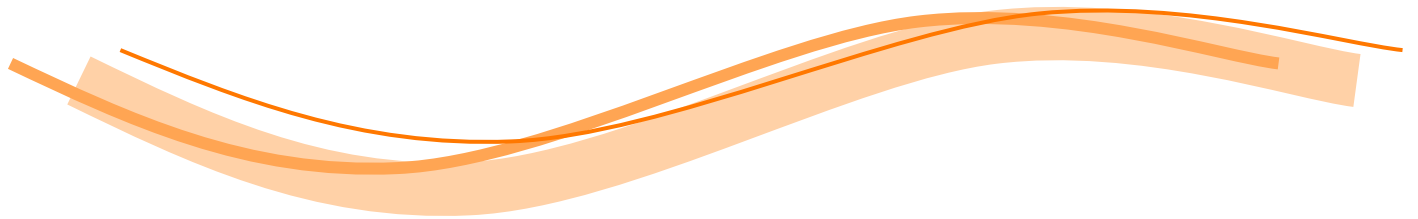




BARCELO RESORTS & TRANSAT HOLIDAYS





TRAVEL NOTES SECTIONS	<p>To help you find what you are looking for, these Travel Notes are organized in the following order:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Barcelo Hotels and Resorts 2. Transat Holidays and Nolitours 3. Dominican Republic
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BARCELO RESORTS	<p>Discover Barceló Hotels and Resorts, 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.</p> <p>Transat Holidays and sister company Nolitours offer vacation packages at Barceló Resorts. Be sure to pick up their winter brochures at your Travel Agent! These three great names together translate into a vacation cocktail of carefree days in the sun for you. Barceló Hotels and Resorts are located in Punta Cana, Puerto Plata, Cancun, Riviera Maya, Cayo Santa Maria, Varadero, Costa Rica and many other destinations.</p> <p>Transat Holidays features Barceló resorts in its Transat Distinction Collection, an outstanding line of luxury hotels offered exclusively to Transat Holidays clients. With Prestige Class, guests enjoy exclusive privileges, enhanced services and fabulous facilities – at resorts that are already renowned for their attentive service and their wide array of activities for couples and families.</p>
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Barcelo History	<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</p>
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	<p>Riviera in México, and purchase of two hotels (Ixtapa and Huatulco) on Mexico's Pacific coast</p> <p>In 2012 they have 182 resorts in 17 countries.</p> <p>Barcelo believe that they have a great responsibility that includes social and environmental aspects, so Barceló Hotels & Resorts has explicitly confirmed its commitment to society and the environment by signing the United Nations Pact on Human Rights and the Environment.</p>
Websites	<p>Have fun exploring:</p> <p>www.barcelo.com</p> <p>www.barcelobrochures.com</p> <p>www.barceloweddings.com</p>
Barcelo Resorts in Bavaro Beach, Punta Cana	<p>In the Transat Holidays 2012 -2013 brochure:</p> <p>Barcelo Bavaro Beach Prestige Class Barcelo Bavaro Palace Deluxe Barcelo Punta Cana Prestige Class</p> <p>In the Nolitours 2012-2013 brochure:</p> <p>Barcelo Punta Cana Barcelo Dominican Beach</p>
Barcelo and Transat Holidays 2012-2013	<p>Transat Holidays offers 9 Barcelo resorts in 7 destinations:</p> <p>Barcelo Cayo Santa Maria Beach Resort Prestige Class, Cayo Santa Maria, Cuba Barcelo Marina Palace Prestige Class, Varadero, Cuba Barcelo Puerto Plata Prestige Class, Puerto Plata, Dominican Republic Barcelo Bavaro Beach Prestige Class Barcelo Punta Cana Prestige Class, Punta Cana, Dominican Republic Barcelo Bavaro Palace Deluxe Prestige Class, Punta Cana, DR Barcelo Karmina Palace Deluxe, Manzanillo, Mexico Barcelo Puerto Vallarta, Puerto Vallarta, Mexico Barcelo Maya Colonial Prestige Class, Riviera Maya, Mexico Barcelo Maya Palace Beach Prestige Class, Riviera Maya, Mexico</p>
Barcelo and Nolitours 2012-2013	<p>Nolitours offers 11 Barcelo resorts in 8 destinations:</p> <p>Barcelo Langosta Beach, Liberia, Costa Rica Barcelo San Jose Palacio, San Jose, Costa Rica Barcelo Tambor Beach, San Jose, Costa Rica Barcelo Marina Palace, Varadero, Cuba Barcelo Solymar Arenas Blancas, Varadero, Cuba Barcelo Capella Beach, La Romana, Dominican Republic Barcelo Puerto Plata, Puerto Plata, Dominican Republic Barcelo Punta Cana, Punta Cana, Dominican Republic Barcelo Dominican Beach, Punta Cana, Dominican Republic Barcelo Tucancun Beach, Cancun, Mexico Barcelo Maya Beach Resort, Riviera Maya, Mexico</p>

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AIRLINE PARTNER	Air Transat
Flight details 2012/2013 - Toronto	Transat offer daily flights to Punta Cana and Puerto Plata from Toronto.
Flight details 2012/2013 - Montreal	Transat offer daily flights to Punta Cana from Montreal and frequent flights to Puerto Plata.

Newstalk 1010 Prize Hotel	<p>The Barceló Bavaro Beach Resort Prestige Class</p> <p>Exclusive to Transat Holidays is the adults only Barceló Bávaro Beach Prestige Class with Superior Rooms. This fantastic resort is in a unique and spectacular location, situated directly on Bávaro Beach in Punta Cana in the Dominican Republic. The beach is protected off shore by a coral reef, which means a perfect, totally calm sea. This is an ideal spot for romantic getaways, travel with friends and couples.</p> <p>The resort boasts 392 renovated superior rooms. As part of the Distinction Collection, Transat Holidays guests enjoy Prestige Class inclusions - golf unlimited green fees, welcome cocktail and cold towel, separate check-in, welcome bottle of rum in room, beach towels, bathrobe and slippers in room, concierge service, unlimited à la carte dinners with 5 guaranteed, unlimited selected international drinks – and more.</p>
Location	Beachfront on spectacular Bavaro Beach, 15km from the airport.
Accommodation	392 rooms in four 3-storey buildings. Rooms have a maximum occupancy of four.
Services	<p>In the resort complex you will find adults only pools and a semi-Olympic pool. The extensive pool area has all types of fun activities and possibilities for relaxation, such as pool beds, water spouts and much more. There's the Barcy Water Park with slides and waterfalls in the pool. Plus the new Pirates Island Water Park has a wave pool.</p> <p>If shopping is your sport – you will find a gift and craft store, a jeweller's, a perfume shop, multi-brand boutiques, a record store, golf shop and more right in the resort's own shopping centre. The Wellness Centre has an outdoor pool with water and beauty therapies; relaxation, therapeutic and sports massages and other leisure facilities. And at U Spa – relax in the soft candlelight with subtle calming music, the pleasant sounds of nature and the sweet aroma of incense and spices as you receive the perfect spa treatment.</p> <p>For evening entertainment, dancers and a talented orchestra offer different and unique shows every night in the Vegas inspired Teatro Bavaro. And the Disco Bavaro provides international music and beverages for people aged 18 and over from 11am to 3 am! And the best place for gaming in the Caribbean is the Casino Bavaro, open 24 hours (for people aged 18 and over). Have fun with the table games, including American roulette, blackjack, Caribbean Poker and Texas Hold'em. Or try your luck on the slot machines.</p>

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Dining	<p>There is simply no other place in the Caribbean with a gastronomic range that rivals the Barceló Beach Resort. Not only does the resort offer 4 elegant á la carte restaurants (Gourmet International, Mediterranean, Steak House and Sea Food) guests can also access all the facilities of the adjoining Bávaro Palace Deluxe with yet more à la carte restaurants.</p> <p>These take you away to different parts of the world, from the minimalist tradition of Japanese cuisine to the fiery flavours of Mexico, the unique experiences of Spanish and Italian food, the fun of a steak house or the special taste of seafood. In addition there is the impressive international diversity of the buffet restaurant.</p>
Kids	This is an adults only resort with a minimum age of 18 years.
Activities	The Resort facilities offer a world of activities and entertainment for everyone. Play the 18-hole golf course designed by the prestigious PB Dye and enjoy sporting facilities such as a fully equipped gym, soccer and baseball fields and tennis courts. Your all inclusive stay covers a multitude of water sports and for an extra fee you can enjoy everything from water skiing to windsurfing and catamaran classes.
Deals with Transat Holidays	When you book this resort you'll a welcome that puts the ALL in All Inclusive – a Resort Credit of up to \$3000 to use towards anything from a room upgrade to champagne to spa services, a private dinner on the beach and more.

CJAD 800 Prize Hotel	Barceló Puerto Plata Resort Prestige Class in Puerto Plata The Barceló Puerto Plata Prestige Class is also part of the Transat Distinction Collection. So you can expect to be pampered with lots of prestige class inclusions such as a fruit platter upon arrival as well as a bottle of rum, beach towels, bathrobes and slippers in your room. There is also concierge service, turn-down service, 5 guaranteed á la carte reservations and more – even 30 minutes horseback riding is included in your package.
Location	This hotel is located directly on the golden sands and crystal water of Playa Dorada beach and it is surrounded by beautiful lush gardens. The Barcelo Puerto Plata is just 18 Kms from Puerto Plata airport.
Accommodation	The resort features 583 superior rooms in 16 buildings.
Services	The hotel also offers nightly entertainment, a disco, massages, boutiques and a Kids club for ages 4 – 12 years. Making it a relaxing choice for families or couples who also want the value and pampering of Transat's Distinction collection
Dining	The excellence of the cuisine at Barceló Resorts is demonstrated by six á la carte restaurants (Mexican, Pizzeria, Asian, Italian, Grill and Brazilian) and Prestige class guests have priority access to three of these.

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Kids	This resort is excellent for children and boasts a Kids' Club (ages 4 to 12), a Mini-disco and Babysitting (at additional cost).
Activities	<p>There is a variety of daily sports:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The hotel is very close by to an 18 hole golf course, designed by Robert Trent Jones. (\$) • Kayaking • Motorized water sports (\$) • Sailing • Selected non-motorized water sports (1 hour/day) • Snorkeling • Tennis (day) • Tennis (night) (\$) • Windsurfing
Deals with Transat Holidays	<p>Prestige Class inclusions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Direct transfer between the airport and the hotel • Welcome cocktail and cold towel upon arrival • Separate check-in • Distinct identification bracelet • Dedicated room location • Welcome letter and bottle of rum • Mini-bar, restocked daily (water, soft drinks, beer and snacks) • Beach towel, bathrobes and slippers in room upon arrival • Fruit platter upon arrival • Turn-down service • Concierge service • 5 guaranteed reservations/week for à la carte dinners (if made within 24 hrs of arrival) • 15% discount on massages • Admission to the disco (drinks included) • Introduction to scuba diving in pool • Horseback riding (30 minutes/week)

<p>TRANSAT HOLIDAYS and NOLITOURS with BARCELO</p>	<p>Transat Holidays and sister company Nolitours have offered vacation packages at Barceló Resorts for many years – this relationship is one of the most successful in the travel business. Be sure to pick up their winter brochures at your Travel Agent. These three great names together translate into a vacation cocktail of carefree days in the sun for you.</p> <p>Barceló Hotels and Resorts are located in Punta Cana and Puerto Plata in the Dominican Republic. You will also find Barceló Resorts with Transat Holidays and Nolitours in Cancun and the Riviera Maya in Mexico, Cayo Santa Maria and Varadero in Cuba, Costa Rica and many other destinations.</p>
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	<p>Transat Holidays features seven Barceló resorts in its Transat Distinction Collection, an outstanding line of luxury hotels offered exclusively to Transat Holidays clients. With Prestige Class, guests enjoy exclusive privileges, enhanced services and fabulous facilities – at resorts that are already renowned for their attentive service and their wide array of activities for couples and families. Full details on each hotel are in the Transat and Nolitours 2012-2013 brochures.</p>
Transat Background	<p>Transat A.T. Inc. is an integrated tour operator that specializes in holiday travel and offers more than 60 destination countries. Transat, which was created in Canada and has offices in many other countries, is an international company that owns an airline, provides destination services, is active in the accommodation industry and operates an extensive travel agent network.</p> <p>Transat is now the largest tour operator in Canada with its two well-known vacation brands Trans Holidays and Nolitours. , developing and marketing vacation products as well as flights to destinations in the South and Europe.</p> <p>The company acts as a master craftsman in assembling different components of leisure travel: air transportation, passenger transfers from airport to hotel, accommodation, recreational and cultural activities, meals, cruises, and much more.</p> <p>As an industry leader, Transat Holidays offers departures from many Canadian cities including: St-John's, Halifax, Moncton, Fredericton, Montréal, Québec, Ottawa, Hamilton, Toronto, Thunder Bay, Regina, Saskatoon, Winnipeg, Calgary, Edmonton, Lethbridge, Vancouver, Victoria, Comox, Abbotsford, Prince George and Kelowna (as at 2012). Website: http://www.transat.com/en</p>
Mission	<p>Transat offers quality vacation packages to a wide variety of destinations. Each season, the company presents a wide selection of quality products, in order to meet the diversified needs of Canadian travellers. In keeping with their mission, their employees aim to exceed vacationers' expectations in order to maintain their position as a market leader. They see their role, ultimately, to turn holiday dreams into reality: making the vacation experience one of the most memorable ever.</p>
Products	<p>Packages, Cruises, Hotels, Flights, Tours, Car Rentals & Train Travel. With a choice of over 300 hotels located in more than 50 destinations and a complete line of itineraries offered in partnership with the most prestigious cruise lines, all products offered by Transat are subject to a rigorous standard review.</p>
2012: Transat's 25th Anniversary	<p>In 2012, Transat is celebrating its 25th Anniversary with a silver lining, giving travellers a reason to celebrate!</p>
Awards	<p>Agent's Choice Awards: Transat Holidays ranked number one for three years in a row by Canada's travel agents according to the results of</p>

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	the Agents' Choice Awards, a survey carried out by Canadian Travel Press and Travel Courier.
Current Brochures	Transat Holidays Sun 2012-2013 and Nolitours Sun 2012-2013 brochures are available at your local travel agent and cover vacations through to October 2013.
Air Transat's New Comfort Zone	With so many new comfort features, you're on vacation the minute you take your seat. It's Air Transat's 25th anniversary and they're giving their fleet a full makeover. Starting April 2012, one by one, the planes and passengers are soaring to new heights in design and comfort. They are rolling out the new cabins over the next two years. For a glimpse of what it will all look like: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZBse6WOCd70
Air Transat Kids Club	To ensure that your family vacations are fun and unforgettable from beginning to end, Air Transat has created Kids Club so that young passengers can really enjoy themselves whilst onboard an Air Transat flight. It is designed to make air travel a fun experience for young travellers (and for their parents!). Even before the doors of the plane are closed following boarding, every child receives a small bag containing all sorts of surprises and games. The more fun they have, the easier the flight. Furthermore, children who are members of Air Transat Kids Club enjoy certain exclusive privileges. Members of the Air Transat Kids Club will enjoy several benefits that the whole family can share. You can check in at a special "Air Transat Kids Club Members" counter. Thanks to these special counters located in major Canadian airports where Air Transat flies, checking-in is quicker than before. At check-in, special tags will be placed on your baggage; as a result, your baggage gets priority treatment.
Air Transat Upgrades	Air Transat has added more legroom on all their aircraft, making the journey to and from your destination even more comfortable. They have also introduced a new Economy Class meal service on sun destination flights. Passengers flying south will now be welcomed onboard with a glass of champagne, while early morning passengers will be greeted with a mimosa. The meal service has also been improved. The airline will now offer passengers a more complete meal tray, including a choice of two hot meals, a complimentary glass of wine and dessert.
Best Leisure Airline	Air Transat was named World's Best Leisure Airline at the Skytrax annual World Airline Awards, held in July 2012 at the Farnborough International Airshow, near London. Distinctions were based on a survey measuring the satisfaction of more than 18 million customers. Conducted over a 10-month period, this survey included over 200 airlines that were rated on 38 different aspects of the passenger experience. The study analyzed customer satisfaction for the Airline Passenger Experience, from check-in to boarding, onboard seat comfort, cabin cleanliness, food and beverages, onboard entertainment, and service of staff.

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	<p>In the past five years, Air Transat has gained other recognitions as a result of its numerous environmental initiatives. In 2011, the Company ranked first worldwide in the Atmosfair Airline Index environmental performance indicator, in the long-haul category. Air Transat also obtained the Platinum LEED-EB (existing building) certification for its headquarters, located within the Montreal–Trudeau airport site. Air Transat was recognized as the Best Charter Airline for the fifth consecutive year at the Agents’ Choice Awards, which represents the largest sampling of travel agents in Canada. The airline also received the Family Friendly Airline Award, which acknowledges carriers that provide additional services and extra comfort to children & parents.</p>
<p>Transat Compensation Plan</p>	<p>Starting November 1st, 2012, Transat will introduce a new compensation plan for clients affected by an advanced flight schedule change on all South, Florida and Europe flights, packages and cruises. This new policy applies to all bookings made with Transat Holidays, for Air Transat or CanJet flights.</p> <p>Applicable to schedule changes within 45 days of departure.</p> <p>Schedule change of 3 to 12 hours</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Transat will offer a \$50 voucher for future travel. <p>Schedule change of 12 to 24 hours</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Transat will offer a \$75 voucher for future travel. <p>Schedule change of 24 hours or more and cancelled flights</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clients can cancel their flight and are entitled to a full refund in the event of a schedule change of 24 hours or more. • Transat will offer a \$50 voucher for future travel to clients who cancel. • Transat will offer a \$100 voucher for future travel to clients who accept the date change. • Clients who choose a product at a lower fare will be refunded the price difference, whereas clients who select a product at a higher fare will be required to pay the balance. <p>Schedule change of 3 hours or less</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No compensation will be offered to clients experiencing a schedule change that is delayed or advanced by 3 hours or less.
<p>Transat Club Class</p>	<p>Enjoy exclusive privileges such as complimentary seat selection, wider, more comfortable leather seats, a choice of gourmet meals and fine wines, priority check-in, baggage service and boarding.</p> <p>Club Service</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dedicated Club attendants • Attentive, personalized service

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Exclusive, spacious Club cabin <p>Drinks & Snacks</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Welcome cocktails • Complimentary non-alcoholic drinks, snacks and bar service <p>Club Privileges</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased baggage allowance • 40 kg checked/15 kg carry-on • Exclusive, rapid check-in counter in most airports • Priority boarding • Practical travel items (on Europe flights) • Free headsets • Canadian newspapers <p>Comfort & Refinement</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wider, more comfortable leather seats • More leg room • Complimentary Seat Selection: call 1-877-872-6728 • Choice of gourmet meals • Choice of wine and more
Option Plus	<p>This Economy class option includes many priority privileges and services including priority check-in, priority baggage handling, an extra 10kg baggage allowance and even champagne. Here's what you get:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advance seat selection on roundtrip flights • Priority check-in at a dedicated counter • Priority baggage handling • Priority boarding • Complete Air Transat travel kit on flights to European destinations • Snacks from the On Board Bistro selection • Alcoholic beverages during drinks service 200ml bottle of champagne (Sun and Europe) • Supplementary baggage allowance up to 10 kg per flight segment • Wine or beer with the meal • Headsets <p>The cost is \$79-\$119 for southbound destinations and \$99-\$209 for European destinations as at December 2012</p>
Transat and Sustainable Tourism	<p>Transat recognizes the prime importance of the environment, host communities, cultural diversity, and their relationships with their employees, customers and partners. Tourism has become one of the world's leading industries. Society and communities reap the benefits, and, each year, hundreds of millions of travellers discover new countries and cultures. Transat is firmly committed to the responsible development of the tourism industry, and has adopted the following definition of sustainable tourism:</p> <p>"Sustainable tourism entails respect for nature, as well as for host communities and their values; it combines positive socio-economic</p>

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	<p>benefits for local populations with an enriching experience for travellers.” The issue of the environment, as far as Transat’s own facilities are concerned, is a clear and basic target. Their environment committees have implemented concrete initiatives with regard to recycling, conservation of resources, the disposal of obsolete electronic equipment, and raising employee awareness. Air Transat has begun developing an environmental management system that could lead to an ISO 14001 certification in the future. To find out more, consult the Transat and the Environment sections at their website: http://www.airtransat.ca/en/Info/the-environment-its-everyones-business.aspx?ExitID=69&ContentType=voyageur</p>
<p>Gift Certificates</p>	<p>Here’s your chance to make a loved one’s dream come true. With Transat gift certificates you can offer the beauty, excitement, and wonders of the world: the South with its heavenly beaches and endless sunshine, or just a rental car. Transat gift certificates are valid on all Air Transat, Nolitours, or Transat Holidays products in our brochures. They can be redeemed at a travel agent’s office at the time of reservation. To order your gift certificates call 1-800-322-6649.</p>
<p>2012 Hurricane Policy</p>	<p>Nolitours and Transat Holidays provide you with true peace of mind. Vacationers can travel secure in the knowledge that you will be protected should a hurricane affect your destination city in Florida, Mexico, the Caribbean or Central America. This Nolitours/Transat Holidays policy covers reservations for departures between June 1 and November 30, 2012 inclusive, but is likely to be renewed in 2013. If the conditions stipulated in the policy are met, you may choose one of the four options listed below:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Travel at a later date Passengers who choose to travel at a later date can do so at no additional cost. Travel must be completed on or before December 13, 2012. The destination city, departure day, hotel and room category must remain the same. 2. Travel to another destination city Passengers who choose to travel to a different destination can do so by selecting another Transat Holidays destination that is not at risk of a hurricane. Travel must take place within four weeks of the original departure date. In the event the package price is higher than the original booking, the passenger will be responsible for paying the difference. 3. Travel to the booked destination city Passengers who want to travel to their initially booked destination may do so, provided Transat Holidays still serves that destination city on the scheduled departure date. No refund will be issued if this option is taken.

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	<p>4. Cancel with a full refund Passengers who choose not to travel may cancel with a full refund (excluding travel insurance premiums already paid).</p>
<p>Transat Excursions in Punta Cana</p>	<p>ZIP LINE Soar like a bird over the treetops on the ten different zip-lines in an eco tourist park. The professional and knowledgeable guides will provide you with an unforgettable experience.</p> <p>BAVARO RUNNERS – SAFARI ADVENTURE Discover the Dominican countryside with its traditional villages, mountains and sugar cane plantations. Stops are scheduled for lunch and swimming. Experience the Dominican way of life. Unforgettable!</p> <p>SWIM WITH THE DOLPHINS A once-in-a-lifetime experience and a dream come true... Learn about these amazing mammals as you interact with them!</p> <p>BUGGY EXCURSION Drive your own dune buggy through the Dominican countryside, then stop off to relax or go for a swim. A day to remember!</p> <p>SAONA CATAMARAN – MOTOR BOAT Sail the crystal-clear Caribbean Sea on the catamaran cruise of your dreams. On the way back, experience a thrilling speedboat ride and go swimming in one of the world’s most beautiful natural pools!</p> <p>MARINARIUM Swim with sharks and stingrays at this unique marine park, the only one of its kind in Punta Cana. A unique experience, not to be missed!</p> <p>HORSEBACK RIDING Enjoy a beautiful horseback ride on the beach.</p> <p>SANTO DOMINGO Enjoy a cultural and fascinating tour of the capital of the Dominican Republic, the oldest city in the Americas. Visit the first Cathedral of the New World, the Alcazar of Columbus, the Pantheon, the colonial city, and “Los Tres Ojos”, the amazing underground caverns.</p> <p>TROPICAL STORM FULL DAY Go to a beautiful snorkelling area, enjoy a bath in the natural pool, have a nice lunch on the boat and learn how to dance the bachata and merengue! All this while sailing on a magnificent catamaran along the beautiful Bavaro coast.</p>

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	<p>TROPICAL STORM SUNSET Enjoy a beautiful sunset cruise aboard a catamaran, bathe in a natural pool and finish up this magical evening with a lobster dinner in one of the most popular restaurants on the beach.</p> <p>BUCANEROS – SPEED BOAT Discover the beautiful turquoise waters aboard your own speed boat. This 3-hour tour will show you the best of this spectacular area.</p> <p>DEEP-SEA FISHING Did someone say fishing? We have everything you need for a private fishing trip or a shared charter excursion. An unforgettable experience!</p> <p>HIGUEY SIGHTSEEING Visit historic Higuey City, and marvel at magnificent Nuestra Señora de la Altagracia Basilica. Go souvenir shopping in local stores, and finish up this fascinating excursion with a visit to a rum factory located near a Taino cave.</p> <p>ANIMAL ADVENTURE PARK Come and visit this unique park, where you get to interact with animals. Become a trainer for a day and work with sea lions. Different animal shows are also available throughout the park.</p> <p>QUAD EXCURSION This tour will bring out the Indiana Jones in you. Drive your own four-wheeler on the beach and through some breathtaking scenery. Stop at a lovely beach for a refreshing swim. The tour guides will look after you every step of the way.</p>
<p>Transat Excursions in Puerto Plata</p>	<p>ZIP LINE ADVENTURE MONKEY JUNGLE Visit the first ACCT certified zip line on the Dominican Republic’s north coast and fly across the magnificent valley of the Monkey Jungle ranch. Enjoy seven zip lines, two suspension bridges and a controlled 54 foot descent, stretched over 3kms of the mountain range.</p> <p>PUERTO PLATA RUNNERS Explore the Dominican countryside as you tour typical villages, mountains and rivers, and enjoy the spectacular scenery. Stops are scheduled for lunch and swimming. White-sand beaches, crystal-clear waters, lush forests and rich culture.</p> <p>OCEANWORLD The newest jewel in the Caribbean offering the most exciting animal encounters. Swim with dolphins, pet and feed sharks or play with sea</p>

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lions. The marine park is also home to stingrays, tropical fish, exotic birds, reptiles and even tigers.

RAFTING

Hop on a raft and enjoy the cool waters of the Yaque del Norte, the longest river in the Caribbean. Professional guides will take you through canyons, rapids and rarely seen spots. Action and nature together.

DOLPHIN SWIM

Feed and snuggle up with two playful dolphins, who will give you a thrilling dorsal fin ride.

BRAVISSIMO

Enjoy an exquisite dinner in an elegant environment overlooking the Ocean World Marina. The meal is followed by the Bravissimo show, which offers tropical rhythms and astonishing costumes that will take you on an enchanted journey through the Caribbean. Try your luck at the casino before you leave.

ISLA PARAISO

Pass plantations and cactus plants, and sail to a beautiful island surrounded by coral reefs and crystal-clear waters, where you can snorkel or simply relax in the sun.

SANTO DOMINGO

Enjoy a fascinating cultural tour of the capital of the Dominican Republic, the oldest city in the Americas. Visit the first Cathedral of the New World, the Alcazar of Columbus, the Pantheon, the colonial city, and “Los Tres Ojos”, the amazing underground caverns.

TIP TOP SOSUA

Fun in the sun onboard this catamaran. Enjoy some snorkelling or just take in the rays. Lunch onboard.

HORSEBACK RIDING

Travel through mountains and country villages on horseback and enjoy a refreshing swim. Take a boat ride across the Gri-Gri Laguna, the mangroves, a swallow cave and the natural swimming pool (weather permitting). Top it all off with Playa Grande’s crystal blue waters and white sand.

PUERTO PLATA AND SOSUA

Visit Puerto Plata’s main attractions: the San Felipe Fort, Brugal rum factory, the downtown area with its old Victorian houses and an amber

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	<p>gallery. Spend a leisurely afternoon at the flea market or relax on the beach of Sosua.</p> <p>QUAD – 4 WHEELER Drive your own 4-wheeler through the countryside, amidst sugarcane fields and tropical fruit plantations. Refresh yourself in a river and go swimming at Bergantin Beach.</p> <p>FIESTA 151 Enjoy a typical Dominican night-time carnival celebration. It's a cultural adventure, but most importantly it's a fiesta! You'll enjoy a fantastic Dominican-style 5-course feast with free-flowing drinks, and the dancers will be sure to keep you entertained.</p>
Weddings	Some Barceló resorts, such as Barceló Punta Cana Resort, are in the Transat Wedding Collections – Transat works with the travel agent to help with your wedding.
Groups	Group rates are available – as few as 10 adults make up a group.
Special Deals with Barcelo Resorts	<p>Transat currently has some very special deals at the Barcelo Resorts this winter including free wedding offers, free golf and more.</p> <p>\$669 Toronto to Barcelo Bavaro Beach 1 week 9 Dec 2012 tax excl</p> <p>\$709 Montreal to Barcelo Puerto Plata 1 week 8 Dec 2012 tax incl</p> <p>Check out their website at www.TransatHolidays.com for latest deals.</p>

DOMINICAN REPUBLIC	<p>The Dominican Republic is a great destination with a number of different resorts for you to choose between.</p> <p>For relaxing and “fun in the sun” - Punta Cana has crystal seas, vast stretches of white sands and first class golf. Most travelers come to this region because its beaches are among the most beautiful in the country, if not the entire Caribbean. The big hotel complexes in Playa Macao, Playa Bavaro and Punta Cana all organize activities. Their prime locations mean that guests can enjoy scuba diving, snorkelling, sailing, windsurfing, horseback riding and many other sports, including tennis. There are two golf courses in the region.</p> <p>Puerto Plata has a renewed buzz with new resorts, ramped up nightlife and fabulous windsurfing and water sports. The Dominican Republic and Nolitours have joined forces to create the It Zone in Puerto Plata. It is the place to be this year! Designed for people who expect more than just sun and sand on their vacation, it's a destination for people who want to have fun! Beyond the fabulous beaches and great resorts, you'll be able to immerse yourself in the local culture, get into the Dominican beat and</p>
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	<p>enjoy a host of activities open to everyone. It's a great place to kick back and meet new people!</p> <p>Blend the Caribbean with art and culture in Romana. Altos de Chavón, located to the east of La Romana, is a surprisingly beautiful reconstruction of a late 14th century Italian village. It was built by ambitious entrepreneurs to create a major tourist attraction in the region. This replica is faithful in many ways to the original village, due to its incredible attention to detail.</p> <p>The historic, cosmopolitan capital of Santo Domingo is the oldest city in the Americas. It mixes the stately grandeur of colonial architecture with glamorous casinos and nightclubs. A stroll through the streets is pleasant and requires little effort, the buildings all being set in a relatively limited perimeter. Visit the magnificent Catedral Santa María de la Encarnación, constructed during the 1540s, the Alcazar of Columbus and many other beautiful buildings in the old city. It's like a walk through time.</p> <p>Nolitours and sister company Transat Holidays have weekly flights and many excursions to help you discover The Dominican Republic and its culture.</p> <p>Explore the website at: www.godominicanrepublic.com</p>
<p>Choosing Between the Different Destinations Within Dominican Republic</p>	<p>Promotion of DR resorts such as Punta Cana has brought that resort's beaches into frequent comparisons to those of Puerto Plata. So here's your choice: Puerto Plata lies on the more verdant, and rainier, north shore of the island; Punta Cana lies on the dustier, somewhat drier southeastern tip. Instead of the tranquil Caribbean Sea, the beaches of Puerto Plata face the Atlantic Ocean, which means that waters can be more turbulent, especially in the winter months. Rainfall in Puerto Plata, when it comes, arrives suddenly, but doesn't last long. And it keeps the landscape green. Puerto Plata's beaches aren't as wide as some of those in Punta Cana, but recent improvement of the beaches in Puerto Plata has done a lot to even out the equation. However the beaches of Punta Cana truly deserve their worldwide reputation.</p> <p>Staff at hotels in Puerto Plata tend to have been born and raised within the region, and they usually retain cultural links to the region and to their families. Staff within hotels in Punta Cana tend to have moved recently from other parts of the island, and some of them seem a little uprooted. Puerto Plata maintains an urbanized feel, and an economy based on something in addition to tourism, whereas newer communities like Punta Cana and Samana are basically modern communities carved from what</p>

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	<p>was wilderness or scrubland, with none of the feelings of urban life that are so deeply engrained within the Dominican consciousness. Each region has advantages and it's great to have the choice of different styles of vacation.</p>
Location	<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 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 of which the most celebrated are those around Punta Cana, which lies in the east of the country.</p>
Geography	<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>
Name	<p>Hispaniola was named "Little Spain" by Columbus. After various attempts to plant colonies along the northern coast of the island, Spain's first permanent colony, Santo Domingo, was founded and named after the patron saint Dominic.</p> <p>On February 27, 1844, after various Spanish, French and Haitian rules, revolutionaries which sought the complete independence of Santo Domingo without foreign intervention, declared independence from Haiti thus founding "La Republica Dominicana" (The Dominican Republic). The residents of Eastern Hispaniola, throughout most their history, were called "Dominicanos" (Dominicans), which is the adjective form of</p>

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	"Domingo" (taken the name of the original colony "Santo Domingo"), causing the revolutionaries to name their newly independent country "La República Dominicana".
Population	Approximately 9.2 million
Language	The official language is Spanish; many people also speak some English.
Currency	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, 40 pesos = Cdn \$ at December 1 st 2012.
Tiping	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.
Government	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
Documentation	Canadians traveling to the Dominican Republic require a valid Canadian passport from April 2012. 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. Please contact the Consulate of Dominican Republic for more information. The exit tax is currently \$20 (Dec 2012).
Time zone	One hour ahead of EST
Health	Stick to bottled water outside of the main resorts. Consult your doctor about Malaria and Dengue Fever – very unlikely threat to tourists but you may want to additionally protect yourself anyway.
Safety tips	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 certain areas of Santo Domingo and the night hours. There is a low incidence of violent crime against tourists, however. Follow some simple common-sense rules, and you'll be fine.

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CLIMATE	
General climate	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.
Today's weather	28 degrees Centigrade and sunny in Punta Cana for 1 st Dec 2012
Best time to visit	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.

GETTING THERE	There are daily flights to Punta Cana from Canada.
Flying time	It's just over a 4 hour flight from Toronto or Montreal with Air Transat. There is a departure tax of US\$20 which must be paid in U.S. currency as at December 2012.
Punta Cana	<p>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>
Santo Domingo	<p>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.</p> <p>Bartholomeo Columbus, brother of Christopher, founded the city of New</p>

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	<p>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 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>A new highway now links Santo Domingo and Punta Cana. The Coral Highway officially opened in August 2012. The highway stretches from the beach destinations of Punta Cana, La Romana and Bayahibe and ends in Santo Domingo, opening up the historic colonial city to visitors. The 70 km highway allows visitors from Punta Cana to reach Santo Domingo in just two hours. Prior to the highway, the trip took four hours.</p>
Distances	Santo Domingo to Puerto Plata: 235km; to La Romana: 130km; to Punta Cana: 225km; to La Samana: 320km
Ferries	Shuttle boats to Cayo Levantado from Samana Also ferry to Sabana de la Mar across Samana Bay
Trains	There is no passenger train service in the DR
Car Rental	<p>The best way to see the Dominican Republic is to drive or to take excursions with your vacation company. 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; www.avis.com), Budget (tel. 800/527-0700 in the U.S. and Canada, or 809/549-0351; www.budget.com), and Hertz (tel. 800/654-3131 in the U.S. and Canada, or 809/221-5333; www.hertz.com) all operate in the 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.</p>
Buses	<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¢). The minimum fare is RD\$3 (10¢).</p> <p>Public buses, often in the form of minivans or panel trucks, are called <i>guaguas</i> (pronounced gwa-gwas). For about the same price, they</p>

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	provide the same service as públicos, but they're generally more crowded. Larger buses provide service outside the towns.
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ACCOMMODATION TYPES	Transat Holidays and Nolitours feature the widest range of hotels and resorts in the DR, from value 3 star to all-singing, all-dancing 5 star all inclusive resorts.
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LIFESTYLES	
Kids	<p>Acuario Nacional, Santo Domingo 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>Manati Park, Bavaro, Punta Cana Phone: (809) 221-9444 Website: www.manatipark.com 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>Parque Zoologico Nacional, Santo Domingo Phone: (809) 562-3149. http://www.zoodom.gov.do 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>
Teens	<p>Islabon Jungle River Tour, North Coast 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>

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	<p>Monster Truck Safari, Punta Cana 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>
Romance	Lush tropical forests, rolling mountains and long deserted beaches – perfect!
Honeymoons & Weddings	Transat and Nolitours can help you arrange weddings, honeymoons and vow renewals in the Dominican Republic. Let them know through your travel agent.
Seniors	Endless beaches, excellent resorts and accessible tours to the countryside make this an excellent choice for the older vacationer.

UNIQUES	<p>Whale watching: Usually starting in January and lasting until late March, 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>
Surprising	<p>Larimar: is a rare blue variety of pectolite found only in the Dominican Republic. Its colouration varies from white, light-blue, green-blue to deep blue. In 1916 Father Miguel Domingo Fuertes Loren found the first gems but it wasn't until 1974, that Miguel Méndez and Peace Corps volunteer Norman Rilling rediscovered Larimar on a beach at the foot of the Bahoruco Range, in the coastal province of Barahona in southwest DR. There is a Larimar Museum in Santo Domingo: Isabel La Catolica Street no.54, Zona Zolonial-Santo Domingo. Tel: 809-682-3309 Hours: 9:00AM - 6:00PM. http://www.larimarmuseum.com</p>
History	<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 Orinocco 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</p>

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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."

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.

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

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	<p>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."</p> <p>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 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 Trujilo, 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 Trujilo'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>Books</p>	<p>Frommer's Caribbean 2013 Frommer's Portable Dominican Republic is a useful, pocket-sized guide to the resorts in the DR An Adventure Guide to the Dominican Republic by Harry Pariser</p> <p>See also an article I have written for one of the airline in-flight magazines: http://www.chrisrobinsontravelshow.ca/travelarticles/TA_Dominican.pdf</p>

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<p>1000 Places to see before you die</p>	<p>Casa de Campo near La Romana – one of the world’s best golf and sporting destinations</p>
<p>UNESCO World Heritage Site</p>	<p>Santo Domingo After Christopher Columbus's arrival on the island in 1492, Santo Domingo became the site of the first cathedral, hospital, customs house and university in the Americas. This colonial town, founded in 1498, was laid out on a grid pattern that became the model for almost all town planners in the New World.</p>
<p>Must See</p>	<p>Altos de Chavon, is an architectural wonder, a 16th century replica of a Mediterranean village perched high above the Chavón River, near Casa de Campo. The village was designed by Dominican architect Jose Antonio Caro, and created by Italian master designer and cinematographer Roberto Coppa. Dominican artisans handcrafted the stone pathways, decorative ironwork, furniture and enchanting buildings, reviving almost forgotten crafts of metal work and stone carving. Under Coppa´s direction, each stone was hand cut, each wooden door frame was handcrafted and each wrought-iron detail hand-forged. Construction of the village began in 1976 and the village was inaugurated in 1982 with the concert of Frank Sinatra at the amphitheatre.</p> <p>Altos de Chavon was built as a centre of culture for the Dominican people. Dominican residents, tourists and working artists, flock to this magically inspirational locale.</p> <p>Stroll along cobblestone streets and enjoy the architectural grandeur of days gone by as you take in the detailed, amazing quality craftsmanship of yesteryear. Quaint shops, boutiques, art galleries, fine restaurants and an archeological museum are just a sampling of the world that awaits atop the picturesque cliffs of Casa de Campo.</p> <p>Today, this amazing village is the site of many fine restaurants, boutiques, museums and the Altos de Chavon School of Design affiliated with Parson´s School of Design in New York.</p>

<p>SPORTS ACTIVITIES - Baseball</p>	<p>Back in 1866, American sailors stationed on the island of Cuba taught natives the rules of the game of baseball. 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> <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,</p>
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	<p>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 Toros 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 in the DR is October to February each year.</p>
Golf	<p>Punta Cana has 12 professional golf courses, from designers such as Jack Nicklaus, P.B. Dye, Tom Fazio, Nick Faldo and Nick Price. Punta Espada, along with Teeth of the Dog in Casa de Campo figure among the very first 50 best golf courses in the world.</p> <p>The Bávaro Golf Course, at Barcelo Bávaro Beach, Golf & 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>Punta Cana Golf Club. 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>
Fishing	<p>Sea fishing is great in all the resorts for Marlin, sailfish, benito, tarpon, dorado, snook</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 caught around here. A 3-hour tour costs RD\$868 (\$31) per person, and includes tackle, bait, and soft drinks.</p>
Horse riding	<p>Within Punta Cana, 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</p>

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	<p>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.</p>
Hiking	<p>In the National Park and along the endless beaches the walks are superb.</p> <p>For a special hike, there's a three day guided hike up Pico Duarte, the highest mountain in the Caribbean.</p> <p>There is a well-maintained system of trails leading up to the summit, with trailheads at several locations. The easiest access is from the town of La Ciénega, near Jarabacoa. The trail is 23.1 km to the summit, with a total elevation change of 1,977 meters, and a shelter 5 km away from the summit. Tourist-friendly travel agencies in the town of Jarabacoa can help arrange trips from this trailhead, using mules in their employ to help lug food, sleeping bags and supplies for the overnight stay in the shelter. A few fresh water springs labeled "Potable" are along the trail, but water filters or purifying tablets are recommended. The vast majority of hikers travel by this route.</p> <p>For the more adventurous, there is another trailhead northwest of the town of San Juan de la Maguana. These four-day (three night) trips that end at the Ciénega trailhead (or, for an extra day of hiking, back at the starting location) are run entirely by local Dominicans who cook the food you provide and help you camp along the way. Each night is spent in well maintained shelters, and due to the distance traveled, riding by mule-back is strongly encouraged. Far off the beaten path, it is highly unlikely that there will be anyone else on the trail until you merge with the trail from La Ciénega.</p> <p>According to Dominican Park Service representatives in La Cienega, while approximately 1,000 hikers visit Pico Duarte during each of the months of December and January, only about 10 to 15 people a day hike the mountain during off-season months.</p>
Cycling	<p>The coast road is good biking terrain, but the roads are pot-holed and this is not ideal biking country.</p>
Diving	<p>There are diving opportunities with fully qualified operations in all the major resort areas of the country. I experienced my first scuba dive off the coast at Puerto Plata many years ago!</p>

CULTURE	
Arts	Dominican paintings are primitive, colourful and affordable.
Music	Passing through the streets of the Dominican Republic visitors are sure

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	<p>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>Merengue The country's national dance, traditional merengue groups are 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>
Films	<p>Cayo Levantado on the peninsula of Samana, is the original Bacardi Island photographed in the 1970s rum campaign. The island has been in many motion pictures from The Godfather to Pirates of the Caribbean.</p>
Museums	<p>Museo del Hombre Dominicano, Santo Domingo The finest collection in the Caribbean of the artifacts of the pre-Columbian peoples, including the Taíno Indians. This is, in fact, the most important collection in the world of the Taínos, who greeted Columbus in 1492, little knowing the horrible fate that awaited them, including disease, slavery, and ultimately death at the hands of these strange visitors from another world. Thousands of magnificently sculpted ceramic, bone, and shell works are on display, along with grinding stones, carved necklaces, axes, and pottery. One section is devoted to the conquest of the West Indies, focusing on the pain suffered by the slaves under the domination of the Spanish. The life of the peasant is brilliantly depicted, including a typical country house that has been reconstructed in the museum. The exhibits are a pastiche of African, Taíno, and Spanish cultures, all of which went to influence Dominican life today. There's a little bit of everything here, even the "throne car" that the pope rode through the streets of Santo Domingo on a 1979 visit. One</p>

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	<p>festive section depicts carnival costumes from around the island.</p> <p>At the southern end of the Plaza Espana in Santo Domingo is the Museo de las Casas Reales, 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> <p>Amber Museum: Puerto Plata You can see a collection of rare amber specimens at the Museo de Ambar Dominicano (Museum of Dominican Amber), Calle Duarte 61 (tel. 809/586-2848; www.ambermuseum.com), near Puerto Plata's Central Park. Look out for the piece of amber with a perfectly preserved lizard inside! It's open Monday to Friday 8am to 6pm, Saturday 9am to 5pm. Guided tours in English are offered. Admission is RD\$40 or RD\$7 for children.</p>
<p>Festivals</p>	<p>Dominican Republic Jazz Festival: Nov 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. http://www.drjazzfestival.com</p> <p>The Santo Domingo Carnival: The carnival is the climax of the pre-Lenten celebration throughout the country. The winning Diablo Cojuelos, their magnificent masks depicting grotesque human features and expressions, long silk capes, matching jerkins and pantaloons, melded with strong African traditions, all in riotous rainbows of colours, come from Santiago and La Vega. Floats and numerous dance groups and costumed characters parade along the Malecón turning this mass of colour and people into a wonderful festival.</p> <p>Merengue Festival: The Merengue Festival in Puerto Plata during the first week of October is a celebration to celebrate the countryside harvests. The Malecón is blocked off to cars and stalls are set up on both sides of the street selling a variety of homemade goods to eat, drink or wear. A huge stage is erected at one end of the Malecón for concerts by famous merengue singers. At the festival, visitors can observe how Dominican crafts are made, and learn how crops are grown in the nearby countryside. The event is a combination of colourful, imaginative</p>

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	<p>performers, pulsating rhythms, traditional dances and homegrown goodness.</p> <p>Holy Week: The week leading up to Easter Sunday, is celebrated in a grand way in the town of Sosua. Dominicans from all corners of the island head to Sosua for a week of volleyball competitions, eating, drinking and dancing and visitors get their share of joyful Dominican spirit. The fun is extremely contagious and the friendly people will redefine your idea of hospitality.</p>
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<p>ATTRACTIONS</p>	
<p>Beaches</p>	<p>The 30km beach in Punta Cana is more or less continuous and is a perfect blaze of dazzling fine white sand backed by towering palm trees. Often rated as one of the finest beaches in the world, it is the reason why Punta Cana is here. The two ends of this huge beach are Punta Cana and Bavaro which are often combined and called 'Costa del Coco' – The Coconut Coast.</p> <p>It was the beaches of the Dominican Republic's north coast that originally put the country on the world's tourist map, and in 2006, the Dominican government pumped hundreds of thousands of tons of sand from deeper offshore waters onto Playa Dorada's beaches, restoring them to wide, expansive stretches of pale amber-colored sands. The beaches all along the north shore are collectively known as the "Amber Coast" because of their color and because of the rich deposits of amber that have been discovered here. Many concession stands along the beach rent water sports equipment.</p> <p>Don't expect Robinson Crusoe-style isolation at Playa Dorada; you'll rarely, if ever, be alone on a stretch of beach in Puerto Plata. But if you enjoy beige sand that's rarely too hot to walk on, and a seemingly never-ending array of water sports kiosks and chaise longues, as well as an occasional loudspeaker projecting merengue music, you'll be happy here.</p> <p>Lying 5km west of Puerto Plata is a gorgeous beach, Playa Cofresi, set against a backdrop of all-inclusive hotels and some vacation villas that started to be built here in the 1990s. Although you can find plenty of space on this beach on weekdays, it comes alive on Sunday when several hundred local Dominican families descend from the hinterlands for fun, food, and sun.</p> <p>Another good choice in the area, Playa Luperon lies about an 80-minute drive to the west of Puerto Plata. This is a wide beach of powdery white sand, set amid palm trees that provide wonderful shade when the noonday sun grows too fierce. It's more ideal for windsurfing, scuba diving, and snorkeling than for general swimming. Various water sports concessions can be found here, along with several snack bars.</p>

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	<p>Playa Bonita, in the Samana area, has 13km of uninterrupted beach that begins just west of Playa Las Ballenas, and 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 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>
<p>Wildlife</p>	<p>One of the principal breeding grounds in the world for humpback whales is on the Silver and Navidad banks off the north coast of the Dominican Republic. Each winter some 3,000 whales migrate from their feeding grounds in the North Atlantic, and congregate here to reproduce in shallow waters protected by coral reefs. Nearer to the mainland, Samana Bay is also a popular spot for whale watching, which has become an important tourist activity during the months of January, February and March. The humpback is one of the larger species of whale, measuring from 12-15 meters and weighing up to 60 tons. The West Indian manatee is an endangered marine mammal. They can sometimes be seen in the coastal areas of the national parks or in Samana Bay. Nicknamed the 'sea cow', manatees can grow to over 3.5 meters in length and they 'graze' on aquatic plants on the ocean floor. There are two endemic land mammals in Hispaniola. The solenodon is an insectivore not dissimilar to a rat, but more aesthetically pleasing. It has a long snout, lives in caves and hollow tree trunks, and feeds on insects and worms. The hutia is another small rodent which, like the solenodon, lives in caves and tree trunks.</p> <p>Birds: The considerable bird population in the Dominican Republic is made up of indigenous species and wintering birds from the North American mainland. Look out for species such as the Hispaniolan parrot, the Hispaniolan woodpecker, the rarer Hispaniolan trogon and Hispaniolan parakeet, the palmchat (which nests in the royal palms on the coastal plains) and several types of owl and pigeon, including the endangered white-crowned pigeon.</p>
<p>Parks</p>	<p>Nature has been very generous to the eastern half of the island of Hispaniola. Over 25 percent of the country has been protected in the form of National Parks, Reserves, and Marine Sanctuaries, granting access beautifully preserved lands. Untouched landscapes fill the country's numerous national parks; there is no better way to enjoy nature at its best. The Dominican Republic's National Parks include everything from mountains with pine forests to untouched white-sand beaches. Los Haitises National Park on the Northeast Coast has untouched mangroves and the Salto el Limon waterfall, while the National Park of</p>

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	<p>the East along the Caribbean Sea is a favorite for visitors that love tropical islands. These beautiful ecosystems are protected areas within a conservation plan that boasts 83 distinct areas, including 19 national parks, 15 natural reserves, six scientific reserves, 32 natural monuments, two marine sanctuaries and nine areas of protected islands with panoramic views. Some of the most important and most visited protected areas in the country include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The National Park of the East and Saona Island, in the Province of la Altagracia. - The J. Armando Bermudez National Park (Duarte Peak) in Jarabacoa and La Vega. - Los Haitises National Park on the Northeast Coast along the Bay of Samaná. - Cayo Arena located off the coast of the small fishing village, Punta Rucia on the North Coast. - The Marine Mammal Sanctuary of the Dominican Republic off to the Northeast Coast where you can see humpback whales from Jan. 15 – Mar. 15. - The Valle Nuevo National Park, which covers Constanza and La Vega in the Central Region. - Lake Enriquillo on the Southwest Coast boasts the lowest point below sea level in the Caribbean. - The Ebano Verde Scientific Reserve on Casabito Road in Constanza. - The Cuevas de las Maravillas (Cave of Wonders) located between San Pedro de Macoris and La Romana. - The Jaragua National Park and its Bay of Eagles in Pedernales on the country's Southwest Coast. <p>Other very popular natural areas where you will find lodges and planned excursions include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The 27 Pools of Damajagua, Puerto Plata - The Salto del Limón (Lemon Falls), Samaná - The Salto de Aguas Blancas (White Water Falls), Constanza - The Salto de Bayaguana (Bayaguana Falls), Bayaguana, Monte Plata
<p>Gardens</p>	<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 9 to 5.</p> <p>www.jbn-sdq.org</p>

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<p>Historical Buildings</p>	<p>Santo Domingo: 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. Diego became the colony's governor in 1509, and Santo Domingo rose as the hub of Spanish commerce and culture in America. For more than 60 years, this coral limestone structure on the bluffs of the Ozama River was the centre of the Spanish court, entertaining such distinguished visitors as Cortés, Ponce de León, and Balboa. The nearly two dozen rooms and open-air loggias are decorated with paintings and period tapestries, as well as 16th-century antiques. A walk downhill from the Alcázar leads to the impressive Puerto de San Diego, which dates from 1571 when it was built as the main gate into Santo Domingo. 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>
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<p>OTHER ACTIVITIES</p>	<p>The world's largest hand-rolled cigar factory, Tabacalera de Garcia, opened a storefront in La Romana in September. La Flor Dominicana Cigar Factory is the world's largest cigar shop, carrying an extensive selection of premium Dominican cigars at attractive prices. More than 300 blends are manufactured each day, 50 of which are the world's most sought-after cigars. La Flor also includes an on-site museum.</p>
<p>Shopping</p>	<p>Santo Domingo is 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. Notable cigar brands include: Santiago, Cibao Valley, Davidoff, Churchill.</p> <p>Punta Cana: All the mega-hotels here have gift shops for simple souvenir shopping, so there's no need to stray from your all inclusive relaxation unless you want to. If you do, however, then Plaza Bavaro is a nearby and upmarket shopping complex for all your needs. If you want something a bit more local, then try the Mercado on the beach along the northern tier of this shopping complex: this has a buzzing craft market that opens at 8am each morning and doesn't close until sunset.</p> <p>Puerto Plata: The neoclassical house sheltering the Museum of</p>

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Dominican Amber also contains the densest collection of boutiques in Puerto Plata. Many of the paintings here are from neighboring Haiti, but the amber, larimar, and mahogany woodcarvings are local.

Plaza Turisol Complex, the largest shopping center on the north coast, has about 80 different outlets. You may want to make this your first stop so you can get an idea of the merchandise available in Puerto Plata. This complex also has the most upscale and tasteful merchandise. You might want to stop in here if you don't have time to visit all the shopping centres. It's about 5 minutes from Puerto Plata and Playa Dorada, on the main road heading east.

Nearby is a smaller shopping centre, **Playa Dorada Plaza**, with about 80 shops selling handicrafts, clothing, souvenirs, and gifts. Both it and the Plaza Turisol are open daily from 9am to 9pm. The Amber Shop, in the Playa Dorada Plaza (tel. 809/320-2215), is associated with the Amber Museum. This shop sells the best collection of Dominican amber in town, artfully displayed on racks and on shelves. It features necklaces, pendants, bracelets, and rings crafted from amber ranging in color from oil-clear yellow to dark blue. A competitor, Galeria de Ambar, Calle 12 de Julio (tel. 809/586-2101), is both a museum and shop. On the ground floor, both amber and larimar are sold along with Dominican and Haitian arts and crafts and with bottles of rum. Upstairs, a museum displays rare samples of Dominican amber, often with prehistoric insects imbedded inside. It is open Monday to Friday 8:30am to 6pm, Saturday 9am to 5:30pm, charging an admission of RD\$35.

Tobacco Shop, in the Playa Dorada Plaza (tel. 809/320-2216), is the best shop selling cigars around Puerto Plata. Don't overlook the benefits of cigars rolled in the Dominican Republic from tobacco grown with Cuban seeds. They're a lot less expensive than most of the Cubans, and many of them are surprisingly good.

Plaza Isabela, in Playa Dorada about 500m from the entrance to the Playa Dorada Hotel complex, is a collection of small specialty shops constructed in Victorian gingerbread style, although much of its inventory has a Spanish inspiration or flair. Here you'll find the main branch of the Dominican Republic's premier jeweler, **Harrison's**, a specialist in platinum work and a favorite with celebrities. The store has a special clearance area; tours are available. Another branch is in the Centro Comercial Playa Dorada in the Playa Dorada Hotel complex. A particularly attractive outlet for jewelery is **La Canoa**, Calle Beller 18. There is a wide range of prices, suitable for modest to extravagant budgets. Although there are the predictable array of gold, diamonds, and precious colored stones, the best are the chunks of amber - some pale, some tawny, and some of them blue - set into gold frames and configured as pendants, brooches, earrings, or rings.

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Markets	<p>Most of the towns have fun markets to explore. Punta Cana has the craft market mentioned above and Samana town has one of the most colourful public markets in the DR.</p> <p>Although the marketplace at Puerto Plata hardly resembles the greater one at Santo Domingo in the Zona Colonial, the Mercado at Puerto Plata merits a visit. It lies at the corner of Avenida Isabel de Torres and Calle 2, and is open Monday to Saturday 8am to 5pm (it starts winding down after 3pm, however). Everything is sold here, from both Dominican and Haitian art to handicrafts, along with the inevitable T-shirts, as well as luscious fruits and vegetables. It's a great photo op</p>
Nightlife	<p>Punta Cana: Bávaro Disco, on the grounds of the Barcelo Bávaro Beach 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.</p> <p>On Sundays, islanders pour into Playa Cofresi on the north coast, turning the beach here into a giant house party, with the eating, drinking, picnicking, barbecues, and merengue lasting well into the night; it's a great way to meet the locals.</p>
Casinos	<p>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.</p>
Spas	<p>The Dr Fish Ocean Spa in Punta Cana is a fully equipped spa aboard a deluxe catamaran – indulge in treatments, including the renowned Dr Fish exfoliation that will leave your feet smoother than ever! Take a look: http://puntacanatv.com/dr-fish-ocean-spa-punta-cana.html</p>

CUISINE	
Food	<p>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.</p> <p>A foundation of the native diet, "La Bandera Dominicana," 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.</p> <p>Another popular dish is "Sancocho," a Spanish-style stew usually</p>

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	<p>served with rice. Ingredients include various roots, green plantains, avocado and typically chicken or beef, although it sometimes includes a 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>"Locrio," 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 "Pescado con Coco." 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>Comida Creolla – 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>Rum</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 Brugal, Bermúdez, and Barcelo 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>Bermudez, 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.</p> <p>Brugal, established in 1888, is located just east of Puerto Plata and</p>

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	<p>produces more than one and a half million liters of white and dark rum 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. Barcelo, 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> <p>The Barcelo Rum Company has opened the Barcelo Rum Historical Center at its rum aging and warehousing installations in San Pedro de Macoris. The centre showcases the history of rum-making in the Dominican Republic. Visitors can tour the facilities, sample different varieties of rum and purchase rum products.</p> <p>Mama Juana is a unique Dominican Republic drink that is concocted by allowing rum, red wine, and honey to soak in a bottle with tree bark and herbs. The taste is quite similar to port wine and the colour is a deep red. The specific herbs that make up Mamajuana were originally prepared as an herbal tea by the native Taino Indians and much later in time, post-Columbus, alcohol was added to the recipe. Besides being rumored to be an aphrodisiac, with many natives of the Dominican Republic claiming that the drink has similar effects, Mamajuana is also consumed for its medicinal value. The alcohol is said to act as an extract base that pulls the herbs' curative properties, creating an herbal tincture that is often served as a shot. The reported positive effects on health vary, ranging from a flu remedy, to a digestion and circulation aid, a blood cleanser and kidney and liver tonic.</p>
<p>Restaurants</p>	<p>Chez Palace, Punta Cana 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>Le Papillon, Puerto Plata This is an unusual but charming restaurant set on a hillside in a residential neighborhood about 5km southwest of Puerto Plata. The expatriate German owner, Thomas Ackermann, manages to combine aspects of the Black Forest with merengue music. The best way to start a meal here is with a caipirinha (a Brazilian cocktail) at the bar beneath the cane-frond ceiling. Later, within an open-sided pavilion overlooking a forest, you'll be presented with a menu that's divided into categories that</p>

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	<p>feature different preparations of pork, chicken, beef, seafood, rabbit, and even vegetarian offerings. Enduring favorites include fettuccine with lobster; "pirate" kabobs with shrimp, tenderloin of beef, and vegetables; an especially worthy chicken stuffed with shrimp and served with saffron sauce.</p> <p>Casita Rica/Escape al Mar, Puerto Plata These two establishments, one a snack bar, the other an upscale dining choice, sit side by side between Puerto Plata's seafront and its waterfront boulevard, El Malecon, in the heart of town. As such, they're closely linked to the gossip and goings-on of the local community, but somehow manage to emulate the gastronomic style of elegant dining rooms within some of the resort hotels. If you happen to be strolling along the seafront and want a beer, the laid-back but gregarious Casita Rica, a few steps from a wide stretch of beachfront, would be perfect. And if candles and romantic gloss appeal to you at dinner, Escape al Mar has the kind of setting that evokes seafront trattorias within popular resorts in Italy or Spain. Menu items include pizzas, fried chicken, burgers, pastas, and a flavorful casuela de mariscos that's loaded with fish, saffron, spices, and shellfish.</p>
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MORE INFO	DR Tourism Office: 514-499-1918
Brochures	Transat Holidays Sun Collection 2012-2013 and Nolitours 2012/2013 brochures are available at travel agents
Websites	www.transatholidays.com and www.nolitours.com www.godominicanrepublic.com

PERSONAL EXPERIENCES	Puerto Plata; Jarabacoa in the highlands; South Coast – Boca Chica, Santo Domingo, Isla Saona; Punta Cana .
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