

The Churches of Santo Domingo Tourist Trail



01 - Capilla de la Tercera Orden

Built in 1759, the Dominican Chapel was converted into a school in 1880, and subsequently transformed into a library. It is now the home of the Youth Ministry.

02 - Iglesia y Convento de los Dominicos

Construction of the Dominican Convent began in 1511, later becoming the first university in the Americas. At the end of the nineteenth century, the first secular school in Santo Domingo was founded here under the auspices of Eugenio María de Hostos. The Convent also served as barracks for the occupying forces during the Haitian invasion.

The remarkable Chapel of the Blessed Sacrament houses a vault decorated with pagan symbols: the 4 planets (Jupiter, Mars, Saturn and Mercury) represent the 4 evangelists; a sun in the center represents Jesus Christ; the 12 signs of the zodiac symbolize the apostles; and multiple stars represent the saints and martyrs. It is a unique example in the Americas, and one of only three in the world.

03 - Convento e Iglesia de Santa Clara

Dating from 1550, its crypt is dedicated to the burial of sailors who died in this land, far from their families.

The Poor Clare Sisters were cloistered there from 1560.

04 - Catedral Primada de América

Based on plans by the architect Alonso de Rodríguez, who drew inspiration from Seville Cathedral, construction began in 1514 at the request of Pope Julius II, and reached partial completion in 1540. The Cathedral was consecrated in 1541. In 1546, Pope Paul III elevated it to the rank of "Metropolitan and First Cathedral of America". In 1920, Pope Benedict XV raised its status further, this time to the rank of "Minor Basilica of the Virgin of the Annunciation."

The organ, built using traditional techniques, was brought from Magdeburg, Germany, in 1850.

The cathedral was used as the headquarters for troops during the invasion led by Sir Francis Drake in 1586, and was subsequently plundered by them.

05 - Iglesia San Ignacio de Loyola

This Jesuit Church was built in 1714 and abandoned in 1755. It was then put to a succession of uses: as the headquarters of the San Fernando Seminary (1792-1796), as the Royal Tobacco Warehouse, and subsequently as the "La Republicana" theater (1860-1918). It was finally transformed into the National Pantheon in 1956.

06 - Capilla de los Remedios

Dedicated to Our Lady of the Remedies and also known as the Chapel of the Dávilas, it was built between 1541 and 1554. When a barracks was annexed in 1706, it became a military chapel. It also served as the private chapel of wealthy families, before being given to the Church in 1886.

07 - Iglesia de Santa Bárbara

Built before 1562 on the site of the mine from which the construction materials for the city walls and monuments were extracted, the church was severely damaged by the earthquake of 1571, and then restored between 1574 and 1578. Set fire to by Francis Drake in 1586 and partially destroyed by the earthquakes of 1673 and 1684, it was subsequently repaired in a variety of styles. It was initially used as a parish church serving the main parts of the city; the port and the Atarazana areas. Its bells originate from San Francisco monastery.

At the request of King Charles III on July 12 1772, Pope Clement XIV issued a decree according the church the right to offer sanctuary.

Juan Pablo Duarte, the Father of the Nation, was baptized here in 1813.

The cults of Our Lady of Amparo, patron saint of the Marine Corps, and Saint Barbara, patron saint of the Artillery Corps, are both celebrated here.

08 - Ermita de San Antón

The origins of the Church of St. Anthony, which gave its name to the "San Antón" neighborhood, date back to 1502. Founded by "the blacks", it was later built behind the Monastery of San Francisco, under the patronage of Anthony the Great.

Burnt down by Francis Drake in 1586 and flattened by San Zenón hurricane in 1930, it has since been rebuilt by the National Monuments Commission.

09 - Monasterio de San Francisco

1502 marked the arrival of Nicolás de Ovando, head of the Franciscan monks. Construction of the first monastery in the New World started in 1508.

It was here that Cacique Enriquillo, the last great Indian chief, would undertake studies and "forge his soul of steel", before leaving to fight against the colonizers.

In 1586, the monastery was ransacked by Francis Drake; the ensuing repair work was not completed until 1664. The earthquakes of 1673 and 1751 and a succession of hurricanes also caused serious damages, leading to the monastery being abandoned in 1795. The French armed forces began its demolition in 1805. In 1831, occupying Haitian forces plundered the site, carrying away stones and architectural details. In 1847, its walls were removed for use as building materials.

The remains of Don Bartholomew Columbus, brother of Christopher Columbus, were found among the ruins.

Within the area surrounding the church are the ruins of the Chapel of the Tercera Orden de Garay or Maria de Toledo. This chapel's reservoir supplied the water that was distributed to the inhabitants of the Colonial Zone; it was the city's first aqueduct.

10 - Iglesia de La Altagracia

This is the first and oldest church in the New World. Construction began in 1503 under the instructions of Nicolas de Ovando.

It is dedicated to the cult of Our Lady of La Altagracia.

11 - Hospital San Nicolás de Bari

Just next to the Altagracia church lived a charitable "black" woman who picked up and housed the sick and indigent of the city, caring for them as best she was able. Nicolás de Ovando supported this charitable work, in 1552 founding the first hospital in the New World.

12 - Capilla de la Soledad

Used today as the headquarters of the Dominican Academy of History, this chapel was built in 1673. It served as a church while the Las Mercedes church was being repaired. It was also named Chapel of Our Lady of Sorrows and of the "School of Christ" brotherhood.

13 - Iglesia de San Miguel

This small chapel was built in 1740 on the site of a sixteenth century straw chapel. It was one of the wealthiest chapels in the city.

The Spanish "Black Code" of 1796 designated it as the seat of all "black" brotherhoods.

14 - Iglesia de las Mercedes

Built in the years after 1527 at the behest of Rodrigo Gil de Liendo, the church was plundered by Francis Drake in 1586, devastated by the hurricanes of 1615 and 1628, and subsequently restored in 1635.

The monks arrived with Christopher Columbus' second voyage, placing a painting of the Virgin of Mercy that had been donated by Queen Isabella of Spain on the altarpiece of the high altar.

It was in this church that the prolific author of over three hundred comedies, Brother Gabriel Tellez, better known under the name of Tirso de Molina, lived between 1615 and 1618.

Our Lady of Mercy is the patron saint of this island.

15 - Hospital e Iglesia de San Lázaro

Built around 1740 to offer sanctuary and religious instruction to lepers. The Latin word "Caritas" is inscribed on the door in honor of Our Lady of Charity.

16 - Iglesia Nuestra Señora del Carmen

Built in 1615. A revered painting of Jesus of Nazareth originating from San Francisco monastery is housed here. The painting is considered to be miraculous by some worshippers who report having seen and heard it speak.

This is a very important church as it hosts the statue of Christ that is carried in solemn procession through the streets of the city during Holy Week. Following the Spanish tradition, this statue holds the rank of "Colonel" and receives the corresponding military honors.

17 - Hospital y Capilla de San Andrés

The hospital was built in 1562, next to the chapel of the Dean Duke of Rivera. The hospital and chapel were burnt down and looted by Francis Drake in 1586. Centuries later, the hospital was rebuilt and redeveloped as a correctional home for the destitute. It then served as a guardhouse and prison until 1880. It was subsequently converted into a hospital and charitable home, at which time, the chapel was also rebuilt.

18 - Iglesia Regina Agelorum y Convento

This church was the formal headquarters of the Dominican Beaterio following the construction of its convent in 1564. The pious widow Maria Araña financed its construction through the sale of all her property.

This church is dedicated to Our Lady the Queen of Angels. Saint Catherine of Sienna, Our Lady of Sorrows, and Saint Lucy are all venerated here.

19 - Capilla del Rosario

This chapel is located on the eastern bank of the Ozama River, opposite the Colonial Zone, and is dedicated to Our Lady of the Rosary. It is the oldest chapel built in Santo Domingo. Mass has been officiated there since 1497.

It is in this chapel that fay Bartolomé de las Casas blessed the expedition to colonize Guatemala, and this is where he officiated at his last Mass in 1544 before departing for Mexico.