

# THE CHALLENGE OF PICO DUARTE



For many tourists, the Caribbean is a dreamlike destination, where visitors spend their long days lying on the perfect beaches and occasionally go for a lazy swim. Scuba-divers claim local marine life is strikingly diverse. Those who prefer challenging adventures that require some serious physical training are – unlike the rest – lured by the mountains. Each year, the goal of several thousand adventurers is the Pico Duarte of the Cordillera Central region.

Pico Duarte is the highest mountain in the Caribbean; due to its location, the surrounding mountain range is sometimes dubbed as ‘the Dominican Alps’. It reaches the height of 3,087 meters above sea level, with a total elevation change of 1,977 meters. There are several routes available, varying in both difficulty and length. The whole system of trails is very well maintained, with shelters on the way. The trips may be arranged in advance from a nearby town of Jarabacoa. Local tourist agencies provide basically all the necessary equipment, guides, and – most importantly – mules. They are used to carry the gear; however, tourists are strongly advised to ride them while ascending the more difficult passages. Guides are also required for everyone.

The most popular and less demanding trail starts in the town La Ciénega. It is 23.1 km long and usually takes two days. The more adventurous hiking enthusiasts may appreciate the other possibility – the trail that starts northwest of the town San Juan de la Maguana which is a three-day/two night trip. Even though it is not absolutely necessary, Spanish is recommended for anyone that attempts this route.

The hike itself involves the crossing of several rivers, a passage through the rain forest and some amazing vistas from the peak itself. Pico Duarte is located in the Bermudez National Park and the whole area is very charming. Apart from admiring local magnificent waterfalls, many of the restless visitors enjoy other activities, such as whitewater kayaking.

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