ROCKJUMPER

Worldwide Birding Adventures

Dominican Republic

Endemics of Hispaniola V

7th December to 15th December 2021 (9 days)



Palmchat by Adam Riley

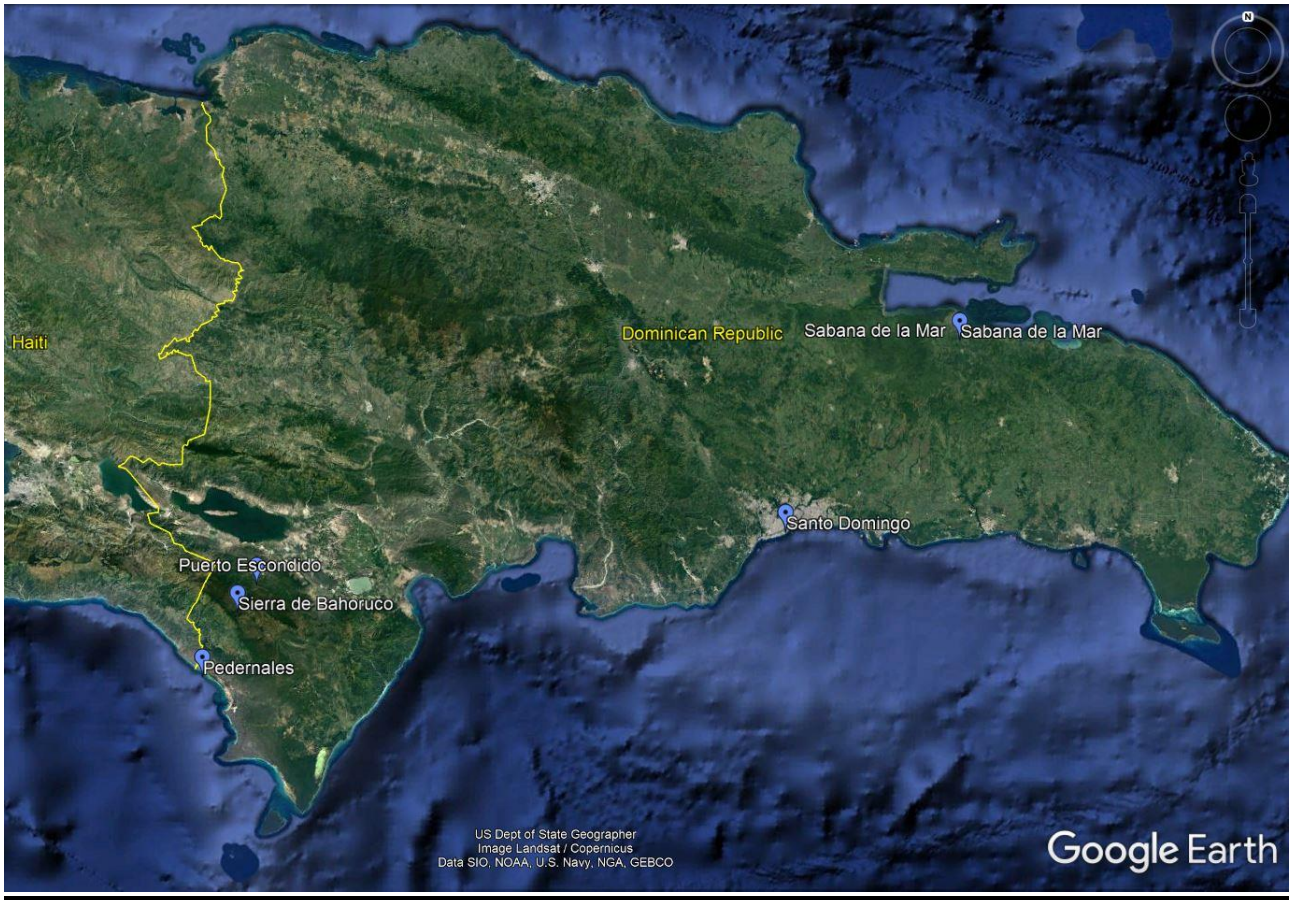
Although the Dominican Republic is perhaps best known for its luxurious beaches, outstanding food and vibrant culture, this island has much to offer both the avid birder and general naturalist alike. Because of the amazing biodiversity sustained on the island, Hispaniola ranks highest in the world as a priority for bird protection! This 8-day birding tour provides the perfect opportunity to encounter nearly all of the island's 32 endemic bird species, plus other Greater Antillean specialities. We accomplish this by thoroughly exploring the island's variety of habitats, from the evergreen and Pine forests of the Sierra de Bahoruco to the dry forests of the coast. Furthermore, our accommodation ranges from remote cabins deep in the forest to well-appointed hotels on the beach, each with its own unique local flair. Join us for this delightful tour to the most diverse island in the Caribbean!

THE TOUR AT A GLANCE…

THE ITINERARY

Day 1	**Arrival in Santo Domingo**
Day 2	**Santo Domingo Botanical Gardens to Sabana del Mar (Paraiso Caño Hondo)**
Day 3	**Paraiso Caño Hondo to Santo Domingo**
Day 4	**Salinas de Bani to Pedernales**
Day 5	**Cabo Rojo & Southern Sierra de Bahoruco**
Day 6	**Cachote to Villa Barrancoli**
Day 7	**Northern Sierra de Bahoruco**
Day 8	**La Placa, Laguna Rincon to Santo Domingo**
Day 9	**International Departures**

TOUR ROUTE MAP…



THE TOUR IN DETAIL…

Day 1: Arrival in Santo Domingo. After landing in the capital city of Santo Domingo, participants will be met and escorted to a modern hotel in the historic district of the western hemisphere's oldest European city. A good night's rest is in order, as we begin our island adventure bright and early the following morning!



Broad-billed Tody by Matthew Matthiessen

Day 2: Santo Domingo Botanical Gardens to Sabana del Mar (Paraiso Caño Hondo). The National Botanical Gardens is a great introduction to the birding bounty of the Dominican Republic. Diligently preserved and full of native plants, the gardens provide a habitat for many of the island's most sought-after species. We can expect to kick off our tour with good views of the scarce West Indian Whistling Duck, retiring Mangrove Cuckoo, ornate Red-legged Thrush and other widespread species such as Zenaida Dove and Greater Antillean Grackle. Near-endemics and endemics are many, including Hispaniolan Woodpecker, Hispaniolan Parakeet, Black-crowned Tanager, Hispaniolan Lizard Cuckoo, Antillean Palm Swift, gorgeous Antillean Mango, minuscule Vervain Hummingbird and the only monotypic family of the Caribbean – Palmchat. This promises to be a great start to an incredible tour!

From Santo Domingo, we spend the remainder of the day driving north east, to the eastern border of Parque Nacional Los Haitises, near the ocean. While the first part of the drive is dominated by one of Hispaniola's main crops – sugar cane, the latter half sees us cruising through some nice lowland forest patches, and mixed secondary habitats ranging from cattle ranch land to rice fields. A few species of interest we'll likely add to our tally this afternoon include Plain or Scaly-naped Pigeons, Hispaniolan Amazon, White-necked Crow, and Black-whiskered Vireo. We might also get our first glimpse of a Tody! Broad-billed Tody is not at all uncommon in the area, and is one of the stars of the show here in the DR. Our biggest focus of the evening will be to locate the endemic Ashy-faced Owl. This particular species is quite successful within its habitat preferences, which include humid forest borders and edges. Our local guide for the area, Juan, usually has a pair staked out and we hope to have nice views of this beauty before dinner.



Hispaniolan Amazon by Dušan Brinkhuizen

Day 3: Sabana de la Mar to Santo Domingo. As was the case yesterday, our birding will be directly focused on a handful of species. In particular, we

will search for one of the most imperilled endemic targets of the tour - Ridgway's Hawk. Critically Endangered, this incredibly rare raptor has had its range reduced to only a small part of northern Dominican Republic, long since extinct in Haiti. On the upside, due to intensive and prolonged efforts by the Peregrine Fund, this species is making a small recovery. Our tour is timed to fall at the beginning of the breeding season, where we are often able to get excellent views of adults near their nesting site.



Ridgway's Hawk pair by Adam Riley

Before departing for Santo Domingo, we will have time to enjoy many other nice species that call the Paraiso de Caño Hondo home, as well as perhaps having time for a quick swim in one of the many waterfall-fed pools at this unique establishment. This site is one of the better spots on the tour to get views of the bizarre Antillean Piculet. Too big to be closely-related to other neotropic Piculets, though too small to be a Woodpecker, this particular species looks and sound much more akin to Pygmy Woodpeckers of the Old World. Grey Kingbirds, Black-whiskered Vireo, several species of swallow, Bananaquits, Yellow-faced Grassquit, and Red-tailed Hawks are all also quite common here. A brief stop at the dock in Sabana del Mar offers a wonderful view of the surrounding mountain ranges that plunge into the Caribbean, as well as providing some nice shorebird and tern viewing. We've often found Hispaniolan Curlytail Lizards and some interesting anoles here, for those herp lovers on the tour. We will probably arrive in Santa Domingo with time for folks to enjoy a walk around the old town.

Day 4: Santo Domingo to Pedernales via Salinas de Bani. Today we depart Santo Domingo early to Salinas de Bani. We will make our way early heading due west, paralleling the coast towards Haiti. While today is largely a travel day, we will have some quality time at the wonderful Salinas de Bani, also known as Bahia de Caldera National Monument. This will be our best exposure to Caribbean mangrove and tidal flat habitats.



Piping Plover by Dušan Brinkhuizen

Though a boat ride through the bay might be possible depending on wind conditions, here there is great access to the beaches, flats, and mangrove edges via a system of maintained trails. Much of the avifauna here can be seen, comfortably from the roads, as well. We will start our birding along the mangrove edges in search of the Caribbean race of

Clapper Rail, Mangrove Warbler, and the stunning American Flamingo which can be seen here in varying numbers. Several endemics live in the scrub and thickets bordering the mangroves, and we might come across our first Stolid Flycatcher or Greater Antillean Bullfinch of the tour here.



Ashy-faced Owl by Dušan Brinkhuizen

An impressive array of shorebirds, including the endangered Piping Plover, is one of the reasons this area has gained international recognition as an area of importance. In spring migration, thousands of shorebirds stage here en route to breeding grounds in the arctic. We will be visiting at the front end of this migration spectacle. While we won't have the astonishing numbers a visit in April would yield, we will encounter large numbers of an array of nice species today. Shorebirds regularly seen here include Black-necked Stilt, Grey (Black-bellied) Plover, Snowy, Wilson's, Semipalmated, and Piping Plovers, Whimbrel, Ruddy Turnstone, Sanderling, Stilt, Least, Semipalmated, Western, and Spotted Sandpipers, Short-billed Dowitcher, Willet, and both species of Yellowlegs. Royal, Cabot's, and Common Terns, as well as the odd Roseate (rare) can be seen here along with the entire compliment of the island's herons and egrets. It will be a pleasant morning at a very scenic location.

The remainder of the day we will be making our way to Pedernales, on the far western border of the Dominican Republic and Haiti. We might have time for some light birding in the dry scrub en route to attempt the tricky Black-faced Grassquit, which seems to be restricted to more arid scrub than we typically bird. Our dinner will be at a locally famous restaurant, which serves up some of the best grub, family-style, of the tour!



Hispaniolan Trogon by Adam Riley

Day 5: Cabo Rojo & Southern Sierra de Bahoruco. There are several well-known birding spots covering the southern Sierra de Bahoruco slopes and coastline. We will likely start birding along the coast at an area known as Cabo Rojo. A few special birds at Cabo Rojo that we hope to encounter include White-tailed Tropicbird, Brown Booby, the Hispaniolan subspecies of Cave Swallow and Antillean Palm Swift. We will then drive up the Alcoa Road. This southern access to the Sierra de Bahoruco was built by the Alcoa bauxite mining company many years ago. These days, the asphalt road allows us easy and quick

access to the higher parts of the ridge where native pine forests remain intact. As with any area, certain birds are more likely to be seen in one locale than the other. Here we hope to find White-crowned Pigeon, Golden Swallow, Hispaniolan Palm Crow, Pine Warbler, Antillean Siskin and Hispaniolan Crossbill, to name just a few.



La Selle Thrush by Dušan Brinkhuizen

After birding the higher elevations, we can make our back down to the coast for a delicious seafood lunch on the beach, at the national park near Cabo Rojo. Some guests might opt for a quick dip after lunch, or we can begin our drive north along the cost towards our abode for the evening near Barahona. Located in the heart of the wettest part of the Sierra de Bahoruco, the eastern slope, our hotel provides quick access to important habitat the following morning. The grounds themselves are often quite productive and some late-afternoon birding around the pool area and cabins might provide us our first Hispaniolan Oriole! Though widespread, this species is often thin-on-the-ground. Palmchat, Hispaniolan Woodpecker and migrant warblers will keep us entertained. Depending on our success with Ashy-faced Owl at Sabana del Mar on day 2, we have another great stakeout to see this species here, tonight.

Day 6: Cachote to Villa Barrancoli This morning we will head into another part of the Sierra de Bahoruco range for a very special treat. With a certain amount of luck and effort, we should be able to get good views of Eastern Chat-Tanager. Many miles outside of its known distribution, this southern slope population is little known and even less often searched for. These songsters are notorious skulkers, but with patience we usually get everyone on the bird. Besides the Eastern Chat-Tanager, we will enjoy our first exposure to the higher-elevation and humid broadleaf forests that the bulk of the island's endemics inhabit. Notably, Rufous-throated Solitaire song fills the air here, and is one of the most beautiful songs in nature! We may find the rare Bicknell's Thrush, common and adorable Narrow-billed Tody, and Hispaniolan Trogons, too! Though more numerous at our next destination, Hispaniolan Spindalis and Green-tailed Warblers are both seen here, adding to a wonderful host of island endemics. We will be treated a special breakfast of local cuisine prepared by our hosts from the nearby village of Cachote, before birding our way back down the mountain.



Eastern Chat-Tanager by Adam Riley

This afternoon we will head to the famous Villa Barrancoli, in the heart of the Bahoruco mountains. This well-known establishment, founded twenty years ago by Kate Wallace, is situated at the foothills on the northern slopes of the Bahoruco range. Her property abuts the Sierra de Bahoruco National Park, and is surrounded by fantastic habitat. This will be our base for the night, allowing us prime access to the best birding in all of Hispaniola.



Hispaniolan Parakeet by Adam Riley

We will arrive in time to sample the lower-elevation birds here, such as Plain Pigeon, Broad-billed Tody, Hispaniolan Lizard Cuckoo, White-necked Crow, and Hispaniolan Amazon. But we have a focus species this afternoon: late in the afternoon Quail-Doves come to feed in the leaf litter along a particular stretch of the Rabo de Gato Trail. We will be there, searching. Though few tours see all three species of Quail-Doves that occur on the island, all three have indeed been observed here. The clear focus is the island's endemic White-fronted Quail-Dove, recently split from Grey-headed Quail-Dove. Key West and Ruddy are also seen here! Night birding here is a must, and we will search for the Endemic Least Poorwill and the more widespread Northern Potoo.

Day 7: Northern Sierra de Bahoruco. This important mountain range supports populations of nearly all of Hispaniola's island endemics and target birds. An early rise this morning will allow us to reach the high elevation cloud forest before activity dwindles. After many exciting new species, we will then bird our way downhill at our leisure. The long list of birds from today's efforts might include Hispaniolan Nightjar, Scaly-naped Pigeon, Antillean Piculet, Hispaniolan Lizard Cuckoo, Hispaniolan Trogon, Antillean Siskin, Green-tailed Warbler, White-winged Warbler, Western Chat-Tanager, Hispaniolan Crossbill, Hispaniolan Emerald, Hispaniolan Amazon, Broad-billed and Narrow-billed Todies, Hispaniolan Woodpecker, Hispaniolan Pewee, Greater Antillean Elaenia, Stolid Flycatcher, Golden Swallow, Rufous-throated Solitaire, Antillean Euphonia, Hispaniolan Spindalis, Greater Antillean Bullfinch, Hispaniolan



Green-tailed Warbler by Dušan Brinkhuizen

Oriole and the extremely rare La Selle Thrush. The lush greenery of the mountains is also the wintering ground of many important North American migrant species. Cape May, Prairie and Black-throated Blue Warblers are among the commoner Neotropical migrants but the range-restricted, boreal-breeding Bicknell's Thrush is also present in small numbers.

We plan to bird our way down for lunch at lower elevations, before making our way slowly back to Duverge where we'll spend the night.



White-winged Warbler by Dušan Brinkhuizen

Day 8: La Placa, Laguna Rincon to Santo Domingo. Our activities this morning will depend on what species we may still want to find, but we shall most likely head to La Paca where we can focus on one of the most spectacular birds of the island – Bay-breasted Cuckoo. Though we might've already encountered this species by now, birding this area offers the tour's best chance for a close encounter with his important, striking species, as well as Flat-billed Vireo, yet another endemic. We will then begin our gradual journey towards Santa Domingo.



Bay-breasted Cuckoo by Dušan Brinkhuizen

Depending on our success this morning, we hope to have some time for a boat ride and some exploration of a seldom-visited, but productive, freshwater site called Laguna de Rincon. As the only large freshwater lake on the island, it attracts a host of waterfowl, rails, herons, and several island endemics. White-cheeked Pintail, American Wigeon, Lesser Scaup and Ruddy Duck frequent the lake, though the marshy areas will be our focus. The elusive Spotted Rail is known to breed here and the enigmatic Yellow-breasted Crake has also been reported. Both are fairly widespread, but certainly one of the most seldom-seen species in their range. We have a fairly decent shot to see at least one of them here at Laguna Rincon!

From here we will make our way back to the bustling capitol of Santo Domingo, for our farewell dinner, and some time enjoying the colonial sector's live music should guests desire.

Day 9: Departures. Guests depart for home today, after our thorough exploration of the best Hispaniola has to offer.

Optional Extension. Guests wishing to search for Grey-crowned Tanager, the only Hispaniolan endemic not present in the Dominican Republic - can contact our Tailor-made team to arrange a short extension to Haiti. This extension can be arranged before or after our scheduled tour to the Dominican Republic, or as a stand-alone tour. Below is a sample itinerary of a typical trip.

Day 1: Arrival in Port-au-Prince, transfer to Les Cayes. After arriving at Port-au-Prince, we will take a short charter flight to the town of Les Cayes on the southern Haitian peninsula.

Time permitting, we shall visit the local botanical gardens for an afternoon stroll amongst the scattered trees, scrub, manicured gardens and even a river. We can expect to find a number of common species here, including regional specialities such as Hispaniolan Lizard Cuckoo, Antillean Mango, Vervain Hummingbird, Broad-billed Tody, Hispaniolan Woodpecker, Black-whiskered Vireo, White-necked Crow, Palmchat and a number of migratory North American warblers.



West Indian Whistling Duck by Dušan Brinkhuizen

Days 2 & 3: Pic Macaya National Park area. We have two full days to visit Pic Macaya National Park, one of only two national parks in Haiti. Encompassing a little over 8 000 hectares, the park is home to Haiti's last virgin cloud forest. However, the park is rugged and difficult to access, so we will spend the majority of the day birding accessible forest patches and riverine gorges in the immediate vicinity.

Our first location is likely to be the secondary riverine forests of Saut Mathurine, Haiti's largest waterfall. This is an excellent site for the endemic Grey-crowned Palm Tanager, and early success may provide us with some relaxing down time enjoying the cold turquoise waters and indeed the waterfall (if there is sufficient river volume for it to flow). Aside from the Palm Tanager, we should also fine Greater Antillean Bullfinch, Black-whiskered Vireo, Loggerhead and Grey Kingbirds, Hispaniolan Woodpecker, Antillean Mango and Hispaniolan Lizard Cuckoo.



Broad-billed Tody by Matthew Matthiessen

We shall also bird a nearby wetland if conditions are suitable. Of primary interest are the large numbers of West Indian Whistling Duck, but a host of other waterfowl and waders are typically encountered such as Blue-winged Teal, American Wigeon, Ruddy Duck, White-cheeked Pintail, Tricolored and Little Blue Herons and Spotted Sandpiper. The associated scrub habitat holds White-

necked Crow, the by now ubiquitous Palmchat, Palm and Prairie Warblers, Greater Antillean Grackle and Yellow-faced Grassquit.

Our second days activities will depend on our success the previous day. Should we already have seen Grey-crowned Palm Tanager, we may investigate patches of mangroves and marshes nearby, adding a host of new species to or Haiti list. Possibilities include the likes of Yellow-crowned Night Heron, Willet, Spotted Sandpiper, Laughing Gull, Royal and Cabot's Tern, Scaly-naped Pigeon, Mourning, White-winged and Common Ground Doves, Antillean Palm Swift, Antillean Mango, Vervain Hummingbird, Broad-billed Tody, Stolid Flycatcher, Black-whiskered Vireo, White-necked Crow and Greater Antillean Bullfinch.

Day 4: Final departure from Port-au-Prince. After breakfast we head back to Les Cayes airport for our return flight to Port-au-Prince International Airport where the tour will conclude.

FINANCIAL ARRANGEMENTS:

Tour dates, prices, single supplement rates, approximate flight costs and spaces available for this tour are displayed on our website. Please see under IMPORTANT NOTES below.

This includes:

- All meals from dinner on day 1 to breakfast on day 9;
- All lodgings;
- Ground transportation;
- Reserve entrance fees;
- Extra activities as mentioned in the itinerary; and
- All guiding services (including tips for local guides and services).

The tour fee does not include:

- Visa fees;
- **ANY flights**;
- Any drinks;
- Special gratuities; and
- Telephone calls, laundry and other items of a personal nature.
- Cultural Tour of Santo Domingo

Single Supplement: The single supplement cost for this tour will be charged if you wish to have single accommodation. If RBL cannot provide you with a rooming partner for these nights although you choose to share, the single supplement will become applicable. We will make all reasonable efforts to ensure that a rooming partner is found if you do wish to share. There is no Single Supplement available for one night on this tour, when staying at the very basic Villa Barrancoli. This lodge does not have en-suite or private bathrooms, all are shared.

IMPORTANT NOTES:

a) Due to constantly fluctuating exchange rates, we quote our tours in 4 currencies. The tour price is however fixed only in the currency printed in bold, and the actual cost in the other currencies listed will be adjusted according to prevailing exchange rates at the time of final invoicing (usually 4 months before the tour.) The same applies to approximate flight and single supplement rates, which are also quoted in the respective fixed currency.

b) Rates are based upon group tariffs; if the tour does not have sufficient registration a small party supplement will have to be charged.

c) Furthermore, these costs are subject to unforeseen increases in tour related costs and may have to be adjusted as a result.

d) Lastly, we may be forced to change or alter the itinerary and / or the designated Rockjumper leader at short or no notice due to unforeseen circumstances; please be aware that we will attempt to adhere as close to the original program as possible.

Tipping: As noted above, gratuities (drivers, hotel staff, restaurants etc) are included on this tour. However, this does NOT include your Rockjumper leader. If, therefore, you feel that he has given you excellent service, it is entirely appropriate to tip him.

Special Notes:

- Much of our time is spent in vehicles, as we do have to cover long distances in order to get to the best birding areas. The more luggage you pack the less room there is in the vehicle, so it is important for the comfort of your fellow travellers that you do not over-pack. Kindly stick to 20kg (44lb) for check in luggage and 8kg (+-18lb) for hand luggage.
- This tour does not require a high level of fitness; however, much of the forest birding will be on foot and may require a fair amount of walking (always at a slow pace).
- The accommodation at Villa Barrancoli is very basic. Over the years, we have reduced the number of nights spent here as alternate and more comfortable options become available.
- Crime is problematic in certain areas of the Dominican Republic. Exercise caution as you would for any big city where crime exists. Do not unnecessarily flaunt cash and valuables and do not leave valuables exposed in the vehicle.
- Prostitution is a legal enterprise in the Dominican Republic and tourists are regularly propositioned even during the day, especially around Santo Domingo.
- There are a number of illegal Haitian immigrants living in the Dominican Republic. You may be approached by young children eager to shine your shoes or beg for money. While the children do not seem to present any theft risks, please exercise caution and consult your Tour Leader if you wish to hand over any food/donations/gifts etc.

ARRIVAL AND DEPARTURE DETAILS:

This tour **does not** include **ANY** airfares. The tour will start with a welcome dinner in Santo Domingo in the evening of day 1. Please make sure that you have arrived in Santo Domingo no later than 17:00. The tour will conclude after breakfast in Santo Domingo on day 9.

The above information in respect of arrivals and departures is a guide only. Precise arrival and departure information will be sent to you in your **Tour Confirmation** package once the tour has been officially confirmed. If you wish to arrive early and/or depart late and would like assistance in this regard, kindly contact the Rockjumper office.

FLIGHTS:

Las Americas International Airport, Santo Domingo (IATA: SDQ) is the main port of entry for international flights into the Dominican Republic and is best serviced by Air France, Copa, Delta Airlines and Jet Blue Airways. **Please DO NOT book any flights until you have consulted the Rockjumper office for confirmation on the status of the tour.**