

Grand Palladium Punta Cana



Christmas Traditions in the Dominican



Christmas is such a large celebration that it starts in October and ends in January. With its exhilarating parties, spectacular fireworks, relaxing family time and fantastic food, there is just too much good information for a small section.

Christmas here lasts for about 3 months, more or less. It is a time to get together with friends and family and enjoy. Although here everyone seems to have a great time always, Christmas is even more of a delight. The airlines are booked solid with people returning to their roots to celebrate in the place they call home. There is such an excitement felt in the streets throughout the country. The passion culminates with the fireworks that seem to happen more often the closer the holiday gets.

Fireworks are a momentous tradition here in Dominican Republic.



Most businesses close around 6 PM on Christmas Eve, some not opening at all on this day. This gives families time to get together for the big celebration of food and drink. In most tourist areas, businesses are open, but I would not count on it. It is best to have what you need before this day just to be on the safe side.



The main celebration happens on Noche Buena/ Christmas Eve (December 24th) this is when the big family dinners are held and people really get some substantial celebrating. Most people return to their

hometowns in order to enjoy the holiday with family and friends. Not to mention, most Dominicans love their mothers or aunts cooking so they must return home to enjoy the feast that is prepared. This family gathering is the center of the holiday festivity. December 25th is just a day to recuperate

As a traditional token of Christmas cheer, most employees receive an extra month's pay in December, and so have a little extra cash on hand. This is called Double Sueldo, a Christmas bonus Dominican style. It is about the same as a month's pay and helps to make Christmas holidays a more lighthearted time

The more religious people usually go to church for the Christmas Eve service. This service called La Misa del Gallo. It is a Midnight Mass traditional type service. There is also a mass on Christmas Day usually held at 12 noon for those who didn't make it to the Midnight mass or for those that like to go to both. This way one can get a little rest in between.

If you are in Santo Domingo in Dominican Republic during the holidays try and make it to the service in the Cathedral Primada de America in Colonial Zone. This service is one of the largest and most elaborate in the whole country. Make sure to get there very early or you will be observing from the outside, which is fine also.



A tradition for gift exchange is called *Un Angelito/ A Little Angel*. This is practiced by all the social classes. All the names of the participants are placed in a sack. Then a name is selected from the bunch. The person whose name you chose is your Angelito. Every week during the Christmas holiday, you are to give that person, whose name you chose, a gift. The identity of your Angelito is to be kept secret until the last day of the gift exchange where you must divulge yourself.

Decorations used for Christmas



The Christmas tree “charamicos” in Dominican Republic, in general, is white. I presume the people want to give the illusion of snow. Since they see green year round, what would be so festive about having a tree this color. Therefore, since there is no snow, it is a nice alternative for those looking for a White Christmas





You can buy them on the streets. You can also make a “nacimiento” (Baby Jesus in the stable with the shepherds and animals) totally in charamicos.

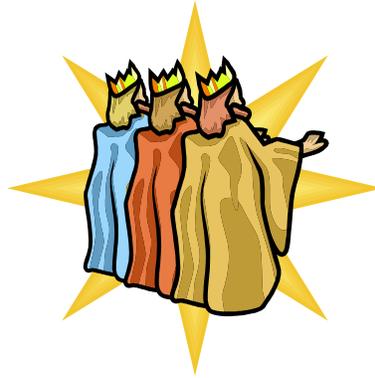
Another adornment is the Flor de Pascua or Poinsettia. This traditional flower is also known as its Christmas name Estrella de Navidad translated the Star of the Birth of Christ. This flower is known and loved the world over. The difference in Dominican Republic is that it grows outside and the flower can get quite large as opposed to the tiny ones most Northerners are customary see.



A Dominican tradition is the lightning and decorating of the Charamicos (which in Dominican slang is a dry tree branch). These items are Dominican folk art and can be found in abundance around the country during the Christmas season. One can see them being made and sold in the streets. These decorations are fashioned from straw, tree branches and pliable wood. They are made in the form of angels, cows, deer, and some giraffe looking animals, pots, and wreaths. The nicer ones are painted in white and adorned with balls, ribbons and lights. In Santo Domingo, a good place to see and purchase these decorations is along Churchill Avenue between Ave. 27 de Febrero and Kennedy Ave. They have every variety and type one might fancy. If you want something special tell the men and maybe they can whip you up what is your heart’s desire.



The Children



Gifts are not presented until el Dia de los Reyes / 3 Kings' Day also known as Epiphany. This is held on the 6th of January. This is the day when the Wise Men's arrived at the birthplace of Jesus. The Kings are the gift givers here in Dominican Republic, not Santa Claus, although some people choose to give gifts on both days. December 25 in accordance with US custom and January 6th according to Dominican practice. This is because of the strong influence and acceptance of United States customs.

Dominican children wait for the arrival of the Three Kings. They do not leave cookies and milk. Instead, they leave grass for the camels and mints or candies for the Kings. They place their offerings either under their beds, outside the bedroom door or out on the outside steps of the home. These offerings are exchanged by the Kings (a.k.a. parents) for gifts for the little ones. Children find it hard to go to sleep and try to stay awake to see the Kings.



In the rural areas and more impoverished neighborhoods, besides the Three Kings and Santa, there is an old tradition of La Vieja Belen. She leaves gifts for the children also.

Many of the businesses will purchase gifts to distribute to the poorer children. It is an all-afternoon affair with gifts distributed drawing style. It is fun to watch these children receive these presents. Some are good gifts including bicycles, dollhouses and much more!

Dominican Brown Sugar Christmas Cake



Sugar cane is a very important crop in the Dominican Republic. The brown sugar in this cake gives it a beautiful color and delectable flavor. Covered with creamy Carnation Frosting and decorated with red guava shells, this festive Christmas cake is ideal for any holiday gathering. Canned guava shells may vary in color, so do not be concerned if some are less brightly colored. For a simple—but still delicious—presentation, omit the frosting and guava shells and dust the top of the cake with powdered sugar just before serving.

Christmas in the Dominican Republic would not be the same without a glass of 'heart-warming' Jengibre. It is a simple beverage, made using fresh ginger root for the 'warmth' and cinnamon for that seasonally spicy twist.



To prepare this simple and traditional Christmas beverage all you need is:

8 cinnamon sticks

1 1/2 - pints of water - about 5 cups

2 - 3 oz of fresh ginger roots - 1/2 a cup

About 1 teaspoon Unrefined Sugar per cup (to taste)

Preparation:

Pour boiling water onto the cinnamon sticks in a pan of adequate size, and bring back to boil. Simmer the cinnamon for about 5 to 10 minutes until the flavor has been imparted and the water has taken on a hint of color.

While the cinnamon is simmering, peel and finely slice the ginger.

Add the ginger slices to the pan and let it all simmer together for another 5 minutes, if the water evaporates too much top it up again.

Strain the liquor, and then add sugar, rather as if making sweet tea, but the amount will depend on your preference.

When your guest arrives, serve a lovely homemade biscuit (cookie) with it.