

Dominican Republic

Dominican Republic is the country that makes up the eastern two-thirds of the island of Hispaniola in the Caribbean region. Haiti covers the island's western end. The Dominican Republic is about 575 miles (925 kilometers) southeast of Miami, Florida. The country is a land of fertile valleys and forested mountains.

Most Dominicans who live in rural areas work on farms. Some own small farms and raise their own food. They sell some of what they raise to buy clothing, household goods, and other items. Other Dominican farmers work for wages on large plantations, especially sugar plantations. Many Dominican farmers live in two-room shacks that have thatched roofs and dirt floors. But small bungalows built by the government are slowly replacing these shacks.

Most city dwellers earn a living as factory workers, government employees, or street vendors. Many of them live in crowded, old Spanish-style apartment buildings. Dominicans dress in much the same way as people in other Western countries.

Dominicans love music that mixes the rhythmic pounding of African drums with such instruments as the accordion, *güira* (a metal cylinder that the musician plays with a special scraper), and guitar. Dominicans enjoy dancing the *merengue*, which is the national dance, and the *bachata*. Merengue and bachata are distinctive styles of music as well as dances.

Children between the ages of 7 and 14 must attend school. The government supplies most of the funds for most schools. A majority of Dominican adults can read and write.

The Dominican Republic is a mountainous land. The *Cordillera Central* (Central Mountain Range) runs from northwest to southeast through the center of the country. Duarte Peak, which rises 10,417 feet (3,175 meters) above sea level in the Cordillera Central, is the highest point in the Caribbean. The land west of the Cordillera Central is mostly dry and desertlike.

The eastern end of the Dominican Republic is less mountainous. Most of the country's sugar cane is grown along the southern coast east of Santo Domingo and in other eastern areas.

The Dominican Republic has a warm, tropical climate all year. Temperatures vary little and seldom go below 60 °F (16 °C) or above 90 °F (32 °C). The country averages about 60 inches (150 centimeters) of rainfall a year. The rainy season lasts from May to November in the south and from December to April in the north. Hurricanes sometimes strike the Dominican Republic.

The majority of the Dominican Republic enjoys beautiful tropical weather all year round, with the average annual temperature hovering around 77°F. Some call the Dominican Republic's climate, 'the endless summer', due to warm and sunny conditions experienced pretty much everywhere in the country, all year round.