailing, or even swimming with dolphins or watching a sea lion show at a water park. Overnight stay in Punta Cana.

● DAY 5 · PUNTA CANA - LOS HAITISES NATIONAL PARK - SAMANA

We understand that you won't want to leave Punta Cana, but that'll change when you find out where you're going. There are several ways to get to the Los Haitises National Park. The best is to take the Carretera 7, skirt around the National Park and then continue on the Carretera 5 to Samana. It might seem the long way round, but it's the best route for two reasons. First, because the roads are in better condition. And second, you can park your car in Samana and visit Los Haitises by boat. (Note: Speed-boat trip not included). By doing this, you'll avoid having to return to the main road and driving to Samana at the end of the visit if you enter via Sabana de la Mar. Whichever route you take, it's not the shortest of trips. It will take four hours without any stops, but it's also a very rewarding experience to park up in a quaint village and mingle with the Dominicans. Local prices are very affordable, so a bite to eat will cost next to nothing. (Note: Check the sea conditions before arriving here and find out what time the boats leave from Samana to Parque Nacional de Los Haitises, as well as the prices and what each option includes. Choose the one that suits you best and set out on your adventure!). After a 45-minute boat trip, you'll reach the second largest National Park in the country (1,600 square kilometres) and the most spectacular. Its mangroves, its fauna and flora, the colour of its waters and its activities for visitors are simply amazing. Although only part of it is open to the public, you can take a boat around the seemingly never-ending mangroves, the sedimentary rocks that will transport you to Southeast Asia and landscapes that you'll never forget. All surrounded by hundreds of pelicans, manatees and species that can't be seen anywhere else on the planet. There are caves full of bats, crater pools tempting you to swim in their crystalline waters, palm trees, lots of coconut trees and a whole load of cacao trees. Pirates have passed through here, as have the odd mermaid (probably) and the entire production team of Jurassic Park (definitely), who used this as a location for their blockbuster movie. And you simply can't miss any of the following masterpieces of nature: Bahía de San Lorenzo, Boca del Infierno, Boca de Tiburón, Naranjo Arriba, Cueva San Gabriel and Cayo de los Pájaros. Quite a lot. Before returning, ask a local to tell you the story of the Ciguapas! When you get off in Samana, don't forget that the town is actually called Santa Bárbara de Samana. It's a pocket-sized place, so you'll have no problem in getting around. Plaza Pueblo Principe, the Malecón and Avenida La Marina are its most interesting and popular places. The magic of Samana lies in its surroundings, which could quite easily be called heaven on earth. Some of the best beaches in the whole world are found here. Our favourite is Playa Rincón, considered one of the top ten on the planet. Overnight stay in Samana.

● DAY 6 · SAMANA - EL LIMON - LAS TERRENAS - SAMANA

After yesterday's sensory experience, we've prepared a much calmer day for you today. Two plans: you choose the one you most fancy! Sun worshippers can unwind beside a palm tree on Playa Rincón beach and enjoy a truly unforgettable beach day. For the more active, exploring the Samana Peninsula and discovering some of its villages is a most enjoyable experience. Whichever you choose, a good idea before leaving Santa Bárbara de Samana is to take a walk on the Bridges to Nowhere, which link the village to Cayo Linares and Cayo Vigia. They're pedestrian-only, but they'll definitely leave an impression on you. Afterwards, you can set off for our first destination of the day: El Limón. Our advice is to take the Carretera 7 and, after visiting Las Terrenas, return on the Carretera 5. This way, you'll take a different route on each leg and it takes practically the same time. To give you an idea, Samana to El Limón is a thirty-minute drive more or less. When you get there, head straight for the Salto del Limón. Plunging some forty metres, this is the biggest waterfall on the peninsula. There's a makeshift car park nearby, where you'll find some local farmers willing to guide you on your excursion in exchange for a few pesos. You can reach the waterfall on foot, but the most common way is on horseback, which will last between 1 and 2 hours depending on the pace you take and the stops you make along the way. You'll come across loads of roadside stands where you can buy coconut water, cocoa or some fruit. The scenery is marvellous. A lush and eternally verdant forest will lead you through to the El Limón waterfall and its natural pools, where you can take a dip and cool down. Remember that you'll need around 1½ hours to get back down to your car, so calculate the time well and make sure you plan for lunch somewhere. Once back in the car, it's time to continue towards Las Terrenas. You should arrive there in half an hour on the Carretera 7. Las Terrenas is particularly famous for its beaches (El Portillo, Punta Popy or Playa Bonita are the most attractive) and the exclusive villas in Bahía Escocesa, although in recent years there's been a boom in water sports. The waters of Las Terrenas are perfect for scuba diving, snorkelling and any kind of sailing. The town comes to life around dusk, and you'll probably start dreaming about how to afford a second home in the area to spend some more time here. Set aside some time to return to Samana on the Carretera 5 and admire the scenery along the route. You'll take about an hour. Overnight stay in Samana.

● DAY 7 · SAMANA - CAYO LEVANTADO - SAMANA

Although many people visit Los Haitises National Park and Cayo Levantado on the same day, our recommendation is to do them on separate days and enjoy both locations to the full. That said, remember that it's a protected area and you can't go to the island by yourself. Your hotel should be able to organise the trip for you. (Note: Tour not included). Cayo Levantado is an atoll located in the bay of Samana that would be the paradise of any castaway. White-sand beaches, palm trees everywhere, Caribbean music and more than the odd mojito. In fact, it's also known as Bacardi Island. There are all-inclusive resorts, but also public beaches. They're definitely worth a visit for their crystal-clear waters, fine sand and great atmosphere. If your trip doesn't include lunch, then you can stop at one of the typically Caribbean beach bars that serve Dominican cuisine at very affordable prices. You'll also have the chance to hire diving gear and explore the outstanding marine fauna in the area. It's also an ideal place to unwind and savour a little piece of paradise. If you're doing this tour in winter, between January and March, then you're in luck, as whale-spotting is at its best in the Bay of Samana. Overnight stay in Samana.

● DAY 8 · SAMANA - PUERTO PLATA

This is our last morning in Samana, as today we'll be heading for Puerto Plata. You have two options to get there. Either along the coast on Carretera 5, or inland on the Autopista Duarte. You'll save yourself fifteen minutes with this second option, but nonetheless there are around four hours ahead behind the wheel. Once in Puerto Plata, you can head out to explore the town. One of its top attractions is the cable car that leads to Monte de Isabel de Torres, at 800 metres above sea level. Riding above the treeline and seeing the town in miniature is quite an experience. Enjoy the scenery at the top, as well as the botanical garden! Once up there, you'll think that you're dreaming and have gone to the wrong country. Yes, that's Christ the Redeemer in front of you. But don't worry, you're not mistaken. The Christ bears a certain resemblance to the one that presides over Rio de Janeiro, but this one is unique. It stands on an anti-aircraft fortress that was constructed to protect the city. From here, you'll enjoy some of the best views of the area. Take out your camera and immortalise this moment! Once back downtown, it's time to discover its history. The best way to do this is to visit the ruins of Columbus's house in La Isabella and the Fortaleza San Felipe. This fort was used to detain Juan Pablo Duarte, one of the founding fathers of the Dominican Republic. You can visit its ruins, the lighthouse, the amphitheatre and also stroll along its seafront walls. Puerto Plata also boasts a fascinating Amber Museum that houses ancient gems with animal fossils, some of which were even featured in Jurassic Park. If you want to find out about the process of how this precious stone is formed, then make sure you pay a visit to this museum. And if you buy something here, you'll be able to take home a certificate of authenticity. Overnight stay in Puerto Plata.

● DAY 9 · PUERTO PLATA - CAYO ARENA - DAMAJAGUA - PUERTO PLATA

If you fancy discovering more treasures of the Dominican Republic, from Puerto Plata you can take a boat (not included) to Cayo Arena, also known as Paradise Island, which - as its name suggests - is akin to paradise on earth. This is a coral island in the sea right off the coast of Puerto Plata. The size of this sandbank depends on the tide, with it growing and shrinking as per the moon's powers. Put on your diving goggles, plunge into this beautiful natural pool and discover the vast array of multicoloured fish under the ocean. You definitely won't be disappointed! In the afternoon, you can drive over to Damajagua, famous for the waterfalls along the River Damajagua, whose name means "trees that grow on its banks". Some of these trees are in danger of extinction. There are a total of twenty-seven waterfalls in an incredible natural space where you can escape from the daily routine and soak up Dominican nature at its purest. On entering the park, you'll be given a full safety kit that includes a helmet and life jacket, so then you'll be ready to hit the water. Get ready to discover a world full of waterfalls, caves and natural chutes where you can dive, swim or even climb. Adventure is definitely on the cards! End the day by having dinner at one of the restaurants in Puerto Plata bay. You'll be enticed in by the smell of fish and seafood, which will be cooked to your liking. Overnight stay in Puerto Plata.

● DAY 10 · PUERTO PLATA - JARABACOA - SANTO DOMINGO

It's our last day in Puerto Plata, so if you have something left to see, this is your chance. We'll then set off in our rental car towards Santo Domingo. En route is Jarabacoa, the ecological capital of the Dominican Republic, located about three hours from Puerto Plata. Its incredible tropical forests make it a paradise for lovers of extreme mountain sports. Here you'll find several waterfalls and also Pico Duarte, the highest peak on all the Caribbean islands, soaring over 3,000 metres above sea level. Many a thrill-seeking tourist comes here to descend waterfalls and canyons or do some whitewater rafting. If you plan to do any of these activities, we recommend booking in advance, as this is a stopover destination and we won't be spending the night here. This way, you can make the most of your day in Jarabacoa. This is also where you'll find the Dajaos nature trail, which if you follow up to Manabao will give you an insight into the harvesting and selection of coffee beans. From Manabao, there are also several nature trails specifically designed for bird-watching. If you prefer to cool off in the River Yaque del Norte, you can do so in Las Guazaras, where there's a specially-prepared area on a ranch to enjoy a freshwater dip while surrounded by nature. Then back to the car, as there are still two hours ahead along the Autopista Duarte until reaching Santo Domingo. Say adios to the country by savouring a rum at a pavement cafe or by making some last-minute purchases. Overnight stay in Santo Domingo.

● DAY 11 · SANTO DOMINGO - CITY OF ORIGIN

Arrival at the airport with enough time to drop off your rental car and flight back to the city of origin.

Night on board.

● DAY 12 · CITY OF ORIGIN

Arrival. End of the trip and our services.

Your trip includes

Your trip includes

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| ✓ Return flight. | ✓ Stay in selected hotel in Santo Domingo. | ✓ Selected meal plan in Santo Domingo. |
| ✓ Stay in selected hotel in Bayahibe. | ✓ Selected meal plan in Bayahibe. | |
| ✓ Stay in selected hotel in Punta Cana. | ✓ Selected meal plan in Punta Cana. | |
| ✓ Stay in selected hotel in Samaná. | ✓ Selected meal plan in Samaná. | |
| ✓ Stay in selected hotel in Puerto Plata. | ✓ Selected meal plan in Puerto Plata. | ✓ Rent-a-car. |

Your trip doesn't include

- | | | |
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| ✗ Entrance fees in Dominican Republic. | ✗ Departure taxes in Dominican Republic. | ✗ Possible toll charges. |
| ✗ Insolvency protection. | | |
| ✗ Boat Bayahíbe-Isla Saona-Bayahíbe / Boat Samaná-Cayo Levantado-Samaná / Boat Puerto Plata-Cayo Arena-Puerto Plata. | | |

Destinations Visited

Santo Domingo



Juan Dolio



La Romana



Bayahibe



Higuey



Bavaro



Las Galeras



El Limón



Costa Dorada



Jarabacoa



Important remarks

- Triple rooms in Dominican Republic are generally rooms with twin beds or a double, in which a folding bed is installed to accommodate the third person. Due to the inconvenience this causes, we advise against using this option as far the possible.
- Check-in time at the hotel on the day of arrival depends on each establishment, but in no case will it be before 3:00 p.m., unless otherwise indicated.
- The proposed excursions and tours for each day are purely suggestions, as you can tailor the trip to suit your times, tastes and needs.
- A credit card is considered a guarantee, so sometimes you will need one for check-in at hotels.
- Hotels usually have cots available. Otherwise, babies will have to share a bed with an adult.
- To pick up your rental car, you'll need a credit (not debit) card in the name of the person who made the booking, who must also be the named driver of the vehicle.
- Consult the necessary documentation to enter the destinations visited and for transit in the countries where air stopovers are made.

- This itinerary has been prepared in collaboration with the Dominican Republic Tourism Board.