

Also check out Iguana Mama, which operates out of Cabarete but offers mountain-bike trips and the like in the mountains south of here.

Playa Ensenada

Playa El Pato, a small cove protected by a giant reef that turns it into a large natural swimming pool, is rather sparsely populated, at least much more so than Playa Ensenada, 1km further west, where Dominican families come to take advantage of the shallow waters. The western end of the 1km-long Playa Ensenada, where it meets the road, is quieter, with stunning white sand, gently lapping turquoise water and a few small boats bobbing just offshore with the mountains as a background. Turn right to the eastern end of the beach for a totally different cultural experience with radios blasting the sounds of bachata and a few shacks selling food and rum. The food's usually excellent and the rum's always cheap.

Punta Rucia

Just around the point from Playa Ensenada, Punta Rucia is arguably the most beautiful beach on the north coast, with more ivory sand and great mountain views. It attracts fewer people than Ensenada but has several informal local places to stop for lunch or a beer, some with live music. The small point that separates the two beaches is bordered by a thriving coral reef, which provides good snorkelling.

Puerto Plata

You'll find much about Puerto Plata to enjoy, particularly its nightlife. Its core, the Old City, or Zona Colonial, borders the port to the east, a narrow grid of streets that was once the

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