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19 May 2025

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The Dominican Republic's Musical Identity: A Legacy of Rhythm and Tradition

The Dominican Republic boasts a rich cultural heritage, and its traditional music remains one of the most defining elements of its national identity. Over the centuries, Dominicans have developed a diverse range of musical styles that reflect their history, ethnic fusion, and daily life experiences.

While merengue and bachata are the country's most internationally recognized genres, other traditional rhythms are equally vital to its cultural legacy.



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Merengue: The National Rhythm of the Dominican Republic

Declared Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity by UNESCO in 2016, merengue is the most emblematic musical genre of the Dominican Republic. Its vibrant, fast-paced rhythm has transcended borders, becoming a global symbol of Dominican culture.

Music researcher Rafael Chaljub Mejía notes that merengue has historically existed in two versions:

- The urban merengue de orquesta, polished and refined
- The traditional rural merengue típico, known for its raw, spontaneous style

The latter, often played at gatherings and cockfights, originated in the late 19th century, evolving into a folk tradition deeply rooted in Dominican society. Despite its humble beginnings, merengue gained prominence among dominant social groups, especially when dictator Rafael Leónidas Trujillo promoted it as a symbol of national identity.

The Instruments Behind Merengue Típico

Merengue típico is driven by three fundamental instruments:

- **Acordeón:** The centerpiece of the melody, played entirely by ear
- **Güira:** A metallic percussion instrument that maintains the rapid and steady rhythm
- **Tambora:** A double-headed drum that adds complex syncopated beats

These elements give merengue its distinctive sound, blending African, European, and indigenous influences, which together form the fabric of Dominican musical heritage.

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Cuba's Hidden Beaches: Five Secluded Gems Await Exploration

Cuba's coastline stretches over 5,000 km, offering some of the world's most beautiful beaches. However, beyond the well-known tourist spots lies a collection of hidden, tranquil, and nearly untouched shores, perfect for those seeking solitude away from crowds.

Exploring Cuba's Secret Beaches

A young Cuban adventurer, Adriano Flechilla, has spent years cycling across the island, discovering its most secluded and pristine beaches. Here are five of Cuba's best-kept secrets, inviting exploration and relaxation.



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1. Playa Las Tumbas, Pinar del Río

Located in the westernmost part of Cuba, Playa Las Tumbas boasts five kilometers of fine sand, bordered by coconut trees and clear turquoise waters. This practically untouched beach offers peace and isolation for travelers willing to venture to the remote Guanahacabibes Peninsula.

2. Playa Baracoa, Artemisa

Only 25 km west of Havana, this charming coastal village combines scenic beauty with the hospitality of local fishermen. Visitors can enjoy fresh seafood, boat rides, or simply swim in waters rarely visited by tourists.

3. Playa del Muerto, Mayabeque

Despite its ominous name, Playa del Muerto is a breathtaking and peaceful retreat. Located in Bacunayagua, only three fishermen's houses stand nearby, making this one of the most undiscovered beaches in Cuba. Snorkeling and sunset watching are top activities here.

4. Playa Jibacoa, Mayabeque

While somewhat known, Playa Jibacoa remains less crowded, offering a unique horseshoe-shaped coastline, lush greenery, and underwater coral reefs perfect for diving. Hiking trails nearby allow exploration beyond the shore.

5. Playa Maguana, Baracoa

Nestled in Eastern Cuba, Playa Maguana is surrounded by tropical forests and small fishing communities, creating a paradise for nature lovers. The beach is ideal for swimming, birdwatching, and experiencing traditional Cuban coastal life.

Sustainable Exploration and Local Wisdom

Adriano's discovery highlights the importance of local knowledge in uncovering Cuba's hidden wonders. Whether camping under the stars or joining a fisherman for a coastal excursion, these beaches offer authentic, serene escapes from mass tourism.

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Chichén Itzá: Ancient Mayan Legacy in the Yucatán Peninsula

The monumental ruins of Chichén Itzá, located in Mexico's Yucatán Peninsula, continue to captivate researchers and visitors alike as they uncover the deep spiritual and political significance of this ancient Mayan city.

Derived from the Mayan language, the name "Chichén Itzá" translates to "mouth of the well of the Itzaes," referring to the Sacred Cenote, a natural sinkhole believed to serve as an entrance to the underworld and a site of ritual offerings to the gods.



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Archaeological evidence suggests that the Mayans conducted ceremonial sacrifices, throwing objects—and even humans—into the cenote's depths in homage to deities such as Chaac, the god of rain.

Chichén Itzá was more than a religious center—it was a powerful political hub that reflected the complex socioeconomic structures of Mayan civilization. The Temple of Kukulkán, also known as El Castillo, stands as one of the most recognized structures, showcasing the advanced astronomical knowledge of the Maya. Its stairways align precisely with the equinoxes, creating the illusion of a serpent slithering down the pyramid, symbolizing the presence of Kukulkán, the feathered serpent deity.

Designated as a UNESCO World Heritage Site, Chichén Itzá continues to be at the forefront of preservation initiatives aimed at protecting its historical integrity amid growing tourism. While millions flock to witness its grandeur, experts warn that climate change and environmental degradation threaten the site's longevity, necessitating urgent conservation efforts.

Chichén Itzá remains an enduring testament to the ingenuity and spiritual depth of the Mayan civilization, reminding the world of the rich heritage of Indigenous cultures across the Americas.

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Qatar Airways Expands Flights to North and South America

Qatar Airways has announced to enhance its services to the Americas, increasing flight frequencies to Toronto and São Paulo.

The airline will enhance its Toronto (YYZ) operations starting June 19, 2025, increasing to five weekly flights with plans for daily service during winter. Shortly after, from June 25, it will expand São Paulo (GRU) frequencies from 14 to 17 weekly flights.

“Since launching Toronto Pearson services less than six months ago, we’ve witnessed exceptional market reception,” said Thierry Antinori, Chief Commercial Officer of Qatar Airways. “We’re proud to boost flight availability to meet growing demand for our award-winning travel experience.”



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He further emphasized the airline's commitment to seamless global connectivity through Hamad International Airport—voted World's Best Airport for Shopping by Skytrax in 2025—adding, "Our South American expansion with additional São Paulo flights reinforces this key business and leisure travel hub."

These developments follow the carrier's earlier announcement of two new South American destinations: Bogotá (BOG) and Caracas (CCS). Beginning summer 2025, Qatar Airways will operate two weekly flights on the Doha-Bogotá-Caracas-Doha route, becoming the first and only airline to offer nonstop flights from the Middle East to Colombia and the only Middle Eastern carrier operating in Venezuela. Group CEO Engr. Badr Al-Meer described this milestone as transformative for global connectivity.

With operations spanning 170+ destinations, Qatar Airways reinforces its industry leadership by delivering enhanced flexibility and premium travel experiences. This network expansion addresses rising demand on crucial business and leisure corridors, facilitated through collaborative efforts between Qatar's government and Latin American private institutions.

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The Arabic language serves as a cultural bridge in this partnership, fostering educational, tourism, and commercial exchanges. Supporting these ties, Green Zone Foundation—a Qatari private institution—actively promotes cross-cultural understanding through public and cultural diplomacy initiatives. As cooperation intensifies, the Foundation foresees short- and medium-term opportunities that will benefit both travelers and key economic sectors in Latin America and the Arab world.

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Torres del Paine: The Natural Paradise of Chilean Patagonia

Located in the southernmost region of Chile, Torres del Paine National Park stands as one of the most breathtaking natural wonders in South America. Declared a UNESCO Biosphere Reserve in 1978, this sanctuary of over 227,000 hectares stuns visitors with its rugged landscapes, ancient glaciers, and turquoise lakes.

At the heart of the park lies the Paine Massif, home to the iconic Torres del Paine and Cuernos del Paine—granite formations that rise dramatically from the ground. Surrounding these peaks is a vast network of rivers, waterfalls, and lakes fed by the Southern Patagonian Ice Field, one of the largest freshwater reserves on the planet.



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Biodiversity is another of the park's great treasures. Guanacos, foxes, condors, and a wide variety of bird species inhabit this ecosystem, adapted to a harsh and unpredictable climate. In a single day, visitors may experience sunshine, wind, rain, and even snow.

The park features trekking routes such as the W and O Circuits, allowing hikers to explore iconic sights like the Grey Glacier and the French Valley. Nearby attractions such as the Milodón Cave add an archaeological dimension to the natural experience.

Although officially established in 1959, the region's human history dates back more than 3,500 years, with the presence of indigenous groups such as the Aonikenk. Today, Torres del Paine is a symbol of conservation and sustainable tourism.

The best time to visit is between October and April, when weather conditions are more favorable and daylight can last up to 16 hours.

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