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TRIP IDEAS

Your Ultimate Travel Guide to Dominica: The Greatest Little Caribbean Island You've Never Heard Of

Prehistoric rain forests, bubbling hot springs, villages untouched by time. Read on for our ultimate travel guide to Dominica, the greatest little Caribbean island you've never heard of.

By Lindsey Olander March 27, 2019



There are many reasons why you've probably never heard of Dominica, a mountainous island nation in the center of the Caribbean's Lesser Antilles. Even today, people confuse it with the Dominican Republic—though the country is pronounced differently (“doe-min-EE-ka”), is many islands away, has no international airport (there's no place flat enough here to build a long runway), and is visibly lacking in the sugar-white beaches and glitzy resort towns found basically anywhere else in the Caribbean.

But get past the absence of soft sands and the near-constant threat of rain (hey, you don't earn the name “Nature Island” without getting a little wet), and you'll find something far more alluring: a place seemingly untouched by time that few

travelers ever make their priority to see. Here, there are no traffic lights or enforced speed limits. Its main cities remain free—for now—of commercial chains, and the indigenous Kalinago people have a 3,700-acre territory all to themselves. And then there's the land itself. The last Caribbean island to be colonized by the Europeans, now-sovereign Dominica is still heavily dominated by its volcanic landscape—its steaming hot springs, its ancient rain forests—that looks much like it did when Columbus landed here in 1493.

Looking to head off the beaten path and discover incredible natural beauty, authentic Creole cuisine, and one of the best dive sites the Caribbean has to offer? Read on for our ultimate travel guide to Dominica.



STAY

Secret Bay

Dominica's most luxurious retreat is a stunner in more ways than one. Just six treehouse-style villas and bungalows hide in a clifftop jungle canopy outside Portsmouth. Open-plan layouts mean the outdoors are always within sight, be it from your outdoor shower, private terrace, or swinging hammock with its

own commanding view of the sea. Staff here is as attentive as any five-star resort, though the endless included perks—mountain bikes, Go-Pros, telescopes for spotting whales, *two* swimmable beaches (almost unheard of on this isle)—mean you won't be asking for much. Unless, of course, you prefer your pre-ordered breakfasts be delivered straight to your bed, or need an in-room massage after that afternoon snorkel session.

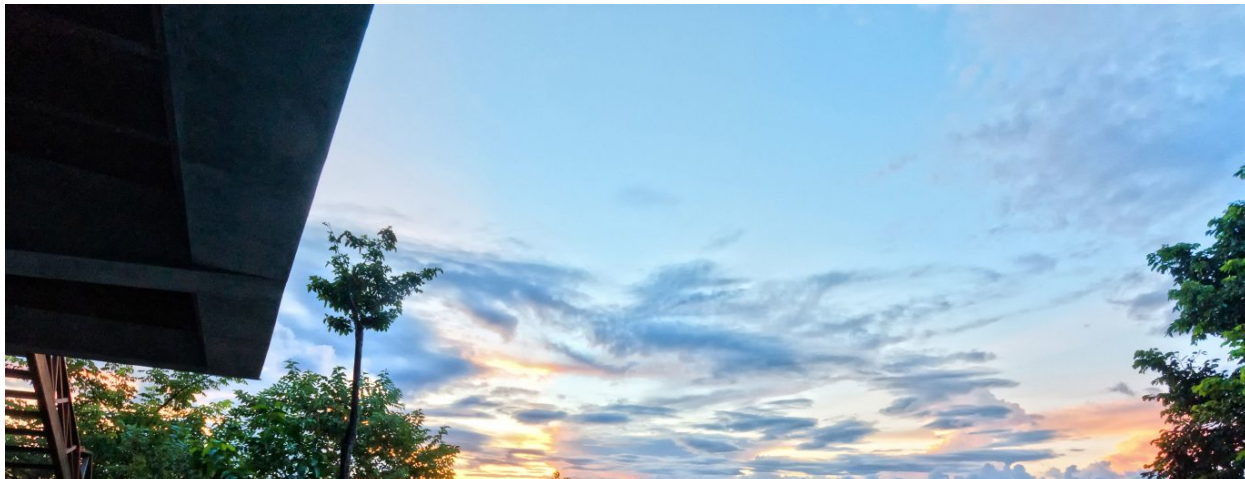
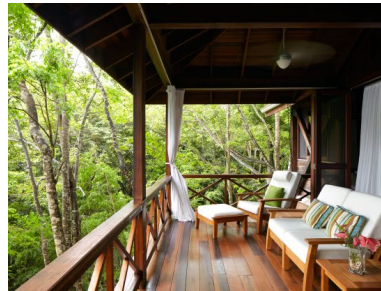
Check Prices for Secret Bay in Portsmouth, Dominica

 Aug 7, 2020 to Aug 10, 2020

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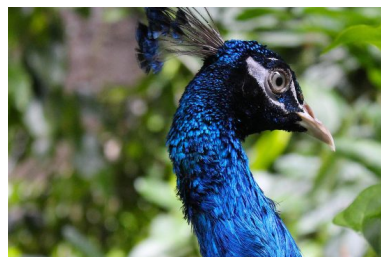
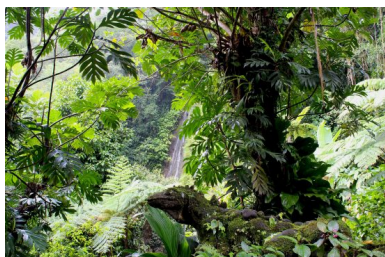
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Papillote Wilderness Retreat (reopening Fall 2019)

This inland [eco-inn](#), high in the Roseau Valley some 15 minutes outside Roseau, is a frequent stop on the cruise ship circuit—and it's easy to see why, with its authentic Dominican snacks, local charm, and incredible forest sounds (and birds) that drift through the open-air terrace. For the past two decades, owner Anne Jno Baptise has built up her own tropical eden—four of the property's 10 acres, roamed by a pair of peacocks, are now a colorful world of ferns, flowers, moss-covered statues, and mineral pools (both hot and cold) fed by the property's natural springs and waterfalls. All of this is the backdrop for five simple guest rooms done up with locally made furniture and quilts. There are no TVs in sight, and WiFi is limited, but you're here to connect in an entirely different way. An added bonus: you're within walking distance (10 minutes at most) to the island's famous Trafalgar Falls.





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Fort Young Hotel

As its name suggests, this [quayside](#) hotel, right across from the State House in Dominica's capital city of Roseau, was built inside the walls of a 1770 colonial fort. The history is fun, but the amenities are better: oceanfront rooms in the hotel's new section come with balconies overlooking the sea, there's a pool for

the kids and a spa for the adults, and its Palisades Restaurant remains one of the nicest in the city, specializing in international and Caribbean dishes like pumpkin and ginger soup and pan-seared lion fish. Ask for a table on the terrace for breezy views of the coastline; on Friday nights, live music can be heard from the downstairs bar.

Check Prices for Fort Young Hotel in Roseau, Dominica

 Aug 7, 2020 to Aug 10, 2020

\$150 **Booking.com**

See Deal

Explore More: [See hotel details](#) | [See all Roseau, Dominica hotels](#)





SEE + DO

Waitukubuli National Trail

The region's first long-distance walking trail covers 115 miles of some of the most unadulterated wilderness in the entire Caribbean, connecting national parks, UNESCO Heritage Sites, waterfalls, hot springs, and coastlines like a charm bracelet of the best the Nature Island has to offer. Since its establishment in 2010, the trail has become a magnet for backpackers and one of Dominica's biggest tourism drivers, spawning new homestays and farm tours and promoting eco-tourism in a way nothing on this island could before. The trail is divided into segments to make it more approachable—Segment 3 is perfect for hitting various sulphur springs and Trafalgar Falls, while Segment 4 covers Morne Trois Pitons and the famous Boiling Lake.

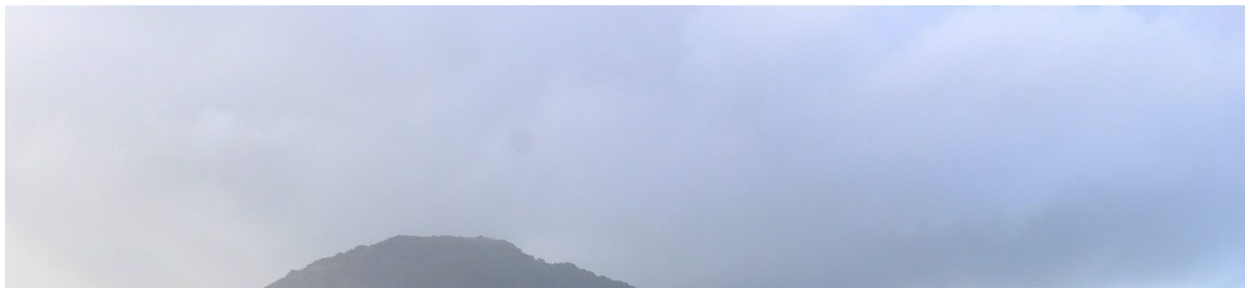






Roseau

The dense, vibrant capital city of Dominica, on the island's southwestern coast, is a cacophony of locals zipping around on motorbikes, lines of tents where farmers hawk coconut water and fresh farm vegetables, and calypso music warbling from low-rise timber buildings painted in every color of the rainbow. Witnessing the 18th-century Creole architecture is enough to warrant a visit here, where remnants of English and French design are stark reminders that this island was once caught in a battle of independence from former rule. Walk the narrow streets, especially in the French Quarter and along the Bayfront, for a glimpse of city life, then pop into the [Dominica Museum](#) for a history lesson before taste of rum punch at local hangout [Garage Bar](#).





Ti Kwen Glo Cho

Dominica, which sits on the highest concentration of dormant volcanoes in the world, is riddled by hot springs that bubble up from the depths of the earth. Screw Sulphur Spa is Dominica's most famous, but it can get overrun by locals

and tourists from passing cruise ships. Ti Kwen Glo Cho, Creole for “little corner of water,” is a gorgeous alternative—a collection of natural sulphur pools and springs hidden in a dense rain forest just outside Wotten Waven, where winding paths lead past a waterfall and flowerbeds to hot communal pools and individual bath tubs. For centuries, hot springs have been proven to provide therapeutic benefits (such as increasing blood flow) while sulphur treats the skin.



Champagne Reef

Champagne Reef, about 20 minutes south of Roseau, is arguably *the* best dive site in the Caribbean and a perfect place for snorkeling. The reef gets its name from underwater geothermal springs that vent warm bubbles, making you feel

like you're swimming through a glass of bubbly. And the sea life spotting is no joke: keep your eyes peeled for parrot fish, seahorses, hawksbill and green sea turtles, and even the remains of a 17th-century Spanish shipwreck.

EAT + DRINK

Islet View Restaurant

Lunch is the biggest meal of the day in Dominica, and even on misty days, [Islet View](#) is a beautiful place to stop. On the terrace, wooden tables lined by bamboo benches look out across the forest towards Castle Bruce beach and the islet for which it's named. Fresh juices (guava; ginger) are served in carved-out coconuts and garnished with hibiscus flowers, while oversize specials of the day (barracuda; roast chicken) are served alongside a for-the-table appetizer of bite-size cuts of sugarcane, pineapple, and watermelon. If you're looking to make an afternoon of it, hit up the adjacent bar, which serves all manners of homemade rum infused with flavors like peanut and mango.



Pearl's Cuisine

Ask any local where to eat in Roseau and they'll point you to **Pearl's**, a city institution best known for chef Pearl's unwavering dedication to genuine Dominican cooking—specifically, old-school broths and soups in flavors like bull foot (we passed) and chicken callaloo. Go on a Saturday for the best prices and flavor options. JS Tip: Order the fish broth and you'll leave happy.



Daniel's Cassava Bakery

Bread is a big deal on Dominica, and when it comes to cassava bread, a staple of the native Kalinago diet, locals travel a long way to get their hands on

Daniel's. This tiny bakery in Castle Bruce, on the northeastern side of the island, still follows age-old tradition, using a gigantic open-air metal grill to grind and bake cassava root for hours until it becomes a powder. The stand is best known for their tropical flavors (cinnamon, raisin, ginger), though the one we tried, and couldn't stop trying, was the coconut.



SHOP

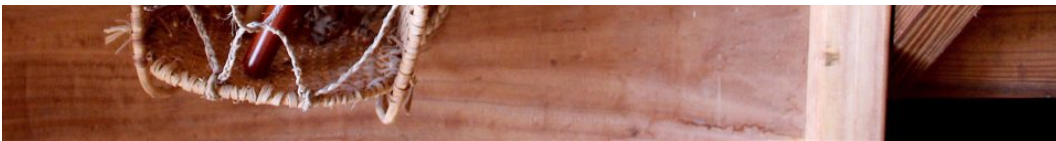
Roseau's Old Market Square

The capital's original cobblestone plaza, behind the Dominica Museum, is a touristed but still worthy place to come for local crafts and souvenirs—as well as a real taste of island history. Look out for the concrete slab that marks the spot of the old slave market, where colonial trading took place before emancipation. Be mindful: stalls are often only set up when a cruise ship is in town.

Kalinago Barana Autê

Before Columbus, there were the Kalinago, the Carib Indians and the island's first inhabitants. Many descendants still survive today, specializing in basket weaving and herbal medicine—a practice that remains prevalent throughout the island. Tour guides at the [Kalinago Barana Autê](#) village talk about heritage and traditions as they lead guests past model huts, where you can witness the process of canoe building, basket weaving, and calabash carving (available for purchase), as well as unique cultural performances.





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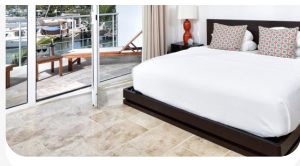
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