

El Limón Waterfalls

La Cascada el Limón

Geographical orientation

El Salto del Limón, as the falls are known locally, is located in the north-eastern corner of Hispaniola, in the attractive Peninsula of Samaná.

The four access routes to the falls are found about halfway along the road joining Las Terrenas, on the north coast, to the town of Samaná, on the south. Four local communities, Rancho Español, Arroyo Surdido, El Café and El Limón, have organised entry points, or *paradas*, where they offer not only guided horseback or mule-back treks to the falls, but also sell food and drink, local produce, such as coffee, cocoa, grapefruit, coconuts, and locally hand-crafted artefacts, such as decorated gourds.

A brief overview

The native *Ciguayos* were driven out upon the arrival of Columbus and the Spanish. The main period of settlement occurred during the 1820ies, when hundreds of freed slaves from Philadelphia arrived at the invitation of the president of the country. These so-called ingleses brought with them their language, customs and beliefs. Many of our older folk still speak English. During the later half of the 19th century, more immigrants from other islands—from English-speaking, too— were attracted to the area by the economic boom in neighbouring Sanchez. The region of Samaná, and our communities, are characterised by our ethnic mix, which is reflected in our cultural and religious diversity.

The landscape in the area of the falls shows how we have moulded it and have adapted to it: the small houses, painted in vivid colours, made from materials found here, such as palm thatch; vegetable plots bordered by plantations; washing clothes and bathing in the rivers, which are still protected by their riverine forests and home to a great variety of trees, plants and birds.

It is crucial that the sources or catchments of Arroyo Chico, the river which plunges 40 m down the falls, and of the adjoining rivers are conserved, not only to ensure the long-term future of the falls themselves and the water supplies for the communities, but also the inherent biodiversity.

NATIVE AND ALIEN SPECIES—WILD PLANTS AND PLANTATIONS

Although it is hard to see the original vegetation from the road, fragments of tropical rain forest are found along the river banks and the trails to the falls. Native trees are found here, such as *Juan Primero* (*Simarouba glauca*), *Cigua Blanca* (*Ocotea coriacea*), *Uva de Sierra* (*Coccoloba diversifolia*), *Cabirma* (*Guarea guidonia*), and especially the *Palma Real* (*Roystonea hispaniolana*), which is an endemic species of Hispaniola. This palm is now officially protected, because it was becoming endangered, due the use of the rind to make thin boards for house building. The large stem of the leaves, dried and flattened, was also used for roofing. The *Cigua Palmera* (*Dulcus dominicus*), an endemic heron, nests in the palm.

Cultivated native species are also found, for example, the *Guanabana* or soursop (*Annona murciata*), *Bija* (*Bixa orellana*), and *Higüero* (*Crescentia cujete*), a gourd once used by the Amerindians and nowadays used to make hand-crafted, decorated vessels and containers.

Other trees and plants have become naturalised. It is hard to believe that the coconut palms (*Cocos nucifera*) are not native, nor for that matter the mango (*Mangifera indica*) or breadfruit (*Artocarpus altilis*) trees. Traditional dishes in the area would not be same without their fruits.

Kitchen gardens and cultivated crops, such as coffee, cocoa, and stands of orange, grapefruit can be seen along the trails.

OUR COMMUNITY ECOTOURISM ASSOCIATION

We have organised ourselves and formed an association of ecotourism workers. The aim is twofold: to provide our visitors with a good “product” and to use our natural resources in a sustainable manner.

Our services include: guided treks to the falls on tame horses or mules or on foot—guides provide “interpretation” of phenomena en route, eg of trees, crops, birds, and traditional practices; guided treks to other places of interest, such as caves; typical food and drinks are served at the *paradas*; lodging with families for greater appreciation of village life and customs.

We are involved in on-going training in areas such as ecology, animal welfare, as well as in physical and structural trail improvements. These activities are supported by CEBSE, a local environmental NGO, the ministry of tourism (SECTUR), the national parks authority (DNP) and the Environmental Programme, which is backed by Helvetas (Swiss Development Agency) and the DED (German Development Service).

To our visitors and the tour operators we look for collaboration to help achieve a model of responsible tourism, which conserves this exceptional environment for our mutual benefit and for generations to come.

TIPS AND HINTS

- The falls can be visited any day, but only during daylight hours.
- Use trained local guides for excursions on foot or horseback. Their experienced eye and knowledge will help you see things in a new way and make the trip even more memorable. Your guide can also answer your questions.
- During the wet season (from May to December—although it doesn’t rain all day), bring rain gear and wear robust rain-proof boots, as it can get very muddy.

- Sunscreen, wide-brimmed hats for shade, light-weight clothing and insect repellent are recommended for all excursions.
- Fire is probably the greatest danger to the environment. Open fires and burning rubbish are strictly prohibited. Smokers are urged to take extreme caution if they cannot desist.
- Remember your swimming gear if you want to enjoy the usually crystal clear waters in the natural pool below the falls. For your safety, don't leap or dive from perches higher up. Some of the local boys might do so, but they know the location of the deeper sections and of the submerged rocks!
- To avoid disturbing wildlife or damage to vegetation, stick to the paths,
- For your safety and the peace of mind of your companions, keep away from the top edge of the waterfall.
- For your safety do not break or pull branches from trees, bushes or vines. You might disturb "dangerous" insects or get hurt by thorns.
- Leave no trace of your presence. Take out all rubbish, which can be deposited at the *paradas*
- Soft drinks are available at the *paradas*. The consumption of liquor, spirits and drugs is prohibited.
- Buy local products whenever possible—except captive birds.
- If the price for the trek to the falls only covers the horse, your horse guide will appreciate a donation or tip.

Use the guest book at each *parada* for your comments, opinions, complaints, praise or recommendations. We welcome your feedback.

The *paradas* (starting out points) for the El Limón Waterfalls are located at El Limón on the road from Samaná to Las Terrenas. You can visit the waterfalls on foot (ca. 30 minutes walking) or by donkey.

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