Dominican Republic

Endemics of Hispaniola



Palmchat by Adam Riley

Although the Dominican Republic is widely known for its beaches, cuisine and culture, it is also one of the Caribbean's most significant islands for bird conservation. With 33 endemic species, Hispaniola ranks as the highest-priority island in the world for bird protection, making it a critical destination for birders.

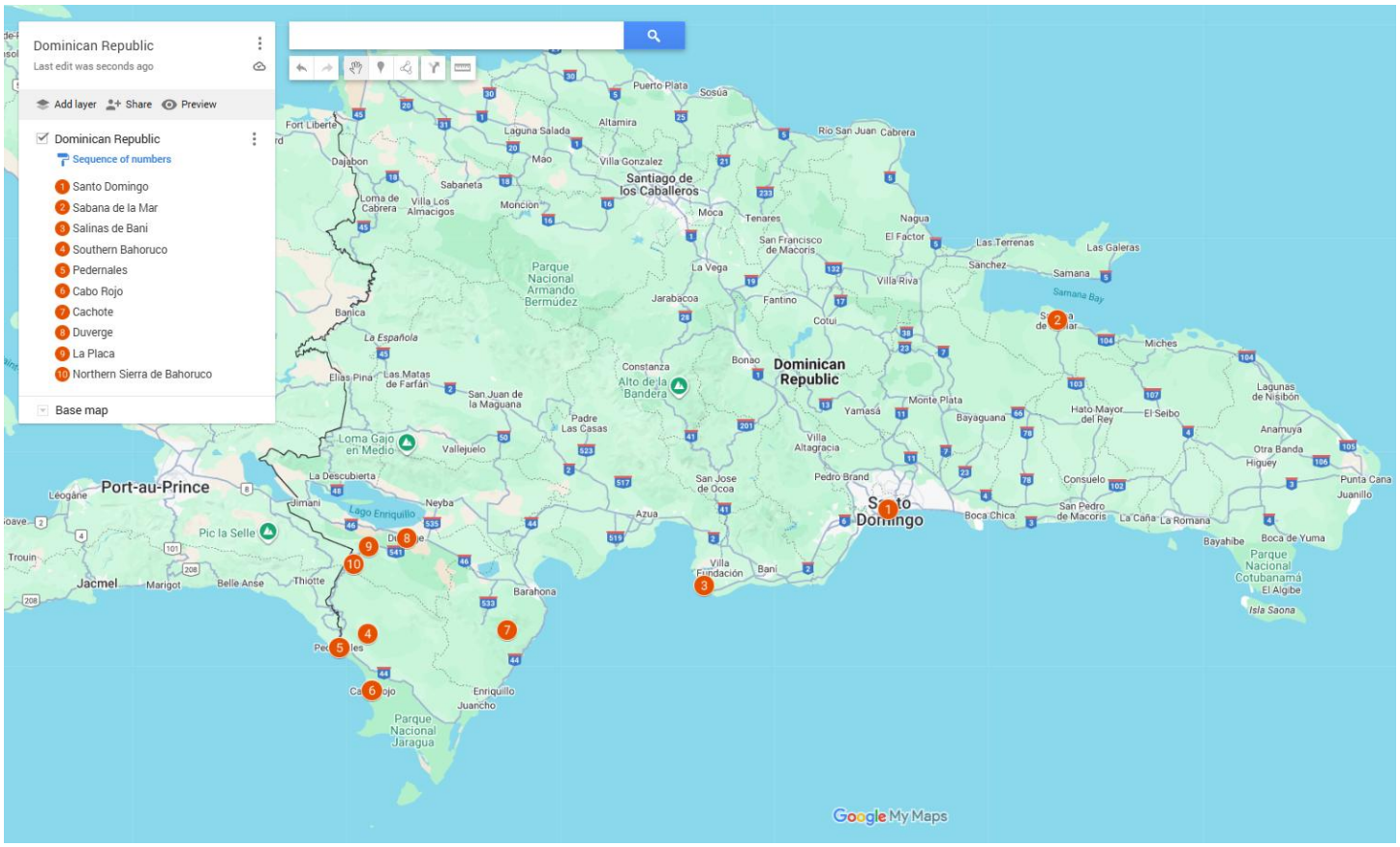
This tour is designed to find nearly all of the island's endemic birds, including the endemic and monotypic Palmchat, Hispaniola's national bird, and the island's distinctive, endemic Chat-Tanager family. We will also search for two of the Caribbean's five tody species and the critically endangered Ridgway's Hawk, one of the world's rarest raptors, as well as a suite of Greater Antillean specialties.

To achieve this, we systematically explore the country's principal habitats, from the pine and broadleaf forests of the Sierra de Bahoruco to coastal dry forest, wetlands and lagoons. Accommodation varies throughout the tour, from simple lodges in remote birding areas to comfortable hotels in coastal towns, ensuring convenient access to key sites while maintaining a comfortable standard throughout.

This itinerary provides a thorough and well-paced tour of the Dominican Republic's exceptional avifauna and habitats.

Itinerary & Map

Day 1	**Arrival in Santo Domingo**
Day 2	**Santo Domingo to Sabana de la Mar**
Day 3	**Sabana de la Mar to Santo Domingo**
Day 4	**Santo Domingo to Pedernales via Salinas de Bani**
Day 5	**Cabo Rojo & southern Sierra de Bahoruco**
Day 6	**Cachote to Duverge**
Day 7	**Northern Sierra de Bahoruco**
Day 8	**La Placa, Laguna Rincon to Santo Domingo**
Day 9	**International Departures**



Birding sites in detail

Santo Domingo Botanical Gardens. 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, near-endemic Eastern 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 one of few monotypic families of the Caribbean – Palmchat.



Broad-billed Tody by Lev Frid

Parque Nacional Los Haitises area. We venture to this section of the country for one particualr species – indeed, 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 and an isolated population on the Les Cayemites island, long since extinct on mainland Haiti. On the upside, due to intensive and prolonged efforts by the Peregrine Fund, this species is making a small recovery.

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, but too small to be a woodpecker, the species looks and sound much more akin to the pygmy woodpeckers of the Old World. The area also supports Plain or Scaly-naped Pigeons, Hispaniolan Amazon, White-necked Crow and Black-whiskered Vireo. We might also get our first glimpse of a tody, as Broad-billed Tody is not at all uncommon. There are also several commoner species to be seen such as Grey Kingbird, Bananaquits, Yellow-faced Grassquit, thousands of Turkey Vultures and Red-tailed Hawks.



Ridgway's Hawk pair by Adam Riley

Sabana de la Mar dock. A brief stop here offers a wonderful view of the surrounding mountain ranges that plunge into the Caribbean, as well as providing some decent shorebird and tern viewing. We've often found Hispaniolan Curlytail Lizards and some interesting anoles here, for those herp lovers on the tour.

Salinas de Bani. 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 here.

On spring migration, thousands of shorebirds stage here en route to breeding grounds in the arctic. While we won't have the astonishing numbers a visit in April may yield, we should 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 and Semipalmated Plovers, Hudsonian 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.



Ashy-faced Owl by Dušan Brinkhuizen

Sierra de Bahoruco (southern slopes). There are several well-known birding spots covering the southern Sierra de Bahoruco slopes and coastline. We will likely start our morning by driving 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 Hispaniolan Amazon, Golden Swallow, Hispaniolan Palm Crow, Pine Warbler, Antillean Siskin and Hispaniolan Crossbill, to name just a few.

Cabo Rojo. This small beach cove is host to a few special birds such as White-tailed Tropicbird, Brown Booby, the Hispaniolan subspecies of Cave Swallow and Antillean Palm Swift.



Antillean Piculet by Lev Frid

Barahona area. Several hotels and lodges in the area have, cultivated gardens that can be quite productive. Specials we'll keep an eye out for include Hispaniolan Oriole, Palmchat, Hispaniolan Woodpecker. We will head out tonight to search for Ashy-faced Owl.

Cachote. 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'll also visit a reliable feeder for both Ruddy and White-fronted Quail-Doves.



Eastern Chat-Tanager by Lev Frid

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 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 to a filling field breakfast prepared by our hosts from the nearby village of Cachote, before birding our way back down the mountain.

Sierra de Bahoruco (northern slopes). 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, Hispaniolan Elaenia, Stolid Flycatcher, Golden Swallow, Rufous-throated Solitaire, Antillean Euphonia, Hispaniolan Spindalis, Greater Antillean Bullfinch, Hispaniolan Oriole and the 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.



Bay-breasted Cuckoo by Dušan Brinkhuizen

La Placa. This site allows us to 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 should have time to sample the lower-elevation birds here, such as Plain Pigeon, Broad-billed Tody, Hispaniolan Lizard Cuckoo, White-necked Crow, and Hispaniolan Amazon. Night birding here is a must, and we will search for the endemic Least Poorwill and the more widespread Northern Potoo.

Lago Enriquillo. Time permitting, we may visit the lake for any waterfowl, rails and herons, as well as Mangrove Cuckoo.



La Selle Thrush by Bobby Wilcox

Tour Grading & Key

Overall Ease		Can be a tiring tour but is suitable for most birding interest levels.
Birding Ease		Moderate. Several skulking species, mostly searched for from the road edge or short trails. Some nocturnal endemics may require several attempts requiring early morning/late evening owling.
Accommodation		Mostly comfortable, hot water availability can be variable at some lodges. Some lodges may experience maintenance issues.
Walking / Trails		Fairly limited, mostly roadside birding. Some longer walks on the gravel roads, beach/mangroves & lodge gardens.
Vehicles / Roads		Comfortable bus on flat sealed roads. High clearance vehicle up a very rocky, bumpy track on at least 1 day. Lots of driving required which is time consuming due to road network.
Photography		Reasonable, quite a few skulking species. No dedicated hides. Informal blind/feeder.
Annoyances		Some long days, biting insects on occasion, can be very bright on the coast.

Financial Arrangements and Important Notes

Tour dates, prices, single supplement, approximate flight costs and tour spaces are displayed on our website.

Tour inclusions:

- All meals from dinner on day 1 to breakfast on day 9;
- All lodgings;
- All ground transportation during the tour;
- All reserve entrance fees;
- All guiding services
- Tips for local guides, drivers and services.

Tour exclusions:

- Visa fees;
- ANY flights;
- Any beverages (including mini-bar charges at hotels);
- Optional excursions;
- Special gratuities;
- Telephone calls, laundry and other items of a personal nature.

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.

Tipping: As noted above, gratuities (drivers, hotel staff, restaurants etc.) are included on this tour. However, this does NOT include your Rockjumper leader/s. If you feel that they have given you excellent service, it is entirely appropriate to tip them at your discretion.

- **Due to constantly fluctuating exchange rates, we quote our tours in 4 currencies. The tour price is 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. The same applies to approximate flight and single supplement rates.**
- **Rates are based upon group tariffs; if the tour does not have sufficient registrations, a small group supplement will be offered to confirm the tour.**
- **Tour prices are subject to unforeseen increases in tour related costs and may have to be adjusted as a result.**
- **The designated tour leader/s may be changed at short due to unforeseen circumstances.**
- **The itinerary is indicative only. Changes may need to be made to the order in which the tour is conducted, or some of the venues we visit closer to departure. We will attempt to adhere as close to the original program as possible.**

- Much of our time is spent in vehicles, as we do have to cover long distances 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.
- Longs days with lots of driving time. Although distances are not great, the driving takes time due to the structure of road network (ie: no highways/motorways).
- Birding can be moderate to challenging as several species, including some endemic families (ie: Chat-Tanagers) are furtive, remaining within cover where possible.
- This tour does require a good level of fitness as much of the forest birding will be on foot and may require a fair amount of walking (always at a slow pace).

- 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 many 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

The tour starts with a welcome dinner on the evening of day 1. As this is an arrival day, you are free to arrive at any time. The tour will conclude after breakfast of 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.

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.

Visa requirements differ by country, nationality of the traveller and duration and purpose of your intended stay. It may be necessary to obtain a visa or an electronic travel authorization in advance of your travel. It is therefore vitally important that you check with your travel agent/consulate/embassy for exact visa requirements.

DO NOT book any flights until the Rockjumper Team have officially confirmed the tour.