

Dominican Republic

FOR THE TRAVELER



La Romana's Teeth of the Dog golf course has been ranked as one of the 50 best in the world

La Romana **From golf and activities to simple relaxation, something for everyone** BY JERRY SOVERINSKY

With miles of pristine beaches; an unspoiled, centuries-old National Park; several world-class golf courses; an American-style casino and a rich assortment of full-featured resorts, La Romana—an emerging tourist destination on the Dominican Republic's southeast coast—is the ideal vacation destination for honeymooners, families, water sports enthusiasts, outdoor adventurers and golfers.

From the moment you arrive on Hispaniola—the Caribbean's second-largest island (Haiti occupies the western third and the Dominican Republic the eastern two-thirds)—any pressures or anxieties from home quickly dissipate. Warm, tropical weather (average year-round temperatures range from 78-88 degrees) coaxes you from the airport as you head to La Romana (you can arrive by boat, too;

many cruise lines stop in La Romana).

Upon arrival, expect to be greeted by your resort's staff with a welcome cocktail (Brugal rum is the drink of choice). Dominicans are gracious, friendly hosts, and stories of your Dominican travel experience will undoubtedly include interactions with locals. (Conversation-starter tip: Brush up on your baseball trivia before arriving; Dominicans are huge fans

of the sport. Something like, “I love Big Papi, how ’bout you?” will work great.)

Turf and Surf

Once you’ve settled into your room, grab some powerful sunscreen—even on the cloudiest days in the Dominican Republic, you’ll need it—and head for the nearest beach, which is onsite at any of La Romana’s major resorts. Recognized internationally as some of the Caribbean’s most dramatic and beautiful beaches, La Romana’s sand spots have been certified “Blue Flag,” an exclusive eco-label presented to beaches and marinas that demonstrate strict adherence to water quality, environmental management and safety practices. Although you can spend a great deal of your vacation snoozing comfortably seaside, even the most stalwart landlubbers will want to venture out into the inviting Caribbean waters, even if just to cool a rapidly developing tan.

Although swimming is the popular activity here, sailing, snorkeling, windsurfing, kayaking and fishing are equally popular sports that can be enjoyed at any of La Romana’s resorts. And with the Caribbean’s endless blue and green waters as a landscape, guests can swim, drift and paddle with nary a thought of e-mail, Tivo or when you’ll finally earn that long overdue promotion.

Scuba fans will love the diving opportunities along the shores of La Romana, some of the Caribbean’s best. Below the clear blue waters lies an undersea world with unlimited opportunities for exploration, with ancient shipwrecks, underwater caverns and stunning coral reefs all beckoning visitors. There are more than 120 species of tropical fish here, all for you to meet firsthand as you venture out from any one of La Romana’s 28 dive sites. And no matter where you’re staying, all La Romana resorts offer on-site PADI certi-

fied dive centers, making booking excursions fast and easy.

Wealth of Activities

La Romana is renowned internationally for its championship golf courses, including three Pete Dye-designed courses (its Teeth of the Dog course at Casa de Campo resort has been ranked as one of the world’s 50 best) and a brand new P.B. Dye course. All offer rates that are significantly less than what you’d pay for similar caliber courses stateside, and tee times are far easier to reserve, too. Ask your resort’s guest services rep for help.

Make time for at least one off-resort excursion. Whether you want to explore the prehistoric Maravillas Cave, visit the recreated 16th-century village of Altos de Chavon, sail the Caribbean on a catamaran, or rent an ATV and cruise through local sugar cane fields, local tour operators can provide you with all the support you need to explore La Romana in great detail (and at modest prices).

While your resort will provide all of the familiar foods and drinks from home, try local specialties that include *pescado con coco* (fish cooked in coconut milk sauce) and *catibias* (meat-filled flour fritters). And don’t forget to wash both down with a properly chilled Presidente, the beer of choice for Dominicans.

With your belly properly nourished, it’s time for some after-hours entertainment. You could meringue—and do the cha-cha—poolside with your resort’s ever-cheerful staff. Or you could catch the tail end of the typical cruise ship-like entertainment revue that your resort probably offers (with enough Brugal in your system, who couldn’t enjoy a Captain & Tenille-themed karaoke contest?). Or, if you’re the gaming type, you might want to head over to La Romana’s recently unveiled American-style casino, the Dominicus



The fifth hole of La Estancia golf course

TIPS

Although airports in Punta Cana and Santo Domingo offer more flight options, spend a bit more and fly directly into La Romana’s cozy regional airport. The modest fare increase (if any) will be more than offset by the added transfer costs you’ll incur from either of the other two airports, both of which are roughly 90-minute drives away. Also, if you plan on spending most of your time at your resort or on guided excursions, you can get by just fine with U.S. dollars. There’s no need to convert money into Dominican pesos, a closed currency that’s difficult to convert once back in the U.S.

Casino. The bustling venue offers an assortment of games for all budgets, great eating options and Vegas-style shows. And no need to worry about dishing out big bucks for roundtrip taxi transfers: The casino offers daily complimentary shuttles to and from all major resorts.

Make no mistake: Although La Romana is an emerging vacation region, its facilities are in no way raw and unpolished. They’re first class in every respect, ensuring a vacation experience that will exceed the expectations of even the most cultivated travelers. 🏠

Dominican Republic

FOR THE AGENT

WHEN IN LA ROMANA...

This southeastern Dominican Republic destination offers world-class golf, four- and five-star resorts and unsurpassed natural beauty



Enjoy an al fresco massage at Casa del Mar

Getting There:

La Romana is served by three international airports. La Romana International Airport (LRM), the most convenient at less than a 20-minute drive from all La Romana resorts, is served by American Airlines (www.aa.com) and USA 3000 (www.usa3000.com). Santo Domingo International Airport (SDQ) and Punta Cana International Airport (PUJ), each a 90-minute drive from La Romana, offer additional carrier options, including Delta Air Lines (www.delta.com), Northwest Airlines (www.nwa.com), United Airlines (www.united.com), Jet Blue Airways (www.jetblue.com), US Airways (www.usairways.com) and Spirit Airlines (www.spiritair.com), among several international airlines.

For elite clients arriving by private jet, contact Servair Aero Base (aerosev1@yahoo.com, 809-813-9018) or IAS

International Aviation Services (jimmy@ias.com.do, 809-813-9114). For those arriving by yacht, visit www.marinacasadecampo.com for more information.

Getting Around:

If your clients suggest renting a car, talk them out of it. Dominican roads are poorly marked, full of potholes and teeming with motorbikes.

Taxis and pre-arranged transfers are the best bets. All resorts offer airport transfers and taxi reservation services. Advise clients to negotiate taxi fees prior to their transfers—and via their hotel's concierge or other representative if possible. Official taxis are yellow and display a Ministry of Tourism-approved "Taxi Turistico" logo.

Tour Operators:

Tropical Tours (www.tropicaltours

romana.com.do, 809-523-2028) is the dominant tour operator in La Romana, with more than 25 years of experience. With a fleet of nearly three dozen vehicles and relationships with all DR tourism contacts, they're well prepared to look after your clients with a bevy of services and established excursions. They pay agents 10 percent commission.

Lodging:

Casa de Campo (www.casadecampo.com.do, 800-877-3643) offers visitors round-the-clock, five-star pampering, with more than 7,000 acres of resort paradise teeming with every conceivable luxury and indulgence. Its 300 immaculate guest rooms and 150 private villa homes offer unequalled comfort. Its facilities are world-class, too: three championship golf courses, a beach, tennis, shooting center, equestrian center, fitness center, spa, watersports, upscale shops, boutiques, and supervised children's areas are all on-site. Packages are both all-inclusive and à la carte; if choosing the latter, lunch and dinner are available at the resort's numerous dining venues.

Sunscape Casa del Mar (www.sunscapecasadelmar.com.do) caters to a predominantly American crowd. Service and facilities are first-rate—not as luxurious as Casa de Campo, but suitable for four-star clients. More than 50 percent of its 751 guest rooms have been recently renovated and offer clean, comfortable spaces with modern conveniences. Although the all-inclusive resort provides bountiful, delicious meals at eight onsite restaurants, romantic couples should opt at least once for its beachside dining experience. For \$90, they'll get a private

candlelit dinner at a seafront table, the perfect romantic setting. Facilities are also top-notch here: watersports, tennis, a fitness center and supervised children's activities are all onsite.

Viva Wyndham (www.vivaresorts.com, 800-WYNDHAM) offers two adjacent resorts: the Dominicus Beach (DB) and Dominicus Palace (DP), which, combined, provide nearly 900 rooms, bungalows and suites that serve a primarily European clientele. Many of the resorts' facilities are shared by guests at either property, including tennis courts, archery, spa, non-motorized watersports, evening entertainment and several restaurants. DP's rooms are noticeably superior to those of DB, where the rooms are dated and in need of renovation. DP also offers complimentary à la carte restaurant dining to its guests, while DB patrons pay a supplemental \$10 fee. Both resorts are kid-friendly, though couples will also feel at home here. Take note: Based on my recent stay, Viva's customer service was at times lacking, an oversight that might leave your clients frustrated. Additionally, guests staying at DB might become tired of the nightly entertainment offered in its otherwise attractive theater. Although the acts are enthusiastic and well-attended, those seeking romance or solitude in the privacy of their hotel room or bungalow might become annoyed at the show's bass-intensive music, from which there is no escape.

Dining:

Casa de Campo, Casa del Mar and the Viva resorts all offer ample dining choices. If you're sending clients to La Estancia for golf, recommend that they dine at the nearby **Vecchia Caserma** (www.vecchiacaserma.com, 809-813-6405), an authentic Italian restaurant that serves Italian fare in a beautifully rustic setting.



Dinner at the Casa del Mar

Attractions and Excursions:

Altos de Chavon (www.altosdechavon.com) is a replicated, 16th-century Mediterranean village within Casa de Campo that offers restaurants, shops, a gallery and an archaeological museum. Check out the concert schedule of its amphitheater, an impressive 5,000-seat venue that was christened in 1982 by Frank Sinatra and continues to attract world-class acts.

Book tee times for your golfing clients at any of Casa de Campo's three Pete Dye championship courses (players need not be guests of the resort to play). The Teeth of the Dog, with many of its holes hugging the rugged Caribbean coastline, consistently ranks as one of the world's 50 best golf courses. Nearby is the brand new **La Estancia Golf Resort** (www.legr.com, 809-689-7027). Its championship course has been carved strategically to take advantage of breathtaking natural vistas, and its expertly trained staff will tend to all of your clients' needs (overnight lodging is available, too, in full-featured golf cottages and villas).

Extra-resort excursions abound in the DR and can be booked through incoming tour operator **Tropical Tours** (www.tropicaltoursromana.com.do, 809-523-2028). Among the more popular: privately guided ATV tours chug through sugar cane fields and stop in sleepy Dominican hamlets; full-day catamaran tours provide festive outings to nearby Saona Island, where guests enjoy a scrumptious picnic barbecue before jetting back to their starting point via motorboat; snorkeling and scuba diving excursions offer up-close looks at the more than 120 species of tropical fish; and the nearby **Maravillas Cave** (www.cuevadelasmaravillas.com, 809-951-9009) offers guests an extraordinary subterranean peek at centuries of stalagmite and stalactite formations.

At night, send your clients to the new **Dominicus Casino** (www.casino.dominicus.com, 809-554-8917), a bustling venue that offers high rollers the chance to challenge Lady Luck.

Vegas-style shows kicked off in February, and three restaurants offer friendly dining options. The casino is open daily from 4 p.m. to 4 a.m., with complimentary shuttles serving all major La Romana resorts.

Entry Requirements: Visitors must pay a compulsory \$10 fee prior to passing through customs (where only a passport is required).

Other Tips and Notes: If your clients plan on spending their time exclusively at a resort or on guided excursions, they can get by just fine with U.S. dollars. There's no need to convert money into Dominican pesos, a closed currency that's difficult to convert once back in the U.S. Major credit cards are accepted at all resorts, golf courses and most restaurants.

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