



Focus on DOMINICAN REPUBLIC School Program

"I loved this year, and I am pretty sure I couldn't choose any better way to spend 10 months of my life. I enjoyed it in 100%, and I've done everything I wanted. I met interesting people, my family and friends are wonderful and I will miss all so much."

Hanna Hradilova, participant from Czech Republic

Of all the Caribbean islands, the Dominican Republic is the most geographically diverse. It has the highest mountain (above 10,000 feet—it even gets snow in winter), the deepest valley, rainforests, deserts, swamps and white sand beaches. Because the Republic is less prosperous than most Caribbean nations, prices are low, and this, along with the scenery and a friendly, hospitable populace, attracts growing hordes of vacationers. Tourism, in fact, is the country's leading industry, as in most of the Caribbean. The Republic's food, music and pace of life are comfortable blends of Spanish, African and native Indian cultures.

AFS & Your Experience

AFS Dominican Republic has been in existence since 1962. AFS volunteers in eight communities across the country work hard year-round to provide you with the most satisfying intercultural experience possible. During the year, AFS Dominican Republic hosts more than 60 students from as many as 14 countries.

AFS will be at your side throughout your intercultural exchange. Even before leaving your home country you will participate in organized AFS orientations and have the assistance of experienced AFS volunteers. Once in your host country, you can rely on your local volunteer contact and other chapter volunteers to support you in your experience. Together we will ensure that you have an incredible experience abroad.

Landing in the Dominican Republic

Your flight will arrive in Santo Domingo, the capital of the Dominican Republic. Once the plane lands and you collect your baggage, you will pass through customs and be met by AFS Dominican Republic staff and volunteers.

Arrival Orientation

After you have spent many long and tiring hours on the plane, a two-day arrival orientation will give you a chance to relax, get to know the other AFSers in the program and learn about AFS in the Dominican Republic and Dominican culture.

Living in the Dominican Republic

Lifestyle and Family Living

Most Dominicans consider the family to be the basic element of society. Families are very close, and they stay close. It is not unusual to find grandparents living at home, fully integrated in the life of the family. A majority of young people stay living with their parents, even after entering college or becoming financially independent. They usually will not leave the home until they get married, and even then, they will try to remain close to their parents geographically.

Masculine and feminine roles are clearly defined in the society and family cultures, which includes *machismo* (the idea that men are superior to women). The father is usually the head of the family. His authority is respected, and his words are final, even if what he says only confirms what the mother or somebody else has already decided. This *machismo* has been decreasing lately, as more women have integrated into the economic and political life of the country. Still, in practice, the men of the family are granted certain privileges that women do not fully enjoy, such as minor participation in the household chores and fewer restrictions regarding social life, going out, permissions, etc.

Dominican families are very conservative and protective of their children, no matter how old they are. Parents have to know their children's friends before letting them go out, and parents will always expect you to ask for their authorization before going out.

It is not common either for children to receive house keys. Most of the time, when they go out at night, parents wait up for them to return home.

Dominicans place great value on education, courtesy and social rituals, such as proper ways of greeting and saying good-bye. Men shake hands, pat shoulders and often embrace; women embrace and pat shoulders, perhaps touch cheeks and kiss the air. It is common to ask about someone's health and that of his or her entire family.

Dominicans put great emphasis on cleanliness. Everyone is supposed to take at least two showers a day, to change clothes, to use deodorant, etc.

AFSers coming to the Dominican Republic should understand that sometimes host families will not have the modern facilities, comforts and latest gadgets to which they might be accustomed. Few houses have air conditioning, electric dishwashers, microwave ovens, and so on.

This should be an important point to consider as you prepare to come to the Dominican Republic. It is true that you may be leaving many things behind, but you will also find many rewards in the Dominican Republic, among them love, communication, hospitality, and most of all, warmth.

Dress and Appearance

In general, it is best to bring casual clothes such as jeans, T-shirts, slacks and skirts. Spring and summer clothes are appropriate. Young people wear jeans a lot, but they

should look neat. Shorts are okay for sports but not acceptable for all occasions. Do not forget your bathing suit.

Girls should bring skirts, blouses and a couple of dresses for parties or other formal occasions, and boys should bring a pair of good pants, with a jacket to match, and a nice dress shirt and tie. It is also recommended that you bring at least one sweatshirt or sweater, because it's cooler in the north and also during the winter.

Dominican students are required to wear uniforms to school, and each school has different uniforms. Make sure to bring US\$100 to cover the cost of purchasing the uniform when you arrive.

Diet and Meals

The basic meal consists of rice and beans prepared in many different ways, seasoned but not spicy. Other staples of the Dominican diet are meat, plantains, tubers, juice and cheese. Many dishes are fried in vegetable oil.

In the Dominican Republic, the whole family customarily eats the same food at meals together; it is considered inappropriate for individuals to request special foods, to prepare separate food for themselves or to raid the refrigerator. Host families tend to think that if a student eats a lot, she or he will be happy.

Many imported foods are available, but they are expensive. Although these products might be easily obtained at your home, they may be seen as luxuries in the Dominican Republic (cereal, imported cheese, jellies, etc.).

School

School is one of the best places for you to make friends while in the Dominican Republic. School is in session from September to June; classes run Monday through Friday from 8 a.m. to 1 p.m. All placements are in private schools. Schools expect students to maintain good grades. Subjects studied are mandatory and are determined by grade-level placement. Tenth grade subjects are Spanish, geometry, English, physics, world history, botany, zoology and religion. Eleventh grade subjects are Spanish, English, trigonometry, Dominican history and geography, chemistry, philosophy, anatomy, French and religion. Twelfth grade subjects are literature, French, psychology and philosophy, economics, physics, chemistry, biology, math, civics and religion. There are monthly tests and exams in December and May or June. Grades are given every month. Exemptions from final exams are given to students with grades above 80.

A transcript, diploma or certificate of attendance can be obtained if you attend classes regularly, complete the course work and pass the examinations. Schools offer sports activities and clubs at the end of the day.

Teen Life

Dominican teens devote most of their time on weekdays to doing homework. Weekends are when teenagers enjoy getting together with friends, going to movies or dancing, relaxing in local cafes or just hanging out in the town square.

Dominicans young and old are very fond of dancing. Many people often go out to dance or organize parties in their homes, where the main activity is dancing. They dance to all

kinds of music, but they especially enjoy *merengue*, which is the national dance. Dancing is a very important part of social life, and both boys and girls learn it at an early age.

AFS Activities

In addition to an orientation at your arrival, AFS Dominican Republic will provide you with several others. AFS orientations are a chance for participants to meet (often for a weekend or for a few days) to talk about both expectations for the future program and past experiences. Orientations involve participating in group activities and self-examination. Sessions usually provide new information and ways of looking at things while also allowing participants to share points of view. AFS orientations are social, interactive and educational, bringing together young people from many countries and helping them to better understand their own intercultural learning experience.

In addition, there may be cultural weekends in Santo Domingo or other places, a trip to the carnival of La Vega and an Adventure Weekend (the cost of this trip will be shared between AFS Dominican Republic and the participants). You can also look forward to an orientation session in October.

Last, but definitely not least, is the so-called End-of-Stay. You will get together with other AFSers right before you return home. The End-of-Stay is about looking back at your exchange sojourn and sharing memories with other AFSers. It is also about thinking of the future.

Travel

Although it is natural for you to want to travel while in Dominican Republic, AFS is not designed as a tourist program. AFS offers the rare opportunity to be immersed in a culture and a country. It is likely, however, that you will have many opportunities to travel with your host family, school, community organization, local chapter or AFS Dominican Republic. We strongly discourage traveling on your own or with friends.

Spending Money

It is probably easier if you bring your money in US dollars because it is the only currency recognized all over the country. You can open a bank account after your arrival. This will give you a resource in case you need extra funds during your stay, since your natural family will be able to make a money transfer directly into your account. If this is not possible, bank drafts or money orders in U.S. dollars can be sent, but you may lose some money in the exchange rate, due to service charges. Personal checks should not be sent, as they can be very difficult to cash.

Another possibility is credit cards: Visa and MasterCard are recognized all over the country, so you will be able to pay or get cash advances wherever you are.

Host families are asked to pay only for ordinary family events in which you are expected to participate. When you do such things as shopping for yourself or going out with friends, the related expenses are your responsibility. Spending more than your peers and family may create a distance between you and them.

Safety and Support

The Dominican Republic is a relatively safe country, and you should do well if you follow the normal precautions you would use in your country.

During your stay, local AFS volunteers will be available to assist you as you learn to live as a Dominican. In the event of an emergency, AFS staff can be reached 24 hours a day by you in your host country and by your natural family at home.

For the welfare of participants, AFS worldwide has two rules: no driving and no use of drugs for non-medicinal purposes. Any student who violates either of these rules will be automatically sent home. AFS Dominican Republic may have additional rules.

Health Precautions

In addition to the precautions mentioned above, AFS suggests that you discuss the health recommendations for the Dominican Republic (which you can get from your government or easily find on the Internet) with your personal doctor, to determine what is best for you and your personal needs.

If you require any medical assistance during your stay, your host family or local volunteers will be ready to help find it. As an AFS participant, your medical expenses are covered for illness or accident injuries incurred while on the program, exclusive of pre-existing, dental or visual aid expenses.

Documents

You must have a passport that will be valid for six months longer than your intended stay. In addition to your passport, you also need a visa to enter and reside in your host country. Visas are obtained through the consular offices of your host country, and requirements often vary from consulate to consulate.

Consulates charge fees for their services, and obtaining your visa can be a complicated and lengthy process requiring a great deal of paperwork, patience and persistence. AFS will help you obtain the visa and provide you with instructions regarding the required documents.

Program Prices

Please [contact the AFS office in your home country](#) for information about program price and scholarship possibilities and what the program price covers for the various program offerings. In most cases the program price covers the following: round-trip international travel with your AFS group; travel in the host country to your host family; travel from your host family to your international departure point; AFS's medical plan; placement with your host; orientation in your home country and your host country; 24 hour emergency assistance in your home and host countries; a global medical assistance organization to support extreme emergencies; a network of trained volunteers who support you throughout your experience.

In order to keep costs low and provide good service, AFS utilizes a network of volunteers and staff in 50+ countries around the world. Volunteers need training, support and assistance from professional staff in each country. Other expenses you will normally need to pay in addition to the program price: passport and visa fees, required inoculations, expenses for eyeglasses, contacts and dental care, school uniforms (where applicable) and personal spending money. Your housing and food are provided by your host family as part of their commitment to our program.

Country Information

Geography and Climate

The Dominican Republic is located in a torrid sub-tropical area, on the second largest island in the Antilles Archipelago. The Dominican Republic occupies two thirds of the island. It has an area of 48,480 km² (18,814 mi²) and a 1,575 km (1,000 mi) coastline, one-third of which is covered by magnificent beaches. The remaining portion of the territory belongs to the Republic of Haiti with which the Dominican Republic shares its only border on the west.

The Dominican Republic's irregular geography ranges from the Caribbean and Atlantic coastal plains in the south and north to the 3,175-meter-high Pico Duarte, the highest peak in the Antilles. Three great mountain ranges cross the territory from southeast to northeast: Cordillera Septentrional to the north; Sierra del Bahoruco to the south, and between these two, Cordillera Central with the widest sweep and highest elevations.

A warm tropical climate predominates in the Dominican Republic's coastal areas, while a cooler and more benign tropical climate is typical in the Central Region. The average temperature throughout the year is 25°C (77°F). August is the warmest month of the year, and January is the coolest. Very low temperatures are often registered in mountain areas, especially during winter months.

Practically every day is sunny in the Dominican Republic, but there are two rainy seasons: the longest and heaviest stretches from May to August and the lighter one arriving in November and December. The southwest is the country's driest region.

Population

The Dominican Republic has a total population of more than 7 million; one-third is concentrated in Santo Domingo, the capital city. Dominicans are a mixture of Europeans, Africans and natives. The racial distribution is as follows: Mulattos (70 %), Blacks (15%), Whites (10%) and Asians (5%).

Dominicans are very nationalistic and proud of their country, but not in an aggressive way. Everyone feels free to criticize institutions or government—but they don't necessarily like criticism when it comes from foreigners.

Government

The country has been a democracy since 1966. The president is elected by popular vote every four years. Members of the Senate and of the Chamber of Deputies are also elected every four years.

Religion

Roman Catholicism is the official religion. The Catholic religion is important in Dominican society. Most people practice their religion and attend church regularly, but many go to church occasionally or are Catholics only by name. Families put a lot of emphasis on religion. Many private schools are religious ones.

Many Dominicans believe they must be resigned to the will of God and usually add the phrase "*Si Dios quiere*" (God willing) to any mention of plans, even something as simple

as “See you tomorrow.” There is freedom of religion, and churches representing different denominations are found in many cities.

Launching Your AFS Experience

Evaluations by previous participants support our belief that those students who prepare prior to leaving have the best experience. In order to get ready, first make every effort to learn some key Spanish words and phrases so that you arrive with at least some basic knowledge of the language.

To familiarize yourself further with life in the Dominican Republic, make use of your local library and/or the Internet. A lot of general information is available about the Dominican Republic and its culture.

Although each participant’s experience is unique, we strongly suggest that you speak with a recent AFS participant to the Dominican Republic. This person will be an excellent resource regarding living as a Dominican. If you do not know any alumni, please contact your local volunteer or national AFS office. In addition, AFS Dominican Republic will provide you with a special packet of country-specific information.

Dominican people will be curious about your home community. You may be surprised to find out how much they already know about your country. Therefore, it is also helpful to be as informed as possible about current events in your community and country.

If you have not already received a full AFS application packet, please contact your local AFS volunteer or national office to request one. We wish you a wonderful experience!

Curiously Dominican

● The island where the Dominican Republic is situated, called Hispaniola, was discovered by Christopher Columbus on December 5th, 1492.

● Santo Domingo is the first city of the “New World,” founded by Bartholomew Columbus in 1502. The city also has the first cathedral, the first street called “Calle Las Damas” and the first university.

● The Dominican Republic is the only country in the world with a Bible on its national flag.

How to Apply

To become a participant in this country's School Program, contact your nearest AFS office. To locate an AFS office, go to <http://www.afs.org/contact>

Student age (upon arrival)	16y to 18y	
Country data	Size	48,730 km ² (18,814mi ²)
	Population	8,442,533
	Official Language	Spanish
	Government	Representative democracy
Currency	Dominican peso (RD\$) = 100 cents	
Useful website	www.dominican.com.do	
AFS Dominican Republic website	http://afsweb.afs.org/Countryp.nsf/pages/dominican_republic	

AFS program destinations are not always available to residents of all countries. If a program interests you, please contact your nearest AFS office to find out if it is an option for you. You can locate your nearest AFS office at <http://www.afs.org/contact>

