

## Beach Resorts East of Santo Domingo

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Once you leave Santo Domingo, heading east along Highway 3, you quickly approach what is virtually the Dominican Republic Riviera centered on the resorts of Boca Chica and Juan Dolio. This is the land where the citizens of Santo Domingo themselves go to cool off in the fiery summer months.

Boca Chica itself became the virtual summer retreat of the wealthy residents of the city during the Trujillo era before developing into the mass vacation resort it is today. To Boca Chica's immediate east, Juan Dolio is a wide beach-bordering string of tourist developments that started to grow up in the 1980s. Don't expect a lot in facilities and attractions except at the hotels themselves, most of which are all-inclusives, attracting a lot of patronage from Western Europe, especially France and Spain. Although Americans and Canadians are also lured in great numbers to these resorts, most of the clients book in on low-cost package deals instead of paying the "rack rates" quoted to everybody.

The eastward trek continues through San Pedro de Macoris, ringed with sugar plantations, until La Romana is reached. We prefer La Romana to either Juan Dolio or Boca Chica, primarily because of its deluxe Casa de Campo (see listing later in this chapter).

At La Romana is found Altos de Chavón, an artists' community built in the style of a 16th-century Mediterranean village. This is the greatest man-made attraction of the Dominican Republic, and is worth a visit even if you have to rush down from Santo Domingo and view the sight in a day before returning to the capital in the evening.

### 1 Boca Chica

31km (19 miles) E of Santo Domingo

This is the Santo Domingo Riviera, dubbed "Playa St. Tropez" by the more fanciful. A favorite stamping ground for the French and Canadians, it also draws massive hordes of city dwellers on weekends.

Lying only a 5-minute drive east of Las Américas International Airport, it grew as a port in the 1930s because of a sugar mill. It wasn't until the 1960s, during the Trujillo era, that it began to develop as a beach resort, when wealthy Dominicans came here to build vacation villas. A decline came about in the 1970s with the rise of such competitive resorts as Puerto Plata and Punta Cana.

The sands are wide and golden, opening onto a shallow lagoon protected by a reef. Meaning "little mouth," Boca Chica Beach is shaped like a bay, and is often called "the largest natural swimming pool" in the West Indies. This mirrorlike body of water has no crashing surf, so it's ideal for a swim and is a special favorite with families with young children.

In recent years the beach has become known for prostitution of both young boys and young girls, with tourists flying in from all over the world to form sexual liaisons. Every now and then, the so-called "tourist police" have a major roundup of these hookers and hustlers, but they seem to appear on the streets and at the beach the next day.

In back of the beach is a winding, rather narrow street filled with small shops whose vendors hawk souvenirs, along with bars (both hooker and otherwise) and lots of seafood eateries. This street is closed to traffic at night, when tables and chairs spill out of the cafes and restaurants and the atmosphere becomes quite festive.

## ESSENTIALS

**VISITOR INFORMATION** In spite of all the thousands upon thousands of tourists descending on Boca Chica, the government has yet to open a tourist office here. The information that's available at the tourist center in Santo Domingo is so limited as to be almost worthless.

**GETTING THERE** If you're motoring, take Highway 3 east of Santo Domingo. Independently operated express buses leave during the day from Santo Domingo on the north side of Parque Central, costing RD\$45 (\$1.60) one way to Boca Chica. You can also flag down any *guagua* or midsize bus heading east.

**CITY LAYOUT** Everything is centered in an area of 10-by-15 blocks stretched out between Highway 3 and Bahía de Andrés, the shallow bay that borders the resort. If you're traveling on Highway 3, you can take a trio of avenues to the heart of the resort: Caracol, Juan Bautista Vicini, or Avenida 24 de Julio. The major street that cuts across Boca Chica is shop- and bar-lined Avenida Duarte. Another smaller artery, Avenida Abraham Núñez, is centered on

Parque Central, where seemingly everybody gathers. This artery is closest to the sea.

**GETTING AROUND** Most visitors simply walk around Boca Chica because of its small size. Locals or visitors who don't want to walk often avail themselves of a *motoconcho*, or motorcycle taxi. The fares are to be negotiated, but they are usually cheap. These *motoconchos* abound all over town and are driven by young men. Given the obvious danger, we don't recommend them. Should you not want to take our advice, you'll find many near Parque Central in the heart of town or cruising along bustling Avenida Duarte. If you want a tour of the area, call **Si Tratuboza**, Av. Duarte 30 (☎ 809/523-4797), which offers 24-hour service. For example, a driver will take you into Santo Domingo for shopping or sightseeing, a total of 3 hours costing RD\$1,540 (\$55).

## FAST FACTS

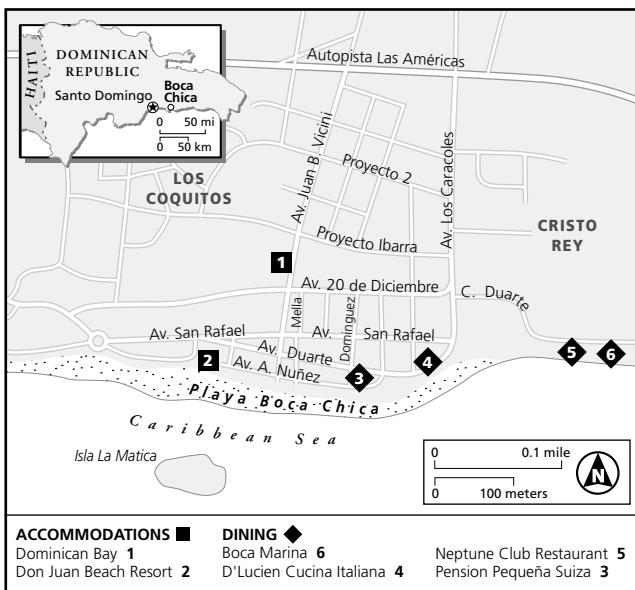
For money transfer and other services, go to **Western Union**, Calle Duarte 65 (☎ 809/523-4625), open daily 8am to 5pm. To call the local **police**, dial ☎ 809/523-4152. There is a 24-hour medical clinic at Boca Chica: **Central de Especialidades Médicas**, Mella 47 (☎ 809/523-5546). The most central pharmacy is **Farmacia Boca Chica**, Av. Duarte 17 (☎ 809/523-4708), open daily 8:30am to 9pm, and Sunday 8:30am to 7pm. To exchange money, go to **Banco Popular**, Av. Duarte 51 (☎ 809/544-8921), which doesn't have an ATM.

## WHERE TO STAY

**Dominican Bay** For years known as *the* Boca Chica Resort, this all-inclusive is the most famous at Boca Chica. Set on well-maintained grounds, it takes up almost a town block and has been much expanded and improved. Although it's one of the best resorts at the beach, its major drawback—at least to some visitors—is its location 18m (60 ft.) from the beach. Bedrooms are midsize and comfortably furnished, each equipped with a private bathroom with a combination tub and shower. The cuisine is better here than that served at Don Juan.

Calle Juan Bautista Vicini, esq. 20 de Diciembre, Boca Chica, Dominican Republic. ☎ 809/412-2001. Fax 809/412-0687. [www.hotetur.com](http://www.hotetur.com). 436 units. Year-round US\$68–US\$79 per person. Children 11 and under stay free with parents, ages 12–17 50% discount. Rates are all inclusive. AE, DC, MC, V. Free parking. **Amenities:** 4 restaurants; 4 bars; 4 pools; 3 tennis courts; water sports equipment; 24-hr. room service; laundry service; nightly entertainment. *In room:* A/C, TV, minibar, safe.

# Boca Chica



**Don Juan Beach Resort** Built in 1989, this resort is a multilevel structure that opens onto fine golden sands. It is the best resort for those who want to pursue an active watersports program, including diving, water-skiing, catamaran sailing, snorkeling, and paddle-boating. Many groups from France can be seen around the pool or strolling through the public rooms. The balconied bedrooms, though reasonably comfortable, are not state of the art, reflecting the wear and tear that comes with group check-ins. The public grounds and areas could also be better maintained. That said, the place is popular, and, because the staff is always arranging for such activities as horse-back riding and sunset cruises, guests often enjoy a vacation here if they're not too demanding. There is also a disco with a tropical setting called La Tambora. One of the downsides of staying here, though, is that you're booked in with all meals included. Buffets dominate the culinary agenda, and they're not always of the best quality.

Calle Abraham Núñez, Boca Chica, Dominican Republic. ☎ 809/523-4511. Fax 809/523-6422. [www.caei.com/djbr](http://www.caei.com/djbr). 223 units. Year-round US\$160–US\$270 double. Rates are all-inclusive. Children 2–12 50% discount. AE, MC, V. Free parking. **Amenities:** 2 restaurants; 4 bars; 2 pools; health club; babysitting; nightly entertainment. *In room:* A/C, TV, dataport, hair dryer, safe.

## WHERE TO DINE

At least for lunch, consider eating at the beach after ordering your meal from one of the many food shacks found here. A freshly cooked seafood lunch on the beach is the way to go, as you sample such tasty local treats as *lambi criolla* (Creole-styled conch).

**Boca Marina SEAFOOD** One of the most enduring, most popular, and most festive places to dine in Boca Chica, this restaurant lies at the eastern end of the resort. Wooden tables are placed out in the open air but shaded by canvas. Some of the tables are actually built out over the Caribbean Sea itself. You're cooled by the trade winds as you peruse the menu of some of the freshest seafood served in the area. The long bar here is also a popular rendezvous point. Established in the late '90s, the restaurant is known for its lobster thermidor. You can also order such delights as fried fish filet with fresh shrimp, or grilled calamari in a zesty sauce. *Langostinos* are always sizzling on the grill as well.

Calle Duarte 12A. ☎ 809/523-6750. Main courses RD\$80–RD\$695 (\$2.90–\$25). AE, DC, MC, V. Daily 10am–midnight.

**D'Lucien Cucina Italiana** ★ SEAFOOD/ITALIAN Somehow, and we don't know how, the cooks here are able to locate good ingredients needed to fashion a tasty cuisine. Established in the mid '90s, this casual beachlike shack stands in the center of the resort, attracting many guests booked in on all-inclusive terms at their hotel but wanting more variety in their cuisine. We recently started out with the seafood salad, finding it freshly made and studded with tasty morsels such as shrimp. Few can resist the grilled lobster, which is done to perfection here and not allowed to dry out. The chefs also make homemade pasta with fresh seafood that's quite succulent. Spaghetti comes with a selection of a dozen different sauces, and you can also order ravioli and tortellini. Vegetarian dishes are also featured, along with thin-crust pizzas and perfectly grilled steaks.

Av. Duarte 1. ☎ 809/523-5878. Main courses RD\$80–RD\$460 (\$2.90–\$17). AE, DC, MC, V. Daily 4pm–1am. Closed Dec 24.

**Neptune Club Restaurant** ★ SEAFOOD Lying west of the Boca Marina, a five minute drive from Aeropuerto Internacional Las Américas, this is the local dive for seafood. All the fish dishes are well prepared and some with imagination, such as the rarely offered Peruvian fish chowder made with milk. *Parrillada del mar*, or the platter of grilled seafood, is a beloved signature dish and justifiably

the most requested. Neptune's chefs also turn out the resort's best paella, studded with fresh morsels of seafood. Another house specialty is the seafood casserole. We'd walk more than a mile for the lobster lasagna and the spaghetti with seafood. Established in the 1980s, the restaurant offers tables that extend out over the surf, one of the best places to be in Boca Chica on a starry night. Often, even with a reservation, you will have to wait for a table.

Calle Duarte 12. ☎ 809/523-4703. Reservations required. Main courses RD\$400–RD\$1,200 (\$14–\$43). AE, DC, MC, V. Sun–Thurs 10am–11pm; Fri–Sat 10am–midnight. Closed Dec 24.

**Pensión Pequeña Suiza** ★ (Finds ITALIAN/DOMINICAN/SWISS/SEAFOOD) You wouldn't think of heading here for a night of dining, but this little pension or boardinghouse—opened in the late '90s—prepares one of the finest cuisines in town, with a careful choice of first-rate ingredients. In honor of its namesake, Switzerland, the kitchen specializes in fondues, an unusual cheese dish for the Dominican Republic. The seafood fondue is especially recommendable. You're given several choices of fondues. Of course, you can also order any number of other good-tasting dishes such as homemade pastas, grilled seafood, and—our favorite—the grilled catch of the day, which can also be fried for you. The offerings also include everything from antipasti to cappuccino. Round off your meal with a good cup of their homebrewed coffee.

Calle Duarte 58. ☎ 809/523-4619. Main courses RD\$380–RD\$1,200 (\$14–\$43). MC, V. Daily 9am–midnight.

## **PLAYA BOCA CHICA** ★★ ★

This is the town's only attraction and, presumably if this beach didn't exist, there would be no Boca Chica. Long a favorite of Santo Domingo's city dwellers before its discovery by foreigners, Playa Boca Chica is one of the grand beaches of the Caribbean, very wide with white or golden sands set against a backdrop of coconut palms with the inevitable beach bars, restaurants, and fast-food stands. The beach is fronted by the amazingly shallow Bahía Andrés. Unlike the north coast, with its turbulent waters, this is the most tranquil beach in the country.

The beach is a whirlwind of activity day and night, with an international crowd staking a claim on a "place in the sun." They are not always allowed to rest in peace, as vendors ply the beach hawking fruit or souvenirs. As mariachi bands entertain (wanting a tip, of course), young boys seek out gay tourists (and the occasional

woman), and young girls ply their trade with older men desiring sex with a teenager.

Lying only 9m (30 ft.) from the shore is a little uninhibited island covered with shrub that you can wade over to. But once you get here, there's nothing to see.

The general public enters the beach on Avenida Duarte. Near the main entrance here you'll see a number of wooden hovels hawking fried fish and *yani queque*, the pizza-size rounds of flavored batter. If you're seeking less crowded conditions, you can walk west along the beach as the tourist facilities gradually disappear. The drawback here is that the waters this far west are often muddy.

**GOLF** Near the beach at Boca Chica with four tee positions, **San Andrés Caribe Golf Club**, Km 27, Las Américas Highway, Boca Chica (☎ 809/545-1278), opened in 1993 with 9 holes. It is open daily from 8am to 6:30pm. The course is par 36, reaching 3,281 yards. Greens fees are RD\$476 (\$17), with caddies, club rentals, and carts costing extra.

**SCUBA DIVING & OTHER OUTDOOR PURSUITS** For divers, the chief attraction in the area is **La Caleta National Marine Park** (★), lying 23km (14 miles) to the east of Santo Domingo and close to the airport, and 12km (7½ miles) west of Boca Chica. At only 41 square km (16 sq. miles), this is the smallest of the country's national parks, but the most frequented because of its closeness to both Santo Domingo and Boca Chica.

The park was created in 1984, the same year that the salvage ship *Hickory* was scuttled to create an added attraction for divers. The ship is 38m (127 ft.) long, and in its heyday was used for the recovery of Spanish galleons sunk off the coast of Bahía de Samaná in the east. Many sea creatures make the *Hickory* their home, and its shallow waters allow divers to spend much time there studying the marine life.

For the snorkeler or diver, the best outfitter is **Treasure Divers** at the Don Juan Beach Resort, Calle Abraham Núñez 4 (☎ 809/523-5320), a beachside outlet offering an array of aquatic sports. They offer day sails to offshore Catalina Island for a day of snorkeling, costing RD\$1,960 (\$70) per person and leaving at 7am. The trip includes lunch and beverages, returning to shore at 6:30pm. Paddleboats can also be rented here, costing RD\$280 (\$10) per person for both guests and nonguests of the hotel. The center also features 3-day diving packages for RD\$2,800 (\$100) per person, RD\$3,192 (\$114) including gear. Day 1, for example, includes a morning and an afternoon dive, followed by a night dive. Some of these dives take

place in La Caleta National Marine Park, where you can view the sunken vessel, *Hickory*.

**SHOPPING** We suggest you confine your serious shopping to Santo Domingo. However, we did discover an intriguing little jewelry store: **Lary 6D**, at the Coral Hamaca Beach Hotel, Calle Duarte 1 (☎ 809/523-4611). It sells jewelry made with semi-precious stones, along with a selection of amber and both white and yellow gold items.

## BOCA CHICA AFTER DARK

Many people like to enjoy the beach at night, but the only part that's safe is the strip east of Don Juan Beach Resort. Here revelers sip rum punches and listen to merengue until around midnight. Muggings elsewhere on the beach are commonplace, especially of those who go for moonlit strolls.

Much of the beach at night is a hot cruising ground, with young men bargaining with older gays over the cost of their "services." Hooker bars are plentiful along Avenida Duarte, as men pursue for-sale *chicas*. In fact, one local paper referred to the street at night as a "gringo brothel."

Many of the after-dark diversions center around **Las Olas** at Coral Hamaca Beach Hotel & Casino, Calle Duarte, corner of Corales (☎ 809/523-4611). The dance club here is the most formal—and the safest—at the resort. Sometimes the music is live, at other times recorded, but expect a lot of merengue and salsa, enjoyed by patrons from 18 to their early 30s. The dance club is open to guests of this all-inclusive hotel. But for a nonguest to gain entrance, he or she must purchase a night pass for RD\$450 (\$16). The pass is a good deal in that it entitles you to a lavish dinner, plus all the liquor or beer you want for the evening.

The Coral Hamaca is also the site of the major **casino** in the area, which is open daily from 5pm to 4am. Guests pay no cover to enter. The usual games of chance include poker, blackjack, roulette, and other games. You're provided with a welcome drink. Patrons must be 18 years of age to enter.

Another option is to purchase a RD\$1,100 (\$40) night pass into the all-inclusive precincts of **Don Juan Beach Resort**, Calle Abraham Núñez (☎ 809/523-4511). The pass entitles you to a dinner, a show (if any is presented), and all your drinks. It's valid daily from 11pm to 2am. The on-site dance club, and scene of most of the action, is La Yola Disco Club.



## 2 Juan Dolio

10km (6¼ miles) E of Boca Chica, 50km (31 miles) E of Santo Domingo

Unlike Boca Chica (see above), Juan Dolio is more of a sprawling strip of tourist development along the beach opening onto the Caribbean Sea. Except for a few fishing huts, the development didn't exist until the 1980s, when builders eyed the great beaches here and moved east from Boca Chica. Today these resorts, mainly all-inclusives along with other developments, stretch out for some 5km (3 miles).

The competition from the emerging resorts of Punta Cana and Playa Dorada have dealt a severe blow to Juan Dolio, yet it struggles on—at least the better-financed businesses.

Be careful in your selection of a hotel as, chances are, you will spend much of your time at the resort and along its beachfront. In lieu of the meager attractions of Juan Dolio itself, the resort of your choice becomes much more important than it would be in a more developed resort with more diversity.

Highway 3 runs along the northern tier of Juan Dolio coming in from Santo Domingo to the west. Most of the development lies south of this highway, fronting the Caribbean. Two minor roads lie south of Highway 3, including Carretera Vieja (or old highway) and Carretera Local (or local highway). These are more lanes than roads and filled with milling throngs of beach-goers and souvenir hawkers.

### ESSENTIALS

**VISITOR INFORMATION** Even though Juan Dolio is one of the Caribbean's biggest tourist developments, the government still hasn't opened a tourist office here. You can stop in at the tourist office before leaving Santo Domingo, but don't expect to obtain much information there.

**GETTING THERE** Most arrivals are at the Santo Domingo international airport, where a taxi can be found waiting to take you to a hotel for a cost of RD\$600 (US\$30). Of course, the drivers will ask a lot more, but you can negotiate. Many cab rides are shared.

If you want to go by bus from Santo Domingo, you can go to Parque Enriquillo and search out the little bus station at the south-eastern corner of the park. Several independently operated buses depart from here on the half hour (schedules are a bit erratic) for Juan Dolio, carrying passengers for just RD30 (US\$1.50) for a one-way trip. It's a bumpy ride and is not suitable for passengers with a lot of luggage.

If you're in Boca Chica (see above), go to the Highway 3 and hail any of the eastbound *guaguas* (midsize buses). Locals use this form of transport, and rides—depending on where you're going—are very cheap.

**GETTING AROUND** Most visitors walk where they want to go in Juan Dolio, and the frontage road opening onto the Caribbean is mainly for passengers anyway. In lieu of that, you can hail one of the *motoconchos* or else a car taxi to get around. Fares are always inexpensive, but must be negotiated and agreed upon in advance.

## FAST FACTS

Don't expect the services of a town. Boca Chica (see above) is more developed and likely to have what you want in the way of services. Most hotels, at least at the big resorts, will exchange either U.S. or Canadian dollars into pesos. If you need to mail something, ask at your reception desk. The staff there will most often turn your mail over to a local carrier when he passes through. Only the first-class all-inclusives sell postage stamps. Most hotels provide laundry service.

## WHERE TO STAY THE ALL-INCLUSIVES

**Barceló Capella Beach Resort** ★★ *Kids* The Barceló chain dominates Juan Dolio, and this all-inclusive five-star, government-rated hotels, is its finest property. Right at the Villas de Mar beach, set against lush landscaping, it is a mammoth resort with some 1,000 beds. The hotel is lavish and complete unto itself; indeed, many patrons head here from the airport and never leave until it's time to go home.

All the buildings in the sprawling complex are less than five floors, and the architectural styles range from Moorish to Victorian, with white latticework, graceful pillars, and red-tile roofs. Even the least desirable units—called standard—are comfortably furnished and well maintained. Because there's so little difference in price, we'd opt for one of the superior or deluxe accommodations, or one of the "executive club rooms" or suites. The deluxe rooms with spacious sitting areas and two queen-size beds are regrettably farther from the sands. As compensation for their reduced size, the standard units in the front wing with one king-sized bed are closer to the beach.

Honeymooners often book one of the special suites with a king-size bed and a Jacuzzi. All the modern bathrooms come with a tub/shower combination.

The restaurants here, including everything from lavish buffets to a first-class French cuisine, are the best in Juan Dolio. This is an excellent venue for children, as two pools are set aside for them and day and nighttime entertainment programs are specially geared for them. There's also a kids' club on the beach.

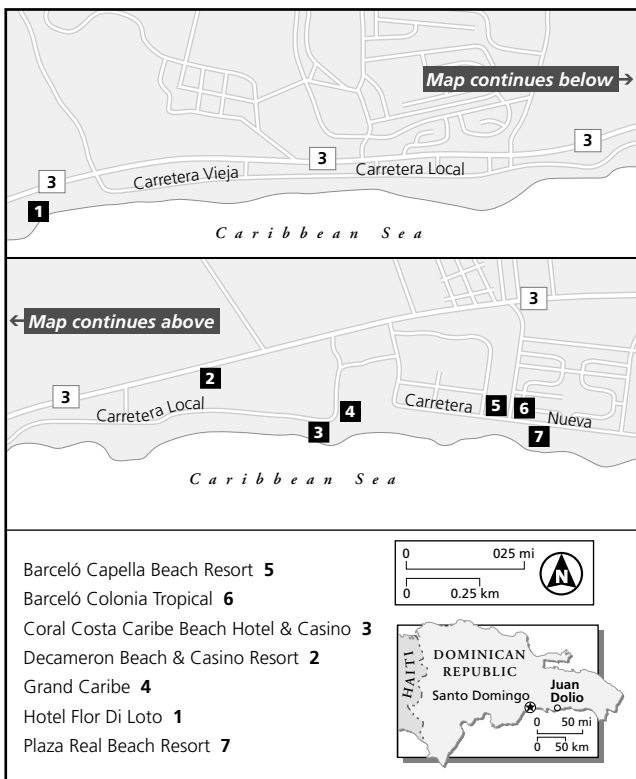
Playa de Villas del Mar, San Pedro de Macoris, Dominican Republic. ☎ 809/526-1080. Fax 809/526-1088. www.barcelo.com. 500 units. Year-round US\$120–US\$140 double; US\$136–US\$156 junior suite. Children 2–12 US\$24–US\$35 extra. AE, DC, MC, V. Free parking. **Amenities:** 4 restaurants; 4 bars; 3 pools; 2 tennis courts; health club; sauna; watersports equipment; children's center; car-rental desk; business center; salon; 24-hr. room service; massage; babysitting; laundry service; dry cleaning; nightly entertainment. *In room:* A/C, TV, minibar, fridge, coffemaker, hair dryer, safe.

**Barceló Colonia Tropical** ★ This is the smallest and most intimate of the Barceló properties strung along Juan Dolio's beachfront, and we prefer it for that reason. You get more personalized attention in this two-story building surrounded by palm trees and gardens. The complex was built in the closing year of the 20th century, and it's decorated with tropical pastels. Bedrooms range from midsize to spacious, and each comes with a neatly tiled bathroom with tub/shower combo. When checking in, you're asked if you want one king-size bed or two queen-size beds. Many guests request one of the 32 studios with a kitchenette; three of the suites also come with kitchens. Clients who check in here can use the superior facilities at the Barceló Capella Beach Resort. The food is better here than at the standard Barceló restaurant, although the Colonia Tropical can't offer the vast variety of cuisine of the megaresorts.

Playa de Villas del Mar, San Pedro de Macoris, Dominican Republic. ☎ 809/526-1660. Fax 809/221-0483. www.barcelo.com. 40 units. Year-round US\$73–US\$92 double; US\$186–US\$275 suite. Children 2–12 US\$37 extra. AE, DC, MC, V. Free parking. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; outdoor pool; watersports equipment; limited room service; babysitting; laundry service. *In room:* A/C, TV, kitchenette, minibar, fridge, coffemaker, hair dryer, safe.

**Coral Costa Caribe Beach Hotel & Casino** ★★ *Kids* If you're fleeing from some snowswept northern clime, and are dreaming of a wide sandy beach with the fronds of palm trees blowing in the trade winds, this cliché of a tropical resort is very much a reality here. Coral Costa Caribe is one of the best of the all-inclusives scattered along the vast beachfront of sprawling Juan Dolio. It caters to every client from high-rollers with its casino, to families with children with facilities such as a day-care center.

Accommodations rated superior or deluxe open onto sea or garden views, and junior suites or grander suites are available both on



the beach side and at the modern business and convention center. Sometimes conferences take over one of these all-inclusives. The bedrooms are comfortably decorated though a bit minimalist in styling, and are midsize for the most part, with well-maintained, tiled bathrooms with tub/shower combinations.

The food is much better than the standardized fare offered at nearby all-inclusives. Guests can opt for a three-meal-a-day buffet on the terraced restaurant, or else dine more exclusively in one of the specialty a la carte dining rooms. Featuring watersports on the beach, the resort has one of the most activity-filled agendas of any of the megaresorts—yes, even aerobics. The hotel lies just a short distance from the 18-hole Guavaberry Golf Course.

Autopista Blvd, San Pedro de Macoris, Dominican Republic. ☎ 809/526-2244. Fax 809/526-3141. www.coralhotels.com. 535 units. Year-round US\$160–US\$210 double; US\$220–US\$300 suite. Children 2–12 US\$20 extra. AE, DC, MC, V. Free parking. **Amenities:** 3 restaurants; 3 bars; 4 pools; nearby golf; tennis court; health club; spa; watersports equipment; children's center; salon; limited room service; laundry service; dry cleaning; casino; disco; Internet center; nightly entertainment; 24-hour medical service. *In room:* A/C, TV, fridge, hair dryer, safe.

**Decameron Beach and Casino Resort** ★ *Kids* This is a mammoth all-inclusive right on the golden sands at Villas de Mar and enveloped by luxuriant vegetation. It sits next to the Talanquera Beach Resort & Casino. If you wake up in a room at any of these resorts, you wouldn't be able to tell which one you're in until you went outside.

Since there's not much difference in price, ask for one of the "superior" bedrooms, each with sea views. Otherwise, you'll find all the bedrooms fairly standard and comfortable, furnished with decorative tropical flavor. Although this resort is old (1985) in terms of upstart Juan Dolio, it has been renovated frequently and kept fairly up-to-date. Most rooms are midsize, with a small bathroom with tub/shower combination.

Most guests find the attractions, entertainment, and dining on-site so comprehensive that they don't feel the need to leave the resort at night. The food is good and international in scope, with the rare Brazilian cuisine a feature along with Mexican and Italian specialties, combined with the usual barbecue stands and pizza. A wide range of sports is offered, including everything from kayaking to archery. Kids are especially catered to with their own play area and pool. A "nanny" can also be provided.

Playa de Villas del Mar, San Pedro de Macoris, Dominican Republic. ☎ 809/339-2009. Fax 809/526-1430. www.oceanarc.com. 440 units. Year-round US\$36–US\$72 per person double. Children 2–12 US\$30–US\$50 extra. AE, DC, MC, V. Free parking. **Amenities:** 4 restaurants; 2 bars; 3 pools; 2 tennis courts; health club; watersports equipment; salon; massage; babysitting; laundry service; basketball court; casino; children's playground; nightly entertainment. *In room:* A/C, TV, hair dryer, safe.

**Grand Caribe** ★ *Kids* Lying on one of the best beachfront areas in the southwestern part of the island, this is a rather massive all-inclusive in a tropical setting of palm trees and landscaping. Rooms are spread over three different buildings, each opening onto the water. The furnishings of the midsize bedrooms are airy and tropical, very Caribbean, each with a modern bathroom with tub/shower combination. Many of the rooms are geared toward accommodating families with small children at reduced rates. Each room is designed to accommodate up to four guests in reasonable comfort. A wide range of restaurants from casual to elegant await your choice,

since you will most likely take all your meals here. You dine on every cuisine from Mexican to Italian, even enjoying an outdoor barbecue or seafood on a grill by the beach.

There's entertainment at night, even a karaoke pub bar. The program of outdoor activities is extensive, embracing water aerobics, water polo, kayaking, windsurfing, canoeing, snorkeling, scuba diving and, yes, even biking and archery. The fitness center with a sauna and steam room complements the Jacuzzis and beauty salon, and an Internet room is open 24 hours for those who need a daily e-mail fix.

Playa de Villas del Mar, San Pedro de Macoris, Dominican Republic. ☎ 809/526-1521. Fax 809/526-2194. www.grandcaribe.com.do. 260 units. Year-round US\$75–US\$100 double. Children 2–11 50% discount. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Free parking. **Amenities:** 4 restaurants; 4 bars; pool; 2 tennis courts; health club; water-sports equipment; salon; babysitting; laundry service; nightly entertainment. *In room:* A/C, TV, hair dryer, safe.

**Plaza Real Beach Resort** ★ *(Kids)* Lying directly on the beach, this is a hotel that just grew and grew, opening first in 1987, with the last building added in 1997. Close to the center of Juan Dolio, it is separated by palm trees from golden sands. The place is almost a cliché of a Caribbean beach resort surrounded by well-landscaped gardens and palm trees. The standard rooms here are midsize and comfortably furnished, each with a shower-and-tub combo.

Even better is a room in the on-site Club Playa Real, like a hotel within a hotel, offering more personalized attention and such extra features as a private Jacuzzi. The food is of an acceptable international standard, but hardly the reason to stay here. For variety and as a break from those endless buffets, Italian and Mexican restaurants are a possibility as well.

The hotel is very activity-oriented, featuring everything from horseback riding to scuba diving. The Occidental Fun Club organizes a variety of activities during the day, everything from aerobics to merengue lessons.

Calle Villas del Mar, San Pedro de Macoris, Dominican Republic. ☎ 809/526-1114. Fax 809/526-1623. www.amhsamarina.com. 391 units. Year Round US\$120 double. Children 4–12 US\$60 extra. Extra adult US\$96. AE, MC, V. Free parking. **Amenities:** 5 restaurants; 4 bars; 2 pools; tennis court; watersports equipment; children's center; room service; babysitting; laundry service; aerobics; disco; horseback riding. *In room:* A/C, TV, safe.

## INEXPENSIVE

**Hotel Fior di Loto** ★ *(Finds)* In business for some 2 decades, this is a hip, most affordable, and friendly oasis for those who wish to escape from the curse of the megaresorts. A three-story villa, this

gay-friendly and laid-back guesthouse offers simply furnished but comfortable guests rooms. Although small, they are cozy, often with Indian accents. Each of the small units comes with a tidily maintained little bathroom with shower. Your hostess, Mara Sandri, is surely the most worldly in the area, even teaching yoga and meditation classes. She can do everything for you—from setting you up with an acupuncturist to having a “therapeutic sacred dance” performed for you by a troupe nearby. She’s also a font of information about this part of the island.

Calle Central 517, Guayanes, Dominican Republic. ☎ 809/526-1146. Fax 809/526-3332. www.fiordilotohotel.com. 24 units. Year-round US\$20–US\$40 double. MC, V. Free parking. **Amenities:** 24-hr. Restaurant/bar; laundry service. *In room:* TV, ceiling fan.

## BEACHES, DIVING & OTHER OUTDOOR PURSUITS

**BEACHES** There are three major beaches spread along the Caribbean Sea, beginning with **Playa Guayacanes** in the west, with **Playa Juan Dolio** in the center and **Playa Real** in the east. These beaches are often referred to collectively as Playa de Villas del Mar. Our favorite of these is Playa Guayacanes, which is one of the most beautiful beaches in the area and home to a little community of locals called Guayacanes.

As you move east from Guayacanes, the sands are better than the water, the latter filled with wide expanses of dead coral, making the swimming less than desirable. Many of the best sandy beaches are maintained zealously by the all-inclusives.

Frankly, if wide, sandy beaches are important to your holiday, the beaches of Punta Cana and Bávaro (see chapter 6) are better. The chief advantages of the resorts at Boca Chica and Juan Dolio are their accessibility to Santo Domingo, only a 1-hour bus ride away on a *guagua* (midsize bus).

**GOLF** An 18-hole championship golf course, **Guavaberry Golf Course**, Km 55, Autovía del Este, Juan Dolio (☎ 809/333-4653), opened in 2002 and accepts players daily from 7am to 7pm. Reservations are recommended for this par 72 course of 7,092 yards. The cost is RD\$2,772 (\$99) for 18 holes or RD\$1,960 (\$70) for 9 holes, including cart fees.

An older course, also 18 holes, from 1995 is **Los Marlins Golf Course**, Metro Country Club, Las Américas Highway, Juan Dolio (☎ 809/526-3315), designed by Charles Ankrom. Reservations are recommended at this par 72 course of 6,396 yards. Greens fees are RD\$1,652 (\$59) for 18 holes or RD\$840 (\$30) for 9 holes (includes cart fees). Carts, clubs, and caddies are available at both courses, which also have a clubhouse and lockers.

**SCUBA DIVING & SNORKELING** There are more than 15 dive sites in Juan Dolio, and new ones are being discovered yearly. Depth ranges are from 9m to 30m (30 ft.–100 ft.). A lot of underwater photographers come here to view the deep channels and ravines offshore and the diversity of soft and hard corals along with the rainbow-hued fish.

One of the best dive centers in southwestern Dominican Republic is the **Neptuno Dive Center**, in the Barceló Colonia Tropical, Playa de Villas del Mar, San Pedro de Macoris (☎ 809/526-1473; [www.neptunodive.com](http://www.neptunodive.com)). Here a one-tank dive costs RD\$1,008 (\$36) and a three-tank dive RD\$2,772 (\$99), with a night dive an additional RD\$784 (\$20). Complete equipment, including snorkel fins, can also be rented. A snorkel course is also offered for RD\$980 (\$35). This is a complete PADI diving facility with all the equipment, offering dive courses. Even nondivers can ask about their 1-day cruise from Juan Dolio to the Catalina Island offshore, costing RD\$2,100 (\$75) per person, including lunch.

## JUAN DOLIO AFTER DARK

**ROLLING THE DICE** One of the older casinos is found at **Barceló Decameron Beach & Casino Resort**, Playa de Villas del Mar, San Pedro de Macoris (☎ 809/339-2009), which is open daily from 11pm to 4am. Slots get the most attention, but you can also play roulette, blackjack, poker, and other games of chance.

**Coral Costa Caribe Beach Resort**, Calle San Pedro de Macoris (☎ 809/526-3318), contains one of the best casinos in the southern part of the country. Elegantly decorated, it aggressively pursues the gringo dollar with its games of chance, such as blackjack, poker, and roulette, along with plenty of slot machines. Open daily from 8pm to 4am.

## 3 La Romana & Altos de Chavón

114km (71 miles) E of Santo Domingo, 37km (23 miles) E of San Pedro de Macoris

On the southeast coast of the Dominican Republic, La Romana was once a sleepy sugar-cane town that specialized in cattle raising. Visitors didn't come near the place, but when Gulf + Western Industries opened a luxurious tropical paradise resort, the Casa de Campo, about 1.6km (1 mile) east of town, La Romana soon began drawing the jet set. It's the finest resort in the Dominican Republic, and especially popular among golfers.



Just east of Casa de Campo is Altos de Chavón, a charming and whimsical copy of what might have been a fortified medieval village in Spain, southern France, or Italy. It's the country's leading sight-seeing attraction.

## ESSENTIALS

**VISITOR INFORMATION** The government maintains **La Romana Tourist Office** at Teniente Amado García 22 (☎ 809/550-6922), open Monday to Friday 8am to 6pm. Don't expect to come away with a wealth of information, however.

**GETTING THERE By Plane American Airlines** (☎ 800/433-7300 in the U.S.; www.aa.com) offers one daily flight to Casa de Campo from Miami, with a travel time of about 2½ hours each way. (Yes, it's a slow plane.) **American Eagle** (same phone number) operates at least two (and in busy seasons, at least three) daily non-stop flights to Casa de Campo/La Romana airport from San Juan, Puerto Rico. The flight takes about 45 minutes, and it departs late enough in the day to permit transfers from other flights.

**By Car** You can drive here in about an hour and 20 minutes from the international airport, along Las Américas Highway. (Allow another hour if you're in the center of the city.) Of course, everything depends on traffic conditions. (Watch for speed traps—low-paid police officers openly solicit bribes, whether you're speeding or not.)

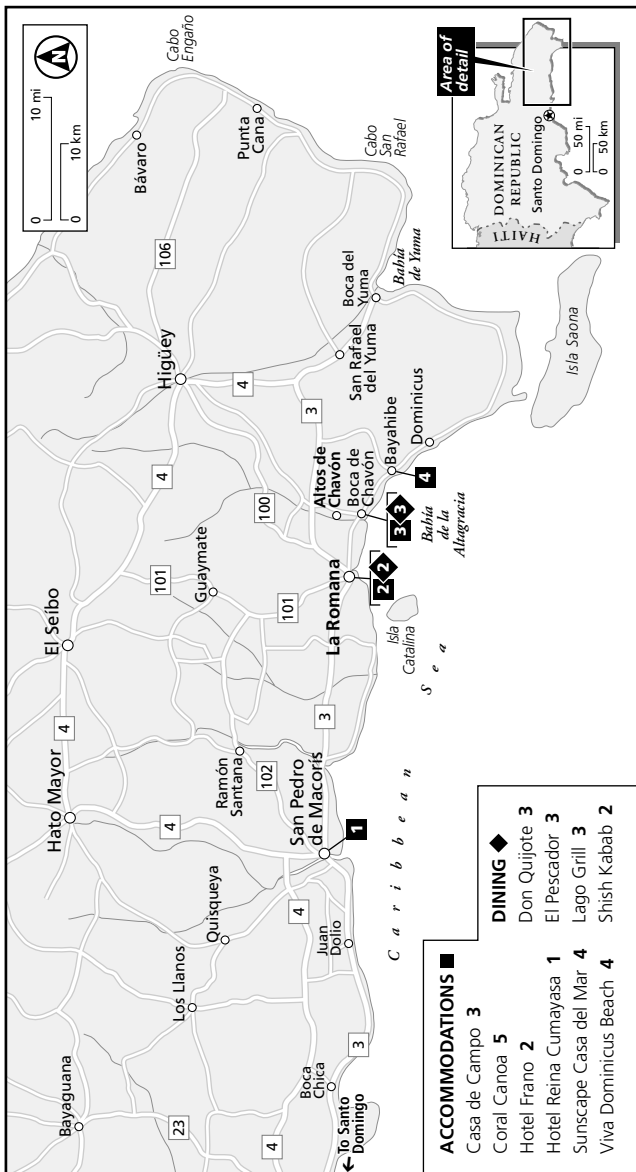
**GETTING AROUND** Most visitors don't rent a car but rely on local transportation, which is very haphazard and operated by independent drivers. You'll find both taxis and *motoconchos* (motorized scooters) at the northeast corner of Parque Central in the heart of La Romana. A typical ride almost anywhere within town costs less than RD\$60 (\$2.15), with the average taxi ride costing less than RD\$120 (\$4.30). Prices are always to be negotiated, of course.

You can also rent a car at the airport. Your best bet is **Budget**, La Romana Airport (☎ 809/813-9111), open Monday to Saturday 9am to 5pm. A competitor is **Honda Rent a Car**, Calle Santa Rosa 84 (☎ 809/556-3835), in La Romana, open Monday to Friday 8am to 6pm, Saturday and Sunday 8am to 4pm.

## FAST FACTS

To exchange money, go to **Scotiabank**, a bank at Calle Trinitaria 59 (☎ 809/556-5151), open Monday to Friday from 8:30am to 4:30pm. There's an ATM out front. Long-distance calls can be made at **Verizon**, the phone company at Calle Trinitaria 51 (☎ 809/220-7927), open Monday to Friday 8am to 6pm, Saturday

# La Romana & Altos de Chavón



9am to 1pm. The **La Romana Post Office** lies on Calle Francisco del Castillo Marqu   (  809/556-2265), 2 blocks north of Parque Central. For Internet access, head to the **Casa de Campo** resort (see below). The **business center** here (  809/523-3333) is open Monday to Saturday 8am to 7pm, and Sunday 8am to 2pm. Use of a computer costs RD\$65 (\$2.32) for 15 minutes or RD\$260 (\$9.28) for 1 hour.

## WHERE TO STAY

### THE MEGARESORTS

**Casa de Campo** ★★ Translated as “country house,” Casa de Campo, on its own beach, is the leading resort in the Dominican Republic. In the 1960s, the former Gulf + Western corporation took a vast hunk of coastal land, more than 2,800 hectares (6,916 acres) in all, and carved out this chic resort. Tiles, Dominican crafts, mahogany furniture, louvered doors, and flamboyant fabrics decorate the interior of both the public areas and the accommodations.

Rooms are divided into red-roofed, two-story casitas, each with four units, radiating out from the main building, and more upscale villas that dot the edges of the golf courses, the gardens near the tennis courts, and the shoreline. (Ask for one near the water if you plan to spend most of your time on the beach, or one near the links if you’re an avid golfer, since the grounds are massive.) Nineteen of the villas each have their own private pool. Some are clustered in a semi-private hilltop compound with views overlooking the meadows, the sugar cane, and the fairways down to the distant sea. Accommodations have either a shower only or a shower/tub combination.

La Romana, Dominican Republic.   800/877-3643 or 809/523-8698. Fax 809/523-8548. www.casadecampo.cc. 279 units. Winter US\$190–US\$299 casita for 2, US\$580 suite; off season US\$183–US\$214 casita for 2, US\$312 suite. Rates are all-inclusive. AE, DC, MC, V. **Amenities:** 8 restaurants; 5 bars; 8 outdoor pools; 3 18-hole golf courses; 13 tennis courts (10 lit); health club; sauna; watersports equipment; bikes; children’s center (ages 3–12); limited room service; massage; babysitting; laundry service; aerobics; horseback riding; polo; theater. *In room:* A/C, TV, dataport, minibar, hair dryer, iron/ironing board, safe.

**Coral Canoa** ★★ When you come here and see the thatch roof huts, you’ll think you’ve arrived south of Pago Pago. The hotel’s architecture has a real tropical ambience, with many small villas reproduced in the style of the island’s native thatch houses, called *clavos*. Some of the architecture uses such island materials as stone, jute, and canna, along with some symbolic architectural details of the Ta  no Indians, the original inhabitants. Bedrooms come in a

range of styles, from midsize to spacious, although each has a tiled bathroom with tub/shower combination. Much use is made of rattan, the furnishings placed against creamy walls given added color by the flamboyant fabrics.

Many outdoor enthusiasts like its location on the border of Parque Nacional del Este (see description later this chapter).

The resort's most outstanding feature is its spa, with an array of treatments and classes, everything from yoga to shiatsu massages and hydrotherapy along with beauty treatments. The food is plentiful and fresh, and prepared more or less well without arriving at the sublime. Caribbean and Italian favorite dishes are served, along with a selection of international specialties, including pizza and pastas.

Bayahibe Beach, La Romana, Dominican Republic. ☎ 809/682-2662. Fax 809/688-5799. [www.coralhotels.com](http://www.coralhotels.com). 532 units. Year-round US\$190–US\$290 double; US\$280–US\$330 junior suite. Children 2–12 US\$60 extra. Rates are all-inclusive. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Free parking. **Amenities:** 4 restaurants; 4 bars; 2 pools; health club; spa; sauna; children's center; 24-hr. room service; babysitting; laundry service; dry cleaning; nightly entertainment. *In room:* A/C, TV, kitchenettes in suites, minibar, hair dryer, safe.

**Sunscaper Casa del Mar** ⚡ Casa de Campo dominates the southeast coast, but this contender on a spectacular beach is giving the grand dame a run for her money. The golf and tennis facilities here aren't as elaborate as those at Casa de Campo, and there are no polo grounds, but the resort, dating from 1997, is beautifully landscaped, and the beach is palm fringed.

Accommodations are within seven three-story buildings with yellow walls and blue-tiled roofs. Decor inside features lots of tile, varnished hardwood, wicker, and rattan, plus a neatly appointed shower-only bathroom. There's an overall cheerfulness about the place and lots of emphasis on merengue music that helps keep the good times rolling. Everything served in all of the resort's restaurants is covered by the all-inclusive price. Michelangelo serves Italian food, Chinese is on the menu at Asia, and Saona does beachfront barbecues and grills, Dominican style. There's also a buffet restaurant and a disco.

Bayahibe Beach, La Romana, Dominican Republic. ☎ 866/786-7227 in the U.S., or 809/221-8880. Fax 809/221-2776. [www.sunscaperesorts.com](http://www.sunscaperesorts.com). 563 units. Winter US\$150–US\$167 per person double, US\$184 per person suite; off season US\$60–US\$95 per person double, US\$72–US\$120 per person suite. Rates are all-inclusive. AE, MC, V. **Amenities:** 4 restaurants; 6 bars; 2 outdoor pools; 4 tennis courts; health club; Jacuzzi; sauna; watersports equipment; bikes; children's programs; limited room service; babysitting; disco; horseback riding. *In room:* A/C, TV, dataport, minibar, hair dryer, iron/ironing board, safe.

**Viva Dominicus Beach** ★ This is a megaresort that lies 5km (3 miles) east of Bayahibe, opening onto a magnificent golden sandy beach with a swimmable surf. Dating from the '80s, it is like a small village of buildings four or less floors each. This is a sort of all-purpose resort that's a destination unto itself. Many patrons confess that they hardly leave the premises until the end of their vacation.

The midsize bedrooms feature decorative accents of the island and are comfortable and tasteful, with a variety of places to lay your head at night. The least desirable rooms are rated "standard." Since there is so little price difference, it's better to ask for a superior room. Even better might be to request one of the thatch-roof bungalows opening onto the ocean or tropical gardens. Each unit comes with a well-maintained private bathroom with tub and shower.

Even if the food is not always "get *Gourmet* magazine on the phone," it is plentiful and generous, prepared with fresh ingredients. Menus are eclectic, inspired by international recipes, especially those of the Caribbean, Mexico, and Europe, with plenty of American dishes as well. Buffets are big here, and there's also a grill restaurant and a pizzeria. On our latest rounds, we spotted guests still eating at 2:30am.

Although no great competition for Casa de Campo, the resort aggressively features activities around the block, from complimentary land and nonmotorized watersports to musical cabaret shows often staged by the staff as performers.

Bayahibe Beach, La Romana, Dominican Republic. ☎ 809/686-5658. Fax 809/687-8383. [www.vivaresorts.com](http://www.vivaresorts.com). 530 units. Year-round US\$160–US\$170 double. Rates are all-inclusive. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Free parking. **Amenities:** 4 restaurants; 4 bars; 3 outdoor pools; 4 tennis courts; health club; spa; Jacuzzi; sauna; water-sports equipment; babysitting; laundry service; dry cleaning; basketball court; disco; Internet center; nightly entertainment; soccer field. *In room:* A/C, TV, hair dryer, iron/ironing board, safe.

## MODERATE

**Hotel Reina Cumayasa** ★ *Finds* Most chain properties are megaresorts, except this one lying at the mouth of the Cumayasa River with a small private beach of golden sands. The property is far more intimate than the bigger resorts and is surrounded by the wild flora and fauna of this part of the D.R. The complex appears like a large, overscaled villa you might encounter on the Mediterranean. Furnishings are traditional, with lots of cedar wood and mahogany. The tallest of the structures is three floors, and there are no elevators. All bedrooms are midsize and rather tastefully most comfortably furnished, with tiled bathrooms, each with a shower. Children

are not welcome at this hotel. Daytime activities include an array of activities ranging from horseback riding to hiking, canoeing to snorkeling, and even water-skiing.

Km 12, Carretera San Pedro de Macoris, La Romana, Dominican Republic. ☎ 809/550-7506. Fax 809/550-8105. 50 units. Year-round US\$170–US\$270 double; US\$150–US\$300 junior suite. Rates are all-inclusive. AC, DC, MC, V. Free parking. **Amenities:** Restaurant; 2 bars; outdoor pool; 2 tennis courts; watersports equipment; laundry service; horseback riding; Internet center. *In room:* A/C, TV, minibar, coffeemaker, hair dryer, safe.

## INEXPENSIVE

**Hotel Frano** This is for frugal travelers who shun the megaresorts, preferring more of a guest house–type accommodation. The prices are so affordable that many traveling Dominican salesmen often book in here. The midsize bedrooms are simply but tastefully decorated and quite comfortable, each with a small tiled bathroom with tub and shower. The three-story building is from the early '90s and has been kept up-to-date since then. Within the little town of La Romana itself, these are the best guest rooms, though you'll have to travel nearby for a good beach.

Calle Padre Abreu 9, La Romana, Dominican Republic. ☎ 809/550-4744. 41 units. Year-round US\$43 double. AE, DC, MC, V. Free parking. **Amenities:** Restaurant. *In room:* A/C, TV.

## WHERE TO DINE

**Café del Sol** ITALIAN The pizzas at this stone-floored indoor/outdoor cafe, which is positioned one flight above the medieval-looking piazza outside, are the best on the south coast. The favorite seems to be *quattro stagioni*, topped with mushrooms, artichoke hearts, cooked ham, and olives. The chef makes a soothing minestrone served with freshly made bread. To reach the cafe, climb a flight of stone steps to the rooftop of a building whose ground floor houses a jewelry shop.

Altos de Chavón. ☎ 809/523-3333, ext. 5346. Pizzas RD\$255–RD\$480 (\$9.10–\$17); salads RD\$180 (\$6.45). AE, MC, V. Daily noon–11pm.

**Casa del Río** FRENCH/CARIBBEAN The most romantic restaurant at Altos de Chavón occupies the basement of an Iberian-style 16th-century castle whose towers, turrets, tiles, and massive stairs are entwined with strands of bougainvillea. Inside, brick arches support oversized chandeliers, suspended racing sculls, and wine racks. Amid this bucolic atmosphere, you can indulge in some of the best seafood dishes on the south coast. Although the food has a slight French flair, and often a few Thai twists, everything tastes

and looks firmly West Indian. Any of the seafood dishes, such as lobster lasagna, is worthy of attention. Lobster might also appear glazed with vanilla vinaigrette, which tastes a lot better than it sounds. You'll encounter innovative taste sensations here, especially in dishes involving lemon grass or coriander. Some favorites include warm goat cheese with a tossed almond-and-arugula salad; Provençal-style snails au gratin; and sautéed tenderloin of beef with Roquefort cheese and almonds.

Altos de Chavón. ☎ **809/523-3333**, ext. 3260. Reservations required. Main courses RD\$256–RD\$576 (\$9.20–\$21). AE, MC, V. Daily 6–11pm. Closed Feb–Oct.

**Don Quijote** ★ *Finds* INTERNATIONAL/SEAFOOD Outside Casa de Campo, you get some of your best seafood here. The menu offers few exciting surprises, and the dishes are all very familiar to those who dine here, but everything is nicely served and tastes good. Their seafood paella is the best we've sampled in the area, and we are especially fond of lobster Creole style. The chicken breast is beautifully sautéed and flavored, and a tender and well-flavored chateaubriand comes with shrimp in a coconut sauce, a combination that's a bit jarring to our palate but which receives praise from the regular diners. If you have no room for dessert, finish off with a strong Dominican coffee.

Calle Diego Avila 42. ☎ **809/556-2827**. Main courses RD\$175–RD\$900 (\$6.30–\$32). AE, DC, MC, V. Mon–Fri 11am–4pm; Sat–Sun 11am–11pm.

**El Pescador** ★★ SEAFOOD The best and the freshest seafood in the area is served at one of the restaurants inside the Casa de Campo, which is not only the finest place to stay along the southern coast, but serves the grandest cuisine. In an elegant setting, you can dine inside or out on the alfresco terrace. The atmosphere is informal, but the service is first rate. The freshest fish, based on the catch of the day, is brought here for the chefs to concoct into a number of delectable dishes, including perfectly grilled fish, the preferred method of cooking for most diners. A justifiably favorite dish is the deep-fry mix of calamari, shrimp, and the "catch of the day." For lunch many visitors prefer the fish salad with tropical fruit, or fish sandwiches, which are among the best in the area.

In Casa de Campo. ☎ **809/523-3333**. Reservations recommended. Main courses: lunch RD\$335–RD\$605 (\$12–\$22), dinner RD\$650–RD\$1,500 (\$23–\$54). AE, DC, MC, V. Daily noon–4pm and 7–11pm.

**El Sombrero** MEXICAN In this thick-walled, colonial-style building, the jutting timbers and roughly textured plaster evoke a corner of Old Mexico. There's a scattering of rattan furniture and an

occasional example of Mexican weaving, but the main draw is the spicy cuisine. Red snapper in garlic sauce is usually very good as are the beef and chicken fajitas. Most guests dine outside on the covered patio, within earshot of a group of wandering minstrels. Chances are you've had better versions of the standard nachos, enchiladas, black-bean soup, pork chops, grilled steaks, and brochettes served here, but a margarita or two will make it a fun night out anyway.

Altos de Chavón. ☎ 809/523-3333. Reservations recommended. Main courses RD\$570–RD\$780 (\$20–\$28). AE, MC, V. Daily 6pm–midnight.

**Giacosa** ITALIAN/INTERNATIONAL This is the only restaurant within Altos de Chavón that's not owned and operated by Casa de Campo. As such, its owners and staff tend to try a bit harder. It's a branch of a success story based in Coral Gables, Florida. Within a two-story stone Tuscan-style building you can try Mediterranean dishes like seafood soup studded with lobster and shrimp, risotto with shrimp and sun-dried tomatoes, or savory imported mussels with olive oil, garlic, white wine, parsley, and fresh tomatoes. Another superb dish is red snapper filet with fresh tomatoes, baked in a paper bag to seal in its aromatic flavors.

Altos de Chavón. ☎ 809/523-8466. Reservations recommended. Main courses RD\$500–RD\$1,000 (\$18–\$36). AE, MC, V. Daily noon–midnight.

**Lago Grill** CARIBBEAN/AMERICAN With one of the best-stocked morning buffets in the country, Lago Grill is ideal for breakfast. At the fresh-juice bar, an employee in colonial costume will extract juices in any combination you prefer from 25 different tropical fruits. Then you can select your ingredients for an omelet, and another staff member will whip it up while you wait. The lunchtime buffet includes sandwiches, burgers, *sancocho* (the famous Dominican stew), and fresh conch chowder. There's also an abundant salad bar.

In Casa de Campo. ☎ 809/523-3333. Breakfast buffet RD\$750 (\$27); buffet RD\$1,500 (\$54). AE, DC, MC, V. Mon–Sat 7–11am and noon–3pm; Sun 6:30–11am and noon–4pm.

**Shish Kabab** MIDDLE EASTERN/INTERNATIONAL/ DOMINICAN Very close to the center of town, this is an informal restaurant that's a real change of pace from Dominican fare. Naturally, the chefs specialize in kabobs, but there are many other Middle Eastern specialties as well, notably *baba ghanoush*, with mashed eggplant studded with fresh parsley, fresh garlic, lemon juice, olive oil, and sesame paste. The beef kabobs are perfectly grilled. There's even a shish kabob pizza. Skewered grouper is yet



another worthy specialty. You can also order substantial meals such as broiled lobster, deep fried chicken, or stuffed grape leaves.

Calle Francisco del Castillo Marquez 32. ☎ 809/556-2737. Main courses RD\$600 (\$22). DC, MC, V. Tues–Sun 10am–11pm.

## HITTING THE BEACH

**La Minitas**, Casa de Campo's main beach and site of a series of bars and restaurants all its own, is a small but immaculate beach and lagoon that requires a 10-minute shuttle-bus ride from the resort's central core. Transportation is provided by bus, or you can rent an electric golf cart. A bit farther afield (a 30-min. bus ride, but only a 20-min. boat ride), **Bayahibe** is a large, palm-fringed sandy crescent on a point jutting out from the shoreline. Finally, **Catalina** is a fine beach on a deserted island, surrounded by turquoise waters; it's just 45 minutes away by motorboat. Unfortunately, many other visitors from Casa de Campo have learned of the glories of this latter retreat, so you're not likely to have the sands to yourself.

## SPORTS & OTHER OUTDOOR PURSUITS

**Casa de Campo** is headquarters for just about any sporting activity or outdoor pursuit in the area. Call the resort's guest services staff at ☎ 809/523-3333 for more information. Casa del Mar weighs in with a heavy array of outdoor activities ranging from horseback riding to banana boating. Call ☎ 809/221-8880 for more details.

**FISHING** You can arrange **freshwater river-fishing trips** through Casa de Campo. 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. A 4-hour deep-sea fishing trip costs RD\$15,372 to RD\$20,496 (\$549–\$732) per boat, with 8 hours going for RD\$22,204 to RD\$30,744 (\$793–\$1,098).

**GOLF** *Golf* magazine declared Casa de Campo (☎ 809/523-3333, ext. 3187) "the finest golf resort in the world." The **Teeth of the Dog** ★★ course has been called "a thing of almighty beauty," and it is. The ruggedly natural terrain has seven holes skirting the ocean. Opened in 1977, **The Links** ★★ is an inland course modeled after some of the seaside courses of Scotland. In the late 1990s, the resort added a third golf course to its repertoire, **La Romana Country Club**, which tends to be used almost exclusively by residents of the surrounding countryside rather than by guests of Casa de Campo.

The cost for 18 holes of golf is RD\$4,480 (\$160) at the Links and RD\$5,544 (\$198) at Teeth of the Dog or the La Romana Country Club. (Some golf privileges may be included in packages to Casa de Campo.) You can also buy a 3-day membership, which lets you play all courses for RD\$7,056 (\$252) per person (for Casa de Campo guests only). A 7-day membership costs RD\$14,056 (\$502). You can hire caddies for RD\$700 (\$25); electric golf-cart rentals cost RD\$560 (\$20) per person per round. Each course is open 7:30am to 5:30pm daily. Call far in advance to reserve a tee time if you're not staying at the resort.

**HORSEBACK RIDING** Trail rides at Casa de Campo or Casa del Mar cost RD\$700 (\$25) per person for 1 hour, RD\$1,120 (\$40) for 2 hours. The stables shelter 250 horses, although only about 40 of them are available for trail rides. For more information, call **Casa del Campo** at ☎ 809/523-3333, ext. 5249, or **Casa del Mar** at ☎ 809/221-8880.

**SNORKELING** **Casa de Campo** has one of the most complete watersports facilities in the Dominican Republic. You can charter a boat for snorkeling. The resort maintains eight charter vessels, with a minimum of eight people. Full-day snorkeling trips to Isla Catalina cost RD\$980 (\$35) per snorkeler. Rental of fins and masks cost RD\$140 (\$5) per day, although they probably won't clock your time with a stopwatch; guests on all-inclusive plans use gear for free. Snorkeling is also included in the all-inclusive rates at **Casa del Mar** (☎ 809/221-8880).

**TENNIS** **Casa de Campo's** 13 clay courts are available from 7am to 9pm (they're lit at night). Charges are RD\$672 (\$24) per court per hour during the day or RD\$840 (\$30) at night. Lessons are RD\$1,708 (\$61) per hour with a tennis pro, and RD\$1,372 (\$49) with an assistant pro. Call far in advance to reserve a court if you're not staying at the resort. The four courts at **Casa del Mar** (☎ 809/221-8880) are reserved for the resort's all-inclusive guests.

## PARQUE NACIONAL DEL ESTE ★

The National Park of the East, its English name, lies in the south-eastern part of the island, comprising some 310 sq. km (121 sq. miles) of dry forest, one of the largest such forests in the Caribbean. The park is home to 112 known species of birds, a total of eight endemic to the Dominican Republic.

This is a most interesting park to explore as it is the site of trails, cliffs, caves, mangrove estuaries, sandy beaches, and even Taíno

## Altos de Chavón: An Artists' Colony

In 1976, a plateau 161km (100 miles) east of Santo Domingo was selected by Charles G. Bluhdorn, then chairman of Gulf + Western Industries, as the site for a remarkable project. Dominican stonecutters, woodworkers, and ironsmiths began the task that would produce **Altos de Chavón**, a flourishing Caribbean art center set above the canyon of the Río Chavón and the Caribbean Sea.

A walk down one of the cobblestone paths of Altos de Chavón reveals architecture reminiscent of another era at every turn. Coral block and terra-cotta brick buildings house artists' studios, craft workshops, galleries, stores, and restaurants. The **Church of St. Stanislaus** is the central attraction on the main plaza, with its fountain of the four lions, colonnade of obelisks, and panoramic views. Masses are conducted at this church every Saturday and Sunday at 5pm.

The **galleries** (☎ 809/523-8470) at Altos de Chavón offer an engaging mix of exhibits. In three distinct spaces—the Principal Gallery, the Rincón Gallery, and the Loggia—the work of well-known and emerging Dominican and international artists is showcased. The gallery has a consignment space where finely crafted silk-screen and other multiple works are available for sale. Exhibits change about every month.

Altos de Chavón's *talleres* are craft ateliers, where local artisans have been trained to produce ceramic, silk-screen, and woven-fiber products. From the clay apothecary jars with carnival devil lids to the colored tapestries of Dominican houses, the rich island folklore is much in evidence. The

Indian ruins. Traversing the park is hell, however, as no roads lead into its luxuriant interior. The usual method of exploring it is to hire a boat in Bayahibe and travel along the highlights at the water's edge. Often you'll see trails where you can hike into the interior.

The road leading into town ends at a car park, often filled with tour buses. If you're not part of a group, you can negotiate with one of the captains for a tour of the park, going as far as Peñón Gordo on the park's western coast. A 2-hour trip usually costs RD\$500 (\$18) per person.

posters, note cards, and printed T-shirts that come from the silk-screen workshops are among the most sophisticated in the Caribbean. All the products of Altos de Chavón's *talleres* are sold at **La Tienda** (☎ 809/523-3333, ext. 5398), the foundation village store.

The Altos de Chavón **Regional Museum of Archaeology** (☎ 809/523-8554) houses the objects of Samuel Pion, an amateur archaeologist and collector of treasures from the vanished Taíno tribes, the island's first settlers. The timeless quality of some of the museum's objects makes them seem strangely contemporary in design—one discovers sculptural forms that recall the work of Brancusi or Arp. The museum is open Tuesday to Sunday from 9am to 8pm. Entrance is free.

At the heart of the village's performing-arts complex is the 5,000-seat open-air **amphitheater**. Since its inauguration over a decade ago by Carlos Santana and the late Frank Sinatra, the amphitheater has hosted renowned concerts, symphonies, theater, and festivals, including concerts by Julio Iglesias and Gloria Estefan. The annual Heineken Jazz Festival has brought together such diverse talents as Dizzy Gillespie, Toots Thielmans, Randy Brecker, Shakira, Carlos Ponce, Carlo Vives, and Jon Secada.

The creations at **Everett Designs** (☎ 809/523-8331) are so original that many visitors mistake this place for a museum. Each piece of jewelry is handcrafted by Bill Everett in a mini-factory at the rear of the shop.

## SHOPPING

An artisans market, **El Artístico** (☎ 809/556-2273), lies on the northern side of Carretera Romana, Km 3.5, at a point 1km (½ mile) east of Yina Bambu Shop (see below). This is set up almost exclusively for tourists and offers a limited selection of arts and crafts. It's mainly for souvenirs, most of which are of dubious quality. The market is open daily from 7:30am to 7pm.

For more substantial shopping, head to **Yina Bambu Shop**, Km 4.5, Carretera Romana (☎ 809/550-8322), open daily 7:30am to

7pm. Lying on the south side of the main road into town, this is the best showcase in the area for Dominican handicrafts and furnishings, even amber necklaces and bracelets. The merchandise dims when compared with what's available in the Colonial Zone of Santo Domingo, but you may not be going there to shop.

If you're a true shopper, seeking some quality items, we suggest you head to Altos de Chavón (see above).

## LA ROMANA AFTER DARK

The best entertainment is at the hotels, where programs can change weekly based on their house count (or lack of guests thereof). One popular place is **El Pirata**, Km 12, Carretera San Pedro, Hotel Santana Beach Resort (☎ 809/412-5342). Since this is an all-inclusive, you can purchase a night pass for RD\$600 (\$22) entitling you to dinner and drinks. There's are shows on Wednesday and Fridays at 9pm, followed by dancing from 10:30pm to 2am when a deejay plays salsa, merengue, and pop. On-site is a casino, open daily from 8pm to 4am, where the usual games of chance, such as blackjack, are offered.

At the previously recommended Viva Dominicus Beach in Bayahibe (☎ 809/686-5658), **La Locura**, a dance club, is the scene of much of the local action. Deejays play the latest international hits along with a selection of salsa, merengue, and pop. You have to call the management during the day and arrange for a night pass since this is an all-inclusive resort. The cost of RD\$560 (\$20) entitles you to dinner, drinks, and any entertainment being presented that night. The club is usually open from 11:30pm or 12:30am to about 4am, though it may close earlier on less busy nights.

Many nonguests, willing to purchase night passes, can also go to the previously recommended **Coral Canoa (The Cocuyo Disco)**, in Bayahibe (☎ 809/682-2662). There are two types of night passes sold here, the regular pass costing RD\$1,120 to RD\$1,260 (\$40–\$45) for adults. This entitles you to a buffet and “national drinks” of the Dominican Republic, and it's good daily from 6 to 11pm. Night owls might want to purchase the “Disco Pass” for RD\$560 to RD\$700 (\$20–\$25), including admission to the disco and unlimited home-brewed libations. This pass is valid nightly from 11pm to 2am. No live entertainment is presented, but there's usually a “hot” deejay.

At Casa de Campo (see previous recommendation) **The Pot Bunker Sports Bar** (☎ 809/523-3333) is a popular gathering spot

at night, especially for male guests. Important sports events are broadcast live via satellite transmission on large screen TV sets while visitors cheer their home teams. From 5 to 11pm, a light menu, costing from RD\$280 to RD\$560 (\$9.95–\$20), is available, although the bar itself, with its table games and pool table, remains open daily from 3pm to midnight.