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Sunset casts a rosy glow over Roseau, Dominica's capital.

A Caribbean Hideaway

OFF-THE-SHIP ADVENTURES IN UNSPOILED DOMINICA

By EVERETT POTTER

LYING BETWEEN Martinique and Guadeloupe, Dominica has long been in the forefront of ecotourism. Rain forest wraps around 4,000-foot slumbering volcanoes, and some of the healthiest coral reefs in the world sit offshore. Hikers and snorkelers love this Caribbean island that's a delightful throwback to gentler times, a place without megaresorts, nightlife, and mass tourism. The self-proclaimed "Nature Island" shifted between British and French occupation for two centuries, but 2013 marks the 35th anniversary of its independence.

RAMBLE IN ROSEAU Ships dock in the heart of Roseau, the pleasantly ramshackle capital, where the streets are lined with rickety wooden houses with balconies. The British colonial-style architecture is best glimpsed along King George V Street. "Those who have an appreciation of history will see Roseau as a treasure," says Daryl Phillip, a local historian and horticulturist. "Our

language and laws are British, but our customs are French." Visit the **Dominica Museum** with its hand-carved Carib canoes, historic island photographs, and weathered oil painting of Queen Victoria. Nearby is **Cartwheel Café**, where strong, homegrown coffee will keep you going. If there are fishermen in the Roseau River scooping up tiny *titiwi* fish, stop at **Olive's**, where the namesake owner fries up *titiwi accra*, a spicy fish cake. Or sit down at **Pearls** for callaloo soup, made with native greens, and a glass of local Kubuli beer. Pick up traditional baskets woven by indigenous Kalinago at the **Old Market Square**. (4 hours)

JUNGLE LAND Hiking on Dominica can be arduous, made harder by frequent bursts of rain. But the plant life, the waterfalls, the hot springs, and the daily rainbows make it more than worthwhile, as does the chance of spotting the native Sisserou parrot. Ken's Hinterland Adventure Tours offers a range of guided hikes, and the three-hour

trek through **Morne Trois Pitons National Park**, a UNESCO World Heritage site, to Middleham Falls packs in some of the best of Dominica. The waterfall drops 200 feet into a natural pool where the cool waters offer a refreshing swim before you hike back through the humid jungle. (4 hours)

WATER, WATER EVERYWHERE Snorkeling on **Champagne Reef**, a 10-minute cab ride south of Roseau, presents an undersea panorama filled with exotic sealife. Champagne Reef Dive & Snorkel provides changing rooms, gear, and a guide for \$19 an hour. In water ranging from 3 to 70 feet deep, you may view giant barrel sponges, flying gurnards, and a steady stream of bubbles from geothermal vents that gave the reef its name. Head back to Roseau and then out to sea again. The waters around Dominica are the permanent home of female sperm whales and pilot whales. **Anchorage Hotel Whale Watch & Dive Center** offers 3½-hour tours for \$67. (6 hours) ■