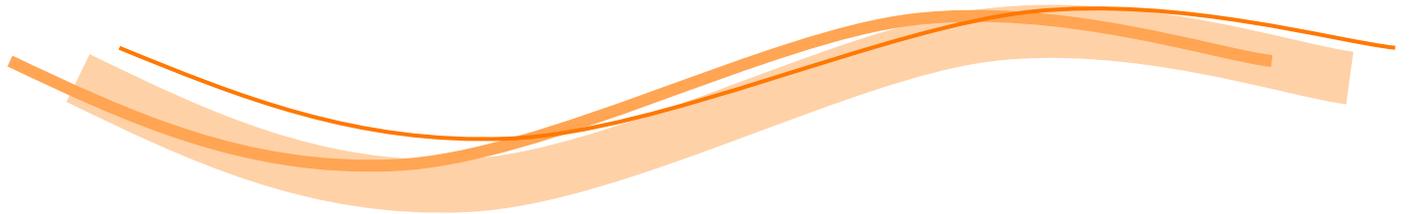




NOLIZONE





<p>NoliZONE</p>	<p>Get ready for a one-of-a-kind vacation where YOU take centre stage! Nolitours' lively noliZONE was specifically created for travellers who would like to step outside their resort, meet new people and really get to know their destination. With tons of activities throughout the day and night - in and out of the resorts - the biggest dilemma is deciding what to do next.</p> <p>Check out www.noliZONE.com to find out more about this unique vacation concept. NoliZONE resorts offer fun activities like parties, happy hour and free internet. There's a calendar of exclusive excursions, deals at local restaurants and bars – even the opportunity for community involvement such as volunteering at an orphanage in Puerto Plata.</p> <p>The It Zone in Puerto Plata in the Dominican Republic is back for 2012/2013. And the ZONE is expanding. There are two new noliZONES this year. The first is in Puerto Vallarta and Riviera Nayarit in Mexico. The second is in Santa Lucia in Cuba.</p> <p>The Travel Notes are organized in four sections as follows:</p> <p>1st section: NoliZONE</p> <p>2nd section: Nolitours and Transat</p> <p>3rd section: Puerto Plata, Dominican republic</p> <p>4th section: Santa Lucia, Cuba</p> <p>5th section: Puerto Vallarta and Riviera Nayarit, Mexico</p>
<p>Puerto Plata</p>	<p>Puerto Plata, Dominican Republic - It's the place to be!</p> <p>Back by popular demand – Nolitours' It Zone is the place to be this year! The Dominican Republic and Nolitours have joined forces to create a destination for people who want to have fun! Beyond the fabulous beaches and great resorts, you'll be able to immerse yourself in the local culture, get into the Dominican beat and enjoy a host of activities open to everyone. It's a great place to kick back and meet new people!</p> <p>Whether your idea of paradise is relaxing on the beach with cocktail in hand, soaring to new heights on your kite board or discovering the beauty of the undersea world, you'll find a world of activities here. During the day, Puerto Plata offers everything from tranquil pursuits, to</p>

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	<p>adrenalin rushes and cultural delights. Once the sun sets things really heat up and you may have a hard time deciding what to do. With restaurants, bars, clubs and beach parties all vying for your attention, you may not get to bed until the wee hours of the morning.</p> <p>TA collection of five 3.5 to 4-star hotels that offer easy access to all the fabulous activities and entertainment in the It Zone. You'll enjoy a host of extras, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Complimentary Internet • Casino Chips at Casa Marina Reef and at Grand Paradise (buy \$10 and get another \$10 free, up to \$50). Also applies to hotels in the Playa Dorada area, for up to a limit of \$10 per day. • Happy hour with hors d'oeuvres twice a week • Weekly White Party • Daily Happy Hour • Golf and Spa discounts <p>Last minute deal: Casa Marina Reef Resort 7 nights all inclusive leaving 7th Sept 2012 is only \$170 + \$388 taxes and fees (as at 30 Aug 2012)</p>
<p>Santa Lucia</p>	<p>Santa Lucia Cuba – ideal for nature lovers and sports enthusiasts</p> <p>Santa Lucia is filled with endless stretches of white-sand beaches, gorgeous coral reefs and over 40 diving sites - this little slice of paradise is custom-made for those who like a dash of culture and history mixed in with their outdoor activities and water sports. Visitors to this pristine destination will find it is the perfect spot to indulge in eco-tourism and discover Cuban culture. Nearby Camaguey, a beautiful town filled with squares and parks, offers a perfect introduction to the real Cuba. This UNESCO World Heritage Site is known as the city of legends and abounds in hidden treasures dating back to the 16th century.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ideal for diving (over 35 sites) and kite surfing • Dive with sharks • Spend an afternoon in Playa Los Cocos with a Cuban family and learn to cook a traditional Cuban meal • Tour Nuevitas port city, offering beautiful landscapes and charming people • Nearby Camaguey, rich with history and culture • Perfect spot to indulge eco-tourism <p>Featured Resort Brisas Santa Lucia noliplus HHH1/2, Toronto departures \$499 + \$277 txs/fees 7 nights - All Inclusive, Thu, Nov 8, 15, 22, 29, Dec 6</p>

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<p>Puerto Vallarta</p>	<p>Puerto Vallarta - Mexico at its most colourful</p> <p>Vacations as they were meant to be! Puerto Vallarta offers a delicious serving of local culture and beauty in extraordinary surroundings. Spectacular mountains, golden-sand beaches and the majestic Pacific Ocean serve as the backdrop for an exciting whirl of daytime activities ranging from surfing, golfing, whale watching and eco-tourism high up in the Sierra Madre. After sunset, head to the most authentic restaurants in town for fresh seafood and gourmet meals, followed by a stroll along the Malecon boardwalk and dancing the night away at trendy discos. As for excursions, Nolitours have something for everyone! You can watch the sun set as you sail to Las Caletas for a dinner-show on the beach, or visit this private cove during the day for some fun in the sun. Thrill-seekers will love the sensation of freedom as they zip line through the forest, race up remote dirt roads on an ATV or ride a speedboat around Banderas Bay.</p> <p>Here are some of the activities available:</p> <p>Take a step back in time and visit San Sebastian, a small 17th century mining town that has maintained its traditional architecture of white houses, red rooftops and cobblestone streets. The perfect tour for those interested in history and culture</p> <p>Las Caletas is a tropical beach hideaway where you'll enjoy sun, fun and adventure. Accessible only by boat, this secluded nature reserve stands out against a steep backdrop of green forest canopy in an isolated cove on the southern shores of Banderas Bay.</p> <p>Relax on a catamaran as you head to the magnificent bay of Majahuitas for a morning of snorkelling or kayaking in its crystal clear waters. In the afternoon, stroll through the charming fishing village of Yelapa, followed by relaxation on the beach or hiking through the jungle to the nearby waterfalls before lunch on board.</p> <p>Cruise the coastline aboard a Spanish-style galleon accompanied by pirates who know how to entertain a crowd. Enjoy a fabulous meal and pirate-themed show.</p>
<p>Riviera Nayarit</p>	<p>Riviera Nayarit - Mexico's Pacific paradise</p> <p>This unique destination perfectly blends beautiful beaches and cultural attractions with historic landmarks and colonial charm. It is a decidedly hip and urban environment filled with bars, restaurants and shops. Snorkelling and kayaking are a must in the crystal clear waters of Majahuitas Bay, topped off with a stroll through the fishing village of Yelapa, leisure time on the beach or hiking through the jungle. You can choose to journey back into time with a tour of San Sebastian, or opt for an entertaining dinner-cruise on a Spanish-style galleon accompanied</p>

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	<p>by pirates. Visit the waterfalls, go horseback riding or explore some of the most remote areas and villages along Banderas Bay for a taste of the real Mexico. Those in search of a bargain will get great deals on tons of fabulous finds at Puerto Vallarta's colourful market.</p> <p>For sports lovers try these thrills: Canopy Adventure park: Enjoy the sensation of freedom as you fly across a series of zip lines that provide you with optimum views of your stunning surroundings. This tour will leave thrill seekers and nature lovers feeling exhilarated and triumphant. ATV: Journey deep into the Sierra Madre on an ATV. Drive through villages, race up remote dirt roads and plow through water hazards. Stop at a lovely riverside restaurant for lunch and simply relax by the river.</p>
<p>Community Outreach</p>	<p>There are community outreach opportunities in all four NoliZONES; here is one from Puerto Plata in the DR</p> <p>Casa Albergue de Martina</p> <p>Martina Alfonseca moved forward from her troubled past and turned her life around, making it her mission to help the homeless by providing them with a place to stay. She later began focusing her efforts on young Dominican girls from broken homes and founded Casa Albergue de Martina, in order to prevent them from resorting to prostitution, as she once did. For the past 55 years, this shelter in Puerto Plata has been providing food and a loving home for between 20 and 40 girls at a time. Now run by Gladys and Federico Finke, Casa Albergue de Martina receives funding from the public sector, as well as food and necessities from egg farms, hotels and other local businesses. Nolitours invites you to be a part of the cause. Participating Hotels: Allegro Puerto Plata; Barceló Puerto Plata; Celuisma Playa Dorada; Grand Paradise Playa Dorada Trips leave every Friday at 9 am (meet in hotel lobby at 8:45 am) and return at 3 pm. The maximum number of volunteers is 10 and the cost is \$25 which includes transportation and lunch Orphanage: Casa Albergi de Martinez</p>
<p>Featured Vacations</p>	<p>Santa Lucia (Camaguey) HOTEL CARACOL 3* All Inclusive Dec. 6, 2012; 7 nights from Toronto \$459 +280 taxes & fees</p> <p>Puerto Plata BARCELO PUERTO PLATA 4* All Inclusive Dec. 8, 2012; 7 nights from Toronto \$559 +392 taxes & fees</p> <p>Riviera Nayarit SAMBA VALLARTA 4* All Inclusive Dec. 7, 2012; 7 nights from Toronto \$749 +354 taxes & fees</p>

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	<p>Puerto Vallarta FRIENDLY VALLARTA 4* All Inclusive Nov. 2, 2012; 7 nights from Toronto \$779 +354 taxes & fees</p>
<p>Newstalk 1010 Travel Show Prize Partner</p>	<p>Grand Marival Club & Suites, Nuevo Vallarta, Mexico. Address: Blvd Nuevo Vallarta y Paseo Cocoteros S-N 63735 Nuevo Vallarta, Nayarit, Mexico Tel: 011 52 322-297-0100</p> <p>This hotel is on a beautiful beach in Riviera Nayarit, approximately 12 kms from Puerto Vallarta airport. As part of the Nolitours noliZONE this hotel offers fun activities led by lively staff, a weekly Mexican party, happy hours, free 24 hr WIFI internet, 20% spa discount and 15% golf discount.</p> <p>HOTEL DESCRIPTION •495 rooms and suites •5 restaurants •6 bars •Pools</p> <p>ROOMS Superior Room •Air-conditioning • 1 king-size or 2 double beds •Full bathroom •TV •In-room safe •Hairdryer •Coffee-maker • Mini-bar •Balcony • Maximum occupancy 3 adults (or 2 adults and 2 children)</p> <p>HOTEL SERVICES •Gym •Internet (\$) •Lounge chairs and towels • Room service (\$) • Scuba diving centre (\$) •Spa (\$)</p> <p>ACTIVITIES •Daily activities program •Introduction to scuba diving in pool •Mini-golf •Nightly entertainment •A variety of daily sports •Kayaking •Selected non-motorized water sports (1 hour/day) •Windsurfing</p> <p>RESTAURANTS / BARS Buffet restaurant: •Casebella: Breakfast/Lunch/Dinner À la carte restaurants: •Amalfi (Italian): Dinner •La Pergola (Mediterranean): Dinner •Las Palomas (Mexican): Dinner •La Bamaba (Steakhouse): Dinner Other restaurants: •La Pergola (International): Breakfast/Lunch •La Piazzetta dei Forni (Pizzeria) •La Bamba (Snacks)</p> <p>Bars: •La Palapa bar (Swim-up) •Miramar Bar (Swim-up) •Mirabel (Lobby) •Volare (Lobby) •M & M Martini Bar •Cesar's (Disco)</p>

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	<p>NOLIZONE This latest noliZONE in Puerto Vallarta and Riviera Nayarit offers a taste of local culture and beauty in extraordinary surroundings. Spectacular mountains and the majestic Pacific Ocean serve as the backdrop for an exciting whirl of activities that range from surfing to whale watching in the daytime to enjoying gourmet meals, strolling the Malecon and dancing the night away in the evenings. This resort provides easy access to the great activities and entertainment you'll find in the noliZONE, and offer the following unique advantages to make your vacation that much more fun!</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •No Single Supplement (limited quantity) •Fun activities led by lively staff •Weekly Mexican Party •Happy Hours •Free Internet <p>The noliZONE representative will always keep you informed on upcoming activities and events, and you can also visit www.nolizone.nolitours.com to get the latest news and updates on what is going on in the noliZONE.</p>
<p>CJAD 800 Travel Show Prize Partner</p>	<p>Club Amigo Caracol Resort in Santa Lucia, Cuba. Address: Ave Traraco, Playa Santa Lucia, Nuevitas, Camaguey, Cuba Tel: 011 53 32-365-158</p> <p>Santa Lucia is a nature lover's paradise with endless white-sand beaches, gorgeous coral reefs and over 40 dive sites. The hotel is right on Santa Lucia Beach and 110 kms from Camaguey airport. As part of the Nolitours noliZONE this hotel offers fun activities led by lively staff, a weekly white party, a beach BBQ and 50% massage discount.</p> <p>HOTEL DESCRIPTION •150 rooms •2-storey buildings •3 restaurants •4 bars •Pool</p> <p>ROOMS •Air-conditioning •1 king-size or 2 twin beds •Full bathroom •Hairdryer •TV •Mini-fridge •In-room safe •Living area •Balcony or terrace with garden view •Maximum occupancy 3 adults (or 2 adults and 2 children, or 1 adult and 2 children)</p> <p>HOTEL SERVICES •Gift shop •Gym •Internet (\$) •Massage (\$) •Scuba diving centre (\$)</p> <p>ACTIVITIES •Bicycles •Catamaran •Daily activities program •Dance lessons •Nightly entertainment •Pedal boat •Pool table •Spanish lessons •Kayaking</p>

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Selected non-motorized water sports (1 hour/day) •Snorkeling •Tennis •Volleyball •Windsurfing <p>RESTAURANTS / BARS</p> <p>Buffet restaurants:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Puerto Príncipe <p>À la carte restaurants*:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Capitán Grillo (Italian) •El Velero (Cuban) <p>Other restaurants:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Capitán Grillo (Snacks) <p>Bars:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Chiringuito (Pool) •El Velero (Beach) •Aroma (coffee-bar): 24 hrs <p>NOLIZONE</p> <p>Santa Lucia's new noliZONE offers a one-of-a-kind travel experience, unlike any other. It's a nature lover's paradise filled with endless stretches of whitesand beaches, gorgeous coral reefs and over 40 diving sites. Visitors to this pristine destination will find it is the perfect spot to indulge in eco-tourism and discover Cuban culture. This resort provide easy access to the great activities and entertainment you'll find in the noliZONE and offer the following unique advantages to make your vacation that much for fun:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Fun activities led by lively staff •Weekly White Party •Beach BBQ •50% discount on a 30-minute massage <p>The noliZONE representative will always keep you informed on upcoming activities and events, and you can also visit www.nolizone.nolitours.com to get the latest news and updates on what is going on in the noliZONE.</p> <p>FOR KIDS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Kids' Club (ages 4 to 12) •Children's pool <p>HONEYMOON</p> <p>Free honeymoon package</p> <p>To be eligible for the honeymoon package, newlyweds must advise at the time of booking and present their proof of wedding, dated within the last month, upon arrival at the hotel.</p>
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<p>NOLITOURS</p>	<p>Nolitours offer direct flights and packages from major Canadian gateways to 19 destinations in the Caribbean, Mexico and Central America for this winter 2012/2013.</p>
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<p>Transat Background</p>	<p>Nolitours is a part of Transat A.T. Inc., an integrated international tour operator with more than 60 destination countries and that distributes products in over 50 countries. A holiday travel specialist, Transat operates mainly in Canada and Europe, as well as in the Caribbean, Mexico and the Mediterranean Basin. Montreal-based Transat is also active in air transportation, destination services and distribution. Transat is now the largest tour operator in Canada, and is at the core of the vertical integration process developing and marketing vacation products as well as flights to destinations in the South and Europe. The company acts as a master craftsman in assembling different components of leisure travel: air transportation, passenger transfers from airport to hotel, accommodation, recreational and cultural activities, meals, cruises, and much more. Year-round, Transat Holidays provides its customers across Canada with a full range of holiday products. It offers sun vacations, with a choice of more than 140 hotels, mainly in the Caribbean, Mexico and Florida, along with an impressive array of flights, packages and tours to some 30 European destinations. Transat Holidays also offers more than 100 cruises all around the world. As an industry leader, Transat Holidays offers departures from many Canadian cities including: St-John's, Halifax, Moncton, Fredericton, Montréal, Québec, Ottawa, Hamilton, Toronto, Thunder Bay, Regina, Saskatoon, Winnipeg, Calgary, Edmonton, Lethbridge, Vancouver, Victoria, Comox, Abbotsford, Prince George and Kelowna (as at 2012). Website: http://www.transat.com/en</p>
<p>Mission</p>	<p>Nolitours and Transat Holidays offers quality vacation packages to a wide variety of destinations. Each season, the company presents a wide selection of quality products, in order to meet the diversified needs of Canadian travellers. In keeping with their mission, their employees aim to exceed vacationers' expectations in order to maintain their position as a market leader. They see their role, ultimately, to turn holiday dreams into reality: making the vacation experience one of the most memorable ever.</p>
<p>Vacation Types</p>	<p>Packages, Cruises, Hotels, Flights, Tours, Car Rentals & Train Travel. With a choice of over 300 hotels located in more than 50 destinations and a complete line of itineraries offered in partnership with the most prestigious cruise lines, all products offered by Transat Holidays are subject to a rigorous standard review.</p>
<p>2012: Transat's 25th Anniversary</p>	<p>In 2012, Transat is celebrating its 25th Anniversary with a silver lining, giving travellers a reason to celebrate!</p>
<p>Weddings and Honeymoons</p>	<p>With Nolitours, getting married in paradise surrounded by those you love and cherish is now simpler than ever. Let them send you to Cloud Nine with their Passion package and turn your dream wedding into a week-long festivity! Here are their wedding promises:</p>

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - They promise to use their experience in destination weddings to help you create the special day you've always dreamed about. - They promise to provide you with over 16 exotic destinations, the greatest choice of options and a vast selection of turn-key wedding packages at over 54 resorts, so you can choose the perfect tropical setting for your wedding. - They promise to simplify your plans by offering a no deposit wedding: they will book and hold space for your wedding party and guests for up to 90 days without a deposit. - In the event a price drops below your group contract rate, they promise to honour the lower price <p>Passion from Nolitours Your special day calls for a celebration beyond the ordinary. Designed for couples that want to make a lasting impression on the day of their wedding yet avoid going over the top, their basic package is sure to fit your needs. For \$600 you can enjoy the essentials of a carefree wedding including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Private roundtrip transportation between the airport and hotel • Separate check-in at the hotel for the wedding guests • 2 hours of wedding coordinator services • Fruit basket in the couple's room • Bridal bouquet and boutonniere for the groom • Wedding decorations • Sparkling wine and wedding cake after the ceremony for up to 24 guests • Romantic dinner for the bride and groom including sparkling wine, flowers and candles • US \$50 credit toward a hair and make-up session for the bride and groom • US \$100 credit toward wedding photos
Singles	<p>You can have a rejuvenating vacation alone in a tropical paradise as Nolitours offer hotels that do not charge a single supplement. Enjoy your dream vacation, and save money thanks to their array of hotels and destinations. Details of the resorts offering this deal can be found here:</p> <p>http://www.nolitours.com/EN/Voyage/produits/Single-Travellers?WHATID=304&ID=2&ParentID=INTERET&</p>
Option Flex	<p>Life doesn't always go exactly according to plan, so Nolitours has come up with Option Plus. This lets you</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Change your departure date, destination or hotel up to three

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	<p>hours before departure</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Transfer your vacation package to a friend or family member up to seven days before departure - Cancel your trip and get a full refund - No charges for additional fuel or currency surcharges once you have booked <p>The cost is \$49 + taxes at time of booking.</p>
Awards	Agent's Choice Awards: Transat Holidays ranked number one for three years in a row by Canada's travel agents according to the results of the Agents' Choice Awards, a survey carried out by Canadian Travel Press and Travel Courier.
Current Brochure	Nolitours new Sun brochure is available at your local travel agent.
Air Transat's New Comfort Zone	With so many new comfort features, you're on vacation the minute you take your seat. It's Air Transat's 25th anniversary and they're giving their fleet a full makeover. Starting April 2012, one by one, the planes and passengers are soaring to new heights in design and comfort. They are rolling out the new cabins over the next two years. For a glimpse of what it will all look like: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZBse6WOCd70
Air Transat Kids Club	<p>To ensure that your family vacations are fun and unforgettable from beginning to end, Air Transat has created Kids Club so that young passengers can really enjoy themselves while onboard an Air Transat flight. It is designed to make air travel a fun experience for young travellers (and for their parents!). Even before the doors of the plane are closed following boarding, every child receives a small bag containing all sorts of surprises and games. The more fun they have, the easier the flight. Furthermore, children who are members of Air Transat Kids Club enjoy certain exclusive privileges.</p> <p>Members of the Air Transat Kids Club will enjoy several benefits that the whole family can share. You can check in at a special "Air Transat Kids Club Members" counter. Thanks to these special counters located in major Canadian airports where Air Transat flies, checking-in is quicker than before. At check-in, special tags will be placed on your baggage; as a result, your baggage gets priority treatment.</p>
Air Transat Upgrades	Air Transat has added more legroom on all their aircraft, making the journey to and from your destination even more comfortable. They have also introduced a new Economy Class meal service on sun destination flights. Passengers flying south will now be welcomed onboard with a glass of champagne, while early morning passengers will be greeted with a mimosa. The meal service has also been improved. The airline will now offer passengers a more complete meal tray, including a choice of two hot meals, a complimentary glass of wine and dessert.
Best Leisure Airline	Air Transat was named World's Best Leisure Airline at the Skytrax annual World Airline Awards, held on July 12, 2012 at the Farnborough International Airshow, near London.

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	<p>Distinctions were based on a survey measuring the satisfaction of more than 18 million customers. Conducted over a 10-month period, this survey included over 200 airlines that were rated on 38 different aspects of the passenger experience. The study analyzed customer satisfaction for the Airline Passenger Experience, from check-in to boarding, onboard seat comfort, cabin cleanliness, food and beverages, onboard entertainment, and service of staff.</p> <p>In the past five years, Air Transat has gained other recognitions as a result of its numerous environmental initiatives. In 2011, the Company ranked first worldwide in the Atmosfair Airline Index environmental performance indicator, in the long-haul category. Air Transat also obtained the Platinum LEED-EB (existing building) certification for its headquarters, located within the Montreal–Trudeau airport site. Air Transat was recognized as the Best Charter Airline for the fifth consecutive year at the Agents’ Choice Awards, which represents the largest sampling of travel agents in Canada. The airline also received the Family Friendly Airline Award, which acknowledges carriers that provide additional services and extra comfort to children & parents.</p>
<p>Transat Compensation Plan</p>	<p>Starting November 1st, 2012, Transat will introduce a new compensation plan for clients affected by an advanced flight schedule change on all South, Florida and Europe flights, packages and cruises. This new policy applies to all bookings made with Transat Holidays, for Air Transat or CanJet flights.</p> <p>Applicable to schedule changes within 45 days of departure.</p> <p>Schedule change of 3 to 12 hours</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Transat will offer a \$50 voucher for future travel. <p>Schedule change of 12 to 24 hours</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Transat will offer a \$75 voucher for future travel. <p>Schedule change of 24 hours or more and cancelled flights</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clients can cancel their flight and are entitled to a full refund in the event of a schedule change of 24 hours or more. • Transat will offer a \$50 voucher for future travel to clients who cancel. • Transat will offer a \$100 voucher for future travel to clients who accept the date change. • Clients who choose a product at a lower fare will be refunded the price difference, whereas clients who select a product at a higher fare will be required to pay the balance. <p>Schedule change of 3 hours or less</p>

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No compensation will be offered to clients experiencing a schedule change that is delayed or advanced by 3 hours or less.
Transat Club Class	<p>Enjoy exclusive privileges such as complimentary seat selection, wider, more comfortable leather seats, a choice of gourmet meals and fine wines, priority check-in, baggage service and boarding.</p> <p>Club Service</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dedicated Club attendants • Attentive, personalized service • Exclusive, spacious Club cabin <p>Drinks & Snacks</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Welcome cocktails • Complimentary non-alcoholic drinks, snacks and bar service <p>Club Privileges</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased baggage allowance • 40 kg checked/15 kg carry-on • Exclusive, rapid check-in counter in most airports • Priority boarding • Practical travel items (on Europe flights) • Free headsets • Canadian newspapers <p>Comfort & Refinement</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wider, more comfortable leather seats • More leg room • Complimentary Seat Selection: call 1-877-872-6728 • Choice of gourmet meals • Choice of wine and more
Option Plus	<p>This Economy class option includes many priority privileges and services including priority check-in, priority baggage handling, an extra 10kg baggage allowance and even champagne. Here's what you get:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advance seat selection on roundtrip flights • Priority check-in at a dedicated counter • Priority baggage handling • Priority boarding • Complete Air Transat travel kit on flights to European destinations • Snacks from the On Board Bistro selection • Alcoholic beverages during drinks service 200ml bottle of champagne (Sun and Europe) • Supplementary baggage allowance up to 10 kg per flight segment** • Wine or beer with the meal • Headsets <p>The cost is \$79-\$119 for southbound destinations and \$99-\$209 for European destinations as at September 2012</p>
Transat and Sustainable Tourism	<p>Transat recognizes the prime importance of the environment, host communities, cultural diversity, and their relationships with their</p>

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	<p>employees, customers and partners. Tourism has become one of the world's leading industries. Society and communities reap the benefits, and, each year, hundreds of millions of travellers discover new countries and cultures. Transat is firmly committed to the responsible development of the tourism industry, and has adopted the following definition of sustainable tourism:</p> <p>“Sustainable tourism entails respect for nature, as well as for host communities and their values; it combines positive socio-economic benefits for local populations with an enriching experience for travellers.”</p> <p>The issue of the environment, as far as Transat's own facilities are concerned, is a clear and basic target. Their environment committees have implemented concrete initiatives with regard to recycling, conservation of resources, the disposal of obsolete electronic equipment, and raising employee awareness. Air Transat has begun developing an environmental management system that could lead to an ISO 14001 certification in the future. To find out more, consult the Transat and the Environment sections at their website:</p> <p>http://www.airtransat.ca/en/Info/the-environment-its-everyones-business.aspx?ExitID=69&ContentType=voyageur</p>
<p>Gift Certificates</p>	<p>Here's your chance to make a loved one's dream come true. With Transat gift certificates you can offer the beauty, excitement, and wonders of the world: the South with its heavenly beaches and endless sunshine, or just a rental car. Transat gift certificates are valid on all Air Transat, Nolitours, or Transat Holidays products in our brochures. They can be redeemed at a travel agent's office at the time of reservation. To order your gift certificates call 1-800-322-6649.</p>
<p>2012 Hurricane Policy</p>	<p>Nolitours and Transat Holidays provide you with true peace of mind. Vacationers can now travel secure in the knowledge that they will be protected should a hurricane affect their destination city in Florida, Mexico, the Caribbean or Central America. This Nolitours/Transat Holidays policy covers reservations for departures between June 1 and November 30, 2012 inclusive. If the conditions stipulated in the policy are met, clients may choose one of the four options listed below:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Travel at a later date Passengers who choose to travel at a later date can do so at no additional cost. Travel must be completed on or before December 13, 2012. The destination city, departure day, hotel and room category must remain the same. 2. Travel to another destination city Passengers who choose to travel to a different destination can do so by selecting another Transat Holidays destination that is not at risk of a

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	<p>hurricane. Travel must take place within four weeks of the original departure date. In the event the package price is higher than the original booking, the passenger will be responsible for paying the difference.</p> <p>3. Travel to the booked destination city Passengers who want to travel to their initially booked destination may do so, provided Transat Holidays still serves that destination city on the scheduled departure date. No refund will be issued if this option is taken.</p> <p>4. Cancel with a full refund Passengers who choose not to travel may cancel with a full refund (excluding travel insurance premiums already paid).</p>
Nolitours Excursions	<p>Whilst staying in NoliZONE resorts you can purchase a number of excursions to see more of the destination in Nolitours style: full details can be found on their website at www.nolitours.com</p>

DOMINICAN REPUBLIC	<p>The Dominican Republic is a great destination with a number of different resorts for you to choose between.</p> <p>For relaxing and “fun in the sun” - Punta Cana has crystal seas, vast stretches of white sands and first class golf. Most travelers come to this region because its beaches are among the most beautiful in the country, if not the entire Caribbean. The big hotel complexes in Playa Macao, Playa Bavaro and Punta Cana all organize activities. Their prime locations mean that guests can enjoy scuba diving, snorkelling, sailing, windsurfing, horseback riding and many other sports, including tennis. There are two golf courses in the region.</p> <p>Puerto Plata has a renewed buzz with new resorts, ramped up nightlife and fabulous windsurfing and water sports. The Dominican Republic and Nolitours have joined forces to create the It Zone in Puerto Plata. It is the place to be this year! Designed for people who expect more than just sun and sand on their vacation, it’s a destination for people who want to have fun! Beyond the fabulous beaches and great resorts, you’ll be able to immerse yourself in the local culture, get into the Dominican beat and enjoy a host of activities open to everyone. It’s a great place to kick back and meet new people!</p> <p>Blend the Caribbean with art and culture in Romana. Altos de Chavón, located to the east of La Romana, is a surprisingly beautiful reconstruction of a late 14th century Italian village. It was built by</p>
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	<p>ambitious entrepreneurs to create a major tourist attraction in the region. This replica is faithful in many ways to the original village, due to its incredible attention to detail.</p> <p>The historic, cosmopolitan capital of Santo Domingo is the oldest city in the Americas. It mixes the stately grandeur of colonial architecture with glamorous casinos and nightclubs. A stroll through the streets is pleasant and requires little effort, the buildings all being set in a relatively limited perimeter. Visit the magnificent Catedral Santa María de la Encarnación, constructed during the 1540s, the Alcazar of Columbus and many other beautiful buildings in the old city. It's like a walk through time.</p> <p>Nolitours and sister company Transat Holidays have weekly flights and many excursions to help you discover The Dominican Republic and its culture.</p> <p>Explore the website at: www.godominicanrepublic.com</p>
<p>Choosing Between the Different Destinations Within Dominican Republic</p>	<p>Promotion of DR resorts such as Punta Cana has brought that resort's beaches into frequent comparisons to those of Puerto Plata. So here's your choice: Puerto Plata lies on the more verdant, and rainier, north shore of the island; Punta Cana lies on the dustier, somewhat drier southeastern tip. Instead of the tranquil Caribbean Sea, the beaches of Puerto Plata face the Atlantic Ocean, which means that waters can be more turbulent, especially in the winter months. Rainfall in Puerto Plata, when it comes, arrives suddenly, but doesn't last long. And it keeps the landscape green. Puerto Plata's beaches aren't as wide as some of those in Punta Cana, but recent improvement of the beaches in Puerto Plata has done a lot to even out the equation. However the beaches of Punta Cana truly deserve their worldwide reputation.</p> <p>Staff at hotels in Puerto Plata tend to have been born and raised within the region, and they usually retain cultural links to the region and to their families. Staff within hotels in Punta Cana tend to have moved recently from other parts of the island, and some of them seem a little uprooted. Puerto Plata maintains an urbanized feel, and an economy based on something in addition to tourism, whereas newer communities like Punta Cana and Samana are basically modern communities carved from what was wilderness or scrubland, with none of the feelings of urban life that are so deeply engrained within the Dominican consciousness.</p> <p>Each region has advantages and it's great to have the choice of different styles of vacation.</p>
<p>Location</p>	<p>In the heart of the Caribbean archipelago - nestled amid Cuba, Jamaica, and Puerto Rico - the island of Hispaniola (Little Spain) is</p>

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	<p>divided between Haiti, on the westernmost third of the island, and the Dominican Republic, which has a lush landmass about the size of Vermont and New Hampshire combined. In the Dominican interior, the fertile Valley of Cibao (rich sugar-cane country) ends its upward sweep at Pico Duarte, the highest mountain peak in the West Indies, which soars to 3,125m (10,250 ft.).</p> <p>Much of what Columbus first sighted still remains in a natural, unspoiled condition. One-third of the Dominican Republic's 1,401km coastline is devoted to beaches of which the most celebrated are those around Punta Cana, which lies in the east of the country.</p>
Geography	<p>The mountains of the Dominican Republic divide the country into northern, central, and southwestern regions. The northern region includes the Cordillera Septentrional (northern mountain range), the Cibao Valley, which is the country's major agricultural area; and the tropical Samaná Peninsula with its coconut plantations and bay, where humpback whales breed.</p> <p>The central region is dominated by the Cordillera Central (central range) which ends at the Caribbean Sea. The highest point in the Caribbean is Pico Duarte, which reaches an elevation of over 10,414 feet (3,175 meters) and has alpine forests near the summit. The Caribbean coastal plain includes a series of limestone terraces that gradually rise to a height of about 328 feet (100 meters) and has sugarcane plantations. The southwestern region lies south of the Valle de San Juan and encompasses the Sierra de Neiba. Much of the region is a desert and it includes Lake Enriquillo, the island's largest lake. Lake Enriquillo is a saltwater lake that lies 150 feet (46 meters) below sea level and is inhabited by unique fauna, including crocodiles, huge iguanas, and flamingos.</p>
Name	<p>Hispaniola was named "Little Spain" by Colombus. After various attempts to plant colonies along the northern coast of the island, Spain's first permanent colony, Santo Domingo, was founded and named after the patron saint Dominic.</p> <p>On February 27, 1844, after various Spanish, French and Haitian rules, revolutionaries which sought the complete independence of Santo Domingo without foreign intervention, declared independence from Haiti thus founding "La Republica Dominicana" (The Dominican Republic). The residents of Eastern Hispaniola, throughout most their history, were called "Dominicanos" (Dominicans), which is the adjective form of "Domingo" (taken the name of the original colony "Santo Domingo"), causing the revolutionaries to name their newly independent country "La República Dominicana".</p>
Population	Approximately 9.2 million
Language	The official language is Spanish; many people also speak some English.

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Currency	The Dominican monetary unit is the peso (RD\$), made up of 100 centavos. Coin denominations are 1, 5, 10, 25, and 50 centavos, 1 peso, and 5 pesos. Bill denominations are RD\$5, RD\$10, RD\$20, RD\$50, RD\$100, RD\$500, RD\$1,000, and RD\$2,000. Price quotations in this section sometimes appear in U.S. and sometimes in Dominican currency, depending on the policy of the establishment. Currently, 39 pesos = Cdn \$ at September 1 st 2012.
Tipping	Most restaurants and hotels add a 10% service charge to your check. Most people usually add 5% to 10% more, especially if the service has been good.
Government	Representative democracy with Presidents elected for a 4 year term Although the DR has long been viewed primarily as an exporter of sugar, coffee, and tobacco, in recent years the service sector has overtaken agriculture as the economy's largest employer due to growth in tourism
Documentation	Canadians traveling to the Dominican Republic require a valid Canadian passport from April 2012. You will also require tourist card which will be provided on the aircraft during your southbound flight. Minors (under the age of 18) being nationals of Canada in addition to the above documentation requirements must: if traveling as an unaccompanied minor or with an adult other than a parent or legal guardian must hold a permit issued by the Consulate of Dominican Republic in Canada or the Director General's Office of Immigration in Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic to leave the country of Dominican Republic. Baptismal Certificates are not acceptable as a birth certificate, nor are birth certificates issued in Quebec prior to January 1, 1994. Please contact the Consulate of Dominican Republic for more information.
Time zone	One hour ahead of EST
Health	Stick to bottled water outside of the main resorts. Consult your doctor about Malaria and Dengue Fever – very unlikely threat to tourists but you may want to additionally protect yourself anyway.
Safety tips	Safety is still a concern in the Dominican Republic, but it shouldn't dissuade you from planning a vacation here. Crime consists primarily of theft, robberies, and muggings, and most of it is limited to certain areas of Santo Domingo and the night hours. There is a low incidence of violent crime against tourists, however. Follow some simple common-sense rules, and you'll be fine.

CLIMATE	
General climate	The average temperature is 25°C. August is the warmest month, and January the coolest month, although even then it's warm enough to swim.

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Today's weather	31 degrees Centigrade and sunny in Puerto Plata for 1 st Sept 2012
Best time to visit	The DR is a year-round destination, but with special attraction to Canadians during the cold winter months! Hurricane season is generally September and October, but you would be very unlucky indeed to experience one of these storms.

GETTING THERE	There are daily flights to Punta Cana from Canada.
Flying time	It's just over a 4 hour flight from Toronto or Montreal with Air Transat. There is a departure tax of US\$20 which must be paid in U.S. currency as at September 2012.
Punta Cana	<p>On the easternmost tip of the island is Punta Cana, site of several major vacation developments with more scheduled to arrive in the near future. Known for its spectacular beaches and clear waters, Punta Cana is an escapist's dream. Its 32km of white sands, set against a backdrop of swaying palm trees, are unrivaled in the Caribbean, and that's the chief and perhaps only reason to come here.</p> <p>Many Europeans (especially Spaniards) rushed to take advantage of Punta Cana's desirable climate - within one of the most arid landscapes in the Caribbean; it rarely rains during daylight hours. Capitalizing on cheap land and the virtually insatiable desire of Europeans for sunny holidays during the depths of winter, a half-dozen European hotel chains participated in something akin to a land rush, acquiring large tracts of sugar-cane plantations and pastureland. Today, at least a dozen mega-hotels, most with no fewer than 500 rooms, some with even more, attract a clientele that's about 70% European or Latin American. Some of them have some of the most lavish beach and pool facilities in the Caribbean, spectacular gardens, and relatively new concepts in architecture (focusing on postmodern interplays between indoor and outdoor spaces).</p> <p>If you choose to vacation in Punta Cana, you won't be alone, as increasing numbers of Latino celebrities are making inroads, usually renting private villas within private compounds. Julio Iglesias and celebrity designer Oscar de la Renta both spend time here.</p>
Santo Domingo	<p>Santo Domingo is one of the Caribbean's most vibrant cities, with a 12-block Colonial Zone to rival that of Old San Juan in Puerto Rico. Come here to walk in the footsteps of Cortés, Ponce de León, and, of course, Columbus himself. Allow at least a day to capture some of the highlights of the old city such as its Alcazar and its Cathedral Santa Maria la Menor.</p> <p>Bartholomeo Columbus, brother of Christopher, founded the city of New Isabella (later renamed Santo Domingo) on the southeastern Caribbean coast in 1496. It's the oldest city in the New World and the capital of the Dominican Republic. Santo Domingo has had a long, sometimes glorious, more often sad, history. At the peak of its power, Diego de</p>

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	Velázquez sailed from here to settle Cuba, Ponce de León went forth to conquer and settle Puerto Rico and Florida, and Cortés set out for Mexico. The city today still reflects its long history - French, Haitian, and especially Spanish.
Distances	Santo Domingo to Puerto Plata: 235km; to La Romana: 130km; to Punta Cana: 225km; to La Samana: 320km
Ferries	Shuttle boats to Cayo Levantado from Samana Also ferry to Sabana de la Mar across Samana Bay
Trains	There is no passenger train service in the DR
Car Rental	The best way to see the Dominican Republic is to drive or to take excursions with your vacation company. Motorists drive on the right here. Although major highways are relatively smooth, the country's secondary roads, especially those in the east, are riddled with potholes and ruts. Roads also tend to be badly lit and poorly marked in both the city and the countryside. Drive carefully and give yourself plenty of time when traveling between island destinations. For reservations and more information, call the rental companies at least a week before your departure: Avis (tel. 800/331-1212 in the U.S. and Canada, or 809/535-7191; www.avis.com), Budget (tel. 800/527-0700 in the U.S. and Canada, or 809/549-0351; www.budget.com), and Hertz (tel. 800/654-3131 in the U.S. and Canada, or 809/221-5333; www.hertz.com) all operate in the Dominican Republic. All three have offices at the Santo Domingo and Puerto Plata airports, as well as in downtown Santo Domingo. Avis and Hertz also have offices in La Romana and in Punta Cana.
Buses	Públicos are unmetered multipassenger taxis that travel along main thoroughfares, stopping often to pick up people waving from the side of the street. A público is marked by a white seal on the front door. You must tell the driver your destination when you're picked up to make sure the público is going there. A ride is usually RD\$5 (15¢). The minimum fare is RD\$3 (10¢). Public buses, often in the form of minivans or panel trucks, are called guaguas (pronounced gwa-gwas). For about the same price, they provide the same service as públicos, but they're generally more crowded. Larger buses provide service outside the towns.

ACCOMMODATION TYPES	Transat Holidays and Nolitours feature the widest range of hotels and resorts in the DR, from value 3 star to all-singing, all-dancing 5 star resorts.
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LIFESTYLES	
Kids	Acuario Nacional, Santo Domingo Phone: (809) 766-1709 Open from Tuesday to Sunday from 9:30am to 5:30 pm.

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	<p>Bordering the Caribbean Sea, the national aquarium offers visitors a glimpse of the Caribbean's diverse, colorful sea life. The aquarium's Plexiglas tunnel surrounds spectators with water, sharks, rays and conger eels. A variety of colorful fish swim throughout the tunnel, while exhibits explain different types of marine environments.</p> <p>Manati Park, Bavaro, Punta Cana Phone: (809) 221-9444 Website: www.manatipark.com Manati Theme Park focuses on nature, animals and the history of the Dominican Republic. Located in Bavaro-Punta Cana, the park is centered on an incredible landscape of magnificent gardens abundant with orchids and tropical plants. This park is a huge hit with kids as it encourages them, with the assistance of professionals, to hold non-poisonous snakes and play in a pool with dolphins.</p> <p>Parque Zoologico Nacional, Santo Domingo Phone: (809) 562-3149. http://www.zoodom.gov.do Open Tuesday to Sunday, 9am to 5pm Located north of Santo Domingo, Parque Zoologico is one of the largest zoos in Latin America. The 320-acre park provides guests with the opportunity to see intriguing animals like tigers, chimps and hyenas, while also offering glimpses of crocodiles, flamingos and nocturnal anteaters. Whether children are discovering creatures in the large landscaped grounds or going for a ride on the shuttle train, they're sure to enjoy their visit to Santo Domingo's National Zoo.</p>
<p>Teens</p>	<p>Islabon Jungle River Tour, North Coast Phone: (809) 248-2818 Located about three miles east of Cabarete, the Islabon Jungle River Tour allows kids to explore the Islabon river area by boat and walk through jungle trails to a mini zoo that includes iguanas, snakes, turtles, ravens and North American crocodiles. The tour includes an informative chat about the nature found in the area.</p> <p>Monster Truck Safari, Punta Cana Phone: (809) 244-4060 This full-day adventure tour allows participants to experience the diversity and beauty of the Dominican countryside in a fun, comfortable and safe environment. Holding approximately (28 people for small jeeps, and 32 for large), the large eight-wheel drive safari jeeps are driven by professionals on a variety of terrain. Participants are seated up high to ensure an exceptional view of the countryside and will be covered in case of rain. Various stops throughout the day offer a glimpse of true Dominican culture and life.</p>

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Romance	Lush tropical forests, rolling mountains and long deserted beaches – perfect!
Honeymoons & Weddings	Transat and Nolitours can help you arrange weddings, honeymoons and vow renewals in the Dominican Republic. Let them know through your travel agent.
Seniors	Endless beaches, excellent resorts and accessible tours to the countryside make this an excellent choice for the older vacationer.

UNIQUES	<p>Usually starting in January and lasting until late March, Samana's humpback whales return every year to these tropical waters. Tours originate from Samana and Las Galeras (and several bayside locations in between) and from Las Terrenas.</p> <p>Whale-watching as a local tourist industry was begun in the 1980s by Kim Beddall, then an itinerant scuba instructor with no formal training as a marine biologist – although she's since been instrumental in the implementation of a code of conduct for whale-watch boats. Beddall still runs excellent whale boat tours through her Whale Samaná/Victoria Marine operation, Malecón (\$45) that allow you to get an up-close look at the humpbacks; sitings are guaranteed in season</p>
Surprising	<p>Larimar: is a rare blue variety of pectolite found only in the Dominican Republic. Its colouration varies from white, light-blue, green-blue to deep blue. In 1916 Father Miguel Domingo Fuertes Loren found the first gems but it wasn't until 1974, that Miguel Méndez and Peace Corps volunteer Norman Rilling rediscovered Larimar on a beach at the foot of the Bahoruco Range, in the coastal province of Barahona in southwest DR.</p> <p>There is a Larimar Museum in Santo Domingo: Isabel La Catolica Street no.54, Zona Zolonial-Santo Domingo. Tel: 809-682-3309 Hours: 9:00AM - 6:00PM. http://www.larimarmuseum.com</p>
History	<p>For at least 5,000 years before Christopher Columbus discovered America for the Europeans the island was inhabited by Amer-Indians. Anthropologists have traced multiple waves of indigenous immigration from two principle places. Some of the early Amer-Indians came from Central America (probably Yucatan and/or Belize) and some came from South America, descendants of the Arawakan Indians in Amazonia, many of whom passed through the Orinocco Valley in Venezuela. It is from the blending of these waves of indigenous immigrants that the Taíno Indians, the people who welcomed Columbus on his arrival, are believed to have originated.</p> <p>The Dominican Republic was discovered on December 5, 1492, by Christopher Columbus during his first voyage to the New World. At that time the island of Hispaniola (as Columbus named it) was called "Quisqueya" by the Taino Indians who occupied the land. With a</p>

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population estimated around 600,000, the Tainos (meaning "the good") were peaceful and hospitable to Columbus and his crew of Spaniards. Columbus himself grew a particular fondness for Hispaniola, describing it in his journal as "a beautiful island paradise with high forested mountains and large river valleys."

Columbus' admiration for Hispaniola coupled with his crew's discovery of gold deposits in the island's rivers led to the establishment of European settlements, the first of which was founded in 1493 in La Isabela. With the presence of new settlements, the Taino Indians were put into slavery and over the next 25 year, were eventually wiped out. Simultaneously, the settlers began bringing African slaves to the island to ensure adequate labor for their plantations.

Columbus' brother, Bartholomew, was appointed governor of Hispaniola and in 1496 he founded the city of Santo Domingo. The capital city quickly became the representative seat of the Spanish royal court and therefore, a city of power and much influence. However, by 1515 the Spaniards realized the gold deposits of Hispaniola had significantly dwindled. Around this time Herman Cortes discovered silver deposits in Mexico. Upon hearing this news, most Spanish residents of Santo Domingo left for Mexico, leaving only a few thousand settlers behind. Because of the predominance of livestock, initially introduced by Columbus, these settlers sustained themselves by providing food and leather to Spanish ships passing Hispaniola on their way to the richer colonies on the American mainland. It is during this period of time that the pirates of the Caribbean made history.

The island of Hispaniola remained under Spanish control until 1697 when the western third of the island became a French possession. (In 1804, the western part of the island became the Republic of Haiti.) This area, which the French called "Saint Domingue" became the richest colony in the world thanks to large sugar plantations which were worked by hundreds of thousands of slaves imported from Africa. In 1791 a slave revolt broke out in Saint Domingue. For fear of losing their colony to the slaves, the French abolished slavery in 1794. With calm in Saint Domingue, the French were able to focus on overwhelming the Spanish on the island's eastern side, who later surrendered power.

In 1809 the eastern side of the island returned to Spanish rule. In 1821 the Spanish settlers declared an independent state but just weeks later, Haitian forces invaded the eastern portion of the island and incorporated Santo Domingo. For the next 22 years the entire island came under Haitian control. However, fueled by their loss of political

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	<p>and economic control, the former Spanish ruling class developed an underground resistance group led by Juan Pablo Duarte called "La Trinitaria." After several attacks by La Trinitaria on the Haitian army, the Haitians retreated. On February 27, 1844, the eastern side of the island declared independence and gave their land the name "Dominican Republic."</p> <p>The 70 years that followed were characterized by political unrest and civil war, mainly due to fights for leadership of the government by Dominican strongmen. Disputes continued with Haiti and power returned to the Spanish for a short period of time (Restoration Day celebrates the day that a national war of "restoration" began, re-establishing the Dominican Republic's independence by 1865). Turmoil in the early 1900's led the United States to intervene. In 1916 U.S. troops occupied the country and stayed until 1924 when a democratically elected Dominican government was put into place. However, the head of the army that was put into place during the American occupation, Raphael Leonidas Trujillo, used his power to block government reform and shortly thereafter, took total control of power in the form of a repressive dictatorship. His rule lasted until 1961 when his motorcade was ambushed and he was killed. (The anniversary of his death is a public holiday in the Dominican Republic.)</p> <p>Following Trujillo's death, political unrest again prevailed. The Dominican Republic went through a series of leaders until 1965 when Lyndon B. Johnson ordered the U.S. marines to again occupy the country. A rigged election in 1966 put Dr. Joaquin Balaguer, a member of the Partido Reformista Social Cristiano (PRSC), in power for a reign that lasted until 1978 when Dominicans elected Antonio Guzman, also of the PRD. Guzman died in 1982 at which time Dominicans elected another member of the D.R.P. In 1986 Balaguer was again elected, this time legitimately, and remained president until 1996 when President Leonel Fernandez (of the Party of the Dominican Liberation or PLD.) was elected. He served for four years and was replaced by Hipolito Mejia in 2000. Today's Leonel Fernandez is again president.</p>
<p>Books</p>	<p>Frommer's Caribbean 2012</p> <p>Frommer's Portable Dominican Republic is a useful, pocket-sized guide to the resorts in the DR</p> <p>An Adventure Guide to the Dominican Republic by Harry Pariser</p> <p>See also an article I have written for one of the airline in-flight magazines:</p> <p>http://www.chrisrobinsontravelshow.ca/travelarticles/TA_Dominican.pdf</p>
<p>1000 Places to see before you die</p>	<p>Casa de Campo near La Romana – one of the world's best golf and sporting destinations</p>

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<p>UNESCO World Heritage Site</p>	<p>Santo Domingo After Christopher Columbus's arrival on the island in 1492, Santo Domingo became the site of the first cathedral, hospital, customs house and university in the Americas. This colonial town, founded in 1498, was laid out on a grid pattern that became the model for almost all town planners in the New World.</p>
<p>Must See</p>	<p>Altos de Chavon, is an architectural wonder, a 16th century replica of a Mediterranean village perched high above the Chavón River, near Casa de Campo. The village was designed by Dominican architect Jose Antonio Caro, and created by Italian master designer and cinematographer Roberto Coppa. Dominican artisans handcrafted the stone pathways, decorative ironwork, furniture and enchanting buildings, reviving almost forgotten crafts of metal work and stone carving. Under Coppa's direction, each stone was hand cut, each wooden door frame was handcrafted and each wrought-iron detail hand-forged. Construction of the village began in 1976 and the village was inaugurated in 1982 with the concert of Frank Sinatra at the amphitheatre.</p> <p>Altos de Chavon was built as a centre of culture for the Dominican people. Dominican residents, tourists and working artists, flock to this magically inspirational locale.</p> <p>Stroll along cobblestone streets and enjoy the architectural grandeur of days gone by as you take in the detailed, amazing quality craftsmanship of yesteryear. Quaint shops, boutiques, art galleries, fine restaurants and an archeological museum are just a sampling of the world that awaits atop the picturesque cliffs of Casa de Campo.</p> <p>Today, this amazing village is the site of many fine restaurants, boutiques, museums and the Altos de Chavon School of Design affiliated with Parson's School of Design in New York.</p>

<p>SPORTS ACTIVITIES - Baseball</p>	<p>Back in 1866, American sailors stationed on the island of Cuba taught natives the rules of the game of baseball. Following the Ten Years' War (also known as the Big War) in Cuba, baseball migrated to the Dominican Republic along with Cubans who were fleeing their country. Quickly nicknamed "beisbol" by the Dominican people, the sport was rapidly learned and became a passion. Today, traveling from one side of the country to the other presents national scores of baseball fields and stadiums, attesting to the Dominicans' love for the game.</p> <p>The sport first turned competitive in the 1920s when baseball games began being played against neighboring countries. This competitiveness encouraged the establishment of the Dominican Baseball League. Four baseball teams were formed: Tigres del Licey and Leones del Escogido, both from Santo Domingo, Estrellas</p>
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	<p>Orientales of San Pedro and the Las Aguilos Cibaenas in Santiago. The popularity of professional baseball in the Dominican Republic ascended throughout the following years, but came to a halt in 1937 due to a financial downturn in the country. Meanwhile, amateur baseball evolved with Dominican teams competing with those from the U.S. and other Caribbean countries. The hiatus finally ended in 1951 with the return of professional baseball. Dominicans' idea of hosting amateur baseball in the summer and professional baseball during the winter months was generated, therefore giving the Caribbean the "home of winter baseball" title.</p> <p>Today there are two additional teams in the country's professional baseball league: the Azucareros del Este from La Romana and the Gigantes del Cibao. Each season extends from the end of October through February, with the winner advancing to the Caribbean Series. At the series, the winning team of the Dominican Republic league plays against the champions of the Mexican, Venezuelan and Puerto Rican leagues.</p> <p>The baseball season in the DR is October to February each year.</p>
Golf	<p>Punta Cana has 12 professional golf courses that were built in 1991, from designers such as Jack Nicklaus, P.B. Dye, Tom Fazio, Nick Faldo and Nick Price. Punta Espada, along with Teeth of the Dog in Casa de Campo figure among the very first 50 best golf courses in the world. The Bávaro Golf Course, at Barcelo Bávaro Beach, Golf & Casino Resort, Bávaro Beach (tel. 809/686-5797), is the best golf course on this end of the island, and bears the honor of being the golf course whose allure helped open the eastern DR to the tourist boom. Greens fees are RD\$1,920 for 18 holes, with cart rentals going for RD\$1,440. Guests of the hotel pay only 50% of greens fees. Open daily 7am to 5pm.</p> <p>Punta Cana Golf Club. Fronting the sea, it was designed by P. B. Dye of the famous golfing family. Fourteen of its holes open onto panoramic views of the Caribbean Sea, and four play along the ocean itself. For 18 holes, hotel guests pay RD\$3,520, and non-guests are charged RD\$4,800. In summer, greens fees are reduced to RD\$2,144 for hotel guests, RD\$2,944 for non-guests.</p>
Fishing	<p>Sea fishing is great in all the resorts for Marlin, sailfish, benito, tarpon, dorado, snook</p> <p>You can arrange freshwater river-fishing trips through Casa de Campo in the south. Some of the biggest snook ever recorded have been caught around here. A 3-hour tour costs RD\$868 (\$31) per person, and includes tackle, bait, and soft drinks.</p>
Horse riding	<p>Within Punta Cana, the guest services staff at your hotel can arrange</p>

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	<p>horseback riding for you, but if they can't, consider an equestrian jaunt at the region's biggest stables. These are headquartered at Rancho RN-23, Arena Gorda (tel. 809/747-7356 or 7538). It supervises as many as 125 horses that are stabled at three separate "ranches," each within a reasonable distance of one another. For RD\$1,800 (\$54) an hour, you'll be guided on equestrian tours through groves of coconut palms near the beach and, in most cases, onto the beach itself. To reach it, you'll follow some clearly marked signs 3km through some of the wildest terrain left in Punta Cana, down winding sandy paths to a series of palm groves, to the site of these stables.</p>
Hiking	<p>In the National Park and along the endless beaches the walks are superb.</p> <p>For a special hike, there's a three day guided hike up Pico Duarte, the highest mountain in the Caribbean.</p> <p>There is a well-maintained system of trails leading up to the summit, with trailheads at several locations. The easiest access is from the town of La Ciénega, near Jarabacoa. The trail is 23.1 km to the summit, with a total elevation change of 1,977 meters, and a shelter 5 km away from the summit. Tourist-friendly travel agencies in the town of Jarabacoa can help arrange trips from this trailhead, using mules in their employ to help lug food, sleeping bags and supplies for the overnight stay in the shelter. A few fresh water springs labeled "Potable" are along the trail, but water filters or purifying tablets are recommended. The vast majority of hikers travel by this route.</p> <p>For the more adventurous, there is another trailhead northwest of the town of San Juan de la Maguana. These four-day (three night) trips that end at the Ciénega trailhead (or, for an extra day of hiking, back at the starting location) are run entirely by local Dominicans who cook the food you provide and help you camp along the way. Each night is spent in well maintained shelters, and due to the distance traveled, riding by mule-back is strongly encouraged. Far off the beaten path, it is highly unlikely that there will be anyone else on the trail until you merge with the trail from La Ciénega.</p> <p>According to Dominican Park Service representatives in La Cienega, while approximately 1,000 hikers visit Pico Duarte during each of the months of December and January, only about 10 to 15 people a day hike the mountain during off-season months.</p>
Cycling	<p>The coast road is good biking terrain, but the roads are pot-holed and this is not ideal biking country!</p>
Diving	<p>There are diving opportunities with fully qualified operations in all the major resort areas of the country.</p>

CULTURE	
Arts	Dominican paintings are primitive, colourful and affordable.

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<p>Music</p>	<p>Passing through the streets of the Dominican Republic visitors are sure to notice the handmade posters that hang from telephone poles promoting an upcoming merengue or bachata night at a nearby venue. Continue walking and it doesn't take long to realize that music acts as the soundtrack of the country and its people, often heard blaring from vehicles, stores, restaurants and houses. After sunset, the pulsing beats fill the air with life and draw locals and tourists alike toward the crowded dance floors of the world's hottest night clubs. A way of life on the island, Dominicans view dancing as an art and take pride in sharing their native movements with others. Salsa, Latin jazz and other types of dance music can be heard in the country, but are not as popular as their beloved merengue and bachata counterparts.</p> <p>Merengue</p> <p>The country's national dance, traditional merengue groups are comprised of a three-piece band including a melodeon (accordion-like instrument), a guira (a scraped percussion piece) and a tambora (double-headed drum); however, it has expanded to incorporate other instruments such as the saxophone, trumpets, violin, flute and piano. Its tempo is characterized by an aggressive beat, requiring its dancers to swing their hips in rapid, fluid motions and make sure their feet follow suit. Early merengue's lyrics were based on sexual encounters and other socially taboo subjects, thus preventing it from becoming widely accepted. Today, merengue's lyrics cover more general topics including politics and current events. Its music has become so popular, in fact, that it is honored with two regional festivals each year.</p>
<p>Films</p>	<p>Cayo Levantado on the peninsula of Samana, is the original Bacardi Island photographed in the 1970s rum campaign</p>
<p>Museums</p>	<p>Museo del Hombre Dominicano, Santo Domingo</p> <p>The finest collection in the Caribbean of the artifacts of the pre-Columbian peoples, including the Taíno Indians. This is, in fact, the most important collection in the world of the Taínos, who greeted Columbus in 1492, little knowing the horrible fate that awaited them, including disease, slavery, and ultimately death at the hands of these strange visitors from another world. Thousands of magnificently sculpted ceramic, bone, and shell works are on display, along with grinding stones, carved necklaces, axes, and pottery. One section is devoted to the conquest of the West Indies, focusing on the pain suffered by the slaves under the domination of the Spanish. The life of the peasant is brilliantly depicted, including a typical country house that has been reconstructed in the museum. The exhibits are a pastiche of African, Taíno, and Spanish cultures, all of which went to influence Dominican life today. There's a little bit of everything here, even the "throne car" that the pope rode through the streets of Santo Domingo on a 1979 visit. One festive section depicts carnival costumes from around</p>

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	<p>the island.</p> <p>At the southern end of the Plaza Espana in Santo Domingo is the Museo de las Casas Reales, built between 1503 and 1520, was the administrative centre of the West Indies, housing the Royal Court, Treasury and Office of the Governor. Inside, the museum's rather hodgepodge collection includes a few Taíno artefacts, Spanish navigational instruments, and an armoury donated by Trujillo with examples of weaponry used here since Columbus. Opposite the Casas Reales is the Alcazar de Colón, the fortified palace of the Columbus family, built by Diego from 1511 to 1515.</p> <p>Amber Museum: Puerto Plata You can see a collection of rare amber specimens at the Museo de Ambar Dominicano (Museum of Dominican Amber), Calle Duarte 61 (tel. 809/586-2848; www.ambermuseum.com), near Puerto Plata's Central Park. Look out for the piece of amber with a perfectly preserved lizard inside! It's open Monday to Friday 8am to 6pm, Saturday 9am to 5pm. Guided tours in English are offered. Admission is RD\$40 or RD\$7 for children.</p>
<p>Festivals</p>	<p>Dominican Republic Jazz Festival: Nov in Cabarete The Dominican Republic is world-renowned for merengue so it is no surprise that the annual Dominican Republic Jazz Festival attracts a line-up of Latin jazz performers. Concerts are held at Cabarete beach and the Gran Teatro del Cibao in Santiago. http://www.drjazzfestival.com</p> <p>Carnival is held in late Feb – Diablo Conjuelo costumes, singing, dancing, every weekend in February.</p> <p>Merengue festivals: July in Santo Domingo – a musical blowout; Oct in Puerto Plata on the Malecon.</p> <p>Las Nochas de Vela: The night of the prayer festival on Jan 21 is a mix of Catholic and African religious festivities.</p>

<p>ATTRACTIONS</p>	
<p>Beaches</p>	<p>The 30km beach in Punta Cana is more or less continuous and is a perfect blaze of dazzling fine white sand backed by towering palm trees. Often rated as one of the finest beaches in the world, it is the reason why Punta Cana is here. The two ends of this huge beach are Punta Cana and Bavaro which are often combined and called 'Costa del Coco' – The Coconut Coast. It was the beaches of the Dominican Republic's north coast that</p>

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	<p>originally put the country on the world's tourist map, and in 2006, the Dominican government pumped hundreds of thousands of tons of sand from deeper offshore waters onto Playa Dorada's beaches, restoring them to wide, expansive stretches of pale amber-colored sands. The beaches all along the north shore are collectively known as the "Amber Coast" because of their color and because of the rich deposits of amber that have been discovered here. Many concession stands along the beach rent water sports equipment.</p> <p>Don't expect Robinson Crusoe-style isolation at Playa Dorada; you'll rarely, if ever, be alone on a stretch of beach in Puerto Plata. But if you enjoy beige sand that's rarely too hot to walk on, and a seemingly never-ending array of water sports kiosks and chaise longues, as well as an occasional loudspeaker projecting merengue music, you'll be happy here.</p> <p>Lying 5km west of Puerto Plata is a gorgeous beach, Playa Cofresi, set against a backdrop of all-inclusive hotels and some vacation villas that started to be built here in the 1990s. Although you can find plenty of space on this beach on weekdays, it comes alive on Sunday when several hundred local Dominican families descend from the hinterlands for fun, food, and sun.</p> <p>Another good choice in the area, Playa Luperon lies about an 80-minute drive to the west of Puerto Plata. This is a wide beach of powdery white sand, set amid palm trees that provide wonderful shade when the noonday sun grows too fierce. It's more ideal for windsurfing, scuba diving, and snorkeling than for general swimming. Various water sports concessions can be found here, along with several snack bars.</p> <p>Playa Bonita, in the Samana area, has 13km of uninterrupted beach that begins just west of Playa Las Ballenas, and boasts the kind of powdery white sand you might expect to see only in tourist brochures. From Playa Bonita's entrance, a sand road provides access for four-wheel-drives and motorbikes, past a beachfront populated at most by a few small groups of people taking advantage of the isolation to swim or sunbathe naked, until, after 6km, you reach Playa Cosón, a small fishing village holding two gourmet beach shacks with tables and chairs on the sand, serving grilled, fresh-caught fish for a few pesos.</p>
<p>Wildlife</p>	<p>One of the principal breeding grounds in the world for humpback whales is on the Silver and Navidad banks off the north coast of the Dominican Republic. Each winter some 3,000 whales migrate from their feeding grounds in the North Atlantic, and congregate here to reproduce in shallow waters protected by coral reefs. Nearer to the mainland, Samana Bay is also a popular spot for whale watching, which has become an important tourist activity during the months of January, February and March. The humpback is one of the larger species of whale, measuring from 12-15 meters and weighing up to 60 tons.</p>

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	<p>The West Indian manatee is an endangered marine mammal. They can sometimes be seen in the coastal areas of the national parks or in Samana Bay. Nicknamed the 'sea cow', manatees can grow to over 3.5 meters in length and they 'graze' on aquatic plants on the ocean floor. There are two endemic land mammals in Hispaniola. The solenodon is an insectivore not dissimilar to a rat, but more aesthetically pleasing. It has a long snout, lives in caves and hollow tree trunks, and feeds on insects and worms. The hutia is another small rodent which, like the solenodon, lives in caves and tree trunks.</p> <p>Birds: The considerable bird population in the Dominican Republic is made up of indigenous species and wintering birds from the North American mainland. Look out for species such as the Hispaniolan parrot, the Hispaniolan woodpecker, the rarer Hispaniolan trogon and Hispaniolan parakeet, the palmchat (which nests in the royal palms on the coastal plains) and several types of owl and pigeon, including the endangered white-crowned pigeon.</p>
<p>Parks</p>	<p>Los Haitises National Park – 1200 square kilometers of limestone hills and mangroves. Guided tours to explore the many small islands and caves of the park are offered from Samana, Sanchez, Sabana de la Mar. Pre-Colombian pictograms cover the walls of some of the caves. In total, there are 16 national parks and 67 protected areas.</p>
<p>Gardens</p>	<p>The National Botanical Garden in Santo Domingo occupies an area of one square mile and was founded to study, preserve and investigate the varied plant life of Dominican Republic. Opened in 1976, the Botanical Garden is named after Dr. Rafael María Moscoso, the first Dominican botanist who wrote a catalog of the plants of the Spanish island in 1943. It is a sanctuary where animals and plants live in perfect harmony, with roads and trails will lead you a personal encounter with nature. It highlights the permanent exhibitions of bromeliads, ferns, palms, orchids, aquatic plants and the Japanese garden. Open daily 9 to 5.</p> <p>www.jbn-sdq.org</p>
<p>Historical Buildings</p>	<p>Santo Domingo:</p> <p>Santo Domingo is the city of firsts in the Americas. Located in this metropolis are the first buildings constructed for religious, health, judicial and government purposes after the Spanish arrived. Among them, the first Cathedral of the Americas was erected (1523-1546), with its blend of Gothic and Renaissance styles. Don't miss the beauty of the Alcázar de Colón, the oldest Viceregal residence in the Americas. It was built at the beginning of the 16th century by the son of Admiral Christopher Columbus, Don Diego Columbus. He lived there with his wife María de Toledo, the niece of the King of Spain. Diego became the colony's governor in 1509, and Santo Domingo rose as the hub of Spanish commerce and culture in America. For more than 60 years, this coral limestone structure on the bluffs of the Ozama River</p>

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	<p>was the centre of the Spanish court, entertaining such distinguished visitors as Cortés, Ponce de León, and Balboa. The nearly two dozen rooms and open-air loggias are decorated with paintings and period tapestries, as well as 16th-century antiques. A walk downhill from the Alcázar leads to the impressive Puerto de San Diego, which dates from 1571 when it was built as the main gate into Santo Domingo. Columbus Park is in the centre of the city's ancient quarter. It is an "urban living room" where everyone goes to enjoy its tree-lined streets where beautiful buildings date back several centuries.</p>
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<p>OTHER ACTIVITIES</p>	
<p>Shopping</p>	<p>Santo Domingo is also one of the grand shopping bazaars of the Caribbean, with such "hot" items as hand-wrapped cigars for sale virtually everywhere, along with local handicrafts. Jewelry made of larimar or amber is also much sought after. Notable cigar brands include: Santiago, Cibao Valley, Davidoff, Churchill.</p> <p>Punta Cana: All the mega-hotels here have gift shops for simple souvenir shopping, so there's no need to stray from your all inclusive relaxation unless you want to. If you do, however, then Plaza Bavaro is a nearby and upmarket shopping complex for all your needs. If you want something a bit more local, then try the Mercado on the beach along the northern tier of this shopping complex: this has a buzzing craft market that opens at 8am each morning and doesn't close until sunset.</p> <p>Puerto Plata: The neoclassical house sheltering the Museum of Dominican Amber also contains the densest collection of boutiques in Puerto Plata. Many of the paintings here are from neighboring Haiti, but the amber, larimar, and mahogany woodcarvings are local.</p> <p>Plaza Turisol Complex, the largest shopping center on the north coast, has about 80 different outlets. You may want to make this your first stop so you can get an idea of the merchandise available in Puerto Plata. This complex also has the most upscale and tasteful merchandise. You might want to stop in here if you don't have time to visit all the shopping centres. It's about 5 minutes from Puerto Plata and Playa Dorada, on the main road heading east.</p> <p>Nearby is a smaller shopping centre, Playa Dorada Plaza, with about 80 shops selling handicrafts, clothing, souvenirs, and gifts. Both it and the Plaza Turisol are open daily from 9am to 9pm. The Amber Shop, in the Playa Dorada Plaza (tel. 809/320-2215), is associated with the Amber Museum. This shop sells the best collection of Dominican amber in town, artfully displayed on racks and on shelves. It features necklaces, pendants, bracelets, and rings crafted from amber ranging in color from oil-clear yellow to dark blue. A competitor, Galeria de Ambar,</p>

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	<p>Calle 12 de Julio (tel. 809/586-2101), is both a museum and shop. On the ground floor, both amber and larimar are sold along with Dominican and Haitian arts and crafts and with bottles of rum. Upstairs, a museum displays rare samples of Dominican amber, often with prehistoric insects imbedded inside. It is open Monday to Friday 8:30am to 6pm, Saturday 9am to 5:30pm, charging an admission of RD\$35.</p> <p>Tobacco Shop, in the Playa Dorada Plaza (tel. 809/320-2216), is the best shop selling cigars around Puerto Plata. Don't overlook the benefits of cigars rolled in the Dominican Republic from tobacco grown with Cuban seeds. They're a lot less expensive than most of the Cubans, and many of them are surprisingly good.</p> <p>Plaza Isabel, in Playa Dorada about 500m from the entrance to the Playa Dorada Hotel complex, is a collection of small specialty shops constructed in Victorian gingerbread style, although much of its inventory has a Spanish inspiration or flair. Here you'll find the main branch of the Dominican Republic's premier jeweler, Harrison's, a specialist in platinum work and a favorite with celebrities. The store has a special clearance area; tours are available. Another branch is in the Centro Comercial Playa Dorada in the Playa Dorada Hotel complex. A particularly attractive outlet for jewelry is La Canoa, Calle Beller 18. There is a wide range of prices, suitable for modest to extravagant budgets. Although there are the predictable array of gold, diamonds, and precious colored stones, the best are the chunks of amber - some pale, some tawny, and some of them blue - set into gold frames and configured as pendants, brooches, earrings, or rings.</p>
<p>Markets</p>	<p>Most of the towns have fun markets to explore. Punta Cana has the craft market mentioned above and Samana town has one of the most colourful public markets in the DR.</p> <p>Although the marketplace at Puerto Plata hardly resembles the greater one at Santo Domingo in the Zona Colonial, the Mercado at Puerto Plata merits a visit. It lies at the corner of Avenida Isabel de Torres and Calle 2, and is open Monday to Saturday 8am to 5pm (it starts winding down after 3pm, however). Everything is sold here, from both Dominican and Haitian art to handicrafts, along with the inevitable T-shirts, as well as luscious fruits and vegetables. It's a great photo op</p>
<p>Nightlife</p>	<p>Punta Cana: Bávaro Disco, on the grounds of the Barcelo Bávaro Beach, Golf & Casino Resort (tel. 809/686-5797), has emerged as the hottest, most popular, and sexiest dance club in Punta Cana, thanks to a superb sound system. The venue is more European than North American, thanks to a heavy concentration of clients from Italy, Spain, and Holland. Painted black, with simulated stars overhead and lots of mirrors, the place is open nightly from 11pm to 5am.</p> <p>On Sundays, islanders pour into Playa Cofresi on the north coast, turning the beach here into a giant house party, with the eating,</p>

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	drinking, picnicking, barbecues, and merengue lasting well into the night; it's a great way to meet the locals.
Casinos	Most casinos are conveniently located within major resort complexes and are open until dawn, if not 24 hours. Dominican casinos use Las Vegas odds, so the casino's profits and player winnings are relatively the same and considered fair.

CUISINE	
Food	<p>Breakfast typically calls for a serving of "Mangu," a mix of plantains, cheese and bacon, which can be found at most hotel and resort restaurants. Mangu has been dubbed the "mashed potatoes" of the Dominican Republic and is a must-try for all visitors. Locals are also known to prepare the dish for evening meals.</p> <p>A foundation of the native diet, "La Bandera Dominicana," or the Dominican flag meal, is eaten by nearly everyone at lunch time. The most important meal of the day, La Bandera consists of rice, beans, meat, vegetables and fried plantains to ensure energy throughout the afternoon and evening.</p> <p>Another popular dish is "Sancocho," a Spanish-style stew usually served with rice. Ingredients include various roots, green plantains, avocado and typically chicken or beef, although it sometimes includes a combination of seven meats (Sancocho prieto). Goat meat, a staple in many Dominican homes, may also be used in this recipe. It offers a unique addition to the character of any dish as these animals graze on wild oregano.</p> <p>"Locrio," or Dominican rice, varies with its preparer. An adaptation of the Spanish paella, locrio is made with achiote (a colored dye produced from the seeds of the achiote plant), since saffron spice is unavailable.</p> <p>Near Samana, coconut trees decorate the landscape and provide a delectable milk sauce for fish, known as "Pescado con Coco." Throughout the south central coast, "bulgur", or whole wheat, is a main ingredient in "Quipes" (ground beef wrapped in wheat) or "Tipili" (bulgur salad).</p> <p>Comida Creolla – creole cuisine blends Spanish, African, Indian and Caribbean influences; plantains, cassava, tropical fruits, mango, papaya, seafood, rice and beans; pastelitos: meat or cheese pastry turnovers; chimichurris: pork sandwiches hot off the spit; sancocho: national dish, sausage, pork, chicken, beef, goat, veg, herbs, spices in stew.</p>

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	Local beers, which are very good, are Quisqueya and El Presidente.
Rum	<p>Rum production in the Caribbean is attributed to the African colonists who brought sugar cane with them to make crystallized sugar and molasses. They noticed, however, that the molasses began to ferment when left in the hot Caribbean sun and could be mixed with water to create what became known as rum.</p> <p>During the 1700s, sugar cane plantations and their by-products contributed to a booming social and economic climate which eventually drew the attention of the DR's three rum brand founders. In the mid-to-late 1800's Don Andres Brugal Montaner, Don Erasmo Bermudez and Julian Barcelo started experimenting with their own personal refining processes. Today, the Brugal, Bermúdez, and Barcelo brands of rum have become popular across the globe and are considered some of the world's best. Unlike that of Jamaica and Barbados, Dominican rum is produced through a more natural process of distillation. Aging is often done in special American white oak kegs, thus creating a sweet, hearty blend.</p> <p>Bermudez, the eldest of the Dominican rum distilleries, was established in 1852. Its first formula, Bitter Panacea, remains famous. Distilling in Santo Domingo, Bermudez boasts the Dominican's oldest aging cellar.</p> <p>Brugal, established in 1888, is located just east of Puerto Plata and produces more than one and a half million liters of white and dark rum each year. Considered the most popular distiller, Brugal offers affordable bottles of rum for sale at its bottling plant and gives guests a free rum drink. Tours are offered Monday through Friday and admission is free.</p> <p>Barcelo, established in Santo Domingo in 1930, is said to be best-liked by locals. The plant manufactures 40 thousand liters of rum per day.</p> <p>Mama Juana is a unique Dominican Republic drink that is concocted by allowing rum, red wine, and honey to soak in a bottle with tree bark and herbs. The taste is quite similar to port wine and the colour is a deep red. The specific herbs that make up Mamajuana were originally prepared as an herbal tea by the native Taino Indians and much later in time, post-Columbus, alcohol was added to the recipe. Besides being rumored to be an aphrodisiac, with many natives of the Dominican Republic claiming that the drink has similar effects, Mamajuana is also consumed for its medicinal value. The alcohol is said to act as an extract base that pulls the herbs' curative properties, creating an herbal tincture that is often served as a shot. The reported positive effects on health vary, ranging from a flu remedy, to a digestion and circulation aid, a blood cleanser and kidney and liver tonic.</p>
Restaurants	<p>Chez Palace, Punta Cana</p> <p>This is the showcase restaurant of one of the biggest resort complexes</p>

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in the Dominican Republic. If you're not staying at one of the Barcelo hotels, you'll have to make reservations in advance. The decor is cool and stylish, as if it were imported from a chic resort in the south of Spain. A formally dressed staff serves superb dishes that include salmon mousse in a prawn sauce, tartar of tenderloin, grilled red snapper, grouper with mustard sauce, and filet mignon with truffles and foie gras.

Le Papillon, Puerto Plata

This is an unusual but charming restaurant set on a hillside in a residential neighborhood about 5km southwest of Puerto Plata. The expatriate German owner, Thomas Ackermann, manages to combine aspects of the Black Forest with merengue music. The best way to start a meal here is with a caipirinha (a Brazilian cocktail) at the bar beneath the cane-frond ceiling. Later, within an open-sided pavilion overlooking a forest, you'll be presented with a menu that's divided into categories that feature different preparations of pork, chicken, beef, seafood, rabbit, and even vegetarian offerings. Enduring favorites include fettuccine with lobster; "pirate" kabobs with shrimp, tenderloin of beef, and vegetables; an especially worthy chicken stuffed with shrimp and served with saffron sauce.

Casita Rica/Escape al Mar, Puerto Plata

These two establishments, one a snack bar, the other an upscale dining choice, sit side by side between Puerto Plata's seafront and its waterfront boulevard, El Malecon, in the heart of town. As such, they're closely linked to the gossip and goings-on of the local community, but somehow manage to emulate the gastronomic style of elegant dining rooms within some of the resort hotels. If you happen to be strolling along the seafront and want a beer, the laid-back but gregarious Casita Rica, an open-air dive a few steps from a wide stretch of beachfront, would be perfect. And if candles and romantic gloss appeal to you at dinner, Escape al Mar has the kind of variety that has successfully sheltered wedding receptions, local charity luncheons, and romantic evenings within a classy, napery-strewn setting that evokes seafront trattorias within popular resorts in Italy or Spain. There's even a bronze statue of Neptune positioned like a guardian on a rocky offshore island, within full view of your table. Menu items include pizzas, fried chicken, burgers, pastas, and a flavorful casuela de mariscos that's loaded with fish, saffron, spices, and shellfish.

MORE INFO	DR Tourism Office: 514-499-1918
Brochures	Nolitours 2012/2013 brochure is available at travel agents
Websites	www.nolitours.com www.godominicanrepublic.com

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CUBA

Fly away to the largest and most colourful island in the Caribbean. Cuba has endless tropical white sand beaches, first class all-inclusive resorts, a vibrant culture, natural treasures ...and a warm and friendly people. It's welcoming for families and perfect for weddings and honeymoons.

Transat Holidays, Canada's largest Tour Operator, together with sister company Nolitours, offer daily direct flights to Cuba from airports across Canada. This frequency of flying means that, as well as the traditional 7 and 14 week package vacations, they can also offer 3, 4 or 10 day stays. Plus they offer an unbeatable choice of fabulous resorts, fascinating destinations – together with excursions to help you explore the culture, landscapes, soft adventure and beautiful beaches of Cuba.

You can do as much or as little as you want in Cuba. But beyond the beach there is so much to do for all ages and interests! Take to the water for a snorkelling or catamaran tour – or enjoy an unforgettable swim with the dolphins. Get out and about by boat or go on an adventure through the countryside on a Jeep safari - or travel in one of Cuba's famous vintage cars, or on a steam train from the last century! Visit fascinating cities that are Unesco World Heritage Sites like historic Havana or the old colonial city of Trinidad. Meet the Cuban people as you tour a cigar factory - or visit a nightclub for a show and to enjoy the ever present Cuban music.

Discover resort destinations like the nature lover's paradise of Cayo Santa Maria; popular and lively Varadero; the soft white sands of Cayo Coco and beautiful Holguin.

Varadero

Varadero is Cuba's most popular beach destination for fun in the sun, thanks to its warm waters and superb resorts. Varadero is part of a narrow peninsula that stretches far out into the calm waters of the Atlantic, and this location ensures that it is constantly cooled by tropical breezes. The 21-kilometre strip of fine white sand is an ideal vacation spot for sun-lovers, water babies and golfers. Plus lively Varadero is one of the best cities in Cuba for nightclubs. Well used to catering to tourists, Vardero's nightlife offers a wide variety of music and atmospheres.

Of all the destinations on Cuba's northern coast, Varadero is closest to the unique and fascinating city of Havana – so choose this resort if you want to visit Cuba's capital city. Transat Holidays also offer "duos"

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where you can split your vacation, for instance 4 nights in Varadero and 3 nights in Havana.

Havana

Romantic, resilient and revolutionary – Havana is a unique city brimming with life, music and nightlife, such as the famous “Tropicana” show. Founded in 1514 and dubbed “the jewel of the Spanish colonies”, Havana is a UNESCO world Heritage Site thanks to its fabulous architecture, rich history, fascinating culture and energetic people. You can retrace the steps of author Ernest Hemmingway as you explore all that Havana has to offer.

Cayo Santa Maria

The white sand beaches of Cayo Santa Maria are known for great snorkelling and diving and the exotic flora and fauna of the area. Cayo Santa Maria is close to the city of Santa Clara Remedios - best known as the place where the Cuban president Fulgencio Batista surrendered to Che Guevara in 1958. The Che Guevara Museum and Memorial Centre provides a good historical background, and displays a number of Che Guevara's personal items, including his uniforms, hand-written letters as well as many photos.

Cayo Coco

The powdery beaches of Cayo Coco are found on the cays that lie off the mainland of the North East coast and which jut out into the Atlantic Ocean. A spectacular 17-km stretch of road runs on a causeway through the marshes to reach Cayo Coco, contributing to its more isolated and natural feel. Along the way, visitors can take in the region's abundant flora and fauna. Cayo Coya boasts beautiful coral reefs, lagoons and marshes with abundant bird life - including the largest native colony of Pink Flamingos in the Americas. If you like to fish – there is great fishing off the cays and also in the deeper waters off the coast.

Holguin

When Christopher Columbus discovered Cuba in 1492 he described the rugged mountainous region of Holguin as “the most beautiful land that man has laid eyes upon.” Huguin offers snowy white beaches and many excellent dive sites. If you exhaust the entertainment available at the excellent all inclusive resorts in nearby Guardalavaca you'll find at least

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	two good night spots: lively La Dulce Vida, which is a hotel nightclub, and La Roca, an outdoor nightclub on Playa Esmeralda where you can dance under the stars!
Location	<p>Cuba is the largest Caribbean island, between the Caribbean Sea and the North Atlantic Ocean. It lies 145 km south of Key West, Florida, between the Cayman Islands and the Bahamas, to the west of Haiti, and northwest of Jamaica.</p> <p>Formed by over 4,000 keys, islets and islands, Cuba covers 110,922 square kilometers of terrain, encompassing luxuriant vegetation with a huge variety of flora and fauna, virgin islands, grottoes, caves, mountains, forests and over 280 beaches.</p>
Geography	<p>Cuba is an archipelago of islands located in the northern Caribbean Sea where the Gulf of Mexico meets the Atlantic Ocean. It lies between latitudes 19° and 24°N, and longitudes 74° and 85°W. The United States lies less than 150kms across the Straits of Florida to the north and northwest (to the closest tip of Key West, Florida), the Bahamas to the north, Haiti to the east, Jamaica and the Cayman Islands to the south, and Mexico to the west. Cuba is the principal island, surrounded by four smaller groups of islands: the Colorados Archipelago on the northwestern coast, the Sabana-Camagüey Archipelago on the north-central Atlantic coast, the Jardines de la Reina on the south-central coast and the Canarreos Archipelago on the southwestern coast.</p> <p>The main island is 1,200 km long, constituting most of the nation's land area (105,006 km²) and is the largest island in the Caribbean and 16th-largest island in the world by land area. The main island consists mostly of flat to rolling plains apart from the Sierra Maestra mountains in the southeast, whose highest point is Pico Turquino (1,975 m (6,480 ft)).</p> <p>There are 4,200 coral cays and isles and 7,000 km of coastline. It's the largest country in the Caribbean and larger than Portugal or Ireland or Costa Rica.</p>
Name	Columbus named it Juana, the first of several names he successively applied to the island. It eventually became known as Cuba, from its aboriginal name, Cubanascnan.
Population	Nationally 11.2 million, with Havana having more than 2 million
Language	Spanish; English is widely spoken in the resorts and in Varadero
Currency	<p>One Canadian Dollar = 27 CUP or Cuban Pesos (September 1st 2012) One Canadian Dollar = one CUC or Cuban Convertible Pesos (Sept 1st 2012) i.e. there is parity at present.</p> <p>There are two currencies circulating in Cuba, Cuban Pesos (CUP) and Cuban Convertible Pesos (CUC). Prior to 2004 US dollars were in wide circulation on par with the CUC, but the government discontinued that</p>

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	<p>and they are no longer used.</p> <p>CUC is the currency most tourists will use in Cuba. It is how you will pay for hotels, official taxis, entry into museums, meals at restaurants, cigars, rum, etc. Conversion into CUC can be done at exchange houses (casa de cambio, or cadeca). These are located in many hotels and in other places throughout the cities. CUC are valued at 24 times the value of CUP. Tourists are permitted to import or export a maximum of CUP 100 or CUC 200 at any one time.</p> <p>CUP are also known as local Pesos and Moneda Nacional (National money). There is a limited range of goods that can be bought for local pesos, and these are transactions carried out in agricultural markets or from street vendors. Fruits, vegetables, fresh juices and snacks from street vendors are among the things CUP can buy. Because the products that can be purchased with CUP are limited, it is not a good idea to change more than CUC 5-10 into CUP at a time, as the CUP will last for a good while.</p> <p>Note that Amex, MasterCard MBNA and Visa Citibank credit cards are not accepted in Cuba and US dollars are not accepted for exchange in official outlets.</p>
Tipping	American dollar notes are always appreciated if you receive good service
Government	Socialist republic, but Fidel Castro has created his own brand of more pragmatic Socialism
Documentation	Passport and tourist card (included in package tours) Departure tax is 25 CUCs
Time zone	Eastern Standard Time
Health	<p>Cuba's health and education facilities are more accessible to the average citizen than those of many richer countries, including the U.S. Life expectancy is 76 years and literacy is 96%.</p> <p>Since 2010, travellers must present proof of health insurance in order to enter the country. Upon arrival, travellers may be required to present an insurance policy, insurance certificate, or medical assistance card valid for the period of their stay in Cuba. Those who do not have proof of insurance coverage may be required to obtain health insurance from a Cuban insurance company when they arrive.</p>
Safety tips	<p>Cuba is generally a very safe country; strict and prominent policing, combined with neighborhood watch style-programs keep the streets safe from violent crime. Nonetheless, a certain degree of common-sense and caution is advisable, especially in major cities.</p> <p>In my personal opinion and experience, Cuba is the safest destination in the Caribbean today.</p>

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CLIMATE	
General climate	Wet season is May to Oct; temp averages 26 degrees in Jan and temperatures are sub-tropical year-round. There are occasional cooler periods in the heart of the northern hemisphere winter.
Today's weather	32 degrees Centigrade and sunny in Santa Lucia (1 st Sept 2012)
Best time to visit	November to April

GETTING THERE	
Flying time	3.5 to 4 hours from Montreal and Toronto
Cities	<p>Havana: A city of 2.5 million people and gently faded glory, 1950's cars, swinging nightlife; "a rhythm all of its own: halfway between the easy tempo of a sleepy tropical resort and the feverish pace of a metropolis". Founded 1514, it was "the jewel of the Spanish colonies"; UNESCO world Heritage Site.</p> <p>Here are the highlights of Old Havana: The Malecón is the avenue that runs along the seawall at the northern shore of Havana, from Habana Vieja to the Almendares River. Castillo del Morro, picturesque fortress guarding the entrance to Havana bay. The construction of the castle Los Tres Reyes del Morro owed to the step along in Havana of the English pirate Sir Francis Drake. The king of Spain arranged its construction on a big stone which was known by the name of El Morro. He sent the field master Juan de Texeda, accompanied of the military engineer Battista Antonelli, who came to Havana in 1587 and began the task at once. La Cabaña fortress, located on the east side of the Havana Bay. The most impressive fortress of the Spanish colony was La Cabaña. Its impressive 18th century walls were constructed at the same time as El Morro. Every night at 9 p.m., some soldiers dressed in suits of the epoch shoot from her the "el cañonazo de las nueve", (gunshot of the nine). It went off every day to warn of the closing of the doors of the wall that surrounded the city. San Salvador de la Punta Fortress, In the shore opposite to the Castle of El Morro, at the beginning of the curve of El Malecon, there rises the fortress of San Salvador de la Punta, of minor architectural dimensions. It was constructed in 1590, and in 1629 the Chapter of Havana decided, to defend better the port, to join her in the night with the El Morro by using a thick chain that prevented the entry of enemy ships. Castillo de la Real Fuerza, The fortress or 'Castle of the Royal Army' is another big monument that closes the Plaza de las Armas. It was the first big fortification of the city, initiated in 1558 on the ruins of an ancient fortress. In the same year, the Crown sent to Cuba the engineer</p>

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Bartolomé Sanchez, supervised by 14 official and main stonemasons in order to reconstruct the castle, which had been set fire and destroyed by the French corsair Jacques de Sores.

Catedral de San Cristóbal, the most prominent building on the Plaza de la Catedral. The Cathedral was raised on the chapel after 1748 by order of the bishop from Salamanca, Jose Felipe de Trespalacios. It is one of the most beautiful and sober churches of the American baroque.

National Capitol, styled after the Panthéon (Paris), looking similar to the U.S. Capitol.

Galician Centre, Central Park, The Galician Centre, of neobarroque style was established as a social club of the Galician emigrants between 1907 and 1914. Built on the Theater Tacon (nowadays Great Theatre of Havana), it was open during the Carnival of 1838 with five masked dances.

Plaza de Armas – the main square. The origin of its name is military, since from the end of the 16th century the ceremonies and the military events took place here.

Gran Teatro de la Habana, the Great Theatre of Havana is famous, particularly for the acclaimed National Ballet of Cuba and its founder Alicia Alonso. It sometimes performs the National Opera. The theatre is also known as concert hall, Garcia Lorca, the biggest in Cuba.

The Museum of the Revolution, located in the former Presidential Palace, with the boat Granma on display in front of the museum.

San Francisco de la Habana Basilica, Habana Vieja, The set of church and convent of San Francisco de Asis, byline of the year 1608, and it was reconstructed in 1737.

Varadero:

Varadero is a privileged enclave on the west coast of Cuba, with over 20 kilometers of superlative beaches sheltering caves and virgin keys whose crystalline waters conceal more than 40 different kinds of coral, fish, lobsters, shrimp, crabs and turtles. This beautiful destination has excellent connections and a vast range of leisure and entertainment options, making it the ideal spot for a relaxing and enjoyable vacation in the heart of the Caribbean.

Here are the main sights:

Parque Josone — A park in the middle of Varadero filled with birds, vendors, music and camel rides for the kids.

Tropicana Matanzas — Visit the newest Tropicana, the most famous cabaret of Cuba. An artistic production featuring Cuban dance, music and history. Wed-Sun, 5 hours duration, 49CUC.

Seafari Cayo Blanco — Excursion by Catamaran, snorkeling in a coral barrier reef, entertainment, music, lunch and open bar with Cuban cocktails in Cayo Blanco. There is the option to either swim with the

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dolphins or visit the dolphin show at Delfinario and enjoy a sunset party. Mon-Sun (7 hours duration). 75CUC for the sunset party and dolphin show trip. 85CUC for the chance to swim with dolphins instead.

Delfinario — A dolphin show with the option to actually swim with the dolphins, 15CUC for the show and 85CUC for the show + swim.

Bellamar Caves — Visit the oldest tourist attraction in Cuba, open to visitors since the 1860s. The caves are extensive and impressive. There are quite a few steps down into the cave and it is slightly damp and rough underfoot, and also very warm.

Villa Du Pont Once the residence of Irénée Du Pont, the green-roofed hacienda style building built in 1928 is today the headquarters of the Varadero Golf Club. The golf course, just a few steps away, features 18 holes, the largest in Cuba. The visitor has the opportunity to admire the splendor of its mahogany furniture, floors made out the finest Italian marble, bronze candelabra and oil paintings. The basement offers Varadero's most luxurious and expensive restaurant, "Las Américas". On the first floor there are 5 finely decorated and equipped guest rooms, plus a presidential suite. A few steps higher on the second floor, an attractive bar "Mirador" (open 24 hours), product of a mixture between art deco and Moorish style, will surely keep you there sipping tasty Cuban cocktails at sunset.

History: Siboney Indians, Cubanacan nation, Cueva de San Ambrosio: 50 drawings at tip of peninsula, discovered in 1961; 1928: Mansion Xanadu – Cary Grant, Ava Gardner; 1900-1920: wooden houses

Santa Clara:

Santa Clara is a pretty city set amid green hills. The capital of the province of Villa Clara; it was founded in 1689 as San Juan de los Remedios.

Overlooking the Parque Leoncio Vidal, the Museo de Artes Decorativas occupies a magnificent colonial house built around 1740. Transformed over the centuries, it was restored in 1820 and again in 1980. The museum has some extraordinary items, including an armoire built entirely without nails and a washbasin from the days when there was no running water.

The memory of Che Guevara permeates the town of Santa Clara. Located a little over 2 kilometres west of Parque Leoncio Vidal, the Plaza de la Revolución is dedicated to the famous Argentine guerrilla who fought fiercely alongside Fidel Castro to overthrow Batista in the late 1950s. A gigantic statue of Che Guevara dominates this plaza, the site of major political and cultural rallies in Santa Clara. Built in 1988 to commemorate the Guevara-led Battle of Santa Clara, this 7-metre high bronze sculpture is the work of Cuban artist Delana; the gigantic stone

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	<p>pedestal upon which it rests is more than 10 metres high. Below this monument, anyone interested in this almost mythical Argentine revolutionary will not want to miss the Museo Memorial Nacional Comandante Ernesto Che Guevara. Inaugurated on December 28, 1988, it traces Che's life from his childhood up to his death, including his trips through Latin America, his stay in Mexico during which he met an exiled Fidel Castro, the landing of the Granma on the coast of Cuba, and his revolutionary experience in the Sierra Maestra. The museum is well documented, and displays a number of Che's personal items, including his uniforms, hand-written letters as well as many photos.</p> <p>The door that faces the entrance to the museum leads to the Mausoleo del Che, where lie the remains of Che and the 13 Cubans who were killed with him in Bolivia. An eternal flame shines in this solemn and touching shrine.</p> <p>Following Che Guevara's footsteps in Santa Clara also requires a visit to the Monumento del Descarrilamiento, Acción y Toma del Tren Blindado, which recounts the decisive battle led by Che Guevara against an armoured train carrying Batista's forces on December 28, 1958. Four of the train's 22 cars can be viewed at the monument.</p> <p>The Museo de Artes Decorativas also offers classical music concerts. The museum is recognized as Santa Clara's most important centre for classical music.</p> <p>The Casa de la Cultura Juan Marinero is Santa Clara's community cultural centre. At the entrance, a small art gallery exhibits works by contemporary artists from the region. This beautiful house, built in 1927, is the site of many cultural activities. Shows and concerts are held here regularly.</p> <p>Shopping is a rare diversion in this region of the country, but you can still head to Calle Independencia, open only to pedestrians starting at Calle Maceo. Most of the shops are intended for local residents, including Santa Clara's biggest bookshop.</p> <p>Santiago de Cuba: Set on the seaside, near the island's eastern tip, Santiago de Cuba is the country's second-largest city. Vibrant, tropical, and often sweltering, Santiago is the country's liveliest cultural showpiece, outside of Havana. With a population just under a half-million people, Santiago is a world apart, with a unique history and rhythms all its own.</p>
Distances	Varadero to Havana: 144 km Santa Clara to Havana: 270 km Cayo Coco to Havana: 500 km
Buses	There are 30,000km of paved road. Probably the nicest way to get around Cuba is on the Víazul buses. These are well-staffed and

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	<p>luxurious air-conditioned buses with toilets, big comfy seats, and lots of leg room. Refreshments are provided. Víazul buses are mostly used by foreigners and rich locals. You'll need to book your ticket a day before departure to secure your seat; you may not get a ticket if you just show up right before departure.</p>
Trains	<p>Standard gauge: 4,226 km of which 140 km is electrified</p>
Car Rental, Taxis	<p>Car rental starts from CUC 65 per day (including insurance) plus the cost of a full tank of gasoline. The refundable deposits start around CUC 200. Rental cars are for the most part fairly new, imported European or Asian models.</p> <p>Collective taxis often use pre-1959 US cars.</p>
Regions	<p>Central Cuba is an area rich in both historical and natural attractions. It is home to several wonderful colonial-era cities, as well as isolated and pristine beaches. Heading east from Matanzas into Cuba's central heartland you first hit Villa Clara province, which is devoted largely to sugar cane, citrus, and tobacco farming and cattle ranching. The provincial capital, Santa Clara, a lively university town, is often called "Che Guevara's City" and features an impressive monument and plaza dedicated to the fallen revolutionary. To the north of Santa Clara lie the tiny and well-preserved colonial-era city of Remedios, and the jaw-droppingly beautiful beach resort destination of la Cayería del Norte.</p> <p>Abutting Villa Clara to the south is Cienfuegos province. The city of Cienfuegos is affectionately known as La Perla del Sur (The Southern Pearl). Cienfuegos is a busy port city with a pretty, colonial-era center and the country's second-longest seaside promenade, or Malecón. Cienfuegos is connected to Trinidad by a pretty coastal highway, and is definitely worth a visit on a loop trip around the region.</p> <p>The province of Sancti Spíritus is the only one in Cuba to count two of the original seven villas (towns) in Cuba among its offerings. The colonial gem Trinidad, tucked in the southwest corner of the province, is the highlight of a visit to the central section of the country, or all of Cuba for that matter. The provincial capital, Sancti Spíritus, isn't a great deal larger than Trinidad, and though it is more ramshackle and rough around the edges, lacking Trinidad's remarkable collection of perfectly preserved architecture, it is still worth a visit to see its couple of colonial highlights.</p> <p>Cuba's Northeast Coast: The extraordinary, powdery beaches of Cayo Coco and Cayo Guillermo, the cays that lie off the mainland and jut into the deep blue of the Atlantic Ocean, are the primary attractions of Ciego de Avila province. It is a remote area, but one with the infrastructure and natural gifts that make it perfect for idyllic sun, sand, and sea holidays. The namesake provincial capital Ciego de Avila and</p>

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	<p>other towns and cities in this province hold few attractions for visitors. A little farther east, predominantly flat low-lying Camagüey province, southeast of Ciego de Avila, is the largest in the country, though it is also the least densely populated. It occupies the widest swath on the island, 120km from the Atlantic coast to the Caribbean coast. Camagüey, the provincial capital, is Cuba's third-largest city, after Havana and Santiago de Cuba, and is a relatively undiscovered colonial gem of a city that is worth exploring.</p> <p>El Oriente: Prior to the 1959 Revolution, the eastern half of Cuba was a single province, straightforwardly called "El Oriente," or the East. Most Cubans still refer to everything east of Camagüey - a region much more scenically and historically interesting than most of central Cuba - as El Oriente, even though it is now composed of the distinct provinces of Holguín, Granma, Santiago de Cuba, and Guantánamo. The region is less known and visited than the west, but every bit as rewarding for travelers (and perhaps more so). The farther east you go, the more emphatically Caribbean it feels. The region's remarkable landscapes include the north coast's exuberant banana and coconut groves, densely wooded peaks of the Sierra Maestra, and tropical rainforest on the east coast.</p>
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<p>ACCOMMODATION TYPES</p>	<p>Everything from five star international resorts to the B&B equivalent in Cuba called casas particulares. In general, the rooms and homes are kept very clean, while the furnishings and amenities are quite simple. The rates average between \$8 and \$20 per person, and meals are often available at very reasonable prices.</p>
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<p>TARGET GROUPS</p>	
<p>Kids</p>	<p>Varadero: If you've got kids in Varadero, you might want to head to the Parque de Diversiones, a small amusement park in Varadero that has the types of rides and booths you might find at a county fair. Near the Marina Chapelín, on the ocean side of the road, you'll find the Delfinario. Open daily from 8am to 5pm, this attraction offers a 40-minute show by trained dolphins about four times daily. Admission is \$10 per person; it's \$5 extra to take photos, and 55 CUC for a 15-minute swimming session with the dolphins.</p>
<p>Teens</p>	<p>Varadero: If all the activities at the resorts are not enough, there is a large swath of the eastern end of the Varadero peninsula is protected as the Parque Ecológico Varahicacos. There are some gentle paths through the scrub forests here, and you can visit a series of small caves, some of which contain ancient indigenous pictographs.</p>

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	<p>If your family is adventurous, try the Jungle Tour, which is a fast and furious trip through the mangroves aboard sit-on-top motorized watercraft.</p> <p>Sign up for a day-cruise on one of the many sailboats operating out of Varadero. These cruises head out to nearby cays, and include some snorkeling time, as well as lunch either on the boat or on some private little island beach.</p>
Romance	Old Havana has to be one of the most romantic cities on earth...
Honeymoons & Weddings	The major resorts are all able to create magical wedding events – involve your travel agent at the early planning stage.
Seniors	<p>The nicest spot to visit in "downtown" Varadero is the Parque Josone, a beautifully maintained little city park with cool shady grounds and gardens. There are paths winding around and over little lakes with fountains, several restaurants and food stands, and the park is dotted with gazebos and park benches.</p> <p>The old colonial city of Trinidad is a perfect day excursion from many of the island resorts.</p>

UNIQUES	<p>Fábrica de Tabaco Partagas, Havana: Founded in 1845, this is Cuba's largest and perhaps most renowned cigar factory, producing around 5 million cigars a year.</p> <p>If you want a bird's-eye view of things, the Centro Internacional de Deportes Aéreos, off a little side road across from the Marina Dársena, offers parachute jumps and ultralight flights. Tandem parachuting costs \$150 per person. Ultralight flights run \$30 to \$300, depending on the length of time</p>
Surprising	<p>Santería is a folk religion of African deities combined with Catholic saints; Cubans are open about it and happy to tell you more.</p> <p>Guantanamo Bay: the US forced Cuba to accept a US lease in 1903 which can be ended only by abandonment or mutual agreement.</p> <p>In 2006, Cuba was the only nation in the world which met the WWF's definition of sustainable development; having an ecological footprint of less than 1.8 hectares per capita.</p>
History	<p>History is important in Cuba, so I have expanded this section for a fuller account of Cuba's intriguing past...</p> <p>It's thought that humans first cruised from South America to Cuba around 3500 BC. Primarily fishers and hunter-gatherers, these original inhabitants were later joined by the agriculturalist Taino, a branch of the Arawak Indians. Christopher Columbus sighted Cuba on 27 October 1492. Columbus said of Cuba "I have never seen a more beautiful</p>

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country...” and by 1514, Diego Velázquez de Cuéllar had conquered the island for the Spanish crown and founded seven settlements. When captured Taino chief and resistance fighter **Hatuey** was condemned to die at the stake, he refused baptism, saying that he never wanted to see another Spaniard again, not even in heaven.

Cattle ranching quickly became the mainstay of the Cuban economy. Large estates were established on the island under the *encomienda* system, enslaving the Indians under the pretext of offering instruction in Christianity. By 1542, when the system was abolished, only around 5000 Indians (of an estimated 100,000 half a century before) survived. Undaunted, the Spanish imported African slaves as replacements. British troops invaded Cuba in June 1762 and occupied Havana for 11 months, importing more slaves and vastly expanding Cuba's trade links. In 1817, Spain's long-standing monopoly on tobacco ended, which raised prices, encouraging the crop's expansion. Tobacco quickly became one of the island's most important products. Sugar had also become a major industry, as American independence in 1783 created new markets, and the 1791 slave uprising in Haiti eliminated Cuba's biggest sugar-producing competitor. By 1820 Cuba was the world's largest sugar producer.

After the great liberator, **Simón Bolívar**, led Mexico and South America to independence, Cuba and Puerto Rico were the only remaining Spanish holdings in the Western Hemisphere. Spanish loyalists fled the former colonies and arrived in Cuba in droves. Even they, however, began demanding home rule for the island, albeit under the Spanish flag.

In October 1868, planter **Carlos Manuel de Céspedes** launched Cuba's First War of Independence. After 10 years and 200,000 deaths, the rebels were spent and a pact was signed granting them amnesty. Meanwhile, a group of Cuban rebels exiled to the USA began plotting the overthrow of the Spanish colonial government. Among their ranks was **José Martí**, a respected journalist and critic of US policy, as well as an important poet and the author of the best-known Cuban song of all time, *Guajira guantanamera*. Martí and his military commander, General Máximo Gómez, landed on eastern Cuba in 1895; within days Martí, conspicuous on his white horse, was shot and killed in a skirmish with Spanish soldiers. His martyrdom earned him the permanent position of Cuba's national hero.

Gómez and rebel leader Antonio Maceo pushed westward, burning everything in their path. Spain came down hard, forcing civilians into *reconcentración* camps and publicly executing rebel sympathizers. These methods effectively reestablished Spanish control, but Cuba's agriculture-based economy was in ruins. The Spaniards adopted a more conciliatory approach, offering Cuba home rule, but the

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embittered populace would agree to nothing short of full independence. José Martí had long warned of US interest in Cuba, and in 1898 he was proved right. After years of reading lurid (and often inaccurate) tabloids tales about Cuba's Second War for Independence, the American public was fascinated with the island. Although everything was quiet, newspaper magnate William Randolph Hearst told his illustrator not to come home just yet: 'You furnish the pictures and I'll furnish the war.' In January 1898 the US warship Maine, anchored outside Havana harbor, exploded mysteriously. All but two of its officers were off the ship at the time. The **Spanish-American war** had begun.

Spain, weakened by conflict elsewhere, limped to battle, trying to preserve some dignity in the Caribbean. They nearly beat future US president Teddy Roosevelt and his Rough Riders (though they'd had to leave their horses on the mainland) in the Battle of San Juan Hill. The USA's vastly superior forces eventually prevailed, however, and on December 12, 1898, a peace treaty ending the war was signed. The Cubans, including General Calixto García, whose largely black army had inflicted dozens of defeats on the Spanish, were not invited. The USA, hobbled by a law requiring its own government to respect Cuban self-determination, could not annex Cuba outright, as it did Puerto Rico, Guam and the Philippines. In 1903, the USA built a naval base at Guantánamo Bay that is still in operation today.

By the 1920s US companies owned two-thirds of Cuba's farmland, imposing tariffs that crippled Cuba's own manufacturing industries. Discrimination against blacks was institutionalised. Tourism based on drinking, gambling and prostitution flourished. In 1933 Morales was overthrown in a coup, and army sergeant **Fulgencio Batista** seized power. Over the next 20 years Cuba crumbled, and its assets were increasingly placed into foreign hands. On January 1, 1959, Batista's dictatorship was overthrown after a three-year guerilla campaign led by young lawyer **Fidel Castro**. Batista fled Cuba for the Dominican Republic, taking with him US\$40 million of government funds.

Castro was named prime minister and began reforming the nation's economy, cutting rents and nationalizing landholdings larger than 400 hectares. Relations with the USA, already shaky, deteriorated when he nationalized US-owned petroleum refineries that had refused to process Venezuelan oil. The Americans retaliated by cutting Cuban sugar imports, crippling the Cuban economy, and the CIA began plotting devious ways to overthrow the revolutionary government.

In 1961, 1400 CIA-trained Cuban expats, mainly upper-middle-class Batista supporters who had fled to Miami after the revolution, attacked the island at the **Bay of Pigs**. They were promptly captured and ransomed back to the US for medical supplies. The following week, Castro announced the 'socialist nature' of the revolutionary government,

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	<p>and its relationship with the Soviet Union flourished, who provided food, technical support and, of course, nuclear weapons. The October 1962 Cuban Missile Crisis is said to be the closest the world has ever come to nuclear conflict.</p> <p>The missiles were shipped back to the USSR, and the USA declared an embargo on Cuba. Castro and his Minister of Economics, Che Guevara, began actively supporting guerilla groups in South America and Africa, sending troops and advisers to assist socialist insurgencies in Zaire, Angola, Mozambique, Bolivia (where Guevara was killed) and Ethiopia. The US response was to support dictators in many of those countries.</p> <p>In December 1991, the Cuban Constitution was amended to remove all references to Marxism-Leninism, and economic reforms began. In 1993, laws passed allowing Cubans to own and use US dollars, be self-employed and open farmers' markets. Taxes on dollar incomes and profits were levied in 1994, and in September 1996 foreign companies were allowed to wholly own and operate businesses and purchase real estate. These measures gradually brought the economy out of its post-Soviet tailspin. The US responded by stiffening its embargo with the Helms-Burton Act, ironically solidifying Castro's position.</p> <p>In July of 2006, Fidel Castro handed off the reins of government for the first time in 47 years. The reins were not passed far. In fact, Fidel turned over the day-to-day chores of governing to his younger brother Raúl Castro, who was already the head of the Cuban armed forces and the head of Cuba's Communist party.</p>
Books	Frommer's Cuba – a comprehensive guide to the country.
1000 Places to see before you die	<p>Cuba's Jazz Festival – 9-17 Dec 2012 in Havana http://www.jazzcuba.com</p> <p>La Habana Vieja – Havana's Old Quarter</p> <p>Hemingway's Hangouts – La Floridita and La Bodeguita del Medio</p>
Must Sees	<p>There are nine UNESCO World Heritage sites in Cuba:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Alejandro de Humboldt National Park Archaeological Landscape of the First Coffee Plantations in SE Cuba Desembarco del Granma National park Historic Centre of Camaguay Old Havana and its Fortifications San Pedro de la Roca Castle, Santiago de Cuba Trinidad and the Valley de los Ingenios Historic Centre of Cienfuegos Vinales Valley
SPORTS ACTIVITIES	<p>Baseball is the national sport. Cuba's amateur players are considered some of the best in the world, and the premier players are aggressively scouted and courted by Major League Baseball. The regular season</p>

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	<p>runs November through March, and playoffs and the final championship usually carry the season on into May. Most major towns and cities have a local team. Some of the consistently better teams include Pinar del Río, Sancti Spíritus, Santiago de Cuba, Santa Clara, and of course Havana's Industriales. It's usually easy to buy tickets at the box office for less than 5 Cuban pesos, or ask at your hotel and perhaps they can get you tickets in advance.</p> <p>If you want to bring presents for the locals, you can't go wrong with any baseball equipment!</p>
Golf	<p>The country's only regulation 18-hole golf course is the Varadero Golf Club (www.varaderogolfclub.com). The course is a relatively flat resort course, with lots of water, plenty of sand, great views, and almost no rough. Greens fees are \$95 for 18 holes in 2012.</p>
Fishing	<p>There's fabulous deep-sea sport-fishing for marlin, sailfish, tuna, dorado, and more off of most of Cuba's extensive coastline, while the Zapata Peninsula and Cayo Largo del Sur may just be some of the best and least exploited bone-fishing spots left in the hemisphere. The mountain lake and resort of Hanabanilla is getting good grades as a freshwater ground for widemouth and black bass.</p> <p>A half-day of fishing should cost between CUC\$150 and CUC\$400, while a full day can run between CUC\$300 and CUC\$1,400, including gear and lunch, depending on the size of the boat and number of fishermen. There's a broad network of state-run marinas all around Cuba; the greatest number are run by Cubanacán (tel. 7/208-6044; www.cubanacan.cu) and Gaviota (tel. 7/66-9668; www.gaviota-grupo.com). All offer sport fishing charters</p>
Hiking	<p>Walking along Havana's Malecón: your best bet is to start in Habana Vieja and work your way toward the Hotel Nacional in Vedado. Take your time to stop and sit on the sea wall for a spell, and be sure to talk to some of the locals on your way. If you time it right, you will reach the Hotel Nacional in the late afternoon - a good time to grab a cool drink and enjoy the setting sun from their "Compass Card" outdoor terrace.</p> <p>Hiking Pico Turquino: Pico Turquino, tucked within the celebrated Sierra Maestra National Park, is the highest peak in Cuba at just under 2,000m. The trail to the summit is swathed in cloud forest and tropical flora. Hikers in good physical condition can do the 15km round-trip journey in a day, but most camp overnight below the summit. The panoramic views of the coast and Caribbean Sea are breathtaking.</p>
Cycling	<p>With a local reliance on bicycles for everyday transportation and a relatively well-maintained road network serving a small motor vehicular fleet, Cuba is a great country to tour by bicycle. There are very few operations renting decent bikes in Cuba, so it may be best to bring your own. There are also specialist tour companies who organize biking</p>

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	<p>holidays in Cuba: try Holiday-n-Adventure (1877-415-4329)</p> <p>Jeff Reid operates a small humanitarian program sending donated bicycles to Cuba – see http://bikesforcuba.wordpress.com or www.bikesforcuba.com for full details. He sends bikes every month and depends on tourists from Ontario to take them.</p>
Diving	<p>There are fabulous scuba diving and snorkeling opportunities on the coral reefs, ocean walls, and ancient wrecks that lie just off Cuba's coasts. Maria la Gorda, Isla de la Juventud, Playa Larga, Playa Girón, and Los Jardines de la Reina are widely considered the absolute top scuba-diving destinations. You will also find perfectly acceptable dive opportunities and operations in Varadero, Cayo Coco, Cayo Guillermo, Guardalavaca, and Cayo Largo del Sur</p>

CULTURE	
Music	<p>You will hear music virtually everywhere in Cuba; it is an essential part of the fabric of Cuban life. Many of the Latin-influenced musical styles that have spread around the world can trace their origins to Cuba. While no means complete, here is a list of some of Cuba's most important musical genres:</p> <p>Son: Developed in the 19th century as a combination of Spanish guitar and lyrical traditions with African vocals and percussion, son is the progenitor of most other Cuban musical genres, and the most important; son is to Cuba what the tango is to Argentina.</p> <p>Salsa: Descended from Cuban son and now practiced throughout the world, this popular dance style has also been greatly influenced by American jazz and many forms of Afro-Cuban music, including rumba.</p> <p>Trova: The traveling singer/songwriters of Eastern Cuba developed this genre as they went from house to house, singing ballads about love, women and their beloved country.</p> <p>Bolero: The ballads of this romantic, heartfelt, slow-tempo genre originated in Santiago de Cuba during the late 19th century, and are often performed by soloists or a duo.</p> <p>Jazz: Originally imported from America in the 1920s and 30s, jazz took on its own Cuban identity to become highly popular throughout the island, and many Cuban-born jazz musicians have become famous throughout the world.</p> <p>Rumba: Cuban in origin but largely African in style, this genre employs</p>

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	<p>only vocals and percussion, and refers to many various forms of Afro-Cuban song and dance.</p> <p>Timba: A dominant genre in today's Cuba, this contemporary version of son-derived salsa draws heavily on African folk dances, rumba, rap and reggae.</p> <p>Buena Vista Social Club; rumba; jazz; salsa; son</p> <p>Cuba has a strong tradition in the performing arts. Cuban musicians, playing in a range of styles, are world-renowned. The Cuban National Ballet (tel. 7/855-3084; www.balletcuba.cu) has been garnering international accolades for decades, under the seemingly eternal direction of Alicia Alonso.</p> <p>The Conjunto Folklórico Nacional de Cuba (Cuban National Folklore Group) hosts the weekly Sábado de la Rumba, a mesmerizing show of Afro-Cuban religious and secular dance and drumming. The 2-hour shows are presented every Saturday at 3pm, at El Gran Palenque, Calle 4, between Calzada and Avenida 5 in Vedado.</p>
<p>Museums</p>	<p>Havana</p> <p>Museo de la Ciudad, Havana: Old Havana's preeminent museum displays colonial-era art and artifacts. It's worth the price of admission alone to stroll the rooms, outdoor courtyards, and interior veranda of the former Palacio de los Capitanes Generales (Palace of the Captain Generals), which houses the museum.</p> <p>The National Fine Arts Museum fills three floors of this square-city-block building, and the design - with a central courtyard and zigzagging ramped stairwell - can make navigating the upper floors confusing, so allow yourself plenty of time, and be prepared to get mildly lost inside. An extensive collection of Cuban art and sculpture is on display at the newly renovated main building here. Modern masters like Wifredo Lam, Raúl Martínez, Amelia Peláez, and Rene Portocarrero are well represented. The international collection is now housed in a recently restored early-20th-century gem of a building.</p>
<p>Festivals</p>	<p>Cuba's Jazz Festival – 9-17 Dec 2012 in Havana http://www.jazzcuba.com</p> <p>This is an internationally renowned event that consistently attracts an excellent line-up, with performances at venues around the city. Cuban music enjoyed a worldwide boost in popularity due to the success of the Buena Vista Social Club, and rightly so. Cuban son was a precursor to salsa and much excellent Latin jazz emanates from this sunny Caribbean island.</p> <p>What better place for a jazz festival than Havana, with its rich musical</p>

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	<p>heritage and unique atmosphere? The Hotel Rivera acts as the festival headquarters, while the Casa de la Cultura Plaza, Teatro Nacional de Cuba, Teatro Amadeo Roldán, Teatro Mella and Teatro Karl Marx also host performances</p> <p>Carnival Santiago de Cuba July/Aug: in the intense heat of summer, Santiago de Cuba explodes with the island's best carnival, an evocative celebration of the city's Afro-Caribbean roots. Ripe with rumba music, conga processions, booming percussion, fanciful floats, and wild costumes, it's a participatory party.</p>
<p>ATTRACTIONS</p>	<p>Trinidad - The best-preserved colonial city in Cuba, in the shadow of the Escambray mountains, Trinidad was not even linked by road to the rest of the country until the 1950s. Declared a national monument by the Cuban government this city is very much as it was four centuries ago, the beauty of its baroque architecture and cobblestones squares harking back to a bygone era when Trinidad was a key player in the Caribbean slave trade. There are many interesting things to see (e.g Guamuhaya Archaeological Museum, Plaza Mayor, Church of Santa Ana, Calle Simon Bolivar....) but the most impressive of all Trinidad's many museums is Trinidad Municipal Museum and a visit to the Taller Alfarero, a large ceramics workshop where traditional techniques are still used is also worthwhile.</p>
<p>Beaches</p>	<p>Cuba has some of the best beaches anywhere in the world.</p> <p>Varadero is Cuba's premier beach resort destination, and it ranks right up there with the best in the Caribbean. If you're looking for a well-run all-inclusive resort loaded with amenities and activity options, Varadero is a good choice, with a 21km stretch of nearly uninterrupted beach. If you prefer less commercialized beach destinations, consider the various Cayo destinations along the north coast.</p> <p>Cayo Santa Maria The white sand beaches of Cayo Santa Maria are known for great snorkeling and diving</p> <p>Cayo Coco The powdery beaches of Cayo Coco are found on the cays that lie off the mainland. It has beautiful coral reefs, lagoons and marshes with abundant bird life - including Pink Flamingos. There is great fishing off the cays and also in the deeper waters off the coast.</p> <p>Holguin Hoguín offers snowy white beaches and many excellent dive sites.</p>
<p>Wildlife</p>	<p>Bird-Watching in the Zapata Peninsula: A dedicated (and lucky)</p>

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	<p>bird-watcher might be able to spot 18 of Cuba's 22 endemic species in the swamps, mangroves, and wetlands of the Zapata Peninsula. In addition to the endemics, ornithologists and lay bird-watchers can spot over 100 other varieties of shore birds, transients, and waterfowl in this rich, wild region. Other top bird-watching destinations include La Güira National Park, as well as the areas around Cayo Coco and Cayo Guillermo and Baracoa.</p> <p>Cayo Largo: An island in the Archipiélago de los Canarreos, off the south coast, 177 km southeast of Havana; it is 38 sq km, 26 km long, 2 km wide with glittering white sands faced by turquoise waters. There are 200 shipwrecks in the area and shallow coral reefs. Wildlife includes turtles, iguanas, cranes, flamingos, bee hummingbirds; Playa Paraiso has a nude beach. Cayo Iguana is home to 100's of friendly iguanas.</p>
<p>Parks</p>	<p>Gran Parque Natural Montemar: 4500 sq km, Peninsula de Zapata, vast wetland of mangroves, 160 birds species, 31 reptiles, 12 mammals, manatee sea-cows, hummingbirds, flamingos, parrots, Apr/May red land crabs swarm in their 10,000's</p> <p>The Viñales Valley: This broad, flat valley is punctuated by a series of limestone karst hill formations, or mogotes. The views from the small mountains surrounding the valley are spectacular. The area offers great opportunities for hiking, mountain biking, bird-watching, and rock climbing, as well as caves to explore. It's a UNESCO World Heritage site.</p> <p>Sierra del Rosario Biosphere Reserve: (100 km west of Havana) The mountainous region between Havana and Pinar del Río is another prime destination in the country's budding eco-tourism industry. With both the Sierra del Rosario Biosphere Reserve and La Güira National Park, as well as eco-tourism projects in Soroa and at Las Terrazas, the area offers a wealth of opportunities to explore the flora and fauna of Cuba's inland mountain forests. Add the sulfurous mineral springs of San Diego de los Baños into the mix, and you've got the perfect recipe for some nature-based rest and relaxation. Declared a UNESCO biosphere reserve in 1985, the 25,000-hectare (nearly 62,000-acre) Sierra del Rosario encompasses a mountainous area of rapidly recovering secondary tropical deciduous forests, cut with numerous rivers and waterfalls. Nearly 100 species of birds can be spotted here, including over half of Cuba's 22 endemic species.</p>
<p>Gardens</p>	<p>Parque Josone in Varadero is a beautifully maintained little city park with cool shady grounds and gardens.</p>
<p>Castles/Forts</p>	<p>Castillo de la Real Fuerza, Havana: a well-preserved 16th-century fort sits within a broad cloverleaf moat. This is the oldest fort in Havana, and the oldest surviving fort in the hemisphere. It was a failure, built too small and too far from the harbor entrance to be of much use, but crossing over the old drawbridge and walking around the ancient stone</p>

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	battlements gives a great sense of history.
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OTHER ACTIVITIES	
Shopping	<p>Highlights of Cuban craftsmanship include articles made from leather, vegetable fibers, wood, stone, metal and coal as well as traditional clothing such as Cuban hats and "guayaberas", beautifully cool, comfortable shirts made from pure linen, and select Cuban tobacco products such as Havana cigars.</p> <p>There are nine shopping centres in Varadero where beautiful examples of Cuban craftsmanship can be found as well as delicious local produce. They are generally open from 9 a.m. to 7 p.m</p>
Markets	<p>Havana: The biggest and best street market in Havana features three narrow rows of stalls stretching over a full city block. It's open daily from 10am to 6pm in Habana Vieja on Calle Tacón, between Calles Empedrado and Chacón. In addition to the typical arts and crafts and souvenir T-shirts, you'll find scores of local painters selling their wares.</p> <p>Varadero: There are several outdoor arts and craft markets around Varadero; the best, Artesanía, is at Avenida 1 and Calle 12. The Plaza de los Artesanos is also good. ARTex has stores at each of these sites, as well as at Avenida 1 and Calle 35. At each you will find a broad collection of trinkets, T-shirts, musical instruments, posters, and CDs.</p>
Nightlife	<p>Tropicana, Havana: This is the original and still reigning cabaret show in Cuba. The Tropicana has been at it for over 60 years and it shows no signs of slowing down. The sea of lithe dancers, the exuberance of their costumes, and the sheer excess of it all is worth the trip. It all occurs under the stars in the shadow of tall overhanging trees. There's a second Tropicana in Matanzas for visitors to Varadero, and another in Santiago.</p> <p>El Gato Tuerto, Havana: The mood is dark and bohemian, although the decor mixes Art Deco and kitsch in equal measure. The nightly show usually features three or four distinct acts, which can range from sultry boleros to up-tempo jazz. A storyteller, poet, or comedian might perform between sets.</p> <p>La Zorra y El Cuervo, Havana: This is Havana's best jazz club, and that's saying a lot. The vibe is mellow and unpretentious in this compact basement club, but the music and acts are usually culled from the best Cuba has to offer.</p> <p>Habana Café, Havana and Varadero: Mix the Tropicana with a Hard Rock Cafe, and Habana Café is more or less what you'd get. The floor show is a mix of cabaret-style dance numbers and slightly burlesque comedic bits, all anchored by a top-notch big band. After the show, the dance floor swings and writhes for hours</p>
Casinos	Casinos are one thing that you will not find in Cuba – unlike in the

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Batista days before Castro when it was like a dry run for Las Vegas!

CUISINE	
Food	Cuban cuisine is influenced by Spanish, African, indigenous and other cultures. The national dish is ajiaco , a stew of assorted root vegetables cooked with pork, poultry or beef. Other typical dishes are lechón (roast pork), fried green plantains (tachinos, chatinos or tostones), black beans, congrí (rice with red beans), moros y cristianos (rice with black beans), picadillo a la habanera (ground beef in tomato sauce), roast chicken and tamales among others. The Cuban sweet tooth ensures that each meal includes dessert.
Wine	Cuban national cocktails include the Cuba Libre (rum and cola) and the Mojito (rum, lime, sugar, mint leaves, club soda and ice). If you request a rum in a small country restaurant do not be surprised if it is only available by the bottle. Havana Club is the national brand and the most popular. Expect to pay \$4 for three year old white rum or \$8 for seven year old dark rum. Cristal is a light beer and is available in "dollar" stores where Cubans with CUCs and visitors may shop. Cubans prefer the Bucanero Fuerte, which at 5.5% alcohol is a strong (hence the "fuerte") darker beer. Both Cristal and Bucanero are brewed by a joint venture with Labatts of Canada, whose beer is the only Cuban beer sold in CUC. In nearby Cardenas is the Arrechabala Rum Factory , where the brand Havana Club was born and where present-day Varadero and Buccanero rums are made. Tours of the factory are given daily between 9am and 4pm; admission is \$3.
Restaurants	The best restaurants are within the major resorts, but good food will also be found in paladares (locally owned restaurants in private homes). Restaurants in Varadero include Mi Casita – Cuban style seafood; El Bodegon – Creole cooking; La Casa de Antiguiedades – best in town; Nightlife: La Cueva de Pirata – Latin music; Casa du Pont – quiet piano bar and gorgeous views.

MORE INFO	
Brochures	Nolitours Sun 2012/2013 brochures are available at your local travel agent.
Websites	www.nolitours.com www.gocuba.ca

PUERTO VALLARTA & RIVIERA NAYARIT, MEXICO	Puerto Vallarta - for stunning ocean views and sunsets, magnificent golf courses and lush jungle countryside. Puerto Vallarta has fabulous shopping and dining, culture and nightlife.
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	<p>Despite being a top Mexican holiday destination, the resort town of Puerto Vallarta has preserved the rich culture and traditional architecture of its downtown core. Stroll along the Malecón (Sea Wall), wander inside one of the city's magnificent art galleries or visit a museum. Or laze on one of Puerto Vallarta's magnificent beaches. The sunset is at its most dazzling along The Malecón, which comes to life at sundown.</p> <p>15 minutes north of downtown Puerto Vallarta, Marina Vallarta is Mexico's most sophisticated marina complex with moorings for over five hundred boats, one and a half miles of beachfront, aqua sports and dive facilities offering PADI certified training – plus an excellent 18-hole golf course. Marina Vallarta can accommodate yachts of all sizes and it is popular with boaters from all over the world thanks to the depth and shelter offered by the calm Bay of Banderas. The beautifully landscaped Marina Malecon is filled with excellent shops, art galleries and restaurants.</p> <p>Nature lovers have the chance to swim with the dolphins, and between December and April it is possible to see Humpback Whales in the Bahia de Banderas. You can take off road adventures into the Sierra Madre mountains, ride mules, zip line across valleys and rappel down waterfalls – or take a canopy tree top adventure. Take to the water in everything from a Spanish style galleon to a speedboat and explore secluded beaches and coves. Or visit traditional fishing villages or the 17th Century mining town of San Sebastian.</p> <p>Nolitours offer direct flights and a range of excursions to help you make the most of the beautiful environment, nature and soft adventure opportunities in Puerto Vallarta.</p>
<p>Location</p>	<p>Puerto Vallarta is on the Pacific coast of Mexico about half way between the US and Mexico's southern border. It is located in the state of Jalisco just south of Puerto Vallarta International Airport. Key attractions include a rich cultural tradition with pre-Hispanic and pre-Columbian history; and abundant and exotic species of protected wildlife, including sea turtles, humpback whales and tropical birds.</p>
<p>Geography</p>	<p>The city is built around the beautiful Bahía de Banderas on Mexico's Pacific coast.</p>
<p>Name</p>	<p>Puerto Vallarta is named after Ignacio Vallarta, a former governor of Jalisco. In Spanish, Puerto Vallarta is often shortened to "Vallarta", while English speakers call the city P.V. for short. In 1524 a large battle between Hernán Cortés and an army of 10,000 to</p>

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	20,000 Indians resulted in Cortés taking control of much of the Ameca valley. The valley and the bay was then named Banderas (flags) after the colorful standards carried by the natives.
Population	Puerto Vallarta has a population of approximately 256,000.
Language	Spanish – but English is widely spoken in the coastal resort towns.
Currency	The Mexican Pesos – although the US Dollar is also widely accepted too. Currently (1 st September 2012) \$1 Cdn = 13.4 Mexican Pesos.
Tipping	The average tip for service is 10-15% and one or two dollars per suitcase carried. Always check your bill first as tips may already be included.
Government	Democracy
Documentation	Passports are required but no Visa is necessary for Canadians.
Time zone	In Puerto Vallarta, the time zone is Central, just one hour behind EST. There is a further one hour time difference across the river in Riviera Nayarit.
Health	There are no special health problems here and the hospital facilities are excellent.
Safety tips	Despite the lurid media stories of security issues in Mexico, Puerto Vallarta is as safe as any resort city and car break-ins are just about the only frequent crime here.

CLIMATE	
General climate	<p>One of the chief considerations in planning a vacation is the weather, and it is the weather that makes Puerto Vallarta is an excellent choice for anyone trying to escape the cold of a northern winter, or the heat of a southern summer. On the same latitude as Hawaii, Puerto Vallarta enjoys a mild tropical climate with an average temperature of a comfortable 25 °C. Those who find themselves snowbound in the winter months will find an escape here for a tropical vacation just the thing to break up those long winter nights.</p> <p>Summer can be a bit warm for some, with average highs in the 30's, but the rainy season comes in June and lasts until November, bringing with it afternoon showers and relief from the summer heat. Occasional thunderstorms roll through in late summer providing an evening's entertainment without interfering with daytime activities.</p> <p>If you are looking for the right climate for outdoor activities like golf, deep sea fishing, sailing, or just sitting on the beach, Puerto Vallarta has what you're looking for.</p>
Today's weather	32 Centigrade and sun & showers in Puerto Vallarta as at 1 st Sept 2012
Best time to visit	In the winter months, Puerto Vallarta has the perfect antidote to northern snows and cold temperatures!

GETTING AROUND	
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Getting There	Puerto Vallarta International Airport (PVR) is the nearest commercial air service to the city and is just a 10kms cab ride from downtown. Flight time is 4.75 hours.
Cities	Puerto Vallarta Set against a backdrop of rippling mountains and the sweeping Bahía de Banderas on the Pacific Coast, Puerto Vallarta is one of Mexico's most visually striking cities. The big draw here is the outdoors - whether you want to cool off in a waterfall, scuba dive with manta rays off Islas Marietas or enjoy a sunset stroll along the Malecón promenade. This sophisticated resort city has boutique shopping, happening nightlife and some of Mexico's best dining, yet retains its small-town charm with its tangle of cobbled streets scattered with traditional adobe houses.
Distances	Puerto Vallarta is 840 kms from Mexico City and 1150 kms to Acapulco
Ferries	Water taxis to Yelapa, Las Animas, and Quimixto leave at 10:30 and 11am from the pier at Los Muertos Beach (south of downtown), on Rodolfo Rodríguez next to the Hotel Marsol. Another water taxi departs around 11:30am from the beachside pier at the northern edge of the malecón. A round-trip ticket to Yelapa (the farthest point, which takes about 45 minutes each way) costs \$22. Return trips usually depart between 3 and 5pm, but confirm the pickup time with your water taxi captain. Other water taxis depart from Boca de Tomatlán, about 30 minutes south of town by public bus. These water taxis are the better option if you want more flexible departure and return times from the southern beaches. Generally, they leave on the hour for the southern shore destinations, or more frequently if there is traffic. Prices run about \$15 round-trip, with rates clearly posted on a sign on the beach. A private water taxi costs \$60 to \$120, depending on your destination, and allows you to choose your own return time. They'll take up to eight people for that price, so often people band together at the beach to hire one.
Car Rental	Rental cars are readily available at the airport, through travel agencies, and through the most popular international car rental services.
Buses	City buses in Puerto Vallarta, easy to navigate and inexpensive, will serve just about all your transportation needs. They run from the airport through the Hotel Zone along Morelos Street (1 block inland from the malecón), across the Río Cuale, and inland on Vallarta, looping back through the downtown hotel and restaurant districts on Insurgentes and several other downtown streets.
ACCOMMODATION TYPES	From a quaint "Posada" hotel on a forgotten beach, to the ultra modern family travel oriented resorts, Puerto Vallarta has the kind of accommodations and services that will send you home refreshed and rejuvenated.

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LIFESTYLES	
Kids	<p>The extensive beaches and great resorts with children’s facilities make this a very suitable destination for children. I vacationed here with my kids when they were 12 months and 6 years old – a perfect time for them.</p> <p>Dolphin encounters: Vallarta Adventures have a special program tailor-made for kids aged 4 to 8 years so that they can interact and get closer to dolphins than they ever dreamed possible. Cost: \$75 US</p>
Teens	<p>With jeep excursions into the mountains, canopy tours, surfing and all kinds of activities at the many resorts, there’s plenty to keep old kids happy in this region too.</p> <p>Sea Lion Encounters: Sea lions are one of the ocean's most fascinating creatures - and snorkeling with them adds another element of excitement and adventure to your day of fun-in-the-sun at Las Caletas, where on the Vallarta Adventures trip you'll also enjoy a superb buffet lunch, beverages, parrot encounters, nature walks, Paella cooking lessons, guided kayak tours, and lots of fun!</p>
Romance	<p>Pamper yourself in the glow of a romantic Mexican sunset on a luxury yacht. There is nothing more peaceful and romantic than sailing across Banderas Bay as the crimson sun dips into the deep blue waters of the Pacific.</p>
Honeymoons & Weddings	<p>Many of the larger resorts in Puerto Vallarta will organize destination weddings – see the Transat website or brochure for more details.</p>
Seniors	<p>Many Canadian Seniors have holiday homes here. The beautiful sunsets over the Pacific, great climate year round and the excellent value of the region are all appealing.</p>

UNIQUES	
Surprising	<p>San Sebastian</p> <p>It feels like a million miles away from the bright lights of Puerto Vallarta...Nestled at the top of the spectacular Sierra Madre mountains is colonial, historical San Sebastián del Oeste. This remote village has retained the charm of colonial Mexico while offering an impressive array of modern amenities and expansive views. There is little to do in San Sebastian but relax and mingle with the locals. The fresh mountain air revitalizes, while the sunsets over the mountains provide a soothing alternative to the downtown lights of Vallarta. The altitude of the village requires a sweater if not a scarf and hat in winter- seriously.</p>
History	<p>From the discoveries of the first settlements here and with the arrival of its first settlers, the Azatlan (from Durango), with the passage of time developed their own culture to which they gave the name Banderas.</p>

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	<p>The chroniclers from this period called the valley Xiutla; which means “where all the small plants grow.”</p> <p>Around 1525, the Spaniards began to call it Banderas Valley, bringing with them four banners and an image of the Holy Virgin Mary. It was not an easy co-existence and there were many skirmishes. During one confrontation between the indigenous and the Spanish, the Spanish realized they were outnumbered by the enemy, and a Spanish friar went down on his knees in surrender. The story goes that the image of the Virgin of Guadalupe, that was directly behind the friar, threw out beams of light and became covered in a radiant light. The Spaniards believed this a miracle while the indigenous became frightened and submitted themselves before the Spanish, led by the nephew of Herman Cortes, the famous Francisco Cortes de Buenaventura.</p> <p>After the Spanish conquest, Vallarta began a process of rediscovering itself, but it wasn’t until after Mexican independence that it became a township on December 2, 1851 and renamed Las Peñas de Santa Maria Guadalupe for the patron virgin by Don Guadalupe Sanchez Torres.</p> <p>Like most seaside city at the time, a port was a necessity in order to transport the silver that came from the mines of what is known today as San Sebastian and Mascota, thereby reducing its name to Puerto Las Peñas.</p> <p>Thanks to the activities in the port, and its quick growth, in May 1918 a municipality was formed and named after the Governor of Jalisco, at the time, Ignacio L. Vallarta, hence Puerto Vallarta. At the end of the 1930’s and beginnings of the ‘40’s Vallarta began to exploit its marine wealth, principally through shark fishing, which brought a great deal of economic growth. In the 50’s, the port celebrated its history by hosting the event of its 100th anniversary.</p> <p>In 1968, Vallarta was elevated from a municipality to a city by decree of the State Congress. From this point forward Vallarta grew not only economically but culturally, becoming the most important tourism city in the state of Jalisco.</p> <p>With its wealth of natural and cultural riches, from the Sierra Madre mountains, through its rivers, traversing mountains, walking on the sand to the turquoise ocean waves, Puerto Vallarta invites you to breathe in its ambience, taste its textures, feel the warmth of its people, watch the jumping of whales, listen to the murmur of dolphins, watch eagles in flight, listen to the heartbeat of a city that daily reinvents itself without losing its essence. This is the treasure of the pacific discovered centuries ago by the ancient Azatlan tribe.</p>
Books	Frommer’s Mexico is the bible for travellers to Mexico.
1000 Places to See	El Dia de los Muertos – Mexicans remember and celebrate their

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Before You Die	departed in this festival which normally takes place at the start of November.
Must Sees	<p>Marietas Islands: You can also hire a panga (small motorized boat) at Playa Anclote from the fisherman's cooperative on the beach. Ask the captain to take you to the Marietas Islands just offshore. These uninhabited islands are a great place for bird-watching, diving, snorkeling, or just exploring. Blue-footed booby birds (found only here and in the Galapagos) dawdle along the islands' rocky coast, and giant mantas, sea turtles, and colorful tropical fish swim among the coral cliffs. The islands are honeycombed with caves and hidden beaches - including the stunning Playa de Amor (Beach of Love) that only appears at low tide. You enter a shallow passageway to access this semicircular stretch of sand. A cave 12m below the surface has an air pocket in which divers can remove their regulators and have an underwater conversation. Humpback whales congregate around these islands during the winter months, and pangas can be rented for a do-it-yourself whale-watching excursion. Trips cost about \$35 per hour. You can also visit these islands aboard one of the numerous day cruises that depart from the cruise-ship terminal in Puerto Vallarta.</p>

SPORTS ACTIVITIES	
Golf	<p>There are currently eight major golf courses in the region. Among the high profile names associated with the development of championship golf here are: Jack Nicklaus (2 courses in Punta Mita), Percy Clifford (Flamingos Golf Club), Robert Von Hagge (El Tigre, Nuevo Vallarta), Jim Lipe (Mayan Golf Resort Vallarta, currently under renovation). A course designed by Greg Norman is currently under development in Litibu.</p> <p>There are now two breathtaking Jack Nicklaus Signature courses at the Punta Mita Golf Club (tel. 329/291-6000), with the newest addition opening in October 2008. The original "Pacífico" course features 8 oceanfront holes and an ocean view from every hole. Its hallmark is the 3rd hole, the "Tail of the Whale," with a long drive to a green on a natural island - the only natural-island green in the Americas. It requires an amphibious cart to take you over when the tide is high, and there's an alternate hole for when the ocean or tides are not accommodating. The second Jack Nicklaus Signature course, "Bahia," intertwines with the original course, and also affords stunning seaside holes; its finishing hole is adjacent to the new St. Regis Resort. The courses are open only to members or guests staying in the Punta Mita resorts, or to other golf club members with a letter of introduction from their pro. Greens fees are \$244 for 18 holes and \$156 for 9 holes, including cart, with (Calloway) club rentals for \$63. Lessons are also available.</p>
Fishing	Puerto Vallarta is rapidly establishing itself as a major deep sea fishing

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	<p>destination, with world class catches of blue and black marlin, sailfish, yellow fin tuna and other species. Other season's feature wahoo and Dorado and coastal sport fishing. In addition to an extensive fishing fleet available for charter, the area hosts the International Marlin & Tuna Fishing Tournament each year in July.</p> <p>Fishing charters cost \$120 per person, for one to eight people; or select from other options where the price varies with the size of the boat; a boat can be rented for 8 hours for \$450.</p>
<p>Surfing</p>	<p>Sayulita: There are two main surf spots in Sayulita - the most popular is the break fronting the main beach in the village, which is a right longboard break. A faster, left break is found just north of the river mouth, in front of the campground. Surf instruction and board rentals are available at Lunazul Surf School (www.lunazulsurf.com) located at Marlin #4, where this street ends at the beachfront. The 90-minute surf lessons cost \$40 for individual instruction, or \$30 for group instruction. They also offer 2-day weekend clinics for \$80 or weeklong clinics for \$200. Included in all lessons is the use of a surfboard and rashguard. Board rentals through Lunazul are \$20 for the day, or \$150 for the week. Lunazul also has a surf shop, where you can purchase surf gear ranging from wax to boards.</p>
<p>Hiking</p>	<p>Hiking options range from gentle strolls along the Malecon in Puerto Vallarta to strenuous treks in the mountains of the Sierra Madre: take your pick!</p>
<p>Horse Riding</p>	<p>Travel agents and local ranches can arrange guided horseback rides. Rancho Palma Real, Carretera Vallarta, Tepic 4766, has an office 5 minutes north of the airport; the ranch is in Las Palmas, 40 minutes northeast of Puerto Vallarta. It is by far the nicest horseback riding tour in the area. The horses are in excellent condition, and you enjoy a tour of local farms on your way to the ranch. The price (\$60) includes breakfast and lunch.</p>
<p>Canopy Tours</p>	<p>A popular adventure activity is canopy tours. You glide from treetop to treetop, getting an up-close-and-personal look at a tropical rainforest canopy and the trails far below. Expert guides assist you to the special platforms, and you move from one to another using pulleys on horizontal traverse cables, while the guides explain the tropical flora surrounding you. They also offer assistance - and moral support - as you rappel back down to the forest floor.</p> <p>Tours depart from the Vallarta Adventures offices in both Marina Vallarta and Nuevo Vallarta at 8am, returning at 2pm. The price (\$79 for adults, \$69 for children 8-12) includes the tour, unlimited nonalcoholic beverages, and light snacks. Their Outdoor Adventure combines a ride on the canopy line with a day of adventure activities. You'll learn wilderness survival techniques while hiking through the Sierra Madre foothills, splashing through streams, rappelling down waterfalls, then</p>

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	taking a 300m zip line over jungle landscape. The 6 1/2 hour tour costs \$95, for those who are physically fit, ages 12 and older.
Diving	<p>The warm, crystal-clear waters of Banderas Bay and the Mexican Pacific are home to a vast array of sea life making Puerto Vallarta one of Mexico's top diving destinations. At Vallarta Adventure's PADI 5 star IDC Dive Center, professional diving instructors combine their expertise with the utmost personal attention in scuba lessons for every level of PADI Certification.</p> <p>You may snorkel or dive at Los Arcos, a company-owned site at Caletas Cove (where you'll dive in the company of sea lions), Quimixto Coves, the Marietas Islands, or the offshore La Corbeteña, Morro, and Chimo reefs. The company runs a full range of certification courses (up to Instructor). Chico's Dive Shop, Díaz Ordaz 772-5, near Carlos O'Brian's (www.chicos-diveshop.com), offers similar diving and snorkeling trips and is also a PADI five-star dive center. Chico's is open daily from 8am to 10pm, with branches at the Marriott, Las Palmas, Holiday Inn, Fiesta Americana, Krystal, San Marino, Villa del Palmar, Paradise Village, and Playa Los Arcos.</p>

CULTURE	The area's cultural heritage encompasses four separate ethnic groups: Huicholes, Coras, Tepehuanos, and Mexicaneros . This heritage has led to a destination rich in traditional culinary traditions reflected in a wide variety of restaurants as well as popular cultural events and festivals, folklore and, of special importance to visitors, excellent shopping for traditional handicrafts and art.
Arts	Centuries of history are featured in expeditions to pre-Hispanic and pre-Columbian cultural sites, mining towns, colonial San Blas and Mexcaltitlan. Visitors may join group tours or customize their own itineraries, with travel by air, land or boat. There are several traditional Huichol villages in the mountains and resort galleries display their colorful handicrafts, mostly animal figures made from beads pressed into wax.
Films	The Night of the Iguana (1963) - filmed on location at Mismaloya and other minor locations in the Puerto Vallarta area. The filming brought Richard Burton, Ava Gardner, Deborah Kerr, Tennessee Williams, and Elizabeth Taylor (who was not in the film). The off-screen activities of Burton and Taylor were reported in the tabloids and tabloid newsreels of the day. After filming was completed, John Huston decided to build a home in the vicinity, he built a home on remote Las Caletas beach and a house in town. John Huston's children Angelica and Danny are founders and supporters of the Puerto Vallarta Film Festival.
Museums	The tiny Museo del Cuale (Tues-Sat 10am-2pm and 4-6pm; free admission) has a small but impressive permanent exhibit of pre-Columbian figurines.

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<p>Festivals</p>	<p>There are festivals throughout the year in this region: here are a few:</p> <p>Flower and Garden Festival (last week of February) - A week of tours, classes, and workshops at the Vallarta Botanical Gardens. Dozens of plant, garden, flower, and local craft vendors feature their products and knowledge.</p> <p>Electro Beach Puerto Vallarta (42 day festival starting in the beginning of March) - An Electronic Dance Music (EDM) festival.</p> <p>May Festival (last week of may and first week of June) - commemorating the anniversary of the municipality. The festival features outdoor concerts, artistic expositions, sporting events and a parade.</p> <p>Día de Muertos - Day of the Dead (November 2nd) - A day of honouring the dead in full Mexican Tradition held at the Vallarta Botanical Gardens. Workshops on making catrina skeleton dolls and cempasúchil (Tagetes erecta) flower arrangements are followed by celebrations in the Garden of Memories and a bonfire dance.</p> <p>Los Posadas (December 20th) - An evening of candlelight caroling & processions to handmade nativities is hosted by the Vallarta Botanical Gardens. Poinsettias and native Mexican pines are also featured during the celebrations.</p> <p>Festival of the Virgin of Guadalupe December 1 to 12</p>
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<p>ATTRACTIONS</p>	<p>Vallarta Adventures</p> <p>Vallarta Adventures offer trips that are safe learning experiences - designed for people who want to have fun exploring and enjoying all that nature has to offer. They focus on sharing the culture, wildlife, biodiversity and natural beauty of Puerto Vallarta.</p> <p>Website: http://www.vallarta-adventures.com</p> <p>Here are three of their tours to consider:</p> <p>Sierra Madre Expedition: This is the ideal way to get off the beaten path and explore the real Mexico. Visit the remote, traditional villages of the Mexican Outback and uncover the ecosystem and wildlife of the mountains and jungles of the Sierra Madre.</p> <p>Swim with the Dolphins: Dolphins and humans have a natural affinity with one another, and this will be an unforgettable visit to the Dolphin Adventure Centre.</p> <p>Las Marietas Eco Discovery: There is a vast array of marine life living in the Mexican Pacific and on the shores of Banderas Bay. A trip to the Marietas Islands offers the chance to spot whales and dolphins, but the ocean is also home to a majestic giant manta rays, sea turtles and</p>
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	exotic tropical fish. This eco tour will also encounter bird life.
Beaches	<p>There are many golden beaches in Vallarta: here's a few thoughts:</p> <p>Las Animas Las Animas is a beach distinguished by its golden sand. To the right of its division by a line of rocks is the tourist section, to the left is a much more private beach called El Caballito (Little Horse). Behind it stand imposing mountains and before it the Pacific, coloured a light blue due to its shallow depths, which make it perfect for swimming, snorkeling, scuba diving and kayaking. Or if you only want to relax here, you can sunbathe on any of the reclining chairs in front of its many restaurants after you have enjoyed a delicious meal of fresh seafood. There are several houses here for rent.</p> <p>Playa Camarones (Shrimp Beach) - Col. 5 de Diciembre (vicinity of Av. Paragua - Hotel Buenaventura. This is the northernmost public beach in the City of Puerto Vallarta proper. It is named after the shrimp fisherman that once landed their launches on the beach to unload their catch.</p> <p>Playa Olas Altas (High Waves Beach) - Col. Emilio Zapata - the beach extends from the Cuale River South to the fishing pier. In spite of the name, the waves offshore are not particularly high, and the beach is a popular place to swim, especially for locals and national tourists. The beach is lined with outdoor restaurants.</p>
Wildlife	<p>The Sierra Madre Occidental supports some of the richest biodiversity found anywhere in North America, boasting a wide range of wildlife species including white-tailed deer, jaguar, pumas, wild boars, ocelots, jaguarundi, coati mundi, skunks, badgers, coyotes, margays, rabbits, armadillos and iguanas.</p> <p>From mid-December to the end of March, Banderas Bay offers some of the world's most spectacular whale watching opportunities anywhere. And as Vallarta Adventures is the only tour company in the Banderas Bay area with a spotter plane, they can get you closer than you ever thought possible to witness these awesome creatures in action.</p> <p>Their light aircraft is in constant radio contact with each boat captain and reports sightings immediately from all over the bay.</p> <p>No matter which of their four exciting tours you choose, they all deliver an exhilarating and life changing insight into whales and their habitat.</p>
Parks	<p>Los Arcos National Marine Park This incredible marine park is situated between the Las Gemelas and Mismaloya beaches. Don't miss the opportunity to boat, snorkel or SCUBA dive through the deep tunnels, caves, colorful reefs and arches of these amazing islands, and to get to know the numerous forms of sea life and birds that make Los Arcos their home. These islands seem to</p>

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	float on the surface of some of the most profound waters of the Pacific . Their unforgettable image will be brought up in your memory whenever you think of Puerto Vallarta .
Ecotourism	A wide variety of activities ranging from whale watching, swimming with dolphins and adventures with seals to bird watching, excursions in the Sierra Madre mountains and canopy tours in subtropical jungles high above the ground. Throughout the year, there are also opportunities to participate in sea turtle protection programs.
Gardens	Vallarta Botanical Gardens are a popular showcase of orchids, agaves, cactus, palms, and other native plants. A restaurant and river swimming is also available to visitors. The gardens are located 23 km South of Puerto Vallarta on Highway 200. Buses for the Vallarta Botanical Gardens depart from the corner of Carranzas and Aguacate Streets in the Zona Romantica and are labeled as both "El Tuito" and "Botanical Gardens".
Historical Sites	Ixtapa Archeological Zone - north of the town of Ixtapa along the banks of the Ameca River there is an archeological site with remains going back several thousand years. The site comprises 29 mounds. The largest measures 40 meters in diameter and 8 meters in height. The site also includes the remains of ceremonial ball court. The original inhabitants of the site were vassals of the Aztatlán kingdom which was located in Western Jalisco between 900 and 1200 AD. The site is the oldest explored in Western Jalisco. The digs have uncovered a number of residential and ceremonial sites, a wealth of pottery (incense burners, bowls, amphora, etc.). Many of these objects are on display at the Rio Cuale Island Museum.

OTHER ACTIVITIES	
Shopping	Day or night there is always time for shopping, an entertainment form of its own. You'll find treasures everywhere – one-of-a-kind hand-made items of pottery, jewelry, textiles, leather, silver, paintings and the list goes on....Naturally, you can treat yourself to brand name designer goods that may be calling your name as well. Either way, you are sure to take home as much as your heart desires.
Markets	Puerto Vallarta's municipal market is just north of the Río Cuale, where Libertad and A. Rodríguez meet. The mercado sells clothes, jewelry, serapes, shawls, leather accessories and suitcases, papier-mâché parrots, stuffed frogs and armadillos, and, of course, T-shirts. Be sure to comparison-shop, and definitely bargain before buying. The market is open daily from 9am to 7pm. Upstairs, a food market serves inexpensive Mexican meals - for more adventurous diners, it's probably the best value and most authentic dining experience in Vallarta. An outdoor market is along Río Cuale Island, between the two bridges.

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	Stalls sell crafts, gifts, folk art, and clothing.
Nightlife	When the sun goes down the day is far from over - unless of course you want it to be. This diverse paradise is perfect for escaping from the world's crazy pace and just taking a moonlit stroll on the beach before settling in for a peaceful night's rest. Then again, you may find the local entertainment equally beneficial for the soul. Nightly entertainment at the all-inclusive resorts is rounded out with innumerable lounges and music as varied in style as their numbers. Sing along at a piano or karaoke bar, enjoy specialty after dinner drinks, a smooth hand-rolled cigar or head out to local seaside pubs and cantinas. And, of course, its famous river walk, clubs and cobblestone streets are within easy reach for an entertaining night to remember.
Spas	There are a number of spas in the area, principally in the major resort hotels, such as the Zen Set Spa at the Sunset Plaza Beach Resort
Casinos	Mexico has forayed into casino and gambling after many decades and new facilities and permits are on the cards. A minimum of four new services are planned along the Texas-Mexico border. Besides this, over 35 gaming sites are expected to come up within 80kms of the US border. Casinos may also come about in the beachfront resort cities of Acapulco, Puerto Vallarta and Cancun.

CUISINE	
Food	Puerto Vallarta offers many fine dining restaurants as well as intimate cafes and lively bars. Visitors enjoy the fresh seafood, authentic Mexican cuisine and top quality international restaurants. The most famous dish in the region is Huachinango Saradeado, marinated red snapper grilled over coals usually near the beach. The region holds an annual gastronomy festival that takes place in November.
Wine	Tequila is produced nearby and is a great buy here. In Mexico, tequila is often drunk straight. It is popular in some regions to drink fine tequila with a side of sangrita—a sweet, sour and spicy drink typically made from orange juice, grenadine (or tomato juice) and hot chilies. Equal-sized shots of tequila and sangrita are sipped alternately, without salt or lime.
Restaurants	An influx of top chefs from around the globe and November's gourmet festival have solidified Puerto Vallarta's fine dining reputation. Restaurants dish up everything from Modern European to Thai downtown, some with ocean-facing terraces. Everybody is talking about Trio's creative Mediterranean dishes and Thierry Blouet's imaginative menu at Café des Artistes. South of the river is great for fish, Mexican, and Asian food at the popular Archie's Wok. For gourmet sandwiches try Marina Vallarta and cheap tacos the Mercado Municipal. There are over 500 restaurants in the area! Here's my favourite from my last visit there:

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	<p>Café des Artistes/Thierry Blouet Cocina del Autor</p> <p>The award-winning chef and owner, Thierry Blouet, is both a member of the French Academie Culinaire and a Maitre Cuisinier de France. The dining experience of the Café has evolved over the years into a trio of special places, including the upscale Bar Constantini lounge and the Thierry Blouet Cocina del Autor dining area. Together they're located in a restored house that resembles a castle. The Café's menu is a changing delight of French gourmet bistro fare, drawing on Chef Blouet's French training and incorporating regional specialty ingredients. Noteworthy entrees include sea bass filet served with a lentil, bacon, and coriander stew; and the renowned roasted duck glazed with honey, soy, ginger, and lime sauce, and served with a pumpkin risotto. At the Cocina de Autor, the atmosphere is sleek and stylish, and the fixed-priced tasting menu (prices depend on the number of plates you select, from three to five) offers a choice of the chef's most sumptuous creations. Choose any combination of starters, entrees, and desserts. Portions are generally small. After dining, you're invited to the cognac and cigar room, an exquisite blend of old adobe walls, flickering candles, and elegant leather chairs.</p> <p>www.cafedesartistes.com</p>
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MORE INFO	
Brochures	Pick up a copy of the Nolitours Sun 2012/2013 brochure from your local travel agent to see their selection of resorts and vacations in Puerto Vallarta and Riviera Nayarit.
Websites	www.nolitours.com http://visitpuertovallarta.com

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