

# Península de Samaná



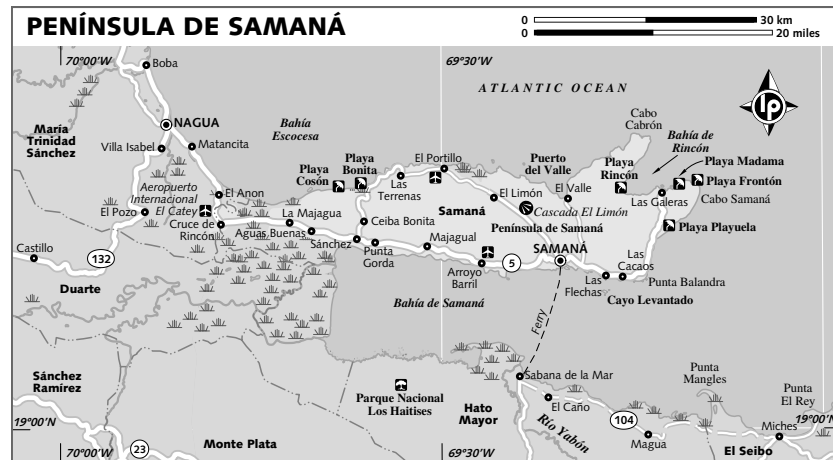
The Península de Samaná is a small sliver of land – just 40km long and 15km wide – of rolling mountains, a sea of hillocks pushing their way to a long coastline of protected beaches and picturesque coves. A new international airport and a new highway to the capital, either ominous signs of development or economic lifelines to the rest of the country and the world, suggest that Samaná's character, defined in part by its relative inaccessibility, is trending more to the mainland and the mainstream. However, for now it's still a place where the stereotypical image of a vacation in the DR need not apply; where the European vibe is as strong as an espresso at a Las Terrenas café; where escape – both from the workaday, urban milieu of New York or Paris and from Santiago or Santo Domingo – is the operative word; where French and Italian are at least as useful as Spanish; and where it's only a short *motoconcho* ride from a luxurious second home to an open-air disco pumping merengue.

Tens of thousands of tourists, following the migratory pattern of the North Atlantic humpback whale, bus and fly in to Samaná from mid-January to mid-March, seeing little else of the peninsula – though if there's time for only one thing, this is definitely it. More urban and more Dominican than either Las Terrenas or Las Galeras, Samaná is also the transport hub for bus connections to Puerto Plata and Santo Domingo, and for the ferry across the bay to Sabana de la Mar and the southeast. Las Terrenas, the most developed in terms of tourism, is the place to base yourself if you crave a lively social scene, and Las Galeras, a sleepy one-road town, boasts several of the best beaches in the DR, their beauty enhanced by the effort it takes to get there.

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## HIGHLIGHTS

- Feel small – very small – after witnessing the majesty of 30-ton humpbacks breaching and diving on a **whale-watching trip** (p145) in Bahía de Samaná
- Take a long walk, and we mean *long*, on the gorgeous sand of **Playa Rincón** (p151)
- Snorkel undisturbed around some of the best reefs the peninsula has to offer at **Playa Frontón** (p151)
- Down a cocktail at an oceanside restaurant in cosmopolitan **Las Terrenas** (p160)
- Take in the rugged mountain scenery of Samaná's interior on a trip to 52m-high **Cascada El Limón** (p145)



## HISTORY

Because of Bahía de Samaná's fortuitous geography – its deep channel, eastward orientation and easy-to-defend mouth, perfect for a naval installation – the Península de Samaná has been coveted, fought over and bought several times over. At least six different countries, including Haiti, France, Spain, the US and Germany, have either occupied the Samaná area or sought to do so.

Founded as a Spanish outpost in 1756, Samaná was first settled by émigrés from the Canary Islands, but the political turmoil of Hispaniola – the sale of the island to the French, a Haitian revolution and two British invasions (see p29) – kept Samaná town's population growing and changing. It was deemed a prize even as early as 1807 during the brief French possession of Hispaniola. France's commander in Santo Domingo, an ambitious leader no doubt, proposed building a city named Port Napoleon in Samaná, but France was dispossessed of the island before the plan could move forward.

After its independence from Spain, the DR was taken over by Haiti, which controlled Hispaniola from 1822 to 1844. During this period Haiti invited more than 5000 freed and escaped slaves from the US to settle on the island. About half moved to the Samaná area. Today, a community of their descendants still speaks a form of English.

During Haitian rule, France pressured its former colony to cede the Península de Samaná in return for a reduction in the debt

Haiti owed it. Incredibly, Haiti had been forced to pay restitution to France for land taken from French colonists in order to gain international recognition. Of course, France never paid restitution to former slaves for their ordeal.

After Dominican independence from Haiti in 1844, the new Dominican government feared Haiti would invade, so sought foreign assistance from France, England and Spain. The DR eventually resubmitted to Spanish rule in 1861, and Spain immediately sent a contingent of settlers to the Samaná area and reinforced the military installations on Cayo Levantado, a large island (and site of a luxury all-inclusive resort today) near the mouth of the bay.

Even after independence in 1864, the Península de Samaná remained a tempting prize for other countries. Beginning in 1868, the US, under President Ulysses S Grant, sought to purchase the peninsula from the DR in order to build a naval base there. Dominican president and strongman Buenaventura Báez agreed to the sale in order to obtain the money and weapons he needed to stay in power. However, the US Senate, under pressure from Dominican exile groups and strong opposition from France and the UK, rejected the proposal in 1871. A year later, Báez arranged to lease the area to the US-based Samaná Bay Company for 99 years. To the relief of most Dominicans, the company fell behind on its payments and Baez's successor, Ignacio María González, rescinded

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the contract in 1874. The US revisited the idea of annexing Samaná in 1897 as the Spanish-American war loomed, but decided to build its Caribbean base in Guantánamo Bay, Cuba after it quickly defeated Spain.

German intentions toward the Península de Samaná are less clear, but US documents from the 1870s suggest that Germany was also seeking to establish a military base in the Caribbean. In 1916, during WWI, the US occupied the DR in part because it feared that Germany was seeking to establish itself here.

## GETTING THERE & AROUND

Península de Samaná is now more easily accessible by air because of the new Aeropuerto Internacional El Catey, on the highway between Nagua and Sánchez. It receives international flights from San Juan, Puerto Rico (American Eagle) and various cities in Europe (Air Comet, Condor, LTU, CanJet, Corsair, Skyservice, Neos, Sunwing and Air Transat). Tourism on the peninsula is likely to be transformed by this airport.

Two other airports – ‘international’ by name only – serve the peninsula. Several small domestic airlines have regularly scheduled flights to Aeropuerto Internacional El Portillo, several kilometers west of Las Terrenas, and during the height of whale-watching season less frequently to the otherwise charter-only Aeropuerto Internacional Arroyo Barril near Samaná.

Other than arriving by cruise ship, the only sea option is the regular ferry service between Samaná and Sabana de la Mar in the southeast. Cars are not allowed, the boats themselves vary from rickety and untrustworthy to serviceable, and the schedule is subject to the weather.

A new highway, said to cut the travel time from Santo Domingo to Samaná to a mere two hours, was scheduled to open in early 2008 but financing and construction hiccups have meant delays. As is their wont in the DR, some drivers have already begun to use portions of the new blacktop even though other parts are impassable. From Santo Domingo, it will pass through Los Merenas, Malta Moreno, Boya, Los Mapolos, Las Coles, Rincón Molinillos and finally Cruce de Rincón, which is almost 20km west of Sánchez; once the highway is operational, expect heavy traffic. Until then, it's a four- to five-hour drive from Santo Domingo. Take Hwy Duarte north to San Francisco de Macoris, Castillo, Nagua, Sánchez and finally

### FIVE WAYS TO GET A NEW PERSPECTIVE ON THE PENÍNSULA DE SAMANÁ

Other than trains (well, and hovercrafts), just about every mode of transportation is available on the Península de Samaná. Each provides a unique way of seeing and understanding this compact and varied land.

- By plane – Approach Samaná from the air for a bird's-eye view of the rugged interior.
- By boat – Arrive on the ferry from Sabana de la Mar to get a sense of the peninsula's isolation.
- By horse – Head out on a trail around Las Galeras to reach remote beaches and coves.
- By ATV – Rumble around Las Terrenas like a European expat out for their daily bread.
- By foot – Make your way with foot power along kilometer after kilometer of uninterrupted beach.

Samaná. From Puerto Plata, it's a three- to four-hour drive east along Hwy 5.

For more information, see p255.

## EASTERN PENÍNSULA DE SAMANÁ

### SAMANÁ

pop 12,500

For much of the year, Samaná follows the slow daily rhythms of an ordinary Dominican town: not much happens; fishermen's days are lived on the water; people pass through on their way to Las Terrenas and Las Galeras or to the mainland via the daily ferry; and the Malecón (main street; literally ‘sea wall’) takes on a somnolent air. It's a compact place built on a series of bluffs overlooking Bahía de Samaná, with little to distinguish it from other more charming towns on the peninsula. In fact, it remained an isolated fishing village until 1985, when the first whale-watching expedition set out. Because North Atlantic humpbacks find the bay water particularly suitable for their annual version of speed dating from mid-January to mid-March, Samaná

is transformed by tens of thousands of tourists who flock here to go on a whale-watching tour, a natural spectacle with few equals.

### Orientation

Arriving in town from the direction of El Limón or Sánchez, it's about a kilometer downhill past the municipal market where the *gua-gua* (small bus) station is, around several traffic circles and along a newly built faux Caribbean village to the main street – Av Malecón or Av la Marina. Most of the restaurants, banks and bus stations are located here. The port is across the street from a small shady park near where the buses leave from. Several of the hotels are all reachable by foot, but are a bit far if you're carrying bags.

### Information

#### EMERGENCY

**Politur** (tourist police; ☎ 809-754-3066; Av Francisco de Rosario Sánchez; 🕒 24hr) On the traffic circle near Av Circunvalación.

#### INTERNET ACCESS & TELEPHONE

**CompuCentro Samaná** (☎ 809-538-3146; cnr Calles Julio Labandier & Santa Barbara; per hr US\$2.10; 🕒 9am-noon & 3-6pm Mon-Fri)

#### LAUNDRY

**Lavandería Santa Barbara** (Calle Santa Barbara; 🕒 8:30am-6pm Mon-Sat) Same-day or overnight service available at US\$1.50 per lb (450g).

#### MEDICAL SERVICES

**Clinic Assist** (Av Francisco de Rosario Sánchez) Doctors on call 24 hours. Located in the pastel faux village.

**Farmacia Giselle** (☎ 809-538-2303; cnr Calles Santa Barbara & Julio Labandier; 🕒 8am-10pm Mon-Sat, 8am-noon Sun) Good selection of meds and toiletries.

**Farmacia Maritere** (Av Francisco Rosario de Sánchez) On the second traffic circle up from the Malecón, on the road to Sánchez.

**Hospital Municipal** (Calle San Juan; 🕒 24hr) A very basic hospital near the Palacio de Justicia.

#### MONEY

**Banco Popular** (Av Malecón; 🕒 8:15am-4pm Mon-Fri, 9am-1pm Sat) Located on the Malecón across from the ferry dock.

**BanReservas** (Calle Santa Barbara; 🕒 8am-5pm Mon-Fri, 9am-1pm Sat) One block north of the Malecón.

**Scotiabank** (Av Francisco Rosario de Sánchez; 🕒 8am-4pm Mon-Fri, 9am-1pm Sat) Closest ATM to the *gua-gua* terminal and the municipal market.

### POST

**Post office** (cnr Calles Santa Barbara & 27 de Febrero; 🕒 8:30am-5pm Mon-Fri)

### Sights & Activities

#### WHALE-WATCHING

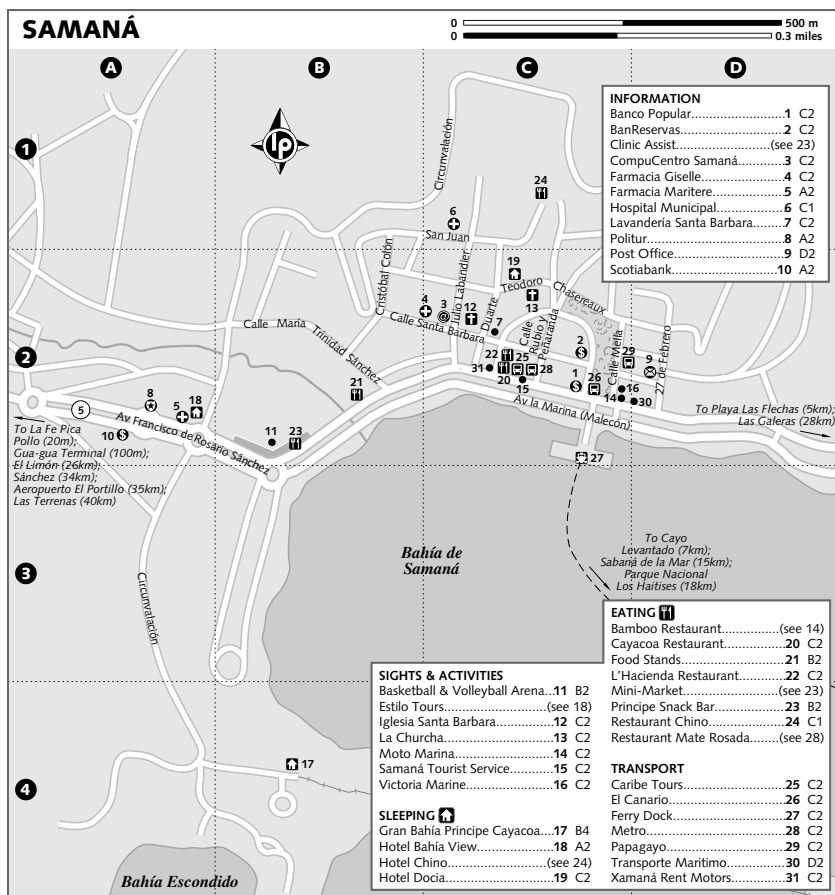
For sheer awe-inspiring, ‘the natural world is an amazing thing’ impact, a whale-watching trip is hard to beat. Around 45,000 people travel to Samaná every year from January 15 to March 15 to see the majestic acrobatics of these massive creatures. Try to avoid coming here during Carnival (celebrated throughout February) and on February 27, which is the Independence Day holiday for Dominicans, making it the busiest day of the year.

Most of the whale-watching companies have a morning and afternoon trip. There's little difference in terms of your likelihood of seeing whales, and although the water may be slightly rougher in the afternoon, it also tends to be quieter, with fewer boats out. There are around 43 vessels in total: eight companies, all owned or at least partly owned by Dominicans from Samaná, and around 12 independent operators. A co-management and self-regulation agreement was established in 1994 between the boat owners and various departments of the Dominican government, including the Ministry of Tourism and the Ministry of the Environment. A manual of rules and responsible behavior was created and every year all the stakeholders sign it to renew their commitment. One of the more important objectives is ensuring a minimum boat size of 8.7m: in big seas small boats are low to the water and sometimes aren't aware of the whales until they're too close. See boxed text, p148 for more about the whales, and p147 for information about how to see this amazing spectacle.

Private vessels are strictly prohibited from whale-watching; this applies to yachts and boats of any size. They can only transit into or out of the bay.

#### CASCADA EL LIMÓN

A trip to this 52m-high **waterfall**, a short distance from the town of El Limón, is a chance to experience Samaná's rugged interior and revel in some breathtaking mountain scenery. Travel agencies in Samaná offer trips here for around US\$45, including transport, horses, guide and lunch. However, it's perfectly easy and much cheaper to do the trip yourself by



taking a *gua-gua* to El Limón. See p156 for more details.

### PARQUE NACIONAL LOS HAITISES

This national park, with its tiny, jungly islands and thick mangrove forests, makes for great exploring by boat or kayak. Victoria Marine and other outfits in town offer trips there for around US\$55 per person, including a guide and transport to and inside the park; see opposite. For more information on the park see p140.

### CAYO LEVANTADO

Only the western third of this lush island 7km from Samaná is open to the public; the eastern two-thirds is now occupied by a five-star hotel development (see opposite). The public

beach here is gorgeous – white sand and turquoise waters – but the idyll is somewhat marred by the Disneyfication of the experience. Large cruise ships dock here regularly, and the facilities, including a restaurant and bar and two thousand lounge chairs, don't offer much peace and quiet. Touts wander the beach looking for tourists who want to have their photographs taken with exotic animals, some endangered and on leashes, such as parrots, boa constrictors, monkeys and even sea lions – not a practice to be encouraged. If you choose to visit, try going in mid- to late afternoon, when most of the activity is winding down. Boatmen at the pier make the trip for US\$10 to US\$15 per person round-trip; if you have a group of six to eight people you can

negotiate the round-trip for US\$60. Another option is to travel to Carenero, a village 8km east of Samaná where there are 10 boats with permits (round-trip US\$35 per person) or wait at Gran Bahía Príncipe Cayo Levantado's mainland wharf, where guests are ferried to and from the resort, only 1km further on, and join a group for around US\$9 per person.

### PLAYA LAS FLECHAS

This small beach several kilometers east of Samaná is thought by many historians to be the site of a small and short battle between Columbus' crew and the Ciguayos, a Taino *cacique* (chiefdom), in which the Spaniards were driven back to their ship. A week later, somehow their differences were reconciled and they formed an alliance against the rival *caciques*.

### Tours

**Victoria Marine** (☎ 809-538-2494; www.whalesamana.com; cnr Calle Mella & Av Malecón; adult/under 5yr/5-10yr US\$55/free/30; ☎ 9am-1pm, 3-6pm) is Samaná's most recommended whale-watching outfit. It's owned and operated by Canadian marine biologist Kim Beddall, who was the first person to recognize the scientific and economic importance of Samaná's whales, back in 1985 (see boxed text, p148). Victoria Marine tours use a large two-deck boat with capacity for 60 people (though most tours have around 40). The skilled captains religiously observe the local boat-to-whale distance and other regulations – most of which Beddall helped create – while on-board guides offer interesting facts and information in five languages over the boat's sound system. Sodas and water are provided free of charge. Tours leave at 9am and last three to four hours. There is also a 1:30pm trip when demand is high, and tours can include a stop at Cayo Levantado on the way back.

Several other agencies also offer whale-watching excursions, as well as trips to El Limón waterfall and Parque Nacional Los Haitises, both for about US\$55 per person. Most of these will generally have a tour guide as part of a larger group who can often answer questions, though there are no permanent naturalists associated with these operators.

**Estilo Tours** (☎ 809-538-2782; estiloutour\_sam@verizon.net.do; Av Malecón 1; ☎ 8:30am-6pm) Next to Hotel Bahía View.

**Moto Marina** (☎ 809-538-2302; motomarina@yahoo.com; Av la Marina 3; ☎ 8am-6pm)

**Samaná Tourist Service** (☎ 809-538-2848; samana.tour@codetel.net.do; Av la Marina 6; ☎ 8:30am-12:30pm & 2:30-6pm Mon-Fri, 8:30am-12:30pm Sat)

### Sleeping

There's little reason to stay in Samaná proper and most people booking whale-watching or Los Haitises trips do so from Las Terrenas, Las Galeras or further afield.

**Hotel Docia** (☎ 809-538-2041; cnr Teodoro Chasereaux & Duarte; r per person US\$15; (P)) The rooms at this concrete hotel on a hill are certainly no-frills, with not much other than a bed and nightstand, but for budget travelers that might be enough. Complimentary coffee in the morning and use of the fridge in the kitchen are pluses.

**Hotel Bahía View** (☎ 809-538-2186; Av Circunvalación 4; r with/without air-con US\$27/24; (A)) A longstanding popular hotel, the Bahía View unfortunately doesn't have great views of Bahía. Definitely ask for a room with a balcony anyway (construction has obstructed some sight lines). Each of the 10 rooms is arranged differently, with multiple beds, but all have high ceilings and clean, modern bathrooms.

**Hotel Chino** (☎ 809-538-2215; Calle San Juan 1; s/d US\$60/75; (P)) Located above a Chinese restaurant on top of a hill, Hotel Chino's rooms have balconies with fantastic views of town and the waterfront. But while the rooms are shiny and clean, with cable TV and air-con, there's no lounge area or other amenities, and not a beach within walking distance.

Bahía Príncipe has two resorts in the area. The older of the two, **Gran Bahía Príncipe Cayacoa** (☎ 809-538-3131; www.bahiaprincipeusa.com; r per person US\$100; (P)) is perched on a cliff 6km east of Samaná with spectacular views of the bay; maybe even of humpbacks during whale season. Food and rooms, however, are mediocre. If the beach here, accessed via an outdoor elevator, isn't to your liking, there are free daily shuttles from this resort to the **Gran Bahía Príncipe Cayo Levantado** (☎ 809-538-3131; www.bahiaprincipeusa.com; Cayo Levantado; r from US\$200; (P)) and its beautiful beach. This new five-star resort is a step above the Cayacoa in every category, including cuisine and room décor. The downside is you're on an island and need to take a boat (provided by the hotel) to get there... Well, that's the upside too.

## A WHALE OF A TIME

Canadian Kim Beddall, a marine mammal specialist since 1983 and pioneer of the whale-watching industry in the DR, has devoted herself to maintaining a healthy environment for the whales and a healthy living for the people of Samaná.

**How many North Atlantic humpbacks come to these waters every year?** The estimated population is 10,000 to 12,000, and almost all of these whales spend part of the winter in Dominican waters. During the peak months here from January to March, there are maybe 200 to 300 whales in the bay itself, but they don't hang out in large groups – they're spread out and others are in transit.

**Why do the humpbacks come to these waters?** It's like the world's largest singles bar: they come to mate and calve – we see an average of 12 new calves a year in Bahía de Samaná. We think humpbacks come specifically to Samaná because they like certain depths, around 60 feet to 80 feet; within 2km outside the bay it drops to 600m to 700m – good sound transmission. The wind conditions are right, as is the salinity of the bay mouth; it seems that one of the reasons they may enter the less saline waters inside the bay is to cleanse themselves of parasites – adult humpbacks carry with them on average around one ton of parasites.

**Are the humpbacks found in other waters around the DR?** The Bahía de Samaná is part of the National Marine Mammal Sanctuary of the Dominican Republic, covering approximately 27,000 sq km. It's one of the largest [such sanctuaries] in the world, and includes Silver Bank, Navidad Bank and Bahía de Samaná. Silver Bank is around 70 miles north of Puerto Plata and Navidad Bank is 45 miles northeast of Cape Samaná. The rest of the year these whales can be found feeding anywhere from the eastern seaboard of the US to the Arctic Circle, including Greenland and all the way to Norway.

**What is the DR's official position concerning the whale-watching industry?** The DR has no whaling history and promotes responsible whale watching as an economic alternative to whaling

## Eating & Drinking

The majority of restaurants are located along Av Malecón.

**La Fe Pica Pollo** (Av Francisco de Rosario Sánchez; mains US\$3.50; ☎ lunch & dinner) A small hole in the wall close to the *gua-gua* terminal and the municipal market, serving tasty fried chicken and rice plus a few other Dominican dishes.

**Principe Snack Bar** (Av Malecón; mains US\$4-6; ☎ 10am-midnight) Part of the brightly painted fake village that stretches along the western part of Av Malecón, this place is a snack bar dressed up as an elegant restaurant. Owned and operated by the resort chain of the same name, Principe Snack Bar has an indoor dining area that is the nicest in town and perfect for a drink, which makes the menu of chicken fingers (US\$4) and hamburgers (US\$5.50) something of a surprise. The outdoor patio is pleasant, especially at night when the air cools and a breeze blows in from the bay.

**Restaurant Chino** (☎ 809-538-2215; Calle San Juan 1; mains US\$4.50-15; ☎ 11am-11pm) Up a steep flight of stairs several blocks north of the pier, this restaurant has commanding views of the bay and town below. There's indoor and outdoor seating and the eclectic menu includes Dominican

and standard international dishes along with pages of Cantonese-style specialties.

There are a number of restaurants along the Malecón with similar menus – fish, meat and pasta – and equally excellent vantages from which to watch the world go by very slowly, or for a drink late into the evening. Try the following places:

**L'Hacienda Restaurant** (Calle Santa Barbara; mains US\$3-12; ☎ breakfast, lunch & dinner)

**Restaurant Mate Rosada** (Av Malecón; mains US\$4-11; ☎ lunch & dinner)

**Bamboo Restaurant** (Av Malecón; mains US\$5-9; ☎ breakfast, lunch, dinner) Near Calle Mella.

**Cayaco Restaurant** (Av Malecón; mains US\$6-12; ☎ lunch & dinner)

You can also get cheap eats at a series of food stands that line Av Malecón near Calle Maria Trinidad Sánchez. Beginning around 6pm and lasting until the early hours of the morning, fried chicken is served up with Presidente beers for Dominican and foreign customers alike. If you have trouble finding the party – which you probably won't – just listen for the *bachata* (Dominican music) blasting from the west side of town.

in the wider Caribbean. The country is in the process of becoming a pro-conservation member of the International Whaling Commission (IWC). To date six countries vote with Japan in favor of reinstating commercial whaling: Antigua, St Lucia, St Kitts, St Vincent and the Grenadines, Commonwealth of Dominica, and Grenada. These countries' waters are part of the general migratory area for North Atlantic humpbacks. These countries receive economic assistance from Japan – the assumption of many people is that they are being rewarded for their vote. Starting in 1982, there was a 10-year moratorium on whale hunting, this was extended in 1992, but there's no real way to enforce the ban other than through voluntary compliance.

**What's the most immediate threat to the health of the North Atlantic humpback population?** Considering that humpbacks are coastal species, and so brush up against humans and everything that comes with us, they are surprisingly tolerant and resilient animals, but they are still classified as a vulnerable species by the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES). They like to occupy shallow waters close to shore, areas of intense human activity. Entanglement in fishing gear, contamination of feeding and reproductive habitats, uncontrolled coastal development, high concentrations of vessel traffic, unregulated whale-watching and the rapidly developing cruise ship market in the Caribbean, along with sound contamination, may all have impacts on humpbacks that we do not yet fully understand. Global warming and climate change may affect migratory routes, feeding and reproductive grounds, forcing species to move to other areas they previously have not occupied.

**What's your advice for tourists?** Whale watch responsibly everywhere you go on vacation; only in this way can you give local communities an economic alternative to whaling. Only whale watch with permitted vessels. Here in Samaná, all have numbered yellow flags from the Ministry of the Environment, and a permit they can show you. Learn what the regulations are and ask your captain to comply. Ask if there is a naturalist on board and also ask as many questions as possible to reinforce the idea that tourists are concerned and want people with expertise.

## Getting There & Away

### AIR

The nearest airport in regular operation is **Aeropuerto Internacional El Portillo** (EPS; ☎ 809-248-2289), just outside of Las Terrenas (p161). The new **Aeropuerto Internacional El Catey** (AZS; ☎ 809-338-0094), 40km west of Samaná, receives international flights. The closest airstrip to Samaná, **Aeropuerto Internacional Arroyo Barril**, receives mostly charter flights only. For details of domestic and international airlines servicing the DR, see p352.

### BUS

Facing the pier, **Caribe Tours** (☎ 809-538-2229; Av Malecón) offers services to Santo Domingo at 7am, 8:30am, 10am, 1pm, 2:30pm and 4pm (US\$8.50, 4½ hours, daily). The same bus stops along the way at Sánchez (US\$2, 30 minutes), Nagua (US\$2.15, one hour) and San Francisco de Macoris (US\$3, 1½ hours). A block west, **Metro** (☎ 809-538-2851; cnr Av Malecón & Calle Rubio y Peñaranda) offers a similar service (US\$8, 4½ hours, twice daily at 7:30am and 3:30pm). Like its competitor, it stops at Sánchez (US\$2.30, 30 minutes), Nagua (US\$2.30, one hour) and San Francisco de Macoris (US\$3.50, 1½ hours).

Tickets are sold in the small Western Union office next door to Caribe Tours.

For direct service to Puerto Plata 210km to the west, there are two options. **El Canario** (☎ 809-291-5594; Av Malecón) buses (US\$7, 3½ to four hours) leave at 10am beside the Banco Popular. **Papagayo** (☎ 809-970-2991) (ask for Salvador) has a service at 1:30pm from under the mango tree on the eastern side of the little park next to Banco Popular on the Malecón. Locals say the latter is a safer though slightly slower ride. Arrive 30 to 45 minutes early to reserve a seat.

For service to towns nearby, head to the **gua-gua terminal** (Av Malecón) at the *mercado municipal*, 200m west of the Politur station, near Angel Mesina. From here, trucks and minivans head to Las Galeras (US\$2, 45 minutes to one hour, every 15 minutes from 6am to 6pm), El Limón (US\$3, 30 minutes, every 15 minutes from 6am to 6pm) and Sánchez (US\$1.75, 45 minutes, every 15 minutes from 6am to 4:30pm). You can also hail *gua-guas* on the main drag, but more often than not they're packed with passengers, boxes and chickens, so you'll either have to hang off the side or sit on one cheek to catch this ride.

## UNDERWATER CEMETERY

The Bahía de Samaná is a veritable graveyard of ships, some ripped apart by hurricanes, others plundered by pirates. On one occasion the pirate Roberto Cofresi sank his own ship laden with treasure near the throat of the bay when he found himself cornered by Spanish patrol boats. Cofresi and his crew escaped the advancing Spaniards by boarding small skiffs and rowing their way into the area's maze of marshes. To this day the vessel has never been found.

Two other famous sunken ships in Bahía de Samaná – the Spanish galleons *Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe* and *El Conde de Tolosa* – remained untouched for more than 250 years until they were discovered in 1976 and 1977, respectively (see boxed text, p107). Both ships were en route to Mexico from Spain loaded with mercury when hurricane-whipped waves flung them into coral reefs, where they broke apart and sank within hours of each other.

## FERRY

**Transporte Marítimo** (☎ 809-538-2556; Av Malecón) provides the only ferry service – passengers only, no vehicles – across the Bahía de Samaná to Sabana de la Mar (US\$4.25, one hour plus, daily at 7am, 9am, 11am and 3pm). From there, it's possible to catch *gua-guas* to several destinations in the southeast and then on to Santo Domingo, though the road network in this part of the country is rough and public transportation is not so comfortable.

## Getting Around

Samaná is walkable, but if you're carrying luggage, catch a *motoconcho* (motorcycle taxi) – they're everywhere. 4WD vehicles are your only option in terms of car rental – roads on the peninsula are bad enough to warrant the extra expense. Rates run from US\$70 to US\$90 per day (tax and insurance included) and discounts are typically given for rentals of a week or longer. Try **Xamaná Rent Motors** (☎ 809-538-2380; Av Malecón; 🕒 8am-noon & 2-6pm).

## LAS GALERAS

The road to this small fishing community 28km northeast of Samaná ends at a fish shack on the beach. So does everything else, metaphorically speaking. One of the great pleasures of a stay here is losing perspective on the great big world beyond – even a trip to one of the beautiful and isolated outlying beaches seems far away. But Las Galeras, as much as anywhere else on the peninsula, offers terrestrial and subaquatic adventures for those with a will strong enough to ignore the pull of inertia and overcome the temptation to do nothing more than lie around your bungalow or while away the day at a restaurant watching others do the same.

## Orientation

The road coming from Samaná winds along the coast and through lovely, often-forested countryside before reaching the outskirts of Las Galeras. There's one main intersection in town (about 50m before the highway dead-ends at the beach) and most hotels, restaurants and services are within walking distance from there.

## Information

You'll find most of the relevant services are located in or around the main intersection, just a short walk to the beach. The only ATM in town is at the Grand Paradise Samaná resort; it's open to the public and situated close to where the path from town enters the resort property.

**Ashley Communications** (☎ 809-538-0053; internet per hr US\$2; 🕒 8am-7:30pm Mon-Sat, 8am-noon Sun) Internet and telephone access.

**Consultoria Las Galeras** (☎ 829-918-3233; 🕒 8:30am-noon & 3-6pm Mon-Fri, 3-6pm Sat) The most convenient place to receive medical attention.

**Farmacia Joven** (☎ 809-538-0103; Calle Principal; 🕒 8am-9:30pm Mon-Sat) Near the main crossroad; has basic meds and supplies.

**Grand Paradise Samaná** (☎ 809-538-0020; 🕒 24hr) Has a small clinic that nonguests can use in emergencies.

**Hermanos Cruz Agente de Cambio and Rent-A-Car** (☎ 809-341-4574; Calle Principal; 🕒 8am-6pm Mon-Sat, 8am-noon Sun) Exchanges cash dollars and euros; also rents cars.

**Internet Las Galeras** (Calle Principal at main intersection; internet per hr US\$2.75; 🕒 8:30am-1pm & 2:30-7:30pm Mon-Sat) Internet and telephone access; 30-minute minimum.

**Plaza Lusitania Internet & Call Center** (internet per hr US\$2.50; 🕒 8:30am-8pm Mon-Sat) Internet and telephone access.

## Sights & Activities

Las Galeras has a number of natural attractions that can be visited by boat, foot, car or horseback. All can be reached on your own, provided you're in decent shape or have a sturdy vehicle.

## BEACHES

### Playa Rincón

For those who are connoisseurs of such things, Playa Rincón is a pitch-perfect beach. Stretching uninterrupted for nearly 3km of nearly white, soft sand and multihued water good for swimming, there's even a small stream at the far western end, great for a quick freshwater dip at the end of a long, sunny day. Some historians claim that it's here, not Playa las Flechas, where Columbus and his crew landed. Consistently rated one of the top beaches in the Caribbean by those in the know – people who courageously brave heat-stroke and sunburn in a quest for the ideal – Rincón is large enough for every day-tripper to claim their own piece of real estate without nosy neighbors peeking over the seaweed and driftwood. A thick palm forest provides the backdrop.

Several small restaurants serve mostly seafood dishes and rent beach chairs, making this a great place to spend the entire day. Most people arrive by boat; the standard option is to leave Las Galeras around 9am and be picked up at 4pm – it's around 20 minutes each way. If you join up with other beachgoers, it costs about US\$12 to US\$15 per person. You can also drive there, though the last kilometer or so is too rough for small or midsize cars. The turnoff to Playa Rincón is 7km south of Las Galeras on the road to Samaná. A taxi to Rincón should cost US\$55 round-trip.

### Playas Madama & Frontón

Preferred by some locals over Playa Rincón, Playa Frontón boasts some of the best snorkeling in the area. Apparently it's also popular with drug smugglers, Dominicans braving the Mona Passage on their way to Puerto Rico, and reality show contestants – in 2002, *Expedición Robinson*, Colombia's version of the reality show *Survivor*, was filmed here. Playas Madama is a small beach framed by high bluffs; keep in mind there's not much sunlight here in the afternoon.

The trail to both begins at the far eastern end of the Grand Paradise Samaná beach,

about 200m past the resort's entrance, near a private house that most people know as 'La Casa de los Ingleses' (House of the English) after its original owners. Coming from town, the house and the trail will be on your right. In the first kilometer you'll pass a German beer garden and the turnoff to the Museo Taino (actually the home and private collection of a quirky Frenchwoman named Ivette 'La Bruja' Durrieu) before reaching the first of two cut-offs to Playa Madama. If you turn left there (or at the next cut-off a kilometer later) you'll walk another 2km until you reach Madama. If you continue on the main trail, you'll pass a second cut-off to Playa Madama (not indicated) and a few kilometers later the cut-off to Playa Frontón (there's a small house just past the turnoff, so if you see this, turn around and retrace your steps, only about 10m, until you see the trail); from here it's another four winding kilometers to Frontón itself. It's much simpler to take a boat to either of these beaches, for around US\$15 per person round-trip, with a pickup in the afternoon.

## Playita

Better than the beach in town, Playita (Little Beach) is easy to get to on foot or by *motoconcho*. It's a swath of tannish sand, with mellow surf and backed by tall palm trees. There are two informal outdoor restaurants, basically thatched-roof shelters, where you can get grilled fish or chicken, plus water, soda and beer. On the main road just south of Las Galeras, look for signs for Hotel La Playita pointing down a dirt road headed west. Or if you're OK with clambering, follow the road that goes west at the main intersection, past Villa Serena until you reach a gated development; let yourself in and follow the path until you reach the remains of a barbed wire fence. It's easy enough to get over and the beach is just on the other side.

## BOCA DEL DIABLO

'Mouth of the Devil' is an impressive vent or blowhole, where waves rush up a natural channel and blast out of a hole in the rocks. Car or motorcycle is the best way to get here – look for an unmarked dirt road 7km south of town and about 100m beyond the well-marked turnoff to Playa Rincón. Follow the road eastward for about 8km, then walk the last 100m or so.

**WATER SPORTS**

For experienced divers, **Cabo Cabrón** (Bastard Point) is one of the North Coast's best dive sites. After an easy boat ride from Las Galeras, you're dropped into a churning channel with a giant coral formation that you can swim around; you may see dolphins here. Other popular sites include Piedra Bonita, a 50m stone tower good for spotting jacks, barracudas and sea turtles; Cathedral, an enormous underwater cave opening to sunlight; and a sunken 55m-container ship haunted by big morays. Several large, shallow coral patches, including Los Carriles, a series of underwater hills, are good for beginner divers.

**Grand Paradise Samaná Dive Center** (Dive Samaná; ☎ 809-538-2000; www.lacompagniadecarabi.com; Casa Marina Bay resort; ☹ 7am-6pm) is located at the far end of Grand Paradise Samaná's beach. One-/two-tank dives including all equipment cost US\$60/114 (US\$5 to US\$12 less if you have your own). Four- and six-dive packages bring the rate down to US\$48 to US\$52 per dive, including gear. Various PADI certification courses can also be arranged. Also on offer are snorkeling trips (US\$12), whale-watching tours (US\$49), trips to Playa Rincón (US\$10), and windsurf and sailboat rental and instruction (US\$10 to US\$15 per hour), all available to guests and nonguests alike. It's easy enough to walk to the dive shop here by following the path along the beach from town; resort security will let you through.

**HIKING**

The spectacular El Punto lookout is a 5km walk from Bungalows Karin y Ronald (see right). To get there, simply continue past the turnoffs to Playas Madam and Frontón and keep climbing up, up and up. Allow at least an hour to get to the top.

**HORSEBACK RIDING**

The Belgian owners of Bungalows Karin y Ronald (see right) offer well-recommended **horseback riding tours** (from US\$52) to various spots around Las Galeras, including Boca del Diablo, El Punto lookout and Playas Madama and Frontón. Grand Paradise Samaná resort (opposite) offers similarly priced but somewhat less-personalized horseback tours as well.

**Tours**

While you can visit many of the beaches and sights on your own – or hire a *motoconcho*

driver to act as your chauffeur and guide. Organized tour operators include **ATM-Tours** (☎ 809-324-1696; Calle Principal), **R-azor Tours** (☎ 809-538-0218; www.azortour.eu; Calle Principal) and Grand Paradise Samaná resort (opposite). Numerous day trips include whale watching in Bahía de Samaná (US\$80 per person), land and boat excursions through Parque Nacional Los Haitises (US\$70 per person) and hikes to the area's isolated beaches (US\$20 per person). Village tours that include a cockfight and stops in a typical home and primary school, as well as overnight trips further afield, can also be arranged.

**Sleeping**

With the exception of a few, all of the hotels and bungalows in Las Galeras are within walking distance of the main intersection.

**BUDGET**

**El Cabito** (☎ 829-697-9506; www.elcabito.net; campsites per person US\$7.50, cabin incl breakfast US\$60) For those looking to rough it, this property in lush farmland 4km east of the main intersection in town has one of the few campgrounds in all the DR. If you like the out-of-the-way location but want a little more comfort, there's an all-wood guestroom on the 2nd floor of the friendly owner's home. Stunning views are to be had all around, including from the restaurant area perched over crashing waves below. It's also a short walk to Playa Madama. Pickup from Las Galeras is available if arranged in advance.

**Bungalows Karin y Ronald** (☎ 829-878-0637; www.larancheta.com; r/bungalow US\$30/54; ☐) Buried in the lush jungle, 2.5km from the main intersection, is this hotel with a number of funky and simple two-storied bungalows that can accommodate between four and six people comfortably. Semioutdoor rustic kitchens lend an eclectic cabin-in-the-woods feel to this out-of-the-way hotel. Take advantage of Karin, an expert tour guide, who leads day and overnight hiking and horseback riding trips to out-of-the-way beaches and mountaintops (left).

**Casa Por Qué No?** (☎ /fax 809-712-5631; s/d incl breakfast US\$32/45; closed May-Oct; ☐ ☹) Pierre and Monick, the charming owners of this B&B, rent out two rooms on either side of their cozy home – each room has a separate entrance and hammock. Only 25m or so north of the main intersection on your right as you're walking towards the beach, the house

is fronted by a long, well-groomed garden where delicious breakfasts are served (US\$6 breakfast for nonguests).

**MIDRANGE**

**Casa Dorado** (☎ 829-221-2493; www.casadoradodr.com; r US\$40-580; ☐) This house, about a kilometer from town, looks like a McMansion, but the Mexican-style décor, tropical garden and terrace-borne hammocks remind you that you're on vacation. Three rooms are available; the largest and most expensive comes with a Jacuzzi. The English-speaking owner runs sport fishing trips (up to four people from US\$250 to US\$400) and snorkeling excursions to Rincón and Fronton. Wi-fi is available throughout the property.

**Juan y Lolo Bungalows** (☎ 809-875-1423; www.juanlolo.com; bungalows US\$40-120; ☐) An especially good choice for groups and long-term stays, this disparate group of bungalows west of the main intersection has something for everyone. Whatever the size or price, all come with outdoor patios, serviceable kitchen and fans. Most are simply furnished and have thatched roofs, but there's also a stone fortress-cum-monastery-like building available. It's best to see several – if vacant – before deciding. The owners also run Xamaná Rent Moto (p155) and may be easier to find there.

**our pick Todo Blanco** (☎ 809-538-0201; www.hotelodoblanco.com; r US\$75; ☐ ☹ ☹) In a wash of white, Todo Blanco, a well-established inn run by a cheerful Dominican-Italian couple, sits atop a small hillock a short walk from the end of the main drag in Las Galeras. The multi-level grounds are nicely appointed with gardens and a gazebo, all with views of the ocean below. The rooms are large and airy, with high ceilings and private terraces overlooking the sea. However, decorated sparsely and in need of a new paint job and minor repairs, they offer little more than a spacious place to rest your head. A homey living room area has a TV and DVD player and wi-fi internet access. Breakfast of fruit and eggs is available for an extra US\$5, and dinner can also be provided if arranged ahead of time.

**Plaza Lusitania Hotel** (☎ 809-538-0093; www.plazalusitania.com; r incl breakfast US\$60, 1-bedroom apt incl breakfast US\$75-100; ☐ ☹ ☹) This hotel is in downtown Las Galeras. Situated on the main intersection on the 2nd floor of a tiny mall complete with internet and telephone center, a good Italian restaurant (p154), medical office

and shop, Plaza Lusitania is as urban as Las Galeras gets, which is to say not at all. Rooms are large and extremely comfortable and even boast small balconies and kitchenettes; check out several, since the layout and number of beds and price vary.

**TOP END**

**Casa Calliope** (☎ 829-929-8585, 829-448-1498; www.feeneyhayes@hotmail.com; r US\$140) Located near El Cabito, around 4km east of town, this two-bedroom hilltop villa offers funky luxury in beautiful surroundings. Each of the two large bedrooms has a full bathroom and terrace, and there's a fully equipped kitchen for guests' use – vegetarian and healthy meals can be ordered up as well. The owners, a friendly couple from Boston, are a great source of information on the area. Two-night minimum stay generally required.

**Villa Serena** (☎ 809-538-0000; www.villaserena.com; r with/without air-con incl breakfast US\$150/140; ☐ ☹ ☹ ☹) A cross between a Victorian England manor home and a Caribbean villa, this hotel, 300m east of the main intersection, has gorgeous ocean views and is probably the nicest place in Las Galeras. That being said, the room furnishings are a little worn and kitschy, and while every one of the 21 rooms is different, it's mostly in terms of the shower curtain pattern and rug color. Each has a balcony, some face the ocean directly and others open on to the meticulously landscaped garden and swimming pool area. Off the main lobby, where there is a strong free wi-fi signal, is a peaceful terrace with rocking chairs. There's an excellent snorkeling spot just offshore and the hotel provides bikes and kayaks for guests.

**Grand Paradise Samaná** (☎ 809-538-0020; www.amhsamarina.com; r per person US\$140-210; ☐ ☹ ☹ ☹) Doing its best to remain relatively unobtrusive, Las Galeras' only all-inclusive resort (formerly Casa Marina Bay) is tucked into a forest of palm trees 2km west of town. Occupying a wide cove with calm waters and a thin but pleasant beach, much of the property, including lounge chairs and volleyball courts, is set on a somewhat messy lawn studded with palm trees. True to the low-key nature of the town, this resort is far from luxurious and rooms are your standard, bland typical all-inclusive type. Bungalows with full living rooms and terraces are a better bet. More than at other resorts of this category, guests tend

to be active, leaving for excursions around Las Galeras, on their own or on a tour; it's only a short walk (500m) to town along a beach trail.

### Eating

For a town of its size, Las Galeras has an abundance of restaurants and they're mostly all located at the single intersection on the main street. Several of the hotels also offer meals when ordered in advance.

**El Kiosko** (Calle Principal; mains US\$5-7; ☎ 7am-midnight) Chow down on freshly caught fish, seafood and grilled meats at this basic thatched-roofed restaurant on the beach at the end of the main road.

**L'Aventure Pizzeria** (Calle Principal; mains US\$5-10; ☎ dinner) More modern than other restaurants in town, L'Aventure is at least as popular for its bar and backroom disco as for its large menu. Besides the standard pasta, grilled chicken and fish, milkshakes (US\$4.25) are served up and there's a TV at the bar for sports lovers.

**Plaza Lusitania Italian Restaurant** (☎ 809-538-0093; Calle Principal; mains US\$6-12; ☎ breakfast, lunch & dinner, dinner only May-Oct, closed Wed) Easily the nicest restaurant in town both in terms of cuisine and ambience, Plaza Lusitania has a varied menu of Italian dishes; an extensive selection of pastas; excellent, large pizzas; grilled fish; and even a Chinese dish or two (chicken fried rice US\$8). A fruit shake (US\$3) and a banana split (US\$4.25) can round out a nice meal.

**Coconut Ray's Paradise Restaurant** (Calle Principal; mains US\$7-12; ☎ lunch & dinner) Meals at this restaurant in front of Paradiso Bungalows at the main intersection in town are a good deal in terms of portion size. Besides standard pasta and meat dishes like barbecued chicken (US\$7.50), with a little foresight – two to four days' notice – you can get a 4lb to 6lb giant crab (US\$7.50 per lb) or slow-smoked whole pig (US\$6 per lb).

**Grigiri** (Calle Principal; mains US\$5.75-11; ☎ breakfast, lunch & dinner) and **Chez Denise** (☎ 809-538-0219; Calle Principal; mains US\$4-14; ☎ 9am-10pm Mon-Sat), two other restaurants located at the main intersection, have similar menus including crêpes with various toppings. Grigiri is a better value than Chez Denise, where service can be very slow.

Walking toward the beach, take a left at the main intersection and you'll find **L'Épicerie d'Armelle** (☎ 10am-7pm, closed Sun), a little storefront next to Caribe Fun Rentals selling gour-

met French meats, cheeses, wines and other delicacies. There's a **mini-market** (☎ 8am-10pm) at the Grand Paradise Samaná resort. The largest grocery store is **Supermercado £1** (Calle Principal; ☎ 7:30am-9:30pm); it's not uncommon for a power outage to occur here in the middle of the day. The 2nd-floor pool hall makes it easy to spot on the main drag.

### Entertainment

Much of the nightlife involves drinks at one of the restaurants in town – the bar and disco at **L'Aventure Pizzeria** (Calle Principal) especially. Further up on the road on the way out of town is **La Indiana** (Calle Principal), an open-air bar/disco popular with locals that also has a big-screen TV that shows sports, music videos and movies. A little further up the road is **V.I.P.** (Calle Principal), an open-air disco that gets loud after 10pm.

The open-air **pool hall** (Calle Principal; per game US\$0.20; ☎ 10am-10pm) above Supermercado £1 is an all-male affair at night, but more egalitarian during the daytime.

### Shopping

Two good crafts and souvenir stores face one another on the main road: **Talisman Gift Shop** (Calle Principal), which accepts credit cards, and **Tribal Boutique** (☎ 9:30am-12:30pm & 4-6:30pm Mon-Sat).

### Getting There & Around

*Gua-guas* head to Samaná (US\$2, 45 minutes, every 15 minutes from 7am to 5pm) from the beach end of Calle Principal, but also cruise slowly out of town picking up passengers. There's also a daily 5:30am bus with service to Santo Domingo (US\$8, six hours). Locals refer to it as the 'Bluebird Express,' though it's neither blue nor express. To guarantee a seat on this cramped air-con minivan, wait at the main crossroads in town in the pre-dawn hours. It's best not to sit in the front row unless you prefer a stranger on your lap; the aisle is filled with passengers in makeshift seats for most of the ride.

You can pretty much walk everywhere in Las Galeras proper. For outlying areas, a *motoconcho* ride costs around US\$0.50 to US\$1 – consider arranging with the driver to pick you up if you know when you'll be returning.

**Taxis** (☎ 829-380-0775) are available as well. Some sample fares are Aeropuerto Catey

(US\$85), Las Terrenas (US\$85), Samaná (US\$30) and Santo Domingo (US\$200). You may be able to negotiate cheaper fares, especially to Samaná.

Renting a car is an excellent way to explore the peninsula on your own. Prices are generally around US\$85 per day. Try **RP Rent-A-Car** (☎ 809-538-0249; Calle Principal; ☎ 8am-7pm Mon-Sat, 8am-1pm Sun), **Caribe Fun Rentals** (☎ 809-912-2440; ☎ 9am-1pm & 3-6:30pm Mon-Sat, 9am-noon Sun) or **Xamaná Rent Moto** (☎ 809-538-0208; motorcycles per day US\$25; ☎ 9am-noon & 3-6pm Mon-Fri, 9am-noon Sat & Sun). The latter two are located 50m west of the intersection; Xamaná Rent Moto also rents motorcycles.

You can rent a mountain bike at **Piccola Italia** (☎ 809-325-4018; Calle Principal; per day US\$12.50; ☎ 8am-noon & 3-7pm Mon-Sat), a shop near the entrance to town. Most bicycles are 21-speed and in good condition.

## WESTERN PENÍNSULA DE SAMANÁ

### LAS TERRENAS pop 8400

No longer a rustic fishing village, today Las Terrenas is a cosmopolitan town, seemingly as much French and Italian as Dominican. Fashionable-looking European women in designer sunglasses ride their personal ATVs with a bag of baguettes in tow. It's a balancing act between locals and expats – one that has produced a lively mix of styles and a social scene more vibrant than anywhere else on the peninsula. Either way you walk along the beach road leads you to beachfront scattered with hotels, high palm trees and calm aquamarine waters. Just east of town is Playa Punta Popy, not an especially beautiful beach but a popular spot for kiteboarders and windsurfers.

### Orientation

The main road in town, Calle Principal (also known as Av Juan Pablo Duarte or Av Duarte for short – both names are used in official addresses and on maps and other information), begins at the beach and passes several small shopping plazas, restaurants, stores, banks etc before leaving the resort area. Tourist facilities thin out, replaced by Dominican *colmados* (small bars), hair-dresser shops and tire repair kiosks before

turning into the highway to Sánchez. Calle del Carmen, a dirt-road version of Calle Principal, runs parallel to the latter until it, too, ends at the beach and veers left to Pueblo de Los Pescadores (Fishermen's Village), a collection of beachside bars and restaurants. Many hotels are located along the beach west of here. Turning east at the intersection of Calle Principal and Calle 27 de Febrero (also known as Carretera a Portillo) takes you past another cluster of restaurants, bars and hotels and eventually leads to El Portillo airport, an all-inclusive resort, El Limón and finally Samaná. A large golf resort complex covering much of the area east of the road to Playa Bonita is up and running with the official opening scheduled for some time in 2008.

### Information BOOKSTORES

**Prensa International** (El Paseo shopping center, Calle Principal; ☎ 9am-1pm & 4-7:30pm Mon-Sat, 9am-1pm Sun) Towards the rear of the El Paseo shopping mall, this shop sells a variety of international newspapers and magazines – most are a day or two old and the majority are in French, though the *International Herald Tribune* is available.

### EMERGENCY

**Politur** (tourist police; ☎ 809-7240-6595; Av Emilio Prud'Homme; ☎ 24hr)

### INTERNET ACCESS

**A&M Communications** (Calle del Carmen; per hr US\$2.25; ☎ 8am-9pm Mon-Sat, 8am-3pm Sun) Part of same small building as El Pan de Antes.

**Internet Point** (Plaza Taína, Calle Principal; per hr US\$3.75; ☎ 8:30am-1pm & 3-7pm Mon-Sat, 9am-1pm Sun) Fast internet connections, fax, CD burns, copies etc, and international telephone service.

**Top@rym.com Internet** (Calle Principal; per hr US\$1.75; ☎ 8am-10pm) South of the main tourist strip.

### LAUNDRY

**Lavandería Ami** (Calle Principal; ☎ 8am-6pm Mon-Sat) Located next to Plaza Rosada. Wash per load US\$2.25, dry per cycle US\$3.50; detergent and fabric softener each US\$0.75; drop-off service extra US\$1. Same-day service if you drop off early; heavy clothes may require two dry cycles.

**Lavandería Tu Net** (Lavandería Pat y Memo; ☎ 809-848-1661; Centro Colonial, Calle del Carmen; ☎ 8am-6pm Mon-Fri, 8am-3pm Sat) Wash and dry US\$1.50 per lb; same-day service not always available. An internet café



and call center (internet per hour US\$2.25; open 9am to 1pm and 2pm to 9pm Monday to Saturday) is next door.

### MEDICAL SERVICES

**Centro de Especialidades Medicas** (☎ 809-240-6817; Calle Principal; ☎ 24hr) Small private hospital.

**Hospital Pablo A Paulino** (☎ 809-274-6474, ext 24; Calle Matias Mella; ☎ 24hr emergency room)

**Super Farmacia del Paseo** (El Paseo shopping center, Calle Principal; ☎ 9am-7pm Mon-Fri, 9am-noon & 4-7pm Sat) Well stocked but not cheap.

### MONEY

**Banco Leon** (Calle Principal) Has a 24-hour ATM.

**Banco Popular** (Calle Principal; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Fri, 9am-1pm Sat) Located just east of the river. Has a 24-hour ATM.

**BanReservas** (Calle Principal; ☎ 9am-6pm Mon-Fri, 9am-1pm Sat) Across the street from Banco Popular. Has a 24-hour ATM.

**Fort Knox Money Exchange** (☎ 809-240-6719; El Paseo shopping center, Calle Principal; ☎ 8am-1pm & 4-8pm Mon-Sat, 10am-1pm Sun)

### POST

**Post office** (El Paseo shopping center, Calle Principal; ☎ 9am-1pm & 3-5pm Mon-Fri)

### TELEPHONE

**Codetel Centro de Comunicaciones** (Calle Principal; ☎ 8am-10pm) An old facility near the intersection with Calle Salomé Ureña.

### TRAVEL AGENCIES

**Bahia Tours** (☎ 809-240-6088; www.bahia-tours.com; Calle Principal 237; ☎ 9am-1pm & 3:30-7pm Mon-Fri, 9:30am-1pm & 4:30-6:30pm Sat) Full-service travel agency that can handle airline, hotel and car-rental reservations. Area excursions are also organized, and English, French and Spanish are spoken.

### Sights & Activities

#### PARQUE NACIONAL LOS HAITISES

Since so few independent travelers make it to Sabana de la Mar, the closest entrance to Parque Los Haitises across the bay on the mainland, Las Terrenas has become a popular place to book tours to the park. **Tortuga** (☎ 829-808-2233; tropicodolsol@yahoo.fr; El Paseo, Tortuga) offers tours of Los Haitises by catamaran and kayak. Virtually every tour operator in town (see p158) offers trips to Los Haitises (US\$60), though only twice a week unless you're part of a group of six or more, in which case you can arrange things at your own convenience.

There should be at least one company with a tour on offer five days a week, but schedules change, so it's best to book as soon as you arrive in town. For more info on the park, see also p140.

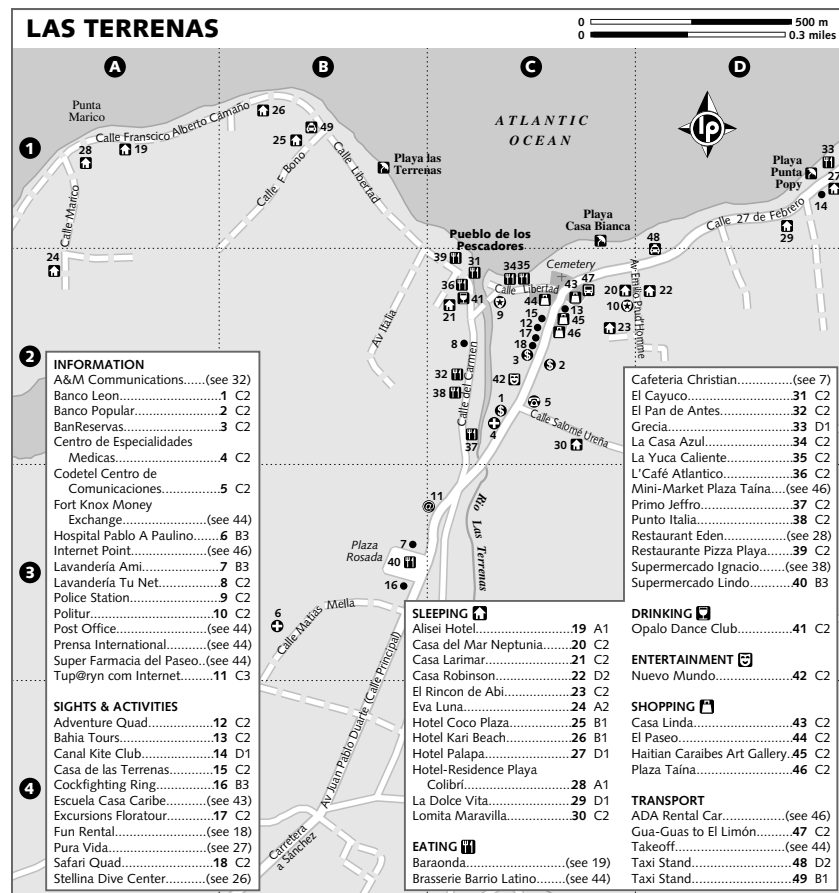
#### CASCADA EL LIMÓN

Tucked away in surprisingly rough landscape, surrounded by peaks covered in lush greenery is the 52m-high **El Limón waterfall**. A beautiful swimming hole is at the bottom, though it's often too deep, cold and rough for a dip except for the committed; other times it's an absolutely perfect place to wash off the sweat and mud from the trip there. The departure point is the small town of El Limón, only a half-hour from Las Terrenas.

Just about everyone who visits does so on horseback, and almost a dozen *paradas* (horseback-riding operations) in town and on the highway toward Samaná offer tours. (It is not recommended to hire someone off the street, as there's little saving and the service is consistently substandard.) All outfits offer essentially the same thing: a 30- to 60-minute ride up the hill to the waterfalls, 30 to 60 minutes to take a dip and enjoy the scene, and a 30- to 60-minute return trip, with lunch at the end. Your guide – who you should tip, by the way – will be walking, not riding, which can feel a little weird but is the custom.

Of course, horses are fully part of the workforce in the DR. In much of the country children learn to ride early on, and it is commonplace to see little ones bouncing along, racing atop ponies down the street at breakneck speed, often in and out of traffic. However, many of the horses are undernourished and many are abandoned, which is to say you should try to pick the operation with healthy, well-cared for horses. After heavy rains, the path to the falls becomes fairly treacherous even for these sure-footed animals. Falls are certainly few and far between but even the strongest horse struggles mightily step by step on this giant rock/mud slide. Most of them aren't work horses and not meant for such trail riding, especially with heavy passengers on board.

Otherwise, it's a minimum 40-minute walk (from the main intersection in El Limón it's roughly 5.6km), sometimes up a very steep trail over rough terrain and even a river or two to ford. It's not difficult to follow the path



once you find it, though, especially if there are groups out on the trail.

Spanish-owned **Santí** (☎ 809-343-0776; limon.santi@terra.es; rides per person with/without lunch US\$23/14; ☎ 8am-7pm), at the main intersection in El Limón, is the most popular of the *paradas* and also the most expensive. The lunch is excellent and the guides and staff (all adults) are better paid than elsewhere. If you book with a tour company in Las Terrenas, transportation to/from El Limón is not included (*gua-gua* US\$1.50). Typically the tour (horse, guide and lunch) costs per person from US\$22 to US\$24. Most other operators charge around US\$14/7 with/without lunch; try **Parada la Manzana** (☎ 809-360-9142; ☎ 8am-4pm), 5km east of El Limón towards Samaná, or **Parada María**

**y Miguel** (☎ 809-282-7699; ☎ 7am-5pm), 2km east of El Limón towards Samaná. A *motoconcho* to either costs US\$1 to US\$2.

#### DIVING & SNORKELING

Las Terrenas has reasonably good diving and snorkeling and at least three shops in town to take you out. Favorite dive spots include a wreck in 28m of water and Isla Las Ballenas, visible from shore, with a large underwater cave. Most shops also offer special trips to Cabo Cabrón (p152) near Las Galeras and Dudu Cave near Río San Juan (p194). Standard one-tank dives average US\$45 with equipment, and around US\$35 if you have your own. Four-, 10- and 12-dive packages bring the per-dive costs to around US\$26 to US\$35, including



equipment. Two-tank Cabo Cabrón and Dudu Cave trips run from about US\$80 to US\$100, including gear, lunch and transport.

Snorkelers also go to Isla Las Ballenas, which has good shallow coral flats (one hour; US\$20 per person). A popular full-day snorkel trip is to Playa Jackson, several kilometers west of town, reached by boat with stops in two or three locations along the way (US\$60 per person including lunch, minimum six people).

Recommended operators:

**Las Terrenas Divers** (☎ 809-889-2422; www.lt-divers.com; Hotel Bahía las Ballenas, Playa Bonita; ☎ 9am-noon) Well-respected German-run operation.

**Stellina Dive Center** (☎ 809-868-4415; www.stellina diving.com; Hotel Kari Beach; ☎ 9am-noon)

### KITESURFING & WINDSURFING

Second to only to Cabarete, Las Terrenas is a good place to try out a wind sport in the DR. The beach at Punta Popy, only a kilometer or so east of the main intersection, is a popular place for kitesurfers and windsurfers. Two recommended outfits, near one another and Punta Popy, are the long-established **Pura Vida** (☎ 809-878-6640; www.puravidacaribes.com; Hotel Palapa, Calle 27 de Febrero; ☎ 10am-5:30pm) and **Canal Kite Club** (☎ 809-240-6556, 829-933-9325; www.canalkite.com; Calle 27 de Febrero), run by a friendly Italian who speaks Spanish, French and English. Both rent windsurf boards, bodyboards, surfboards, kitesurfing equipment and provide lessons for all these activities. Six hours of kitesurfing lessons (really the minimum needed to have a sporting chance of making it work) at Canal Kite Club cost US\$200; a two-hour windsurfing lesson is US\$60, the same time for surfing is US\$40.

### COCKFIGHTING

For those interested in one of the quintessential Dominican experiences, Las Terrenas has a **gallera** (cockfighting ring; admission US\$3; ☎ 2-7pm Sun), located on Calle Principal just past Plaza Rosada. There are around a dozen matchups per night. Tourists are welcome, but the fights are certainly not watered down and betting is still an integral part of the event. Volunteers help explain the rules, strategy and wagering to cockfight neophytes. For more about cockfighting in the DR, see p54.

### Tours

Along with booking airline tickets, hotels and car rentals, the full-service travel agency **Bahia**

**Tours** (☎ 809-240-6088; www.bahia-tours.com; Calle Principal 237; ☎ 9am-1pm & 3:30-7pm Mon-Fri, 9:30am-1pm & 4:30-6:30pm Sat) organizes many area tours. Popular day trips include whale watching in Bahía de Samaná (US\$70 per person), excursions to Parque Nacional Los Haitises (US\$60 per person), jeep tours to Playa El Rincón (US\$70 per person) and horseback riding to Cascada El Limón (US\$25 per person). Overnight trips include rafting, canyoning and trekking in Jarabacoa (p213) as well as climbing Pico Duarte (p217), the highest peak (3087m) in the Caribbean. English, French and Spanish are spoken.

**Aerodomca** (☎ 809-240-6571; www.aerodomca.com) offers helicopter sightseeing flights of the peninsula leaving from El Portillo airport. Prices vary according to season, number of passengers and length of flight.

There are several other recommended tour companies in town:

**Adventure Quad** (☎ 809-657-8766; adventurequad@hotmail.com; Calle Principal 165) Half-day excursions; one 4WD for two people US\$80.

**Casa de las Terrenas** (☎ 809-240-6251; www.lasterrenas-excursions.com; Calle Principal 280) Small, friendly, French-run operation run out of a little kiosk in front of Plaza Taína.

**Excursions Floratour** (☎ 809-360-2793; floratour@caraimail.com; Calle Principal 262)

**Fun Rental** (☎ 809-240-6784; www.funrental.fr; Plaza Creole, Calle Principal 258) Quad rentals (US\$55 per day) and trips to Los Haitises (US\$58).

**Safari Quad** (☎ 809-240-6056; Calle Principal; www.safari-quads.com) Trips to sites all over the peninsula with guides for all skill levels; rentals also available.

**Tortuga** (☎ 829-808-2233; tropicodoelsol@yahoo.fr; El Paseo shopping center, Calle Principal) In addition to trips to Los Haitises, Tortuga offers catamaran excursions to Playa Rincón, Playa Jackson and elsewhere.

### Courses

To hold your own on the dance floor, or at the very least to avoid embarrassment, stop by the **Escuela Salsa Caribe** (☎ 809-880-4609; back of Casa Linda shopping center, Calle Principal; ☎ 9am-7pm Mon-Fri, 9am-noon & 4-7pm Sat) for private (US\$18 per hour) and group merengue or salsa classes.

### Sleeping

The majority of accommodation options in Las Terrenas are located along the beachfront roads to the east and west of the main intersection in town. Those to the east are across from the beach on the paved highway, while

the small sandy road to the west means the area is quieter and feels more secluded. Prices drop dramatically in the low season, but at any time of the year discounts are negotiable for long-term stays.

### BUDGET

**Casa Robinson** (☎ /fax 809-240-6496; www.casarobinson.it; Av Emilio Prud'Homme; r/studio/apt US\$27/33/43; (P) ) Set in leafy grounds down a side street a block from the beach, this hotel offers privacy on the cheap. Fan-cooled rooms in the all-wood buildings are simple and clean and the little balconies have rocking chairs – albeit old ones. Bathrooms, however, are more modern and some rooms have kitchenettes. Service doesn't always happen in a flash but it's friendly when it does finally arrive.

**El Rincón de Abi** (☎ 809-240-6639; www.el-rincon-de-abi.com; Av Emilio Prud'Homme; r incl breakfast US\$32-60; (P) (Q) (S) ) Just a block further down the road from Casa Robinson and Mar Neptunia, this French-owned hotel is well maintained, if a bit sterile. Rooms in the whitewashed two-story building topped with a thatch roof are clean and sparsely furnished; tiling in the bathrooms gives it some color and character. A small pool and outdoor kitchen with grill are for guests' use. Breakfast is Continental style.

**Casa del Mar Neptunia** (☎ 809-240-6617; www.casas-del-mar-neptunia.com; Av Emilio Prud'Homme; s/d incl breakfast US\$35/45; (P) (Q) ) This whitewashed hotel across from Casa Robinson is equally homey and quiet with 12 large, airy rooms. Maybe the only downside is that each of the little porches faces a lush interior garden and so they lack privacy and views. Breakfast can be served here or in the comfortable lounge area in front.

### MIDRANGE

**Hotel Coco Plaza** (☎ 809-240-6172; www.hotelcoco plaza.net; Calle F Bono 2; r US\$45, studio US\$60-80, apt US\$85-100; (P) (Q) (S) ) This rambling four-story Mediterranean-style hotel is across the street from the beach west of town on the way to Playa Las Ballenas. You should see several rooms before deciding, since they vary in layout and size, although all are colorful and comfortable with cable TV and motel room-style décor. Many are tucked behind stairwells and other rooms with no views to speak of. Breakfast (extra charge) is served in an open-air dining area downstairs. Wi-fi available throughout.

**Casa Larimar** (☎ 809-240-6539; www.casa-larimar.com; Pueblo de los Pescadores; r incl breakfast US\$50-55; (P) (Q) (S) ) This French-owned hotel, the first you come to walking west along the path in Pueblo de los Pescadores, is more notable for its spectacular rooftop patio and Jacuzzi and charming little garden pool than for its rooms. The latter are sparsely furnished with concrete floors; check several to find the one with the most sunlight. Cable TV and wi-fi are included. Not much Spanish is spoken here, so bring your French dictionary.

**Hotel Kari Beach** (☎ 809-240-6187; www.karibeach.com; Calle Libertad; s/d incl breakfast US\$52/58; (P) (Q) (S) ) Most of the rooms at the Kari Beach have large balconies with ocean views, an important difference from the Coco Plaza next door. However, rooms here don't stack up well against its neighbor – they're basic fan-cooled cement affairs. Air-con and TV are available upon request and wi-fi is available throughout. But it's a friendly, casual place with a beachside bar and dive shop.

**Hotel Palapa** (☎ 809-240-6797; www.palapabeach.com; cnr Calle 27 de Febrero & Av España; r/q incl breakfast US\$65/85; (P) (Q) (S) ) Across the road from Punta Popy, a good stretch of town beach, the Palapa is a study in monochromatic simplicity. Mostly everything is white, other than the thatched roofs of the bungalows, which surround a little pond – in the far back is a peaceful pool area. This hotel is especially good for families and groups because the rooms are large and have loft spaces serving as an extra bedroom. Look for the hotel behind Pura Vida, the water-sport activity company.

**Hotel-Residence Playa Colibrí** (☎ 809-240-6434; www.playacolibri.com; Francisco Camaño Deño; apt US\$75-130; (P) (Q) (S) ) One of the last hotels along this stretch of Playa Las Ballenas, Playa Colibrí is a good option for those seeking peace and quiet. Regardless of the room layout you choose, all are spacious, include fully equipped kitchens and furnishings out of a Caribbean Pottery Barn catalogue. Split-level apartments are especially good for families. Each has a terrace that overlooks a palm tree-shaded pool area. DSL internet available in apartments. Restaurant Eden (p160) and a bar are on the premises.

**La Dolce Vita** (☎ 809-240-5069; www.ladolcevitaresidence.com; Av 27 de Febrero; r US\$85; (P) (Q) (S) ) Less 'dolce vita' than Fellini had in mind, the apartments at this pastel-colored seafont complex are nevertheless good long-term

rentals. Rooms come with fully equipped kitchens, wicker furniture and the kind of Haitian artwork sold on the streets. A nice pool and landscaped grounds front the property. Rates vary significantly by length of stay and season.

#### TOP END

**our pick Lomita Maravilla** (☎ 809-240-6345; www.lomitamaravilla.com; Calle Salome Ureña; villas US\$100, with private Jacuzzi US\$150, with private pool US\$200; P ♻️ 🚰 🚰) A short walk down a dirt road – often muddy – off Av Duarte, you'll find one of the gems of Las Terrenas. This European-inspired boutique hotel consists entirely of thatched-roof private bungalows set along palmed paths and a center swimming pool. Rooms verge on swanky, with TVs, DVD players, and fully loaded kitchens ready for a make-it-yourself Caribbean meal. Enjoying your morning cup of Joe at your own private coffee bar on your porch might make you forget that you're still a 10- or 15-minute walk from the sea, the only downside to this hotel.

**Alisei Hotel** (☎ 809-240-5555; www.aliseihotel.com; Calle Francisco Alberto Camaño; r US\$130; P ♻️ 🚰 🚰) This hotel is a newer and more luxurious version of Hotel-Residence Playa Colibrí only a short walk away. Think flat-screen TVs, wi-fi internet, DVD and MP3 players, stylish and high-end linens, fully stocked kitchens, an on-site spa, swim-up pool bar...and you have a sense of how far you'd be moving on up with a stay here. Of the 54 apartments, several are villas that can sleep up to six and there's an even more luxurious honeymoon suite. The attached restaurant, Baraonda, is elegantly designed and sophisticated, with a large round open-air dining room supported by gnarled tree trunks – a hip-looking bar is in the center.

**Eva Luna** (☎ 809-978-5611; www.villa-evaluna.com; Calle Marico, Playa Las Ballenas; villas for 2/4 people US\$150/300; P ♻️ 🚰 🚰) A paragon of understated luxury, Eva Luna is a collection of five Mexican-style villas west of town and 200m from Playa Las Ballenas. Set around a beautiful pool and garden area, and with excellent service, this truly is a refuge. Each villa has a fully equipped kitchen, living room and terrace where a delicious gourmet breakfast is served.

**Gran Bahía Principe El Portillo Beach Resort** (☎ 809-240-6100; www.bahia-principe.com; d US\$240; P ♻️ 🚰 🚰) Doing its best to fit in with the

area's anti-big tourism vibe, this resort, the only all-inclusive near Las Terrenas, is actually 4km west directly across from the airstrip. It's a fairly low-key affair set on a nice stretch of beach with placid waters, good for swimming and kayaking. The property stretches all the way to the highway – if your room is near the entrance it's a long walk to the beach and your view will be of the parking lot. All the amenities you'd expect are included and a free shuttle takes guests to and from Las Terrenas.

#### Eating

The best restaurants in Las Terrenas are in Pueblo de los Pescadores, a cluster of fishermen's shacks-cum-waterfront restaurants just west of the river on what was the original site of the town. Virtually every restaurant has an entrance facing the road and an open-air dining or bar area out back, overlooking the ocean and narrow beach.

**El Pan de Antes** (☎ 809-994-3282; Calle Carmen; ☎ 8am-7pm Tue-Sat, 8am-5pm Sun) Delicious pastries are made fresh daily at this French-owned patisserie. Croissants go fast Sunday mornings.

**Cafeteria Christian** (Calle Principal) A step up from the usual *colmado*, this place south of town is where locals eat and grab a pastry or two if they're on the run.

**Primo Jeffro** (☎ 829-352-7654; Calle del Carmen 143; mains US\$2-7; ☎ breakfast, lunch & dinner) For a change of pace, both in terms of cuisine and décor, head to this no-nonsense American-owned Mexican eatery. The open-air dining room couldn't be simpler and unpretentious but the hearty tacos (US\$1.25), burritos and chimichangas hit the spot. *Almuerzos* (set lunches; US\$4) and combo dinners (US\$4.75) are great deals.

**Brasserie Barrio Latino** (☎ 809-240-6367; El Paseo shopping center, Calle Principal; mains US\$2-10; ☎ breakfast, lunch & dinner Mon-Sat) Occupying the busiest corner in town, this casual open-sided eatery has a large menu of international standards like sandwiches, burgers, pastas and meat dishes. Breakfast may be the best meal of the day here and there's a small bar that in addition to beer and alcoholic drinks mixes up smoothies and a delicious *morir soñando* (tasty combination of orange juice, milk, sugar and crushed ice).

**Restaurant Eden** (Hotel-Residence Playa Colibrí; mains US\$7-12) Part of the Hotel-Residence Playa Colibrí, this pleasant outdoor restaurant is close to the end of the sandy beachside path

from town, making it a perfect break before heading back. The menu and specials, from grilled salmon (US\$10) to juicy burgers (US\$7), are displayed on a chalkboard.

**Grecia** (Playa Punta Popo, Carretera a Portillo; mains US\$10; ☎ breakfast, lunch & dinner) A step up from the average beachside shack, Grecia is a combo restaurant, café and bar located steps from a popular beach. Picnic tables and cushions are set out on the sand and it can get crowded when Dominicans, expats and tourists hunker down for the afternoon with sandwiches and drinks.

**La Yuca Caliente** (☎ 809-240-6634; Calle Libertad 6; mains US\$10-23; ☎ lunch & dinner) A definite step up from the neighboring cookie-cutter restaurants, La Yuca Caliente is sophisticated and serene. Spanish, Italian, fish dishes and excellent pizzas are served by a professional and courteous staff. Tables are set out on the beach amid swaying palm trees and the low-key sound system is conversation friendly. Wi-fi internet is available.

A handful of restaurants line Pueblo de los Pescadores, the beachfront just west of Calle del Carmen. Most have pleasant ocean views and offer the same standard menu – pizza, pasta, grilled fish and meat – and do little to distinguish themselves from one another. The almost 40 types of pizzas at **Restaurante Pizza Playa** (☎ 809-240-6399; Pueblo de los Pescadores; mains US\$2-10; ☎ lunch & dinner) are generally better than the competition. **El Cayuco** (Pueblo de los Pescadores; mains US\$5-12; ☎ noon-11pm) serves Spanish cuisine with excellent tapas and **La Casa Azul** (Calle Libertad; mains US\$3-12; ☎ 9am-11pm) is known for its seafood dishes.

**Mini-Market Plaza Taína** (☎ 7:40am-8:40pm Mon-Sat, 8am-1:30pm Sun) has snacks and basic necessities. **Punto Italia** (Calle del Carmen; ☎ 9am-7:30pm), a small Italian-owned grocery, is a vital resource for expats who demand high-quality meat, cheese, bread and brand-name European exports. Next door is **Supermercado Ignacio** (Calle del Carmen), which carries basics. Easily the largest and best supermarket in town, **Supermercado Lindo** (☎ 809-240-6003; Plaza Rosada, Calle Principal; ☎ 8:30am-1pm & 3-8pm Mon-Sat, 9am-1pm Sun) is the place to go for canned foods, pastas, produce, snacks and any other supplies.

#### Drinking

Most of the restaurants have bars and stay open well after the kitchen has closed. Bar hopping could scarcely be easier, as it takes

about 45 seconds to walk (or stagger, depending on the time of night) from one end of Pueblo de los Pescadores to the other. There are a few notable spots outside of Pueblo de los Pescadores as well.

**Opalo Dance Club** (☎ 829-604-4935; Pueblo de los Pescadores; ☎ Mon-Wed 8pm-midnight, Thu-Sun 9pm-2am) A stylish addition to the Las Terrenas nightlife scene, Opalo is a hip lounge-bar that ups the cosmopolitan quotient with plasma screens and the occasional DJ.

**Paco Cabana Restaurant/Bar** (Calle Libertad; ☎ 6pm-late) Located just west of the main intersection in town, Paco Cabana makes great use of its beachside location. Beds and comfortable couches piled with pillows make for a breezy and beautiful place to lounge late into the night. The vibe is sophisticated Miami and, while drinks are the draw, there's a kitchen that serves everything from basics such as hamburgers (US\$8.50) to lobster (US\$18).

#### Entertainment

**Nuevo Mundo** (Calle Principal; ☎ 9pm-4am Wed-Sun) This discotheque, close to the heart of the tourist enclave, is popular with locals and is a good place to get down to merengue and *bachata* in a typically Dominican way.

#### Shopping

Calle Principal and around are virtually wallpapered with the typical Haitian art found everywhere in the DR. The three shopping centers a stone's throw away from one another on Calle Principal – Plaza Taína, Casa Linda and El Paseo – have several high-end boutiques, eateries and a few shops selling basic tourist kitsch. All are open from 9am to 8pm Monday to Saturday and from 9am to 3pm Sunday. For more of a selection of paintings, other than the ubiquitous cookie-cutter mass-produced ones, stop by the **Haitian Caribes Art Gallery** (☎ /fax 809-240-6250; Calle Principal 159; ☎ 9am-1pm & 4-8pm Mon-Sat); it also sells interesting crafts, jewelry and typical batiks and sarongs.

#### Getting There & Away

##### AIR

Domestic airlines service **Aeropuerto Internacional El Portillo** (EPS; ☎ 809-248-2289), a one-strip airport located a few kilometers east of Las Terrenas along the coastal road in the hamlet of El Portillo. In theory, an occasional flight from Europe gives it international credibility, but that's even less likely now

with the opening of **Aeropuerto Internacional El Catey** (AZS; ☎ 809-338-0094), located 8km west of Sánchez and a 35-minute taxi ride (US\$50) to Las Terrenas.

**Takeoff** (☎ 809-552-1333, 809-481-0707; [www.takeoffweb.com](http://www.takeoffweb.com); El Paseo shopping center, Las Terrenas) and **Aerodomca** (☎ 809-240-6571, in Santo Domingo 809-567-1195; [www.aerodomca.com](http://www.aerodomca.com)) operate propeller planes between El Portillo and Santo Domingo. Takeoff flies directly from Aeropuerto Las Américas (US\$80, 30 to 50 minutes), while Aerodomca flies to La Isabela airport in Higüero, north of Santo Domingo (US\$85).

Both also offer an air taxi service – as long as you have enough people or are willing to pay the total amount, flights leave whenever the passengers choose. Regular or air taxi tickets can be arranged through Bahia Tours (see p156).

There are minivan taxis (US\$9) waiting at El Portillo for arriving flights.

## BUS

Las Terrenas has two *gua-gua* stops at opposite ends of Calle Principal. *Gua-guas* headed to Sánchez (US\$1.40, 30 minutes, every 25 minutes from 7am to 6pm) take on passengers at a stop 500m south of Calle Luperón. From Sánchez you can connect to an El Caribe bus to Santo Domingo or to a Bahia Tours bus (see p156) to Puerto Plata that leaves Sánchez at 2:30pm daily.

Those going to El Limón, 14km away (US\$1.75, 20 minutes, every 15 minutes from 7am to 5pm), leave from the corner of Calle Principal and the coastal road; for an onward connection to Samaná, a further 26km, wait at the main intersection in El Limón.

## TAXI

The local **taxi consortium** (☎ 809-240-6391) offers rides for one to six passengers to just about everywhere. Some sample fares are Playa Cosón (US\$15), El Limón (US\$25), Samaná (US\$50), Las Galeras (US\$80), Cabarete (US\$120), Santo Domingo (US\$170) and Punta Cana (US\$360).

## Getting Around

You can walk to and from most places in Las Terrenas, though getting from one end to the other can take a half-hour or more. Taxis charge US\$10 each way to Playa Bonita and El Portillo and US\$15 to US\$20 to Playa Cosón

and El Limón. *Motoconchos* are cheaper – US\$1.75 to Playa Bonita and US\$7 to Playa Cosón – but are less comfortable. There are taxi and *motoconcho* stops in front of El Paseo shopping center and *motoconchos* are plentiful on Calle Principal and around Pueblo de los Pescadores. A bike can be handy for getting around town.

There are several local rental car agencies but rates are exorbitant (around US\$80 per day). One of the more established and reliable ones is **ADA Rental Car** (☎ 809-704-3232; Plaza Taína; ☞ 9am–1pm & 2:30–7pm Mon–Sat).

## PLAYA BONITA

A getaway from a getaway, this appropriately named beach only a few kilometers west of Las Terrenas is a better alternative for those seeking a more peaceful, reclusive vacation. Playa Bonita (Pretty Beach) is not without its imperfections – the half-moon-shaped beach is fairly steep and narrow, and parts are strewn with palm tree detritus. However, backed by a handful of tastefully landscaped hotels, many with well-manicured lawns that rival the beach in terms of attractiveness, this is an enticing spot.

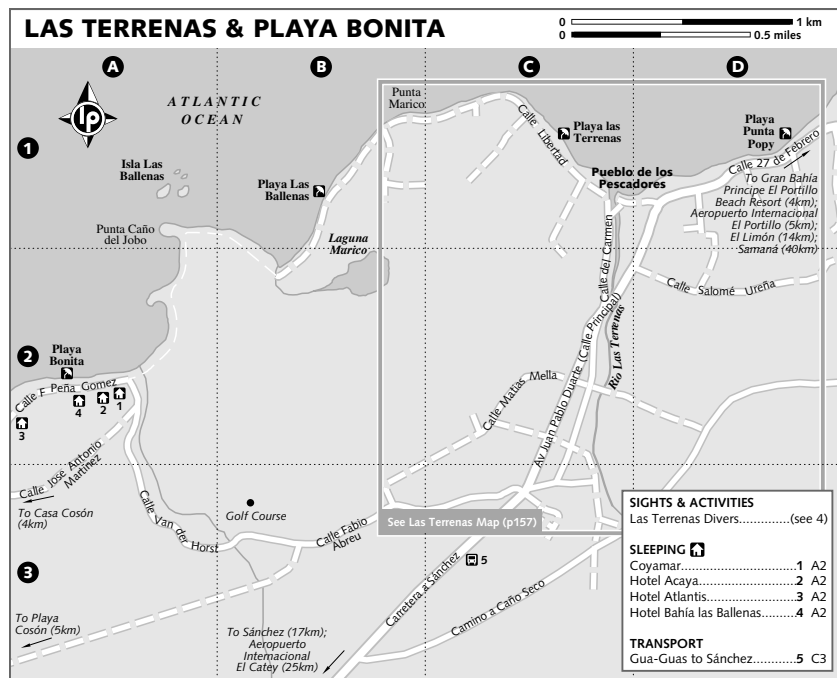
## Sights & Activities

Surfers and bodyboarders hit the waves around the eastern part of Playa Bonita near Calle Van der Horst. Just around the south-western bend is the secluded, 6km-long **Playa Cosón**. The sand here is tan, not white, and the water greenish, not blue, but nevertheless it's a good place to pack a lunch and lose the bathing suit for a day. There are two small rivers that run through the thick palm-tree forest and open onto the ocean; the easternmost is said to contain agricultural runoff.

**Las Terrenas Divers** (☎ 809-240-6066; [www.lt-divers.com](http://www.lt-divers.com); Hotel Bahía las Ballenas; ☞ 9:30am–noon & 3–5pm) offers dive trips and courses (one tank US\$34, equipment US\$7, five tanks US\$155, open-water certificate US\$345) as well as snorkel trips to Isla Las Ballenas (US\$15, one hour) and Playa Jackson (minimum three people, US\$25 to US\$30 per person). You can also rent kayaks, bodyboards and surfboards by the hour or the day.

## Sleeping & Eating

**Coyamar** (☎ 809-240-5130; [www.coyamar.com](http://www.coyamar.com); cnr Calles F Peña Gomez & Van der Horst; s/d US\$45/60; ☞) Located at Calle Van der Horst and



the beach road, Coyamar is the least luxurious of the Playa Bonita hotels. The vibe is casual and friendly, especially good for families, and the restaurant near the front of the property and the pool are good places to hang out. Batiks and bright colors rule the day here and the fan-cooled rooms are simple and comfortable.

**Hotel Acaya** (☎ 809-240-6161; [www.hotelacaya.com](http://www.hotelacaya.com); Calle F Peña Gomez; r US\$65-85; ☞ ☞ ☞ ☞ ☞) Evocative of a more genteel era, the Acaya's two-story colonial building sits back from the beach on a finely manicured lawn. This French-owned hotel is understated and tastefully furnished and there's a relaxing lounge-restaurant on the property. Air-con rooms are available for US\$10 extra; wi-fi is available throughout.

**Hotel Atlantis** (☎ 809-240-6111; [www.atlantis-hotel.com.do](http://www.atlantis-hotel.com.do); Calle F Peña Gomez; s incl breakfast US\$60, d US\$70-100, air-con extra US\$10; ☞ ☞ ☞ ☞) This rambling and charming hotel is straight out of a children's fairy tale – all twisting staircases, covered walkways and odd-shaped rooms. The furnishings are comfortable, not luxurious, and each of the 18 rooms is different – some

have balconies and fine ocean views. There's a palm tree-covered patio and fine French restaurant on the premises. Breakfast is included in the rate and wi-fi is available.

**Our pick** **Hotel Bahía las Ballenas** (☎ 809-240-6066; [www.bahia-las-ballenas.net](http://www.bahia-las-ballenas.net); Calle José Antonio Martínez; d incl breakfast US\$95-130; ☞ ☞ ☞ ☞ ☞) Occupying a large swath of Playa Bonita property, this hotel combines the virtues of a luxurious resort and private retreat. Each one of the 32 huge airy villas scattered over the meticulously manicured lawn and garden is inspired by a Mexico-south of France aesthetic – pastel stucco walls, high thatched ceilings, tile floors and even roofless toilet and shower areas. Large wooden decks look out to an especially nice pool area lined with towering palm trees. An open-air restaurant serves creative Dominican dishes. There's an on-site dive shop as well.

**Casa Cosón** (☎ 809-374-2993; [www.casacoson.com](http://www.casacoson.com); Playa Cosón; r incl breakfast US\$133; ☞ ☞) If Playa Bonita is just too congested for your liking, then this small colonial-style house on Playa Cosón is a good choice. It's fairly isolated, tucked away in a palm forest, but that's the appeal. Three

of the rooms have sea-facing balconies but all guests have access to the attractive back patio, great for a day of lounging. The only thing between you and a beautiful stretch of beach is a well-manicured lawn.

### Getting There & Away

By car, Playa Bonita is reachable by a single dirt road that turns off from the Sánchez–Las Terrenas highway. In theory it’s possible to walk from Playa Bonita to Playa Cacao in Las Terrenas via a coastal dirt/mud trail, but it requires clambering over a steep pitch, and some water wading. A taxi ride here is US\$10, a *motoconcho* around US\$1.75. There are usually a few *motoconchos* there when you’re ready to return but it’s best to set out before nightfall.

## SÁNCHEZ

pop 11,800

Sánchez is a nondescript town that is notable mainly as a transportation hub. Buses to and from Santo Domingo and Puerto Plata stop here briefly, and pickups wait nearby to take passengers on the gorgeous, winding road over the coastal mountains to La Terrenas. There are also frequent *gua-gua* services to Samaná. There’s at least one bank with an ATM if you need to pick up cash on the way.

**Caribe Tours** (☎ 809-552-7434) has services to Santo Domingo from Sánchez (four hours plus, 7:30am, 9am, 10:30am, 1:30pm, 3pm and 4:30pm). **Metro** (☎ 809-552-7332) has capital-bound buses at 9am and 5pm. The fare on both bus lines is US\$7.50 and the trip takes around four hours.