

The Dominican Republic

- Official Name:** Republica Dominicana
- Area:** 18,704 sq. miles. (About the size of Vermont and New Hampshire combined) 240 miles from east to west and 170 miles north to south. The Dominican Republic has 604 miles of coastline.
- Geography:** The Dominican Republic occupies the eastern two-thirds of the island of Hispaniola. The Republic of Haiti occupies the western one-third of the island. Hispaniola is located 575 miles southeast of Miami, Florida. Haiti and the Dominican Republic share a common 193 mile border.
- Climate:** Maritime tropical. The tropical heat is tempered by afternoon sea breezes. The average rainfall is 55-60 inches per year with the heaviest rain from May to June and October to November.
- Capital:** Santo Domingo, the largest city in the Caribbean. (over 3.2 million-1993). Also known as the First City of the Indies.
- Land of Firsts:**
- * First European Colony
 - * First settlement to receive the title of "city" in new world (1507)
 - * First cathedral, hospital, and street
 - * First University in new world (1538)
 - * First designated a capital city (1503)
 - * First Catholic church in new world
- Economy**
- Natural Resources:** Nickel, gold, silver, marble, clay, bauxite and gypsum.
- Agriculture:** Sugarcane, coffee, cocoa, yucca, tobacco, rice, plantains, beef and flowers.
- Government**
- Type:** Representative Democracy
- Independence:** February 27, 1844
- President:** Dr. Leonel Fernandez
- National Flag:** Four sections--two red and two blue; divided by a white cross with the Dominican coat of arms in the center which shows a Bible opened to John.
- Key Statistics**
- Ethnic Groups:** Caucasian 16%, Negro 11%, mixed 73%.
- Religion:** Catholic 95%, Protestant 3%, and other 2%.
- Population:** 7.3 million (AGR 2.0%)
- Death of Children Under 5 yrs:** 57/1000 births

Life Expectancy:	67 years
GNP per capita:	\$940 dollars
Official Language:	Spanish (2% speak Creole)
Education:	6 years compulsory (not enforced) 60% school attendance rate. 68% literacy rate
Water:	55% of the rural and 18% of the urban population do not have access to safe water.
Health:	20% of the population still have no access to health services.
Rural Population:	38%
Poverty Level:	44% of the population are below the poverty level.

History

The island of Hispaniola was discovered by Christopher Columbus on his first voyage to the Americas, Wednesday, December 5, 1492. The *Taino* Indians, the first inhabitants of the island, referred to Hispaniola as "Mother of all lands." Thinking they had reached India, the Spaniards called them "*Indians*."

The *Taino*'s, which were described by Columbus as being friendly and peaceful, were killed and/or absorbed into the Spanish population within 30 years of the island's discovery. Slaves from Africa were introduced in the 1520's to work the mines, and to plant and harvest crops. The discovery of more valuable domains on the mainland (Mexico, central and south America), and the exhaustion of the gold deposits on Hispaniola, caused the Spanish to lose interest in the island.

With Columbus' discovery began the conquest and colonization of Santo Domingo, the first capital city in the Americas. History recounts a long list of trials and tribulations with this first colony of Spain.

The island became not only home to pirates and buccaneers, but different areas on the island and throughout the new world were frequently attacked by them. In 1585 the English pirate, Francis Drake, held Santo Domingo for ransom. Buccaneers took the western part of the island in 1630 and the French settlers arrived shortly afterward. The western portion of Hispaniola was ceded to France in 1697 by Spain. With the outbreak of the French revolution in 1789 a series of rebellions occurred on the island.

The French section of the island, Haiti, was overrun by British and Spanish forces in 1791; they were expelled by the French in the same year and France was given possession of the entire island by treaty in 1795. It was returned to Spain in 1806, and the Spanish-speaking Dominicans declared themselves independent in 1821. However, they were conquered by the neighboring Haitians the following year and did not achieve final independence until 1844. The Dominican day of independence that is celebrated today dates from their 1844 independence from the Haitians, and not Spain.

Language

Spanish is the official language and signs, menus, etc. are in this language. Despite Spain's influence, there are still words which are commonly used in Dominican language that are an inheritance from the sweet and melodious language of the Tainos, and most of which maintain their original meaning.

Example:

aji, bell pepper; *barbacoa*, barbecue; *batea*, tub; *bohio*, hut; *buren*, griddle; *canoa*, canoe; *carey*, tortoise shell; *hamaca*, hammock; *caribe*, Caribbean; *guayaba*, guava; *huracan*, hurricane; *tabaco*, tobacco, *yagua*, royal palm

The rural custom of speaking loudly and making hand gestures is a way to overcome distances with one's voice, and is a typical method of communicating in the DR. This is passed on from one generation to the other.

Health and Employment

The malnutrition rate is high in the country and a recent study conducted by the Central Bank of the Dominican Republic found that 90% of the population does not get the basic nutrients needed to guarantee adequate health. The problem is aggravated by the existence of poor health environmental conditions in the rural and marginal urban areas.

A government study indicated that 81% of the rural population does not have access to private toilets, and 45% have pit latrines. As a result, gastrointestinal diseases and parasites account for a high percentage of infant mortality. The nutrition problem clearly poses one of the major constraints to the success of many development projects in the Dominican Republic, according to the U.S. Peace Corps survey.

Unemployment rates in the urban areas are 28-30%, or approximately one out of every four people. The unemployment rate in the rural areas is much higher, at approximately 55%. This creates one of the larger economic problems in the country. The lowering of employment in the formal sector lowers the quality of life in all areas. At present, the Dominican Republic needs **235 new jobs per day** to keep up with the amount of people needing jobs. Of the 2,615,000 people able to work, 750,000 cannot find jobs. The rate of employable people able to work will grow 3.4% in 1996.

Historical Timeline

- 4000 B.C. • The island of Hispaniola is settled by people called the Ciboneys (or Siboneys), who migrate from Central and South America.
- 200 A.D. • Descendants of the Arawaks, a South American people, arrive at the eastern tip of Hispaniola, gradually replacing the original people.
- 600 A.D. • The Arawak descendants evolve into a new culture and begin to move to the west and interior of Hispaniola. Over time, these people become the ancestors of the Taino people. The Tainos are a gentle, friendly people who live by farming, hunting small animals, and fishing. Their only enemies are the fearsome Caribs on neighboring islands.
- 1492 • Christopher Columbus, an Italian explorer sent by Spain, lands on Hispaniola. He notices the small amount of gold worn by the Tainos who greet him. Convinced there is more gold available, he and the Spaniards begin what would turn into a feverish search. The Tainos try to help, but before long are betrayed by the Europeans. Tainos are treated cruelly and their villages looted of food. A harsh tax of gold or cotton is forced on them, which most cannot pay. Many flee to the hills, starving, or commit suicide. Some bravely fight back, but are no match for Spanish guns.
- 1496 • Columbus's brother Bartolome finds the port city of Santo Domingo, the oldest city in the Western Hemisphere.
- 1499 • The Spanish begin a cruel system of forced labor against the Tainos.
- 1503 • As the number of Tainos decreases, Santo Domingo colonialists begin bringing slaves from Africa to meet the demand for sugarcane laborers. By 1520, the labor force is almost all African.
- 1508 • Only about 60,000 Tainos remain of the original population. Most have died from mistreatment, suicide, hunger, and diseases brought by the Spanish.
- 1511 • A group of priests travels from Spain to Santo Domingo. Horrified at the Tainos' condition, they begin fighting to pass laws protecting them. Laws are passed in 1512 and 1513. The forced labor system ends a few years later. But the changes come too late. By 1548, less than 500 pure-blooded Tainos remain.
- 1586 • Sir Francis Drake, a British pirate, seizes and loots Santo Domingo. Other pirates do the same in the next few decades.
- 1697 • Spain tired of fighting off pirates and, under the Treaty of Ryswick, gives western Hispaniola to France. The prosperous new French colony is called St. Domingue (it later becomes Haiti).
- 1791 • Slaves in St. Domingue rebel against white landowners, led by former slave Francois-Dominique Toussaint l'Ouverture.
- 1795 • Spain gives full control of Hispaniola to France in the Treaty of Basel.
- 1801 • Toussaint l'Ouverture seizes Santo Domingo. He frees all slaves and establishes a constitution. Napoleon, the French emperor, sends soldiers

- to reclaim the island. The French fail to conquer St. Domingue but recapture Santo Domingo.
- 1804 • St. Domingue officially becomes the independent nation of Haiti.
 - 1809 • Juan Sanchez Ramirez, a Spanish nationalist, leads a rebellion. With Britain's help, Spain once again takes over Santo Domingo.
 - 1821 • Spain's lieutenant governor in Santo Domingo declares the colony independent. The new country attempts to join the republic of Colombia. Before it happens, however, Haiti recaptures the region again. Haiti, under president Jean-Pierre Boyer, controls all of Hispaniola until 1843. He establishes a French-based legal system that is still in use today.
 - 1843 • Juan Pablo Duarte begins a revolt that drives the Haitians out of eastern Hispaniola.
 - 1844 • The Dominican Republic declares independence on February 27. The new nation's first 17 years are marked by instability. Its first two leaders, Pedro Santana and Buenaventura Baez, spend their time fighting off Haitian invasions and struggling for power.
 - 1861 • After the Dominican Republic appeals to a few nations to take over, Spain annexes it. Dominicans are opposed to Spain's presence, however. In addition, Spanish occupying forces suffer yellow fever outbreaks and are unable to keep peace.
 - 1865 • On March 3, the Queen of Spain repeals the annexation of the Dominican Republic. Spanish forces withdraw.
 - Over the next 17 years, the Dominican presidency changes hands 12 times.
 - 1882 • Ulises Heureaux, a Dominican, comes to power. Although his reign is cruel and often violent, the nation becomes stable and prosperous for a period. He remains president until he is assassinated in 1899. The country quickly suffers an economic crisis and more political instability.
 - 1905 • The U.S. agrees to manage the Dominican Republic's debts. This arrangement lasts until 1941.
 - 1916 • U.S. Marines are sent by President Woodrow Wilson to administer the Dominican Republic and try to restore order. They largely succeed, but Dominicans resent losing their independence.
 - 1921 • U.S. President Warren Harding proposes a plan to withdraw American troops. The agreement requires the Dominican Republic to hold elections.
 - 1924 • On March 15, Horacio Vasquez Lajara is elected president. U.S. troops withdraw.
 - 1930 • General Rafael Leonidas Trujillo Molina becomes president through his armed forces' intimidation and force. Whether officially in office or not, he controls the country's politics for the next 30 years. During his reign, the economy grows, education and literacy increase, and infrastructure improves. However, he maintains order through fear and violence, kills

people suspected of opposing him, and uses his office to gain wealth.

- 1937
 - Trujillo massacres more than 20,000 Haitians living in the Dominican Republic. This is to avenge the killing of his secret agents in Haiti by the Haitian government.
- 1947
 - The peso becomes the unit of currency. Previously, the country used American dollars.
- 1960
 - Trujillo is suspected of plotting to kill the president of Argentina, Romulo Betancourt. The Organization of American States then votes to expel the Dominican Republic.
- 1961
 - On May 30, Trujillo is assassinated by members of his own army. Power shifts back and forth among leaders for the next year and a half.
- 1962
 - In the first free elections in 40 years, Juan Bosch Gaviño is elected president. His liberal politics anger conservatives, however. The following year, the military stages a coup. They then rule the country until 1965.
- 1965
 - Some military officers who supported Bosch begin a civil war, hoping to reinstate him. The U.S. hears reports of Communist activity in the military and sends troops to stop the war. Elections are organized for the next year.
- 1966
 - On July 1, elections are held between Bosch and Joaquin Balaguer. Balaguer wins and remains president for 12 years. The economy booms due to high sugar prices worldwide, and Balaguer tries to unite opposing political forces.
 - A new constitution goes into effect on November 28.
- 1977
 - Falling sugar prices and rising oil prices begin affecting the Dominican economy. As inflation and unemployment rise, Balaguer loses popularity.
- 1978
 - U.S. President Carter sends troops to monitor the Dominican elections.
 - Silvestre Antonio Guzman Fernandez of the Dominican Revolutionary Party (PRD) defeats Balaguer to become president. He begins austerity measures to bring the economy under control.
- 1979
 - Hurricane David kills thousands of Dominicans and causes billions of dollars worth of damage.
- 1982
 - Salvador Jorge Blanco of the PRD becomes president. He adds more austerity measures.
- 1985
 - Riots break out over Jorge's unpopular economic measures.
- 1986
 - Former presidents Balaguer and Juan Bosch run for office again, along with PRD candidate Jacobo Majluta. Violence during the presidential campaign kills 15 people. Balaguer, although frail and almost blind, finally wins.
- 1994
 - Balaguer, at 86 years old, is reelected president once again.
- 1996
 - Leonel Fernandez is elected president.