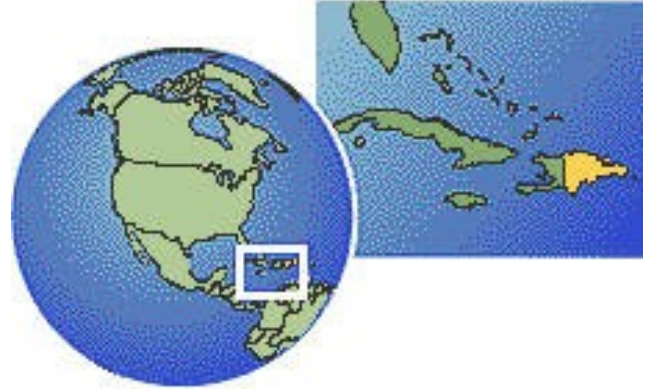


Dominican Republic

Geography & Location

The Dominican Republic is part of the second largest island in the Caribbean Sea. The D.R. is slightly more than twice the size of New Hampshire. It is about 100 miles southeast of Miami, Florida. It shares the island of Hispaniola with the country Haiti and occupies the eastern 2/3 of the island. Climate is maritime tropical. Its lush green vegetation contrasts with the dry desert like side of Haiti.

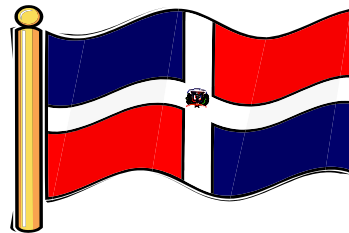


History

Christopher Columbus discovered Hispaniola in 1492. Columbus' brother, Bartholomew, founded the city of Santo Domingo in 1496. Santo Domingo is the Capital of the Dominican Republic. It is the oldest European-founded city in the western hemisphere. The oldest cathedral in the New World, the Cathedral of the Americas, contains the remains of Columbus. It also displays bells from his three ships, the Nina, the Pinta, and the Santa Maria. In 1821 the Dominicans declared their country free from Spain. Haitian military forces occupied and controlled the country until 1844. Thirty years of Dominican military dictatorship ended in 1961. Political struggle continued until a democratic government was established in 1966. The country continues to make progressive strides in many areas of life.

People

Population: 8.7 million
GNP per capita: \$5,800 U.S. dollars
Ethnic Groups:
Mixed 73%



Religion

Catholic 90%
Protestants 7.5%
Evangelical 4.7%
Other 2.5%

Culture & Economy

Most Dominicans are of Spanish and African ancestry. They are hospitable, industrious, fond of music, enjoy dancing the *Merengue*, and love sports (especially baseball). The national dish is *La Bandera* (rice and beans with beef). The Dominican economy experienced dramatic growth over the last decade, even though the economy was hit hard by Hurricane Georges in 1998. Although the country 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 and free trade zones. The country suffers from marked income inequality; the poorest half of the population receives less than one-fifth of GNP, while the richest 10% enjoy 40% of national income.

Elevation Extremes

lowest point: Lago Enriquillo -46 m
highest point: Pico Duarte 3,175 m

Language

Spanish is the official language. English is increasingly prevalent due to international business and tourism.

Education

Most children have the opportunity to attend school. Those with financial backing and ability for academic achievement advance to university level. Literacy rate: 82%

