



**SIGNATURE VACATIONS  
BARCELO RESORTS  
DOMINICAN REPUBLIC**





<p><b>SIGNATURE VACATIONS</b></p>	<p>For over 35 years, Canadians have trusted their leisure travel plans to Signature Vacations, one of Canada’s leading tour operators for package holidays. Today Signature is a proud member of Sunwing Travel Group, Canada’s leading integrated vacation company. This means fantastic value on a variety of vacation options from a brand you can trust.</p> <p>Signature offer over 150 all-inclusive or self-catering resorts in destinations throughout Mexico, Central America and the Caribbean, serviced from 11 gateways across Canada. They also offer escorted tours, group discounts and affordable air only options.</p> <p><a href="http://www.signaturevacations.ca">www.signaturevacations.ca</a> 1-800-268-7063</p>
<p><b>Service</b></p>	<p>Signature Vacations take customer care commitment very seriously. They employ an entire team of quality control specialists on a full time basis to inspect their products and ensure that they adhere to very strict standards. They also work with an external agency to inspect everything from refrigeration temperatures in the kitchen to pH balances in the pools. They even meet regularly to review the results of our Customer Service Questionnaires and remove hotels which are not achieving a minimum average of 65% satisfaction. When you book a Signature Vacation, you can relax knowing that they have taken care of the details.</p>
<p><b>Price</b></p>	<p>As a member of Sunwing Travel Group, Signature is the largest customer for many of the well known hotel chains they work with, giving access to the best possible rates. If you find a better price with a competitor for the same product on the same dates, you can give them an opportunity to price match prior to your booking being made by contacting your travel agent or their Sales Centre staff.</p>
<p><b>Product</b></p>	<p>Signature Vacations offers over 150 hotels in 19 destinations including well known hotel chains such as RIU, Iberostar, Karisma, Barceló, Bahia Principe, Karisma, AM Resorts, Excellence Resorts, Sol Melia, SuperClubs, Princess and Real Resorts. All Signature packages have flights with Sunwing Airlines. Famous for “more frills” service, your vacation truly starts when you board the plane.</p>
<p><b>Reputation</b></p>	<p>Year after year Travel Agency groups across Canada have voted Signature their “Top Tour Operator”. When the experts say this, it’s always a good sign for the travelling customer!</p>
<p><b>Company History</b></p>	<p>Originally called “Adventure Tours”, tour operator Signature Vacations (in Québec: Vacances Signature) was established in Toronto in 1972. The company quickly gained a name for itself by offering convenient and affordable package holidays to sun destinations, specializing in the then-new concept of all-inclusive resorts. Eventually, Adventure acquired well-established regional tour operators in Vancouver,</p>

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	<p>Winnipeg, and Montreal, giving the group a unique national presence. The entire group was acquired by First Choice in 1994. Starting in 2000, the company set on a path of vertical integration, and has since acquired an array of travel agencies across the country now operating as Travel Choice and SellOffVacations.com. Signature Vacations is recognized for high standards of service and quality, and enjoy the loyal support of consumers and travel agents across Canada. Today Signature is a proud member of Sunwing Travel Group, Canada's leading integrated vacation company.</p>
<p><b>Signature's Commitments</b></p>	<p>For more than thirty five years, Signature Vacations has helped thousands of Canadians make the most of their vacation time. Through sharp pricing, the best available service and care, and 24-hour in-destination support, Signature Vacations takes care of every little thing.</p> <p><b>Signature Vacations Pricing Policy</b> Signature Vacations is committed to providing the most accurate pricing possible. They lower or raise the price of our vacations throughout the season to accommodate demand. However, they pledge that once your holiday is booked, that price is fully guaranteed* regardless of fuel or currency fluctuations.</p> <p><b>Better Website</b> You'll get up-to-the-minute information and access to a comprehensive library of travel essentials on the <a href="http://www.signaturevacations.com">www.signaturevacations.com</a> website. You can research, plan and book your holiday online as well as sign up for personalised e-mail updates on travel topics and discounts, all tailored to your interests. Contact Signature at 1-866-324-2883 for answers to your questions.</p> <p><b>On-line Customer Service</b> Signature Vacations' internet team is at your service at 1-866-324-2883 Sign up for their e-mail update while you are visiting the website</p> <p><b>Super Service</b> Signature Vacations was the first tour operator in Canada to offer a 24-hour toll-free hotline - use it as soon as you have booked your holiday. Signature Vacations destination representatives are also famous for their fantastic service.</p>
<p><b>Premier Collection</b></p>	<p>The Premiere Collection is a compilation of 34 hotels in each of Signature's destinations that stand out from the competition. Signature used their Customer Survey Questionnaires to specially select hotels with a satisfaction rating of 80% or higher. Each property showcases excellence in the areas of accommodation, on-site facilities, service</p>

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	levels, food, beaches, pools and more. Your stay at a Premiere Collection hotel will provide the highest level of customer satisfaction.
<b>Signature Vacations Special Packages</b>	2-in-1 Vacations - 3 night Yucatan Explorer Tour plus 4 night all inclusive resort stay
	Adult Only Resorts - El Dorado Seaside Suites, by Karisma
	Adventure Activities - Mountain biking, Huatulco; Zip-lining, Tulum
	Adventure Travel - iexplore.com
	Babymoos - El Dorado Seaside Suites, by Karisma
	Culinary Vacations - El Dorado Royale, A Spa Resort, by Karisma
	Dive Excursions - Palancar Reef, Cozumel
	Escorted Tours - Yucatan Explorer
	European Hotel Deals - laterooms.ca
	Family Travel - Ocean Coral by H10, Riviera Maya
	Gay and Lesbian Travel - Puerto Vallarta, Santo Domingo, St Martin
	Girlfriend Getaways - Eco-conscious breaks, Las Brisas Huatulco, Huatulco
	Golf Vacations - Iberostar Playa Paraiso Golf Course, Riviera Maya
	Group Vacations - Savings on groups as few as 10 travellers
	Last Minute Deals - Travel within 3 weeks of booking for deals on the website
	Mancations - Nightlife Hounds: Grand Marival Nuevo Vallarta, Riviera Nayarit
	Premier Collection - For example: Barcelo Maya Palace Deluxe
Seniors - Grand Riviera Princess All Suites Resort, Riv Maya	
Signature Favourites - Barceló Maya Beach	

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	<p>Single Parent Vacations - At selected resorts</p> <p>Single Travel - Secrets Capri Riviera Cancun</p> <p>Special Durations - 3, 4, 10 or 11 night stays</p> <p>Student Groups - Moon Palace Golf &amp; Spa Resort, Cancun</p> <p>Weddings - Special website section</p>
<b>Signature.ca</b>	<p>Signature's website has many useful features:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- an Agent Locator to help you find the nearest travel agent</li> <li>- contests and promotions</li> <li>- customer satisfaction survey</li> <li>- gift certificates</li> <li>- up to the minute pricing on all vacations</li> <li>- Signature e-newsletter</li> <li>- seat selection</li> <li>- special packages</li> <li>- last minute deals</li> </ul>
<b>Signature Deals</b>	<p>Current Signature Vacations last minute deals can be found in the special "Deals" section of the website <a href="http://www.signaturevacations.ca">www.signaturevacations.ca</a></p>

<b>AIRLINE PARTNER</b>	<b>Sunwing Airlines</b>
<b>Flight details 2011/2012 - Toronto</b>	<p>Puerto Plata: Tuesdays/Sundays</p> <p>Punta Cana: Seven days a week</p>
<b>Sunwing Service</b>	<p>From the moment you get on the plane till you touch the tarmac on landing, everything is first class on Sunwing Airlines.</p> <p>"Elite" in-flight service at no extra charge:</p> <p>Welcome glass of champagne</p> <p>Choice of hot meal or hot snacks</p> <p>Wine with hot meals (except to US) - Soft drinks - Snacks</p> <p>Hot towel service - Pillows - Headset</p> <p>In-flight, first run movies - Kids backpack with games and toys</p> <p>Courteous and friendly service</p> <p>Advance seat selection is available for \$15 per seat each way.</p>
<b>Elite Plus</b>	<p>For \$40 each way you can upgrade to Elite Plus service and receive these additional benefits:</p> <p>Extra leg room seat (35 inches)</p> <p>Advance seat selection</p> <p>Priority check- in at Canadian airports</p> <p>Increased baggage allowance to 30 kg</p> <p>Priority boarding</p>

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<p><b>BARCELO RESORTS</b></p>	<p>Barceló Hotels and Resorts is one of the world's most respected names in all-inclusive vacations. Barceló has a knack for making every place, the best place, and always providing the best holiday. They take the very essence of the local culture and invite you to discover everything it has to offer, while always taking care of the vacationer's every need.</p> <p>We focus on some fantastic Barceló Resorts on the clear, calm waters and pristine beaches of <b>Playa Bavaro</b> in the Punta Cana area on the east coast of the Dominican Republic. Spend endless days lounging on a white sand beach, sipping your tropical drink as the ocean stretches into the horizon. Barceló has a 2 kilometer long beach, the best beach of Punta Cana, protected by a coral reef that converts the sea into a natural swimming pool.</p>
<p><b>Barcelo History</b></p>	<p>The name of Barceló, which began as a small transportation company, is today associated with one of the most prestigious holiday groups. Behind this lies the determination and hard work of three generations for seventy years.</p> <p>1931: Creation of Autocares Barceló (a transport company), founded by Simón Barceló in Felanitx (Majorca, Spain).</p> <p>1962: First hotel of the chain opened in Majorca, Spain. This stage culminates in 1965, with the development of a new concept of hotel: the Barceló Pueblo Palma</p> <p>1985: The international hotel operations begin: opening of the first hotel in the Caribbean (Barceló Bávaro Beach Resort, Punta Cana, Dominican Republic). Thus, Barceló becomes the pioneer Spanish hotel company in the area</p> <p>1999: Opening of the Barceló Maya Resort complex, in the Mayan Riviera in México, and purchase of two hotels (Ixtapa and Huatulco) on Mexico's Pacific coast</p> <p>Barcelo believe that they have a great responsibility that includes social and environmental aspects, so Barceló Hotels &amp; Resorts has explicitly confirmed its commitment to society and the environment by signing the United Nations Pact on Human Rights and the Environment</p>
<p><b>Websites</b></p>	<p>Have fun exploring:  <a href="http://www.barcelo.com">www.barcelo.com</a>  <a href="http://www.barcelobrochures.com">www.barcelobrochures.com</a>  <a href="http://www.barceloweddings.com">www.barceloweddings.com</a></p>

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<b>Travel Show Prize</b>	A seven night all inclusive trip for two to the <b>Barceló Bavaro Palace Deluxe</b> . This newly renovated resort in Punta Cana is directly on Bávaro Beach in Punta Cana in the Dominican Republic.
<b>Barceló Bavaro Palace Deluxe</b>	<p>The five-star all-inclusive Barceló Bavaro Palace Deluxe welcomes you to the clear, calm waters and pristine beaches of Playa Bavaro on the eastern coast of the Dominican Republic, only 20 km from Punta Cana International Airport.</p> <p>Ease your mind from the worries of the outside world as you spend endless days lounging on three kilometers of white sand beach while sipping your tropical beverage of choice with the crystalline ocean stretching into the horizon.</p> <p>If you desire a more active vacation, choose from a wide array of onsite water sports including snorkeling around an offshore reef or venture further with an optional tour or excursion to discover the stunning palm-covered landscapes of the Dominican Republic.</p> <p>The Barceló Bávaro Palace Deluxe, the most upscale in a 4-hotel resort complex, boasts an elegant atmosphere complete with numerous convenient amenities and encourages guests to utilize the additional facilities and restaurants located in the other four hotels using complimentary transportation services.</p> <p>Families searching for a Caribbean paradise where endless options for excitement and adventure await will love this resort. Request the services of their on-site babysitter or allow your children to let loose at their Kids Club featuring fun-filled arts and crafts, activities and games. Barceló Bávaro Palace Deluxe also caters to couples seeking a tropical wedding destination, a seaside haven for honeymooners, or just a place for a picturesque romantic getaway.</p>
<b>Location</b>	On spectacular Bavaro Beach and just 20km from Punta Cana International Airport.
<b>Accommodation</b>	There are 488 suites in four 3-storey buildings. The Junior Suites feature air-conditioning, flat screen TV's, outdoor whirlpools and can accommodate up to four persons.
<b>Services</b>	There's a daily activity program, a nightly entertainment line-up and multiple pools at this luxurious resort.
<b>Dining</b>	There's seafood and Dominican a la carte restaurants, plus three restaurants at the Barcelo Bavaro Beach Caribe.
<b>All-Inclusive</b>	Buffet breakfast, lunch, dinner, snacks, domestic drinks and wine, activities, entertainment
<b>Kids</b>	Free kids club for children aged 4 to 12 years and children's pool. Babysitting is available at an extra charge.
<b>Activities</b>	Free rounds of golf are included in the all inclusive deal with Transat, as well as selected non-motorised water-sports, intro scuba lesson, volleyball, tennis, gym and mini-golf.

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<p><b>DOMINICAN REPUBLIC</b></p>	<p>Explore the white sandy beaches, impressive mountain ranges, spectacular waterfalls and lush greenery of the Dominican Republic. And the history, music, food and culture that give this country such charm and spirit.</p> <p><b>Puerto Plata</b> Expect beautiful beaches, lush green valleys and majestic mountains, along with lively resorts, great nightlife, kite surfing and fabulous windsurfing. This popular destination features a wide range of activities to choose from! Sail to Paradise Island, go swimming with dolphins, enjoy a cabaret show and savour a delicious dinner, or simply spend the day sailing and snorkelling.</p> <p><b>La Romana</b> Deserted beaches, protected lagoons, lush mangroves, towering cliffs and incredible snorkelling are features of this idyllic destination. You will never run out of things to do. La Romana offers a wide array of activities, including snorkelling, golf, 4 x 4 rides through the countryside, cave exploration, and excursions to Catalina, an uninhabited island.</p> <p><b>Samana</b> Eco-friendly Samana offers long sandy beaches, majestic mountains and lush vegetation. The Samana peninsula is the ideal destination for nature lovers and sports enthusiasts alike. Once there, the options are endless! Lounge on the beach, tour the countryside in a Jeep, go whale watching, explore Las Haitises National Park, visit Cayo Levantado or simply sail the seas aboard a comfortable catamaran.</p> <p><b>Punta Cana</b> Here there are miles of silky-fine white sand, gorgeous beaches, coconut palms, crystal clear turquoise waters and lush vegetation - Punta Cana certainly has the wow factor. Beyond its exceptional natural beauty, this vacation spot offers something for everyone. Sail to the idyllic island of Saona, play a round or two of golf at one of the many courses, swim with dolphins, discover the countryside as you drive your own Jeep or go zip lining above the trees.</p> <p>Signature Vacations and its sister company Sunwing have weekly direct flights to all the major destinations in the Dominican Republic.</p>
<p><b>Location</b></p>	<p>In the heart of the Caribbean archipelago - nestled amid Cuba, Jamaica, and Puerto Rico - the island of Hispaniola (Little Spain) is divided between Haiti, on the westernmost third of the island, and the</p>

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	<p>Dominican Republic, which has a lush landmass about the size of Vermont and New Hampshire combined. In the Dominican interior, the fertile Valley of Cibao (rich sugar-cane country) ends its upward sweep at Pico Duarte, the highest mountain peak in the West Indies, which soars to 3,125m (10,250 ft.).</p> <p>Much of what Columbus first sighted still remains in a natural, unspoiled condition. One-third of the Dominican Republic's 1,401km coastline is devoted to beaches</p>
<b>Geography</b>	<p>The mountains of the Dominican Republic divide the country into northern, central, and southwestern regions. The northern region includes the Cordillera Septentrional (northern mountain range), the Cibao Valley, which is the country's major agricultural area; and the tropical Samaná Peninsula with its coconut plantations and bay, where humpback whales breed.</p> <p>The central region is dominated by the Cordillera Central (central range) which ends at the Caribbean Sea. The highest point in the Caribbean is Pico Duarte, which reaches an elevation of over 10,414 feet (3,175 meters) and has alpine forests near the summit. The Caribbean coastal plain includes a series of limestone terraces that gradually rise to a height of about 328 feet (100 meters) and has sugarcane plantations.</p> <p>The southwestern region lies south of the Valle de San Juan and encompasses the Sierra de Neiba. Much of the region is a desert and it includes Lake Enriquillo, the island's largest lake. Lake Enriquillo is a saltwater lake that lies 150 feet (46 meters) below sea level and is inhabited by unique fauna, including crocodiles, huge iguanas, and flamingos.</p> <p>Pico Duarte was not climbed until 1944; it's now a 3 day hike – allow \$240 for a guide plus 4 mules.</p>
<b>Name</b>	Hispaniola was named “Little Spain” by Colombus
<b>Population</b>	Approximately 9.2 million
<b>Language</b>	The official language is Spanish; many people also speak some English.
<b>Currency</b>	The Dominican monetary unit is the peso (RD\$), made up of 100 centavos. Coin denominations are 1, 5, 10, 25, and 50 centavos, 1 peso, and 5 pesos. Bill denominations are RD\$5, RD\$10, RD\$20, RD\$50, RD\$100, RD\$500, RD\$1,000, and RD\$2,000. Price quotations in this section sometimes appear in U.S. and sometimes in Dominican currency, depending on the policy of the establishment. Currently, 37 pesos = 1 Cdn \$ at February 2011
<b>Tipping</b>	Most restaurants and hotels add a 10% service charge to your check. Most people usually add 5% to 10% more, especially if the service has been good.

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<b>Government</b>	Representative democracy with Presidents elected for a 4 year term. Although the DR has long been viewed primarily as an exporter of sugar, coffee, and tobacco, in recent years the service sector has overtaken agriculture as the economy's largest employer due to growth in tourism
<b>Documentation</b>	Canadians traveling to the Dominican Republic require a valid Canadian passport. You will also require tourist card which will be provided on the aircraft during your southbound flight. Minors (under the age of 18) being nationals of Canada in addition to the above documentation requirements must: if traveling as an unaccompanied minor or with an adult other than a parent or legal guardian must hold a permit issued by the Consulate of Dominican Republic in Canada or the Director General's Office of Immigration in Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic to leave the country of Dominican Republic. Baptismal Certificates are not acceptable as a birth certificate, nor are birth certificates issued in Quebec prior to January 1, 1994. Contact the Consulate of Dominican Republic for more information.
<b>Time zone</b>	One hour ahead of EST
<b>Health</b>	Stick to bottled water outside of the main resorts. Consult your doctor about Malaria and Dengue Fever – very unlikely threats to tourists but you may want to additionally protect yourself anyway.
<b>Safety tips</b>	Safety is still a concern in the Dominican Republic, but it shouldn't dissuade you from planning a vacation here. Crime consists primarily of theft, robberies, and muggings, and most of it is limited to Santo Domingo. There is a low incidence of violent crime against tourists, however. Follow some simple common-sense rules, and you should be fine.

<b>CLIMATE</b>	
<b>General climate</b>	The average temperature is 25°C. August is the warmest month, and January the coolest month, although even then it's warm enough to swim.
<b>Today's weather</b>	27 degrees Centigrade and sunny for 12 February 2011
<b>Best time to visit</b>	The DR is a year-round destination, but with special attraction to Canadians during the cold winter months! Hurricane season is generally September and October, but you would be very unlucky indeed to experience one of these storms.

<b>GETTING THERE</b>	The new "Samaná International Airport" at El Catey makes the Samaná Peninsula accessible to direct international air travel. This adds to the existing airports of Santo Domingo, Puerto Plata, Punta Cana and La Romana to allow visitors to fly directly to the resorts of choice.
<b>Flying time</b>	It's just over a 4 hour flight from Toronto or Montreal with Sunwing

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	<p>Airline. There is a departure tax of US\$20 which must be paid in U.S. currency as at February 2011.</p>
<p><b>Destinations</b></p>	<p><b>Punta Cana:</b> On the easternmost tip of the island is Punta Cana, site of several major vacation developments with more scheduled to arrive in the near future. Known for its spectacular beaches and clear waters, Punta Cana is an escapist's dream. Its 32km of white sands, set against a backdrop of swaying palm trees, are unrivaled in the Caribbean, and that's the chief and perhaps only reason to come here.</p> <p>Many Europeans (especially Spaniards) rushed to take advantage of Punta Cana's desirable climate - within one of the most arid landscapes in the Caribbean; it rarely rains during daylight hours. Capitalizing on cheap land and the virtually insatiable desire of Europeans for sunny holidays during the depths of winter, a half-dozen European hotel chains participated in something akin to a land rush, acquiring large tracts of sugar-cane plantations and pastureland. Today, at least a dozen mega-hotels, most with no fewer than 500 rooms, some with even more, attract a clientele that's about 70% European or Latin American. Some of them have some of the most lavish beach and pool facilities in the Caribbean, spectacular gardens, and relatively new concepts in architecture focusing on postmodern interplays between indoor and outdoor spaces.</p> <p>If you choose to vacation in Punta Cana, you won't be alone, as increasing numbers of Latino celebrities are making inroads, usually renting private villas within private compounds. Julio Iglesias and celebrity designer Oscar de la Renta both spend time here.</p> <p><b>Puerto Plata:</b> Columbus wanted to establish a city at Puerto Plata and name it La Isabela. Unfortunately, a storm detained him, so it wasn't until 1502 that Nicolás de Ovando founded Puerto Plata ("port of silver"), 209km northwest of Santo Domingo. The port became the last stop for ships going back to Europe, their holds laden with treasures taken from the New World.</p> <p>Puerto Plata appeals to a mass-market crowd that prefers less-expensive all-inclusives. More accommodations of this kind continue to pop up on this coast, and yet many are still booked solid almost year-round.</p> <p>Most of the hotels are not actually in Puerto Plata itself but in a tourist zone called Playa Dorada, which consists of major hotels, a scattering of secluded condominiums and villas, a Robert Trent Jones, Jr.-designed golf course, and a riding stable.</p> <p>This was the first custom-built tourist haven in the Dominican Republic. If you enjoy beige sand that's rarely too hot to walk on, and a never-ending array of water-sports kiosks, chaise lounges, and loudspeakers projecting merengue music, you'll be happy here. One</p>

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important note: It rains sometimes in Puerto Plata during the winter. If you want guaranteed sun, go to Punta Cana or the beaches on the southern coast.

**Samana:** Samaná has a distinctly modern and airy feel that is not found in most Dominican towns and cities. There is a simple reason for this: although its origins stretch far back in time, the town had to be rebuilt after it was completely destroyed by fire in 1946. Today, wide avenues, traffic circles and recently constructed buildings give it a very distinctive look that is not without its charms. Samaná's location, sheltered by mountains and overlooking the magnificent Bahía de Samaná dotted with fishing boats and yachts, adds greatly to the appeal of the town. This lively city boasts a pretty little port, one of the most colourful public markets in the country, a few quality hotels and several good restaurants.

The structure known as La Churcha, in downtown Samaná, was brought here from England in 1820. Originally a Methodist church, it is now home to the Evangelical Church of Samaná. The Sunday services are celebrated with gospels. The little island of Cayo Vigía can be reached via a long footbridge located just behind the Cayacoa hotel. The island has experienced more prosperous times in the past; the view, however, is still striking, encompassing Samaná, the port, and the bay, and visitors can go for a swim here.

**La Romana:** On the southeast coast of the Dominican Republic, La Romana was once a sleepy sugar-cane town that specialized in cattle-raising. Visitors didn't come near the place until Gulf + Western Industries opened a luxurious tropical paradise resort, the Casa de Campo, about 2km east of town. It's the finest resort in the Dominican Republic, and especially popular among golfers.

Just east of Casa de Campo is Altos de Chavón, a charming and whimsical copy of what might have been a fortified medieval village in Spain, southern France, or Italy. It's the country's leading attraction.

**Santo Domingo** is one of the Caribbean's most vibrant cities, with a 12-block Colonial Zone to rival that of Old San Juan in Puerto Rico. Come here to walk in the footsteps of Cortés, Ponce de León, and, of course, Columbus himself. Allow at least a day to capture some of the highlights of the old city such as its Alcazar and its Catedral Santa Maria la Menor.

Bartholomeo Columbus, brother of Christopher, founded the city of New Isabella (later renamed Santo Domingo) on the southeastern Caribbean coast in 1496. It's the oldest city in the New World and the capital of the Dominican Republic. Santo Domingo has had a long, sometimes

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	<p>glorious, more often sad, history. At the peak of its power, Diego de Velázquez sailed from here to settle Cuba, Ponce de León went forth to conquer and settle Puerto Rico and Florida, and Cortés set out for Mexico. The city today still reflects its long history - French, Haitian, and especially Spanish.</p> <p><b>Cabarete:</b> The winds that blow constantly southward off the Atlantic swept in a hip young crowd in the 1990s, as Cabarete emerged as the premier windsurfing site in the Caribbean. But only a small portion of the visitors who come here today are actually interested in the waves and jumping on a board. Many bask in the glory of the surfers by day and strut their stuff in the hyper hip town bars by night. News of Cabarete's allure has spread among the 20-something populations of Europe. Especially prevalent are visitors from northern Europe; there are fewer North Americans here than you'd expect. The big attraction is Cabarete Beach, with its white sands and ideal wind and surf conditions. Cabarete isn't particularly distinguished architecturally, consisting of a series of relatively small-scale hotels, restaurants, and gift shops lining either side of the highway that parallels the north coast. Virtually everything in town lies along this street (Calle Principal), with the exception of small-scale shops that are found on narrow alleyways that bisect the main street. But as word of the resort has spread, there have been increasing numbers of large all-inclusive hotels built on the outskirts of town. Cabarete hosts an annual weeklong windsurfing tournament every June. Only amateurs are allowed to participate.</p>
<b>Distances</b>	Santo Domingo to Puerto Plata: 235km; to La Romana: 130km; to Punta Cana: 225km; to La Samana: 320km
<b>Ferries</b>	Shuttle boats to Cayo Levantado from Samana Also ferry to Sabana de la Mar across Samana Bay
<b>Trains</b>	There is no passenger train service in the DR
<b>Car Rental</b>	<p>The best way to see the Dominican Republic is to drive. Motorists drive on the right here. Although major highways are relatively smooth, the country's secondary roads, especially those in the east, are riddled with potholes and ruts. Roads also tend to be badly lit and poorly marked in both the city and the countryside. Drive carefully and give yourself plenty of time when traveling between island destinations.</p> <p>For reservations and more information, call the rental companies at least a week before your departure: Avis (tel. 800/331-1212 in the U.S. and Canada, or 809/535-7191; <a href="http://www.avis.com">www.avis.com</a> ), Budget (tel. 800/527-0700 in the U.S. and Canada, or 809/549-0351; <a href="http://www.budget.com">www.budget.com</a> ), and Hertz (tel. 800/654-3131 in the U.S. and Canada, or 809/221-5333; <a href="http://www.hertz.com">www.hertz.com</a> ) all operate in the</p>

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	Dominican Republic. All three have offices at the Santo Domingo and Puerto Plata airports, as well as in downtown Santo Domingo. Avis and Hertz also have offices in La Romana and in Punta Cana.
<b>Buses</b>	<p>Públicos are unmetered multipassenger taxis that travel along main thoroughfares, stopping often to pick up people waving from the side of the street. A público is marked by a white seal on the front door. You must tell the driver your destination when you're picked up to make sure the público is going there. A ride is usually RD\$5 (15¢/8p). The minimum fare is RD\$3 (10¢/5p).</p> <p>Public buses, often in the form of minivans or panel trucks, are called guaguas (pronounced gwa-gwas). For about the same price, they provide the same service as públicos, but they're generally more crowded. Larger buses provide service outside the towns.</p>

<b>ACCOMMODATION TYPES</b>	Signature Vacations feature a wide range of hotels and resorts in the DR, with Barcelo Hotels and Resorts perhaps being the best known group of resorts; they are located in most of the destinations.
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<b>TARGET GROUPS</b>	
<b>Kids</b>	<p><b>Acuario Nacional, Santo Domingo</b>  Phone: (809) 766-1709  Open from Tuesday to Sunday from 9:30am to 5:30 pm.  Bordering the Caribbean Sea, the national aquarium offers visitors a glimpse of the Caribbean's diverse, colorful sea life. The aquarium's Plexiglas tunnel surrounds spectators with water, sharks, rays and conger eels. A variety of colorful fish swim throughout the tunnel, while exhibits explain different types of marine environments.</p> <p><b>Ocean World, Puerto Plata</b>  Phone: (809) 291-1000  Website: <a href="http://www.oceanworld.net">www.oceanworld.net</a>  This large marine theme park offers interactive experiences such as swimming with bottlenose dolphins in the world's largest dolphin lagoon, feeding stingrays, exploring an artificial reef, getting close to sharks in the world's first shark interaction pool and swimming just inches from tigers. Parents need not worry, as children and tigers are safely separated by glass. Guests have the opportunity to experience a rainforest complete with waterfalls, beaches, lagoons and wildlife. Birds, iguanas, lizards, frogs, snakes, fish and tigers will captivate park visitors.</p> <p><b>Manati Park, Bavaro, Punta Cana</b>  Phone: (809) 221-9444  Website: <a href="http://www.manatipark.com">www.manatipark.com</a></p>

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	<p>Manati Theme Park focuses on nature, animals and the history of the Dominican Republic. Located in Bavaro-Punta Cana, the park is centered on an incredible landscape of magnificent gardens abundant with orchids and tropical plants. This park is a huge hit with kids as it encourages them, with the assistance of professionals, to hold non-poisonous snakes and play in a pool with dolphins.</p> <p><b>Parque Zoologico Nacional, Santo Domingo</b>          Phone: (809) 562-3149. <a href="http://www.zoodom.gov.do">http://www.zoodom.gov.do</a>          Open Tuesday to Sunday, 9am to 5pm          Located north of Santo Domingo, Parque Zoologico is one of the largest zoos in Latin America. The 320-acre park provides guests with the opportunity to see intriguing animals like tigers, chimps and hyenas, while also offering glimpses of crocodiles, flamingos and nocturnal anteaters. Whether children are discovering creatures in the large landscaped grounds or going for a ride on the shuttle train, they're sure to enjoy their visit to Santo Domingo's National Zoo.</p>
<b>Teens</b>	<p><b>Islabon Jungle River Tour</b>          Phone: (809) 248-2818          Located about three miles east of Cabarete, the Islabon Jungle River Tour allows kids to explore the Islabon river area by boat and walk through jungle trails to a mini zoo that includes iguanas, snakes, turtles, ravens and North American crocodiles. The tour includes an informative chat about the nature found in the area.</p> <p><b>Monster Truck Safari</b>          Phone: (809) 244-4060          This full-day adventure tour allows participants to experience the diversity and beauty of the Dominican countryside in a fun, comfortable and safe environment. Holding approximately (28 people for small jeeps, and 32 for large), the large eight-wheel drive safari jeeps are driven by professionals on a variety of terrain. Participants are seated up high to ensure an exceptional view of the countryside and will be covered in case of rain. Various stops throughout the day offer a glimpse of true Dominican culture and life.</p>
<b>Romance</b>	<p>Lush tropical forests, rolling mountains and long deserted beaches – perfect for those romantic strolls at sunset!</p>
<b>Honeymoons &amp; Weddings</b>	<p>Signature can help you arrange weddings, honeymoons and vow renewals in the Dominican Republic. Let them know through your travel agent and take a look at page 14 of their Signature 2011/2012 brochure for more details.</p>
<b>Seniors</b>	<p>Endless beaches, excellent resorts and accessible tours to the countryside make this an excellent choice for the older vacationer.</p>

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<p><b>UNIQUES</b></p>	<p>Usually starting in <b>January and lasting until late March</b>, Samana's humpback whales return every year to these tropical waters. Tours originate from Samana and Las Galeras (and several bayside locations in between) and from Las Terrenas.</p> <p><b>Whale-watching</b> as a local tourist industry was begun in the 1980s by Kim Beddall, then an itinerant scuba instructor with no formal training as a marine biologist – although she's since been instrumental in the implementation of a code of conduct for whale-watch boats. Beddall still runs excellent whale boat tours through her Whale Samaná/Victoria Marine operation, Malecón (US\$45) that allow you to get an up-close look at the humpbacks; encounters are guaranteed in season.</p>
<p><b>Surprising</b></p>	<p><b>Los Altos de Chavon</b> village near the south coast is an oddball 16th century Italian style confection on hilltop, crafts, workshops, Taino Art Museum, great views, shopping, restaurants.</p>
<p><b>History</b></p>	<p>For at least 5,000 years before Christopher Columbus discovered America for the Europeans the island was inhabited by Amer-Indians. Anthropologists have traced multiple waves of indigenous immigration from two principle places. Some of the early Amer-Indians came from Central America (probably Yucatan and/or Belize) and some came from South America, descendants of the Arawakan Indians in Amazonia, many of whom passed through the Orinoco Valley in Venezuela. It is from the blending of these waves of indigenous immigrants that the Taíno Indians, the people who welcomed Columbus on his arrival, are believed to have originated.</p> <p>The Dominican Republic was discovered on December 5, 1492, by Christopher Columbus during his first voyage to the New World. At that time the island of Hispaniola (as Columbus named it) was called "Quisqueya" by the Taino Indians who occupied the land. With a population estimated around 600,000, the Tainos (meaning "the good") were peaceful and hospitable to Columbus and his crew of Spaniards. Columbus himself grew a particular fondness for Hispaniola, describing it in his journal as "a beautiful island paradise with high forested mountains and large river valleys."</p> <p>Columbus' admiration for Hispaniola coupled with his crew's discovery of gold deposits in the island's rivers led to the establishment of European settlements, the first of which was founded in 1493 in La Isabela. With the presence of new settlements, the Taino Indians were put into slavery and over the next 25 year, were eventually wiped out. Simultaneously, the settlers began bringing African slaves to the island to ensure adequate labor for their plantations.</p>

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Columbus' brother, Bartholomew, was appointed governor of Hispaniola and in 1496 he founded the city of Santo Domingo. The capital city quickly became the representative seat of the Spanish royal court and therefore, a city of power and much influence. However, by 1515 the Spaniards realized the gold deposits of Hispaniola had significantly dwindled. Around this time Herman Cortes discovered silver deposits in Mexico. Upon hearing this news, most Spanish residents of Santo Domingo left for Mexico, leaving only a few thousand settlers behind. Because of the predominance of livestock, initially introduced by Columbus, these settlers sustained themselves by providing food and leather to Spanish ships passing Hispaniola on their way to the richer colonies on the American mainland. It is during this period of time that the pirates of the Caribbean made history.

The island of Hispaniola remained under Spanish control until 1697 when the western third of the island became a French possession. (In 1804, the western part of the island became the Republic of Haiti.) This area, which the French called "Saint Domingue" became the richest colony in the world thanks to large sugar plantations which were worked by hundreds of thousands of slaves imported from Africa. In 1791 a slave revolt broke out in Saint Domingue. For fear of losing their colony to the slaves, the French abolished slavery in 1794. With calm in Saint Domingue, the French were able to focus on overwhelming the Spanish on the island's eastern side, who later surrendered power.

In 1809 the eastern side of the island returned to Spanish rule. In 1821 the Spanish settlers declared an independent state but just weeks later, Haitian forces invaded the eastern portion of the island and incorporated Santo Domingo. For the next 22 years the entire island came under Haitian control. However, fueled by their loss of political and economic control, the former Spanish ruling class developed an underground resistance group led by Juan Pablo Duarte called "La Trinitaria." After several attacks by La Trinitaria on the Haitian army, the Haitians retreated. On February 27, 1844, the eastern side of the island declared independence and gave their land the name "Dominican Republic."

The 70 years that followed were characterized by political unrest and civil war, mainly due to fights for leadership of the government by Dominican strongmen. Disputes continued with Haiti and power returned to the Spanish for a short period of time (Restoration Day celebrates the day that a national war of "restoration" began, re-establishing the Dominican Republic's independence by 1865). Turmoil in the early 1900's led the United States to intervene. In 1916

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	<p>U.S. troops occupied the country and stayed until 1924 when a democratically elected Dominican government was put into place. However, the head of the army that was put into place during the American occupation, Raphael Leonidas Trujillo, used his power to block government reform and shortly thereafter, took total control of power in the form of a repressive dictatorship. His rule lasted until 1961 when his motorcade was ambushed and he was killed. (The anniversary of his death is a public holiday in the Dominican Republic.)</p> <p>Following Trujillo's death, political unrest again prevailed. The Dominican Republic went through a series of leaders until 1965 when Lyndon B. Johnson ordered the U.S. marines to again occupy the country. A rigged election in 1966 put Dr. Joaquin Balaguer, a member of the Partido Reformista Social Cristiano (PRSC), in power for a reign that lasted until 1978 when Dominicans elected Antonio Guzman, also of the PRD. Guzman died in 1982 at which time Dominicans elected another member of the D.R.P. In 1986 Balaguer was again elected, this time legitimately, and remained president until 1996 when President Leonel Fernandez (of the Party of the Dominican Liberation or PLD.) was elected. He served for four years and was replaced by Hipolito Mejia in 2000. Today's Leonel Fernandez is again president.</p>
<p><b>Books</b></p>	<p>Frommer's Caribbean 2011          An Adventure Guide to the Dominican Republic by Harry Pariser          National Geographic Traveler Dominican Republic          See also an article I have written for one of the airline inflight magazines:  <a href="http://www.chrisrobinsontravelshow.ca/travelarticles/TA_Dominican.pdf">http://www.chrisrobinsontravelshow.ca/travelarticles/TA_Dominican.pdf</a></p>
<p><b>1000 Places to see before you die</b></p>	<p><b>Casa de Campo</b> near La Romana – one of the world's best golf and sporting destinations</p>
<p><b>Must Sees</b></p>	<p><b>The Cascada el Limón waterfall</b> is immersed in a tropical forest on the Samaná peninsula. Tours offer you a relaxing, pleasant and unforgettable trip; a one- to two-hour donkey ride through tropical forest leads to this striking 55-metre waterfall. After bathing in the refreshing, crystal-clear water, you can enjoy a typical meal in the local restaurant.</p>

<p><b>SPORTS ACTIVITIES</b>  <b>- Baseball</b></p>	<p>Back in 1866, American sailors stationed on the island of Cuba taught natives the rules of the game of <b>baseball</b>. Following the Ten Years' War (also known as the Big War) in Cuba, baseball migrated to the Dominican Republic along with Cubans who were fleeing their country. Quickly nicknamed "beisbol" by the Dominican people, the sport was rapidly learned and became a passion. Today, traveling from one side of the country to the other presents national scores of baseball fields and stadiums, attesting to the Dominicans' love for the game.</p>
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	<p>The sport first turned competitive in the 1920s when baseball games began being played against neighboring countries. This competitiveness encouraged the establishment of the Dominican Baseball League. Four baseball teams were formed: Tigres del Licey and Leones del Escogido, both from Santo Domingo, Estrellas Orientales of San Pedro and the Las Aguilos Cibaeñas in Santiago. The popularity of professional baseball in the Dominican Republic ascended throughout the following years, but came to a halt in 1937 due to a financial downturn in the country. Meanwhile, amateur baseball evolved with Dominican teams competing with those from the U.S. and other Caribbean countries. The hiatus finally ended in 1951 with the return of professional baseball. Dominicans' idea of hosting amateur baseball in the summer and professional baseball during the winter months was generated, therefore giving the Caribbean the "home of winter baseball" title.</p> <p>Today there are two additional teams in the country's professional baseball league: the Azucareros del Este from La Romana and the Gigantes del Cibao. Each season extends from the end of October through February, with the winner advancing to the Caribbean Series. At the series, the winning team of the Dominican Republic league plays against the champions of the Mexican, Venezuelan and Puerto Rican leagues.</p> <p>The baseball season is <b>October to February</b> each year.</p>
<b>Golf</b>	<p><b>Punta Cana:</b> The <b>Bávaro Golf Course</b>, at Barcelo Bávaro Beach, Golf &amp; Casino Resort, Bávaro Beach (tel. 809/686-5797), is the best golf course on this end of the island, and bears the honor of being the golf course whose allure helped open the eastern DR to the tourist boom. Greens fees are RD\$1,920 for 18 holes, with cart rentals going for RD\$1,440. Guests of the hotel pay only 50% of greens fees. Open daily 7am to 5pm.</p> <p><b>Punta Cana Golf Club</b>, near the Punta Cana Resort and Club (tel. 809/959-4653), is the best and most sought-after of the four golf courses now flourishing in Punta Cana. Fronting the sea, it was designed by P. B. Dye of the famous golfing family. Fourteen of its holes open onto panoramic views of the Caribbean Sea, and four play along the ocean itself. For 18 holes, hotel guests pay RD\$3,520, and non guests are charged RD\$4,800. In summer, greens fees are reduced to RD\$2,144 for hotel guests, RD\$2,944 for non-guests.</p>
<b>Fishing</b>	<p>Sea fishing is great in all the resorts for <b>marlin, sailfish, benito, tarpon, dorado, snook</b>.</p> <p>You can arrange freshwater river-fishing trips through Casa de Campo in the south. Some of the biggest snook ever recorded have been</p>

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	caught around here. A 3-hour tour costs RD\$868 (\$31) per person, and includes tackle, bait, and soft drinks.
<b>Horse riding</b>	Within <b>Punta Cana</b> , the guest services staff at your hotel can arrange horseback riding for you, but if they can't, consider an equestrian jaunt at the region's biggest stables. These are headquartered at Rancho RN-23, Arena Gorda (tel. 809/747-7356 or 7538). It supervises as many as 125 horses that are stabled at three separate "ranches," each within a reasonable distance of one another. For RD\$1,800 (\$54) an hour, you'll be guided on equestrian tours through groves of coconut palms near the beach and, in most cases, onto the beach itself. To reach it, you'll follow some clearly marked signs 3km through some of the wildest terrain left in Punta Cana, down winding sandy paths to a series of palm groves, to the site of these stables.
<b>Hiking</b>	In the National Park and along the endless beaches the walks are superb. For a special hike, there's a three day guided hike up <b>Pico Duarte</b> , the highest mountain in the Caribbean.
<b>Cycling</b>	The coast road is good biking terrain, but the roads are pot-holed and this is not ideal biking country!
<b>Diving</b>	There are diving opportunities with fully qualified operations in all the major resort areas of the country.

<b>CULTURE</b>	A few blocks back from the waterfront in Samana, the old First African Wesleyan Methodist Church of Samaná, popularly known as La Churca, on Santa Bárbara and Duarte (daily 9am–6pm), tangibly maintains what African-American culture is left in Samaná. The prefabricated, tin-roofed structure was originally shipped over by the English Methodist Church in 1823, in support of a recently emigrated African-American community that still remains here. These days it's known as the Dominican Evangelical Church.
<b>Arts</b>	Dominican paintings are primitive, colourful and affordable
<b>Music</b>	<p>Passing through the streets of the Dominican Republic visitors are sure to notice the handmade posters that hang from telephone poles promoting an upcoming merengue or bachata night at a nearby venue. Continue walking and it doesn't take long to realize that music acts as the soundtrack of the country and its people, often heard blaring from vehicles, stores, restaurants and houses. After sunset, the pulsing beats fill the air with life and draw locals and tourists alike toward the crowded dance floors of the world's hottest night clubs. A way of life on the island, Dominicans view dancing as an art and take pride in sharing their native movements with others. Salsa, Latin jazz and other types of dance music can be heard in the country, but are not as popular as their beloved merengue and bachata counterparts.</p> <p><b>Merengue</b> The country's national dance, traditional merengue groups are</p>

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	<p>comprised of a three-piece band including a melodeon (accordion-like instrument), a guira (a scraped percussion piece) and a tambora (double-headed drum); however, it has expanded to incorporate other instruments such as the saxophone, trumpets, violin, flute and piano. Its tempo is characterized by an aggressive beat, requiring its dancers to swing their hips in rapid, fluid motions and make sure their feet follow suit. Early merengue's lyrics were based on sexual encounters and other socially taboo subjects, thus preventing it from becoming widely accepted. Today, merengue's lyrics cover more general topics including politics and current events. Its music has become so popular, in fact, that it is honored with two regional festivals each year.</p>
<b>Films</b>	<p><b>Cayo Levantado</b> is the original Bacardi Island photographed in the 1970s rum campaign</p>
<b>Museums</b>	<p>At the southern end of the Plaza Espana in Santo Domingo is <b>the Museo de las Casas Reales</b>, built between 1503 and 1520, was the administrative centre of the West Indies, housing the Royal Court, Treasury and Office of the Governor. Inside, the museum's rather hodgepodge collection includes a few Taíno artefacts, Spanish navigational instruments, and an armoury donated by Trujillo with examples of weaponry used here since Columbus. Opposite the Casas Reales is the Alcazar de Colón, the fortified palace of the Columbus family, built by Diego from 1511 to 1515.</p>
<b>Festivals</b>	<p><b>Dominican Republic Jazz Festival:</b> November in Cabarete The Dominican Republic is world-renowned for merengue so it is no surprise that the annual Dominican Republic Jazz Festival attracts a line-up of Latin jazz performers. Concerts are held at Cabarete beach and the Gran Teatro del Cibao in Santiago. <a href="http://www.drjazzfestival.com">http://www.drjazzfestival.com</a></p> <p><b>Carnival</b> is held in late Feb – Diablo Conjuelo costumes, singing, dancing, every weekend in February.</p> <p><b>Merengue festivals:</b> July in Santo Domingo – musical blowout; Oct in Pto Plata on the Malecon.</p> <p><b>Las Nochas de Vela:</b> the night of the prayer festival Jan 21 mix of Catholic and African religious festivities</p>

<b>ATTRACTIONS</b>	
<b>Beaches</b>	<p><b>Playa Bonita</b>, 13km of uninterrupted beach that begins just west of Playa Las Ballenas, boasts the kind of powdery white sand you might expect to see only in tourist brochures. From Playa Bonita's entrance, a sand road provides access for four-wheel-drives and motorbikes, past a beachfront populated at most</p>

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	<p>by a few small groups of people taking advantage of the isolation to swim or sunbathe naked, until, after 6km, you reach Playa Cosón, a small fishing village holding two gourmet beach shacks with tables and chairs on the sand, serving grilled, fresh-caught fish for a few pesos.</p>
<b>Wildlife</b>	<p><b>Whales:</b> 2500 of 6000 world pop of humpbacks breed and give birth in the north on the Silver Bank; they are 50ft long and 60 tons; December to March is the season for whale watching here.</p> <p>The hutia is an endemic mammal, nocturnal, 30cms, lives in caves and is rarely seen.</p>
<b>Parks</b>	<p><b>Los Haitises National Park</b> is 1200 square kilometers of limestone hills and mangroves. Guided tours to explore the many small islands and caves of the park are offered from Samana, Sanchez, Sabana de la Mar. Pre-Colombian pictograms cover the walls of some of the caves in the park.</p> <p>There are 16 national parks across the country and 67 protected areas. Wildlife includes caimans in the southwest; flamingos, parrots; the solenodon (the Caribbean's only insectivorous mammal, almost extinct); sea turtles, and whales galore!</p>
<b>Gardens</b>	<p>The National Botanical Garden in Santo Domingo occupies an area of one square mile and was founded to study, preserve and investigate the varied plant life of Dominican Republic. Opened in 1976, the Botanical Garden is named after Dr. Rafael María Moscoso, the first Dominican botanist who wrote a catalog of the plants of the Spanish island in 1943. It is a sanctuary where animals and plants live in perfect harmony, with roads and trails will lead you a personal encounter with nature. It highlights the permanent exhibitions of bromeliads, ferns, palms, orchids, aquatic plants and the Japanese garden. Open daily from 9am - 5pm. Tel 809-385-2611</p> <p><a href="http://www.jbn-sdq.org">www.jbn-sdq.org</a></p>
<b>Historical Buildings</b>	<p><b>Santo Domingo:</b></p> <p>Santo Domingo is the city of firsts in the Americas. Located in this metropolis are the first buildings constructed for religious, health, judicial and government purposes after the Spanish arrived. Among them, the first Cathedral of the Americas was erected (1523-1546), with its blend of Gothic and Renaissance styles. Don't miss the beauty of the Alcázar de Colón, the oldest Viceregal residence in the Americas. It was built at the beginning of the 16th century by the son of Admiral Christopher Columbus, Don Diego Columbus. He lived there with his wife María de Toledo, the niece of the King of Spain. Columbus Park is in the centre of the city's ancient quarter. It is an "urban living room" where everyone goes to enjoy its tree-lined streets where beautiful buildings date back several centuries.</p>

<b>OTHER ACTIVITIES</b>	
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<b>Shopping</b>	Santo Domingo is also one of the grand shopping bazaars of the Caribbean, with such "hot" items as hand-wrapped cigars for sale virtually everywhere, along with local handicrafts. Jewelry made of larimar or amber is also much sought after. From gambling to merengue, Santo Domingo is also one of the liveliest cities in the Caribbean after dark. Notable cigar brands include: Santiago, Cibao Valley, Davidoff, Churchill
<b>Markets</b>	Most of the towns have fun markets to explore. Samana town has one of the most colourful public markets in the DR.
<b>Nightlife</b>	<b>Punta Cana:</b> Bávaro Disco, on the grounds of the Barcelo Bávaro Beach, Golf & Casino Resort (tel. 809/686-5797), has emerged as the hottest, most popular, and sexiest dance club in Punta Cana, thanks to a superb sound system. The venue is more European than North American, thanks to a heavy concentration of clients from Italy, Spain, and Holland. Painted black, with simulated stars overhead and lots of mirrors, the place is open nightly from 11pm to 5am.  <b>Samaná</b> has a great nightlife scene during the busier times of the year, with most of the action centred around the outdoor food and liquor shacks on the western end of the Malecón, e.g. Naomi, a slick dark, bustling place with great light shows and sound system, playing a mix of merengue and European techno.
<b>Casinos</b>	Most casinos are conveniently located within major resort complexes and are open until dawn, if not 24 hours. Dominican casinos use Las Vegas odds, so the casino's profits and player winnings are relatively the same and considered fair.

<b>CUISINE</b>	
<b>Food</b>	Breakfast typically calls for a serving of "Mangu," a mix of plantains, cheese and bacon, which can be found at most hotel and resort restaurants. Mangu has been dubbed the "mashed potatoes" of the Dominican Republic and is a must-try for all visitors. Locals are also known to prepare the dish for evening meals.  A foundation of the native diet, " <b>La Bandera Dominicana</b> ," or the Dominican flag meal, is eaten by nearly everyone at lunch time. The most important meal of the day, La Bandera consists of rice, beans, meat, vegetables and fried plantains to ensure energy throughout the afternoon and evening.  Another popular dish is " <b>Sancocho</b> ," a Spanish-style stew usually served with rice. Ingredients include various roots, green plantains, avocado and typically chicken or beef, although it sometimes includes a

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	<p>combination of seven meats (Sancocho prieto). Goat meat, a staple in many Dominican homes, may also be used in this recipe. It offers a unique addition to the character of any dish as these animals graze on wild oregano.</p> <p>"<b>Locrio</b>," or Dominican rice, varies with its preparer. An adaptation of the Spanish paella, locrio is made with achiote (a colored dye produced from the seeds of the achiote plant), since saffron spice is unavailable.</p> <p>Near Samana, coconut trees decorate the landscape and provide a delectable milk sauce for fish, known as "<b>Pescado con Coco</b>." Throughout the south central coast, "bulgur", or whole wheat, is a main ingredient in "Quipes" (ground beef wrapped in wheat) or "Tipili" (bulgur salad).</p> <p><b>Comida Creolla</b> – creole cuisine blends Spanish, African, Indian and Caribbean influences; plantains, cassava, tropical fruits, mango, papaya, seafood, rice and beans; pastelitos: meat or cheese pastry turnovers; chimichurris: pork sandwiches hot off the spit; sancocho: national dish, sausage, pork, chicken, beef, goat, veg, herbs, spices in stew.</p> <p>Local beers, which are very good, are Quisqueya and El Presidente.</p>
<p><b>Rum</b></p>	<p>Rum production in the Caribbean is attributed to the African colonists who brought sugar cane with them to make crystallized sugar and molasses. They noticed, however, that the molasses began to ferment when left in the hot Caribbean sun and could be mixed with water to create what became known as rum.</p> <p>During the 1700s, sugar cane plantations and their by-products contributed to a booming social and economic climate which eventually drew the attention of the DR's three rum brand founders. In the mid-to-late 1800's Don Andres Brugal Montaner, Don Erasmo Bermudez and Julian Barcelo started experimenting with their own personal refining processes. Today, the <b>Brugal, Bermúdez, and Barcelo</b> brands of rum have become popular across the globe and are considered some of the world's best. Unlike that of Jamaica and Barbados, Dominican rum is produced through a more natural process of distillation. Aging is often done in special American white oak kegs, thus creating a sweet, hearty blend.</p> <p><b>Bermudez</b>, the eldest of the Dominican rum distilleries, was established in 1852. Its first formula, Bitter Panacea, remains famous. Distilling in Santo Domingo, Bermudez boasts the Dominican's oldest aging cellar. <b>Brugal</b>, established in 1888, is located just east of Puerto Plata and produces more than one and a half million liters of white and dark rum</p>

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	<p>each year. Considered the most popular distiller, Brugal offers affordable bottles of rum for sale at its bottling plant and gives guests a free rum drink. Tours are offered Monday through Friday and admission is free.</p> <p><b>Barcelo</b>, established in Santo Domingo in 1930, is said to be best-liked by locals. The plant manufactures 40 thousand liters of rum per day.</p>
<b>Restaurants</b>	<p><b>Chez Palace, Punta Cana:</b> This is the showcase restaurant of one of the biggest resort complexes in the Dominican Republic. If you're not staying at one of the Barcelo hotels, you'll have to make reservations in advance. The decor is cool and stylish, as if it were imported from a chic resort in the south of Spain. A formally dressed staff serves superb dishes that include salmon mousse in a prawn sauce, tartar of tenderloin, grilled red snapper, grouper with mustard sauce, and filet mignon with truffles and foie gras.</p> <p>In <b>Samana:</b> Le France, Camilo's, La Hacienda, Tropical Lodge, Chino's up the hill; El Riconcito, with typical Dominican food and a few restaurants on the market with fresh fried fish or chicken.</p>
<b>MORE INFO</b>	Call the Dominican Republic Tourism Office: 416-361-2126 (Ontario) and 514-499-1918 (Quebec)
<b>Brochures</b>	The Signature Vacations brochure is available at your local travel agent
<b>Websites</b>	<a href="http://www.signature.ca">www.signature.ca</a> <a href="http://www.barcelo.com">www.barcelo.com</a> <a href="http://www.godominicanrepublic.com">www.godominicanrepublic.com</a>
<b>PERSONAL EXPERIENCES</b>	<p>Puerto Plata – Jarabacoa;          South Coast – Boca Chica, Santo Domingo, Isla Saona;          Punta Cana</p>

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