

DOMINICAN 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.

Community Service Program

AFS's Community Service program gives you the opportunity to share in and contribute to the life of a community in the Dominican Republic by living and working alongside its members in a community-based service organization. At the organization, you will be asked to pitch in and offer assistance in whatever capacity might be needed and to share the knowledge and experience you have gained from your home culture in the process. No one expects you to be an expert with all the answers to local problems or the ability to change local conditions. Rather, you are expected to be a willing participant in a process of mutual discovery. This experience will present you with innumerable learning opportunities both personally and professionally.

Worldwide, AFS Community Service program participants contribute their talents and energies to a variety of social programs that range from protecting the environment to teaching children or adults, from assisting the elderly and the disabled to defending human rights, from enhancing public health to helping local businesses become established.

Past participants in the Dominican Republic have worked for hospitals, nurseries, schools, environmental projects, human rights organizations, and other service programs. However, all specifics—including assignments, orientations, logistics and activities—vary depending on the program cycle.

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. Each year, AFS Dominican Republic hosts more than 60 students and Community Service participants from as many as nine 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.

Orientations

Participants are met at the airport by AFS Dominican Republic staff and introduced to their host families. Two or three days afterward, participants attend an arrival orientation that discusses the realities of the country, the community service projects and host families. During the first month, participants stay in Santo Domingo for an intensive Spanish language course (three hours per day, Monday through Friday). Then they join their projects, some of which are away from Santo Domingo.

In addition to an orientation at your arrival, AFS Dominican Republic will provide you with several others. AFS orientations offer participants a chance to meet for several days and talk about expectations for the future program and past experiences. Orientations involve participating in group activities and self-examination. Sessions also provide language training as well as 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 people from many countries and helping them to better understand their own intercultural learning experiences while preparing them to handle their community service assignments.

Living in the Dominican Republic

Living arrangements

Participants in AFS Community Service programs typically live with local families, sharing their daily lives, their meals and perhaps a host sibling's bedroom.

The typical Dominican host family is quite traditional. In 40% of the cases, the mother does not work outside the home. The lifestyle is informal and slowly paced.

Host families feel very responsible for their AFS participants, and tend to be very protective, especially at the beginning. Boys are generally granted more independence than girls are. Girls, and to some extent boys, are expected to help around the house, and both are given curfews. Some families permit participants to go out (to parties, discos, etc) only two weekends per month. Most host families feel uncomfortable with participants who intend to go out every weekend and show little interest in family life. Even if families allow their AFSer to go out more often, parents must be informed about where the participant is going, with whom and the exact hour of return. Participants accustomed to independence should be capable of adapting to this and to understand it as a cultural difference.

Diet and Meals

A basic Dominican 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, it is customary for families to eat 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 participant 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).

Health Precautions

AFS suggests that you discuss the health recommendations for the Dominican Republic (which you can get from your government or find easily on the Internet) with your doctor at home, 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 injuries incurred while on the program, exclusive of pre-existing, dental or visual aid expenses.

Safety and Support

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.

Travel

AFS's Community Service programs allow participants to travel on their own through their host countries, typically for a week or more, to explore and absorb each country's cultural diversity.

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 in your region 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. It is your responsibility to obtain your visa and pay the fees. However, AFS will let you know how to proceed and will provide you with the documents you need to apply for the visa.

Program Prices

All participants are required to pay participation fee and do a mandatory fundraising. To get further information, please visit our website www.afscanada.org or contact us.

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 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 do not 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 if you prepare prior to leaving, you will have the best experience.

Make every effort to improve your Spanish language skills before departure. Then, to familiarize yourself with life in the Dominican Republic, visit your local library or search the Internet. AFS International's website, AFS.org, provides links to websites for each participating country.

Although every participant's experience is unique, we strongly suggest that you speak with a recent AFS participant to the Dominican Republic. This veteran will be an excellent resource regarding living and working there. If you do not know a veteran, please contact your local AFS volunteer or AFS Interculture Canada office.

In addition, AFS will provide you with essential information about your host country to prepare you for immersion in a new and exciting culture.

Finally, Dominicans will be curious about your home community. You may be surprised how much they already know about your country's history and politics. Therefore, you will find it helpful to be informed about current events in your home community and country.

How to Apply?

You first have to fill out the Preliminary Application form that you can find on our website at www.afscanada.org. If you don't have access to Internet, call us at (514) 288-3282 or 1-800-361-7248 and we will send you the document by mail.

Quick Facts

Country data	Size	48,730 km ² (18,814mil 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	