

A Brief History of the Dominican Republic



The Dominican Republic lies on the eastern half of the tropical island of Hispaniola. To the best of our knowledge, the island was originally settled by the Native American Tainos, an Arawak people. When Columbus arrived in 1492 on his first voyage to the New World, he claimed the island for Spain. At the time the island was inhabited by hundreds of thousands of Native Americans. The number of Taino people declined rapidly, however, due to the wars and diseases brought by the Europeans such as smallpox.

Meanwhile, the Spanish claimed ownership of the whole island but they settled mainly in the east, in what is now the Dominican Republic. The city of Santo Domingo (now the capital of the Dominican Republic) was established in 1496 and was the first permanent settlement in the New World. During the 16th century, large numbers of African slaves were brought into the island and they were forced to work on sugar plantations. The west of the island was left largely empty and in the 17th century, the French settled there. Finally in 1697 the Spanish and French signed a treaty, or agreement. France was given the western third of the island of Hispaniola. The rest remained in Spanish hands. In 1804 this part would become the country of Haiti. The Haitians would conquer the rest of the island in 1821, but the eastern two thirds would be granted independence as the Dominican Republic in 1844.



The first president of the Dominican Republic was Pedro Santana, but rather than leading the country as a democratic president, he became a dictator. A dictator is a ruler with total power over a country, and keeps their power from control and force. Conflict with Haiti, with Spain, and

internal uprising led to unrest and instability in the Dominican Republic for the next 60 years.

In 1916 the USA began to occupy Haiti, or use its army to control Haiti, so that enemies of the USA could not take control of the unstable country. The USA occupied the Dominican Republic for 8 years. The USA claimed to have restored peace in the Dominican Republic and withdrew their army, and elections were held and Horacio Vásquez Lajara won. However, in 1930 Rafael Trujillo staged a coup, which means he took control of the country by military force, and he became a dictator for the next 30 years.

Sources:

Ducksters. "Geography for Kids: Dominican Republic." Ducksters, Technological Solutions, Inc. (TSI), [www.ducksters.com/geography/country.php?country=Dominican Republic](http://www.ducksters.com/geography/country.php?country=Dominican%20Republic). Accessed 23 November 2021.

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