

The Concierge

TIPS FOR TOURING HERE AND ABROAD



MICHAEL TIECK/FOTOLIA

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SANTO DOMINGO

FUN IN THE CARIBBEAN IS NOT JUST BEACHES

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Like most Caribbean islands, the Dominican Republic tantalizes with miles of sugar-white beaches. But if you're headed to the capital city of Santo Domingo, where sun and sand lie at least 30 minutes away by car, you're still in for a treat. With an impressive history, beautiful old quarter, and lively, youthful vibe, this first permanent establishment in the New World that Christopher Columbus's brother, Bartholomew, founded in 1496,

has much to show for itself. In fact, here are seven great things to do in Santo Domingo beyond the beach.

1. See Columbus Lighthouse
The idea to build a monument to honor Christopher Columbus first surfaced in 1852. However, the project didn't begin until 1923, when the Fifth International American Conference held in Chile approved it, leading to an international design competition. British architect, Joseph Lea Gleave, won in 1931 for his giant, cross-shaped building, which wasn't realized

until 1992, due to political and financial reasons. Columbus Lighthouse, not only stores the explorer's remains, but has 63 exhibitions representing different world nations, and shines a massive cross into the night sky thanks to 157 colored beams.

2. Tipple top-shelf rum
Head to any swell bar or restaurant to sample high-end Dominican rum, so smooth, it deserves to be sipped on its own. Look for brands such as Brugal Leyenda, a velvety, amber rum flooded with flavors of toffee, spices, and crème brûlée.

3. Take a historic walking tour
Whether self-guided or through an outfitter, don't miss touring the cobbled, historic quarter Ciudad Colonial, the oldest European settlement in the New World and a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Laid out in a grid pattern that served as a model for many future towns, the area houses lovely Spanish-style colonial buildings and the first cathedral, monastery, university, and hospital in the Americas: Saint Mary of the Incarnation Cathedral, Saint Francois Monastery, Saint Thomas Aquinas University,

and Nicholas de Bari Hospital. The area also has picturesque pedestrian streets, a lovely square, and tree-shaded restaurants and cafes.

4. Discover larimar
The pale blue stone, larimar, only comes from one place in the world — the Dominican Republic. A rare type of pectolite, the mineral ranges from inexpensive blue marbled with green or white to very pricey pure baby blue. Beware, street vendors usually hawk fake larimar, so find reputable stores that sell the real thing, like at

the Larimar Factory in the Zona Colonial.

5. See turquoise lagoons
Escape the heat by plunging into Mirador del Este park, filled with sun-dappled walking trails and several limpid subterranean pools, Les Tres Ojos (The Three Eyes). Via a series of (sometimes slippery) steps and paths, interspersed with plants, stalagmites, and stalactites, you can reach the limestone caves and pools filled with tiny darting fish.

6. Indulge in chocolate
Dominican chocolate can be superb, such as at Kah Kow in the Zona Colonial. At the small museum, you can learn the history of chocolate-making via an excellent film and series of exhibits, including a small chocolate factory. At the gift store and café, load up on bonbons, bars and the shop's signature macadamia nut chocolate spread before savoring super thick hot chocolate (per tradition, request it be made with water, not milk) on the patio. Via Kah Kow's Soap Lab and Chocolate Classes, you also can craft your own cocoa butter soap and chocolate bars.

7. Explore a museum or two
From the itty-bitty amber, cigar, and rum museums, all mainly gift shops with token exhibits, to the Museum of the Royal Houses, displaying the history of SD, the city has a great collection or museums. The Museum of Modern Art has permanent and temporary exhibits of 20th century Dominican art, while the Museum of Dominican Man highlights the native Taino Indian and Dominican culture, has exhibits on voodoo, slavery, and carnival and has one of the top collections of Pre-Columbian Taino artifacts in the world.

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HERE

EMERGING ARTISTS PERFORM AT BERKLEE

Enjoy a series of concerts by innovative up-and-coming musicians at the Berklee College of Music, March 21-25. The Stave Sessions, part of the Celebrity Series of Boston, highlight the experimental and often non-conforming styles of contemporary musicians who take diverse approaches to their music. Don't miss performances by rising tenor sax star Melissa Aldana, the first woman to win the Thelonious Monk International Jazz Saxophone competition; Darcy James Argue and his 18-piece big band, the Secret Society, which has earned Grammy nominations; and Innov Gnawa, which performs hypnotic chants with string and percussion instruments. Shows take place at

an intimate venue at 160 Massachusetts Ave., which offers an urban backdrop and upscale vibe. Tickets: \$25 advance, \$30 at show, \$10 students. www.stavesessions.org.

GO POND SKIMMING ON THE SLOPES

Throw on ski gear, shorts, a costume, or your favorite Hawaiian shirt and try pond skimming at several New Hampshire resorts. Skiers and snowboarders try to cross a pond at the base of each mountain and see who can go the farthest or make the biggest splash. Leave the ski poles at home, but consider bringing your favorite snorkel (suggested, not required). Pond skimming takes place at Black Mountain on March 25 (1 p.m.), King Pine on March 26 (1 p.m.), and Attitash on April 1 (12-1 p.m.). Participants must be 48 inches

or taller for the Attitash event. All events are free, but a lift ticket is required to participate. Show up early to register and sign a waiver. www.blackmt.com, www.kingpine.com, www.attitash.com.

THERE

TEXT FOR FREE WHILE FLYING

Fly on Alaska Airlines and you can use three popular messaging apps for free en route to your destination. The airline's Free Chat service lets you use Facebook Messenger, WhatsApp, and Apple's iMessage from any smartphone on GoGo WiFi-equipped planes at no charge. Sign up for GoGo before takeoff. Alaska also launched a new Premium Class service on certain routes, giving passengers four inches of extra legroom, early boarding, and complimentary snacks and alcoholic drinks. Upgrade to Premium Class when booking, during check-in, or at the airport for anywhere from \$15 to \$79 on top of the base fare. www.alaskaair.com.

APP PROVIDES AIRPORT DEPARTURE TIME

Trying to gauge exactly when you should take off for the airport can be tricky, but a new feature on the TripIt from Concur

app helps eliminate the guesswork. The Go Now feature, which is available to TripIt Pro members, suggests the best time to head to the airport for any US domestic flight based on your current location, the flight status, and the local traffic conditions. The departure info becomes available the day before your flight, and gets regularly updated until flight time. TripIt and Go Now work on Android and Apple devices. TripIt, which organizes all your travel plans in one place, is free, but a TripIt Pro annual subscription costs \$49. www.tripit.com/pro.

EVERYWHERE

MAKE DRINKING WATER SAFE

Put a GoPure Pod in your water bottle to create tasty drinking water when you travel, and help eliminate the use of plastic water bottles along the way. The tiny pod, made by Wilton, Conn.-based Bloc Enterprises, has a highly porous ceramic tube inside that adsorbs harmful bacteria and chemical impurities in drinking water. The pod removes minerals and chemicals that make the water taste bad and, as studies show, can impact our health. It also balances the pH in water and prevents it from growing stale. A harmless



trace of silver within the pod keeps bacteria from forming on the ceramic tube, ensuring the tube's surface remains clean and hygienic. Each pod lasts up to six months, treating up to 264 gallons of water. \$24.95. gopurepod.com.

POWER SIX DEVICES AT ONCE

Turn a single hotel or airport outlet into a charging station with iClever's new BoostStrip IC-BS01. This portable power strip weighs just 11 ounces and comes with two three-prong outlets and four USB ports (12 watts/2.4 amps per port). The three-prong outlets offer surge and short-circuit protection to prevent your devices from getting damaged, and provide up to 1000 watts/10 amps. The power strip's SmartID technology enables it to recognize maximum charging efficiency so it doesn't overcharge your USB devices. It also comes with a handy 5.5-foot-long cord. Currently available for \$20.99 at Amazon.com. www.iclever.com.

KARI BODNARCHUK

