

An aerial photograph of a tropical coastline. In the background, there are lush green mountains under a bright sky with scattered clouds. The middle ground shows a sandy beach curving along the shore, with waves breaking onto it. The foreground is dominated by the deep turquoise water of the ocean. A large bird, possibly a frigatebird, is seen in flight over the water. The overall scene is serene and scenic.

Dominican Republic Country Guide

elevate destinations

Welcome to the Dominican Republic!

In this document you will find information that will be useful during your journey to the Dominican Republic (DR). The information listed in this guide includes cultural guidelines, communication tips, health and safety recommendations, and so much more. Please note that all information specific to your trip, such as inclusions and exclusions, staff contact numbers, flight information, etc. is listed in your Online Trip Portal. For any questions unanswered by either the country guide or the online portal, please don't hesitate to reach out to an Elevate staff member.

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Know Before You Go

Passport

Travelers to the Dominican Republic should ensure that the validity of their passports extends at least six months beyond the end of their intended stay, and should have at least two blank (unstamped) visa pages in their passport to enter the country. The last two amendment pages are unacceptable for visas and immigration stamps. Note that you will need to renew your passport if you are out of visa pages, as the State Department no longer provides additional pages. If you need to renew your passport, please do so as soon as possible.

Visa

US nationals do not need a valid visa to enter the DR.

Medical and Travel Insurance

Elevate Destinations will purchase emergency evacuation coverage for you. This policy covers emergency evacuations due to medical, political, or natural disasters for your trip dates. This policy also provides \$5,000 of emergency medical coverage. More details about this coverage can be found in your online trip portal.

This coverage does not include trip cancellation or interruption benefits and also does not cover pre- or post-trip days of travel booked outside of Elevate Destinations. We strongly suggest you purchase additional coverage to cover your non-refundable expenses in the event you need to cancel your trip or have additional expenses incurred on the trip.

Elevate strongly recommends purchasing additional travel and medical insurance and Cancel for Any Reason Coverage (CFAR) to cover trip related expenses. Please note that some CFAR insurance options are time-sensitive. Please be ready to purchase an insurance policy within 14 days of making your first trip payment.

Below are two insurance brokers that Elevate Destinations recommends.

- [USI Travel Insurance Services](#)
Email: info@travelinsure.com
Phone Number: (800) 937-1387
- Travel Insurance Center (Dan Drennen)
Email: dan@travelinsurancecenter.com
Phone Number: (402) 343-3621

Guests may acquire medical insurance through USI, The Travel Insurance Center, or any other insurance company of their choosing. Elevate Destinations is not equipped to answer specific questions on insurance. Please contact the insurance broker or company for specific information.

Smart Traveler Tip!

Have electronic and paper copies of your passport in case something happens to it while you are traveling.

- Scan a copy of your passport and email it to yourself.
- Take a photo of your passport and save it to your phone in an “Important Documents” photo album. Leave a scanned copy of your passport with friends and family at home.

Immunizations

Prior to travel, Elevate Destinations strongly recommends that you look into recommended immunizations for your time in the Dominican Republic. Given that we are not a licensed Health Care provider, we cannot advise travelers on which immunizations they may or may not need. We recommend that all travelers do the following:

- a) Consult with a travel clinic or your personal physician regarding immunizations and other precautions you may need to take in order to participate in this journey. You will need to do this well in advance of your trip as some vaccinations require time to take effect, and you may need to allow time between a series of shots.
- b) Visit the [CDC website for the Dominican Republic](#) to view recommended vaccines and medicines, travel health notices for the region and other tips for staying healthy and safe.
- c) Check that your medical insurance will cover you in the DR or purchase a supplementary medical insurance policy that will.

Other Health Considerations

In general, we recommend a moderate level of physical agility. For the most satisfying experience, and in fairness to your fellow travelers, please note that this trip requires participants to:

- Walk at least one mile without difficulty on uneven surfaces
- Spend extended periods of time on their feet
- Climb sets of stairs without assistance
- Keep pace with an active group of travelers
- Spend time outside in hot, humid weather
- Ride comfortably in a vehicle on bumpy roads for extended periods of time

- Flexible and positive attitude in the case of sudden changes to the itinerary or weather—expect the unexpected!

The Dominican Republic has hot, humid, tropical weather (see weather conditions section), and can reach temperatures upward of 90°F anytime during the year. Please consider taking some preventative measures against heat and sun exposure such as wearing long, breathable protective clothing and hats and actively hydrating throughout your time in the DR.

Medications

Always travel with medications in their original, clearly labeled containers and in your carry-on luggage. If carrying syringes or needles, be sure to have a physician's letter documenting their medical necessity and keep these handy when entering or exiting any of the Dominican Republic's borders.

Elevate Destinations also recommends that all travelers make and print a list of medications and any existing health conditions to bring on your trip. You may choose to keep this with you, or give it to your guide. Having this list could be life-saving in case of an emergency.

Safety Recommendations

Your guide will give you current briefings on safety while in-country, but here are some basic ground rules for safety while traveling:

- If you have time sensitive medication including epi-pens and inhalers, keep them on you at all times.
- Keep all valuables in the hotel safe.
- Avoid flashing money. Be mindful of your belongings at all times. Keep bags in front of you in crowds and on your lap when at restaurants. If using an ATM, be vigilant.
- Pay attention and avoid walking around with your smartphone in hand.
- Be vigilant when crossing roads.
- Stick with the group.
- Always make sure that others know of your whereabouts and movements.
- Avoid street protests or large gatherings.
- Do not wear expensive or sentimentally valuable jewelry while traveling.
- Let your guide know if you have any safety concerns.
- We encourage you to [register with STEP](#) (see below).

Smart Traveler Tip!

We recommend that all travelers from the USA sign-up for the State Department's Smart Traveler Enrollment Program (STEP)! This is a free service provided by the U.S. Government to U.S. citizens who are traveling to, or living in, a foreign country. STEP allows you to enter information about your upcoming trip abroad so that the Department of State can better assist you in case of an emergency. Enrolling in this program has enormous benefits in case of an emergency while abroad:

- You will receive information from the Embassy about safety conditions in your destination
- Enrolling lets the U.S. Embassy in that country know that you are there and helps them contact you in an emergency, whether natural disaster, civil unrest, or family-related.

Communications

Wi-Fi: In most hotels in the Dominican Republic, Wi-Fi will be available. Speed, bandwidth, and availability will likely be less reliable than you are used to. Often, connection is stronger in the lobby of hotels than in the rooms.

International Calls: The country code for the DR is +1.

Staying connected: Here are the most common methods for making local/international calls:

1. **Smartphone apps:** WhatsApp is the most widely used app for communicating (works on both Wi-Fi and cellular). Remember to download the app *before* you travel (click [here](#) to download)!
2. **International calling package:** Setting up international coverage from your cell phone provider for the duration of your trip is often the simplest option and the best to avoid roaming charges, or check if your current phone plan covers you in the region.
3. **Local phone / SIM card:** This is a good option for making calls within the DR, as international calls can get expensive. Local SIM cards are inexpensive, can be found at a variety of stores, and often have pay-as-you-go plans where you can “top up” your credit for use in the country. Please be aware of any requirements your phone has in order to accept the local SIM cards (i.e. size of SIM card, locked or unlocked, etc). If you use a local SIM card, keep in mind that you may have a new phone number and be sure to share this number with loved ones at home. The alternative is if your phone has dual SIM, then both your original number should still work.

Essential Travel Documents

In case of an emergency, it is advisable to record all of your important information on one sheet of paper, photocopy it, and distribute a few copies in your luggage and among relatives or friends at home. Also email a scanned copy to yourself. Take a photo of these documents and save them in an “important travel document” photo folder on your phone so that you can access these documents electronically.

These are the documents you should have printed and with you during your travel:

- Passport - original and photocopy
- International flight itinerary or e-tickets
- Address and phone numbers of the hotels where you are staying
- Medical/travel insurance policy details and 24-hour emergency number
- Evacuation insurance ID card (will be provided to you by Elevate Destinations closer to the trip)
- Emergency contact sheet (will be provided to you by Elevate Destinations closer to the trip)
- Contact information of relatives/friends and your primary care physician to be contacted in an emergency
- List of current medical needs and medications

Money

The local currency in the DR is the Dominican Peso (DOP). [Click here](#) to see the current exchange rate. Credit cards are widely accepted in the Dominican Republic, but cash is still recommended for certain vendors, including taxis, fruit stands, souvenir shops, beach vendors, and tipping.

Please note the following denominations below:

- **Bank Notes:** RD\$20, RD\$50, RD\$100, RD\$200, RD\$500, RD\$1000, RD\$2000
- **Coins:** RD\$1, RD\$5, RD\$10, RD\$25

The small amount of local currency you may need during your stay in the DR can be obtained at authorized facilities (ATMs, hotels, banks and foreign exchange bureaus). In general, we suggest that you limit the amount of money you convert into local currencies and exchange only what you think you will spend before leaving any foreign country. Save all receipts from your currency exchange transactions. If you plan to exchange USD cash, the bills must be:

- New (printed in the last 5 years)
- In pristine condition (no rips, tears, smudges, markings, creases, etc)
- Larger denominations (\$50 and \$100 bills attract the best exchange rate)

For your extra personal costs and shopping, \$30-\$50 USD per day is a good rule of thumb.

ATM/Debit Cards: You can use your debit card to withdraw money from ATMs.

Note: We recommend traveling with 1-3 crisp \$100 bills in your carry-on luggage to exchange in the case that ATMs are not working for you.

Change: Ask for smaller bills when you change money, or use your large bills at large shops to receive more change. In many cases, people (local vendors especially) don't have change.

Credit Cards: Credit cards (Visa or MasterCard preferred) are acceptable in larger establishments, while at some smaller, local restaurants, shops or markets, merchants may only accept cash. Most merchants will charge an additional 2-5% of the bill for a credit card transaction. Please note American Express and Discover cards are not commonly accepted.

Gratuities: Please check your online trip portal to find which gratuities are and are not covered in your trip cost. We recommend tipping your porters at the hotels and leaving behind cash in your room for the cleaning staff. For porters, \$1 USD per bag is appropriate. For cleaning staff, we recommend leaving behind \$3-5 per day.

Smart Traveler Tip!

Be sure you remember your ATM PIN numbers to withdraw cash at your destination.

Most banks and credit card companies do not flag international use as unusual, but if you use a more local bank it would be wise to notify them of your travel plans.

In-country Info

Time

The Dominican Republic is in the Atlantic Standard time zone (AST), which does not follow any Daylight Saving Time. In comparison to the United States:

1. November 3, 2024 - March 8, 2025: Time in the DR is 1 hour ahead of Eastern Time (ET), 2 hours ahead of Central Time (CT), and 4 hours ahead of Pacific Time (PT).
2. March 9 - November 2, 2025: Time in the DR is the same as Eastern Time (ET), 1 hour ahead of Central Time (CT), and 3 hours ahead of Pacific Time (PT).

Electricity

The DR uses a standard of 120V, 50Hz, and plug types A and B, the same as the United States. Three-prong ports may not be available everywhere. For anyone traveling from outside of the US or for American travelers who require three prongs for your devices, we suggest purchasing a universal plug or adapter.

As the voltage in the DR is the same as the US, you will *not* need a voltage converter for any small appliances you plan on bringing, such as a hair dryer or CPAP machine.

Smart Traveler Tip!

Download a conversion app, such as [Units Plus](#), for things like currency, temperature, time, and distance while traveling.

Water & Food Safety

Tap water is **not** safe to drink in the Dominican Republic. Do not drink tap water or use it to brush your teeth; only use purified water. Only use ice at your hotels and/or restaurants where you know it was made from purified water.

Elevate Destinations encourages travelers to pack a reusable water bottle to fill up with clean drinking water. Clean drinking water and soft drinks will be supplied at all meals and water will be available in the van.

Similarly, we recommend travelers eat foods that have been cooked well. Fresh vegetables and fruits bear the risk of having been washed in contaminated water. Fruits you can peel are usually safe (i.e. bananas). The DR has wonderfully fresh foods and the markets are a great place to try many of the delicious dishes that the country has to offer. Follow your guide's lead about what is safe to eat.

Bathrooms

We recommend carrying toilet paper or tissues with you as some bathrooms, especially in more remote areas or restaurants, may not have any. Please also remember that in the DR you should throw the toilet paper and any feminine hygiene products into the bin provided and not into the toilet itself, as this can cause problems with the delicate sewage system.

Waste Disposal

Keep in mind that much of the world's waste disposal systems are not as advanced as you might be used to. Oftentimes, landfills are adjacent to conservation land or trash is burned. Recycling is often unavailable. To minimize your impact, please consider the following guidelines:

- Leave no trace. Everything that you bring with you should go home with you.
- If you plan on shopping, make sure that you have extra room in your luggage or an extra bag to check on your way home (don't dump items to make room).
- Avoid packing with plastic bags and instead purchase reusable packing cubes, cloth bags, and reusable toiletry bags.
- Bring a reusable water bottle that you can refill.
- Remove packaging or tags of any newly purchased items before you go.

Local Cuisine

Like much of the Caribbean, the Dominican Republic is known for its tropical fruits and savory dishes centered around rice, beans, meat, and seafood. Dominican food is largely influenced by Spanish (spices like vanilla, nutmeg, and pepper), Indigenous Taíno (including local root vegetables like yucca and cassava), Middle Eastern (bulgur), and African flavors (mangú and mofongo).

Here are some common Dominican dishes that you may try during your trip:

- **La Bandera Dominicana:** Literally meaning “Dominican flag,” this is the most typical lunch plate that Dominican people eat on a daily basis: a combination of white rice, red beans, and stewed meat. Garnishes such as avocado, *tostones* (fried plantain), and green salad are often added.
- **Sancocho:** Stew made with meat (or pigeon peas), root vegetables, and corn.
- **Chicharrón:** Fried pork belly or pork rinds, a finger or snack food that can also accompany full meals.
- **Mangú:** Mashed green plantains, often eaten for breakfast with fried eggs, cheese, avocado, fried Dominican salami, and red onion.
- **Mofongo:** Mashed fried plantain cooked with pork rind and garlic butter and shaped into a ball, served either as a side dish or as a main course with meat.
- **Habichuelas Con Dulce:** Popular dessert made of boiled and pureed sweet beans, mixed with evaporated milk, condensed milk, coconut milk, sweet potato, butter, cinnamon, sugar, vanilla, clove, anise, nutmeg, and raisins.

Weather Conditions

The Dominican Republic is a tropical country with a hot, humid climate year-round. The weather pattern is divided into two distinct seasons: rainy (April through November) and dry (December through March).

Elevate Destinations will provide you with a suggested Packing List that has more specifics on the weather in the DR for the dates of your trip.

Average	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
High	84°F	84°F	85°F	86°F	87°F	88°F	89°F	89°F	89°F	88°F	86°F	85°F
Temp.	75°F	76°F	76°F	78°F	79°F	81°F	81°F	81°F	80°F	80°F	78°F	76°F
Low	69°F	68°F	69°F	71°F	73°F	74°F	74°F	75°F	74°F	74°F	72°F	70°F

Cultural Considerations

Experiencing different cultures and ways of life is one of the joys of traveling. Below are some major elements of daily life, culture, and customs in the Dominican Republic that you may experience.

- **Demographics:** Prior to it becoming the first site of permanent European settlement in the Americas, the island of Hispaniola (today home to the Dominican Republic and Haiti) was the land of native Taíno people. Because of its history, most Dominicans are of mixed ethnicity and the majority practice Christianity.
- **LGBTQ+ Rights:** LGBTQ+ people are affected by laws and policies around the world. In the Dominican Republic, consensual same-sex sexual acts are not criminalized, and there are no legal barriers to freedom and expression in place. For more information on LGBTQ+ rights and tools for LGBTQ+ travelers going to the DR, [click here](#).
- **Greetings:** It is common to kiss people on the cheek when greeting them in the DR, though handshakes are also appropriate in formal settings.
- **Social Norms:** Dominicans stand close to each other when speaking, tend to speak very quickly, and use their hands as gestures of communication. It can be considered rude to step back from locals when they are talking, but it is perfectly acceptable to ask Dominicans to slow down when speaking (“*más despacio por favor*,” if you would like to practice your Spanish).
- **Scams:** It is good practice to look out for scams while traveling, especially around tourist areas and big cities. It’s pretty easy to avoid if you know what to look out for. Be vigilant. Here are some tips to avoid theft and scams:
 - When walking, always wear your backpack in front. Wear your purse slung across your body and place your hand over the zipper area in front as you walk.
 - If at the beach, always have a friend watch your belongings if you go for a swim.
 - Carry a photocopy of your passport with you at all times. If a police officer (or anyone, for that matter) asks to see it, say that your passport is at the consulate and offer to give them the photocopy instead. Police sometimes try to bribe tourists by taking their passport and demanding money to give it back.

Language

Spanish is the official language of the Dominican Republic. We recommend practicing the below phrases. People always appreciate you attempting to speak in their language!

English Phrase	Spanish
Hello / how are you?	<i>Hola / ¿Como estas?</i>
Good morning	<i>Buen día</i>
Goodnight	<i>Buenas noches</i>
Goodbye	<i>Adios</i>
Excuse me (I'm sorry)	<i>Perdón</i> <i>Lo siento</i>
How much?	<i>¿Cuánto cuesta?</i>
Thank you	<i>Gracias</i>
Yes	<i>Sí</i>
No	<i>No</i>
Where is the bathroom?	<i>¿Dónde está el baño?</i>
Please	<i>Por favor</i>
What is your name? / My name is...	<i>¿Cómo se llama? / Me llamo...</i>

Despite the fact that the language is Spanish, Dominicans have a strong local slang and below are a few phrases and words in Dominican slang that you might hear or use during your travels.

Dominican Slang	English
Concho	Shared taxi
Ke lo ke	What's up?
Tiguere	Hustler
Guagua	Bus
Chin	A little bit
Vaina	Thing / stuff (context-dependent)
Colmado	Corner store
Pana	Friend / buddy
Zafacón	Trashcan
Chercha	Fun / party atmosphere
Yola	Small boat
Cotorra	Sweet talk / flattery

Photography

The Dominican Republic is a beautiful country, and you will want to take lots of pictures. When photographing people, always ask permission first. This is a sign of respect, as the subjects of your photos have the autonomy to consent. You can do this with gestures or ask your guide to translate.

Always be considerate of anyone's desire not to be photographed. There are some places where photography is prohibited; these areas are usually marked. If you are uncertain about whether or not photography is permitted, your guide will be there to advise you.

If you would like some tips on ethical photography practices, check out our blog post, "[Nine questions to help decolonize your photography.](#)"

Human Trafficking in Travel

Elevate Destinations has signed [The Code of Conduct for the Protection of Children from Sexual Exploitation in Travel and Tourism](#) (The Code) and expects all of its partners to refuse involvement, both direct and indirect, in the commercial sexual exploitation of children. A "child" is defined as a person younger than 18 years of age, according to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

We encourage our travelers and suppliers to report the sexual exploitation of children. Information, even the smallest amount, can represent the missing piece of an ongoing investigation by law enforcement. If you are uncomfortable with leaving your name and contact information, you can report anonymously to law enforcement or NGOs. Report a concern [using this form](#); alternatively, you can email protect@ecpat.net to report sexual exploitation of children.

Read about Elevate's values & vision, our [sustainability commitment](#), our programs that give back and more on our website at www.elevatedestinations.com. Our team members are always excited to share more on this topic. We acknowledge that to maintain truly sustainable travel products takes ongoing commitment. We continue to monitor our programs on the ground in order to improve them, and welcome your thoughts, feedback and encouragement!

Responsible Travel Tips

Elevate Destinations takes pride in its leadership in the field of responsible travel. We take care in selecting our local partners that share our environmental and social values and are avid supporters of locals working in the tourism industry as they are both the most impacted and impactful players at the local level. All of your ground costs on this trip are carbon offset using [Native Energy's Carbon Calculator](#).

Here are a few tips that can help enrich your experience as a responsible traveler:

- **Keep an open mind:** Observe local customs and respect traditional cultures and people.
- **Language:** Learn a few basic greetings and "thank you" in the local language.

- **Local economy:** Support locally owned businesses, restaurants and other services. Shop from local artisans to promote traditional crafts and encourage contemporary arts.
- **Pay a fair price:** Bargaining is acceptable on this trip and a great way to engage with locals. Try to have fun and not be overly aggressive in bargaining for souvenirs.
- **Respect:** It is important to acknowledge the privacy and dignity of others and ask before photographing or filming people. Ask permission before entering sacred places, homes or private land, and take heed of local customs (i.e. remove shoes, hats, cover hair with shawl, etc). Please ask your guide if you are unsure; they are there to support your introduction to the culture!
- **Community and environment:** Contribute to organizations that support traditional cultures and protect the natural environment. Keep to designated trails and do not disturb plants and animals or their natural habitats.
- **Animal products:** Avoid purchasing crafts, clothing, furniture or other products that are derived from members of protected or endangered animal species.
- **Properly dispose of trash:** Avoid using plastic bags and try to minimize the use of other disposables. When traveling in areas away from cities, make sure to take out what you take in. Try using a reusable water bottle and treating your own drinking water when possible. Check out what our friends at [Travelers Against Plastic](#) are doing!
- **Don't feel pressured to give away money or material items:** You will likely encounter instances of poverty and people asking for donations. We try to discourage giving away money or items as it can actually accentuate an unequal relationship between visitors and locals. Additionally, children that receive money, gifts and sweets from you are encouraged to stick around for more rather than to be in school. As difficult as it can be to turn down direct requests, sometimes giving your friendship and respect to locals can be the best gift of all. If you want to help, consider giving to a trustworthy charity, non-profit, or local school.
- **Tip your housekeeping staff:** Many of the staff cleaning hotel rooms are on the bottom of the economic pyramid. Please consider leaving a tip before you check out. The equivalent of \$3-5 a day is appropriate. This is an easy way to ensure some of your money reaches the hands that need it the most.

Smart Traveler Tip!

In travel, especially in the developing world, things happen. Expect the unexpected! Keep an open mind, be flexible and enjoy the moment. Sometimes the best memories come out of the unplanned.