

LOOKING FOR A LESS-GLOSSY ALL-INCLUSIVE  
VACATION VENUE? TRY THE DOMINICAN REPUBLIC



SAY 'HOLA'  
TO THE NEW CARIBBEAN

**IF YOU'RE LOOKING** for something different than the glossy, established Caribbean destinations like Aruba or the Cayman Islands for your next all-inclusive vacation, try the sunny Dominican Republic.

While 15 years ago the Dominican was more likely a destination for your church's service group than for a sand and surf vacation, the island has a thriving tourism industry these days.

Less "slick" than some of its Caribbean counterparts, the Dominican city of Punta Cana offers a variety of sparkling oceanfront resorts that will leave you feel-

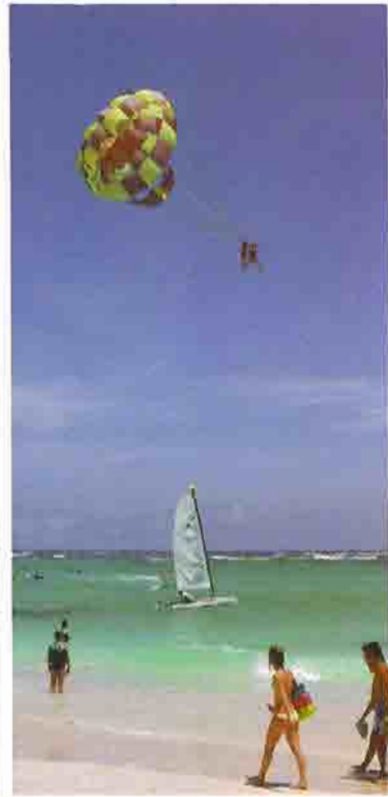
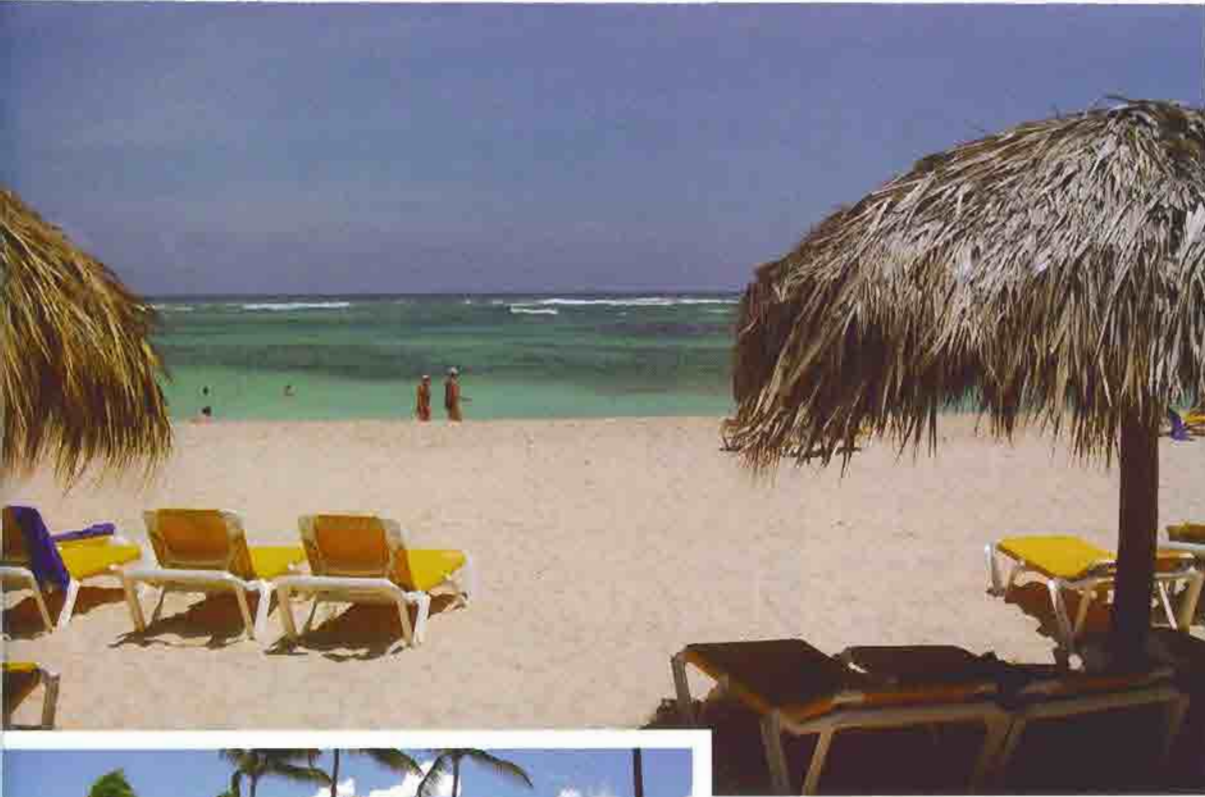
ing pampered, well-fed and carefree.

This lush tropical getaway is imperfect in a perfect way. The Dominican people haven't had decades to polish their tourism offerings. But the cynical attitude you'll find in some Caribbean destinations is absent here, too. The smiling locals go out of their way to welcome visitors, and your dollars help improve the island's standard of living. (Like many Caribbean islands, residents here still struggle with poverty.)

The eastern town of Punta Cana offers countless all-inclusive vacation options, including the adults-only



STORY AND PHOTOS  
BY KRISTIN STANKEWICZ



The Dominican city of Punta Cana offers a variety of sparkling oceanfront resorts and leisure options. While the Dominican people haven't had decades to polish their tourism offerings, the lush tropical getaway is imperfect in a perfect way. The Atlantic Ocean meets the Caribbean Sea off Punta Cana's coast, and the best snorkeling views are where the waters come together.

Secrets Excellence resort and the all-suite Iberostar Bavaro. Rates vary depending on season, but start around \$300 per night for two adults. True to the name, everything is included: food, drink, tips, activities, entertainment...there is really no need to leave your resort.

Rum is a Dominican specialty, so if you're a fan, you won't be disappointed. A word of warning: The white rum is very strong, but you'll barely taste it in the delicious fruity concoctions your bartender will create. Looking to drink something a little more adventurous than a pina colada? Try a bottle of local mojito, a popular mixture of white rum, sugar and mint leaves, said to have aphrodisiac properties.

If you'd rather sample a non-alcoholic Dominican specialty, the nation's coffee is "the second best coffee in the world, right after Colombia," according to an Iberostar staffer. (But Montezuma gets his revenge here, too. So if you are drinking water, avoid the tap.)

If cigars are your vice, the tiny local Cigar Museum gives you the chance to watch the hand-rolling process in action. Resort cigar shops are well-stocked with options for every smoker's palate. The discriminating cigar aficionado will be pleased to see Cuban cigars among the offerings, along with a variety of high-quality Dominican brands.

Mealtime at an all-inclusive resort is a delicious, currency-free experience. At the Iberostar, guests are given several opportunities for gourmet dining, including a

**RUM IS A DOMINICAN SPECIALTY, SO IF YOU'RE A FAN, YOU WON'T BE DISAPPOINTED. A WORD OF WARNING: THE WHITE RUM IS VERY STRONG, BUT YOU'LL BARELY TASTE IT IN THE DELICIOUS FRUITY CONCOCTIONS YOUR BARTENDER WILL CREATE.**

Japanese restaurant, a Mediterranean seafood eatery, an American-style steakhouse and more. An extensive buffet is available the rest of the time, including special touches such as made-to-order omelets at breakfast, steaming seafood paella at lunch and freshly grilled lobster tails at dinner.

At Secrets Excellence, diners have their choice of four ethnic restaurants, plus a seafood restaurant or the sizzling Texas Grill.

If you want to counteract the effects of all those delicious meals, most all-inclusive resorts offer enough activ-



ities to keep you busy for weeks: tennis, aerobics, beach volleyball, yoga, Latin dance lessons and more. Non-motorized water sports such as kayaking, snorkeling and windsurfing are usually included, too.

The Atlantic Ocean meets the Caribbean Sea off Punta Cana's coast, so some resort beaches face breezy Atlantic waters, others the calm Caribbean. The best snorkeling views are where the waters come together. Honeymooners Sam and Stacey Chambliss enjoyed the Caribbean beach at Secrets Excellence. "The weather was fantastic, and the ocean was like bath water," says Stacey Chambliss.

If you decide to venture away from your resort, recreational tours abound. Options include Jeep jungle tours, ATV trail rides and drive-your-own "James Bond" speedboat rentals. Group boat excursions focus on snorkeling, fishing, scuba diving or partying, depending on your preferred activity. Reputable trips can be booked through your hotel or tour company. If you don't choose to book this way, beware: Scam artists sometimes take unsus-

pecting tourists' money for "tours" that never happen.

While endless recreation beckons, many visitors opt to de-stress the old-fashioned way: lying on the beach, doing absolutely nothing (except perhaps sipping an icy Bahama Mama or iced tea). On the white sandy beaches, straw umbrellas and cabanas protect you from the strong Dominican sun, and chaise lounges invite you to relax with a good book.

If you wander down the beach from the resorts, vendors in colorful huts selling unique original art, handmade jewelry and other crafts will pursue your dollars with friendly shouts of, "For you, cheap, today!" If you decide to shop, bring your negotiating skills—they are handy.

A popular getaway for European tourists, you'll have the opportunity to make new friends from around the world ... just remember the global visitor base when it comes to beach etiquette, as you may see some women forego bikini tops, and men with Euro-style bathing suits.

If you're attracted to the idea of visiting a tropical island full of diverse visitors, breathtaking natural beauty, and

enough activities to keep you busy (or not) throughout your stay, an all-inclusive Dominican Republic vacation makes a perfect getaway. ■

Freelance writer Kristin Stankewicz of Appleton recently visited the Dominican Republic. She has previously written European travel stories for Panache and YOU magazines.

### IF YOU GO

- ▼ **Where:** Punta Cana, Dominican Republic.
- ▼ **Getting there:** Several major airlines fly into Punta Cana. Resorts offer airport pick-up.
- ▼ **Language:** Spanish, but most hospitality workers speak English.
- ▼ **Currency:** Dominican peso, conversion rate \$1 = approximately 32 Dominican pesos (most retailers and vendors accept U.S. dollars).
- ▼ **Climate:** Winter, highs in the mid-80s, lows in the upper 60s; summer is a few degrees warmer and more humid. Hurricane season is June to October.
- ▼ **Travel tips:** Bring a lot of small currency bills with you for shopping convenience. Most retailers accept U.S. dollars but will give change in pesos.
- ▼ **For more information:** [www.dominicanrepublic.com](http://www.dominicanrepublic.com)

*Quality at an affordable price.*



**Millwork • Stair Parts • Doors & Hardware  
Tongue & Groove Paneling • S4S Boards**



*Yes!*

we're open to the public

2601 W. Wisconsin Ave.  
Appleton, WI 54914  
**920.739.4712**

**See**

for yourself why  
J. Anthony Jewelers is the area's  
*Round Diamond Specialist.*

Our J. Anthony Signature Series round diamonds are not just beautiful, they're measurably beautiful. *Ins2™* technology lets you quantify for yourself the accuracy of the cut, the intensity of the light and the superiority of the ideal-cut diamond.

**J. Anthony Jewelers**  
*Jewelry • Goldsmiths*

*Two convenient locations*  
250 S. Commercial St.  
Downtown Neenah (next to the clock tower)  
704 S. Military Ave.  
Green Bay (in the corner of Military & Mason)

Mon, Tue, Wed & Fri  
10 a.m. to 6 p.m.  
Thursday  
10 a.m. to 8 p.m.  
Saturday  
10 a.m. to 4 p.m.  
Closed Sunday

*The Round Diamond Specialist*

50112509