Global Health Program

DOMINICAN REPUBLIC
PARTICIPANT GUIDE

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Welcome Message

Welcome to the Dominican Republic! We appreciate your interest in learning about our ways of life, culture, and healthcare and education systems. Our beautiful island has a rich history and colorful folklore that combines native Indigenous, African, and Spanish-European culture. Dominicans are well-known for their warmth and friendliness. Despite having one of the fastest growing economies in the Caribbean, the Dominican people still face stark inequality. Access to basic needs such as safe drinking water and other important assets including high-quality healthcare and education is a privilege available to less than 50% of the population.

As of 2016, Hispanics and Latin Americans are considered the largest ethnic minority in the United States. Given that the Dominican Republic has the greatest number of immigrants in the United States among Latin American countries after Mexico and Cuba, it is likely that you will encounter Latin American patients during your home medical training and practice.

The purpose of this elective is to offer you a firsthand experience in a different healthcare system, the opportunity to become more knowledgeable in endemic diseases as well as other health problems in our country, and the potential to gain a broader vision of healthcare delivery in other parts of the world. We hope that you also learn about our culture, language, and belief systems along the way, and the ways in which these factors impact our view of the health-disease process and overall health outcomes.

I look forward to meeting you once you arrive for your elective in the Dominican Republic!

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History and Culture

The Dominican Republic (Spanish: República Dominicana) is a sovereign state occupying the Eastern two-thirds of the island of Hispaniola in the Greater Antilles in the Caribbean region. The western third of the island is occupied by the nation of Haiti. Both by landmass and population, the Dominican Republic is the second-largest Caribbean nation (after Cuba), with 48,445 square kilometers (18,705 sq. mi) and nearly 10 million people, 3 million of whom live in the capital city of Santo Domingo. The nation is divided into 31 provinces. Santo Domingo is designated Distrito Nacional (National District). The provinces are divided into municipalities (plural: municipios; singular: municipio) which compose the country's second-level political and administrative subdivisions. The president appoints the governors of all provinces, while mayors and municipal councils, elected alongside congressional representatives, administer the 124 municipal districts and the National District (Santo Domingo).

Dominican Flag and Coat of Arms

On the flag, blue represents the sky, red the bloodshed of the patriots, and white the dignity and peaceful character of the Dominicans with their dedication to peace. The Dominican coat of arms features a shield in similarly quartered colors as the flag, supported by a bay laurel branch (left) and a palm frond (right). Above the shield lies a blue ribbon with the national motto: Dios, Patria, Libertad (God, Homeland, and Liberty). Below the shield, the words República Dominicana appear on a red ribbon. In the center of the flag flanked by six spears (three on each side), the front four holding the national flag, is a Bible with a small golden cross above it. The constitution dictates that the Bible be opened to John 8:32, which reads "Y la verdad os hará libre" ("And the truth shall make you free").

Brief History

On December 5, 1492, when Christopher Columbus landed on the island now known as the Dominican Republic, which the Taíno people had inhabited since the 7th century, it became the site of the first European settlement in the Americas. Santo Domingo became the oldest continuously inhabited city and the first seat of the Spanish colonial rule in the New World. After more than three-hundred years of Spanish rule, the Dominican people declared independence in November 1821. José Núñez de Cáceres, the leader of the independence movement, intended for the Dominican nation to unite with the country of Gran Colombia. However, the newly independent Dominicans who were no longer
under Spain’s custody were forcefully annexed by their more powerful neighbor Haiti in February 1822. Twenty-two years later, they finally declared independence from Haitian rule in 1844.

Juan Pablo Duarte, Ramon Matias Mella and Francisco del Rosario Sanchez (Picture) are considered the founding fathers of the Dominican Republic. Over the next 72 years, the nation experienced much internal strife. It had a brief return to colonial status, and was the only nation in the hemisphere to do so after gaining independence. Spanish rule was ended permanently in 1865 after the Dominican War of Restoration. An eight-year U.S. occupation (1916-1924), was followed by a calm and prosperous six-year period under Horacio Vásquez Lajara, who was succeeded by dictator Rafael Leonidas Trujillo Molina until 1961. A civil war in 1965, the country’s last, was ended by U.S. military occupation and followed by the authoritarian rule of Joaquin Balaguer from 1966–1978. Since then, the Dominican Republic has moved toward representative democracy. At present, Danilo Medina is the president of the Dominican Republic.

Language

The population of the Dominican Republic is mostly Spanish-speaking. The local informal and conversational Spanish is called Dominican Spanish, which closely resembles other Spanish vernaculars in the Caribbean as well as Canarian Spanish. It also has influences from West-Central African languages and borrowed words from indigenous Caribbean languages particular to the island of Hispaniola. Schools are based on a Spanish educational model in which English and French are mandatory secondary languages in both private and public schools. Haitian Creole, spoken by Haitian immigrants and their descendants, is the largest minority language.

Climate

The Dominican Republic is a tropical maritime nation. Due to its diverse topography, the climate shows considerable variation over short distances and is the most varied of all the Antilles. The annual average temperature is 25 °C (77 °F). The temperature averages 18 °C (64.4 °F) at higher elevations and 28 °C (82.4 °F) near sea level. Meanwhile, low temperatures of 0 °C (32 °F) are possible in the mountains and high temperatures of 40 °C (104 °F) in protected valleys. January and February are the coolest months of the year, while August is the warmest.

Cuisine

Dominican cuisine is predominantly made up of a combination of Spanish, indigenous Taíno, and African influences. Many Middle Eastern dishes have also been adopted, such as the "Quipe" that comes from the Lebanese "kibbeh." A traditional breakfast consists of mangu, fried eggs, fried salami, fried cheese, and sometimes avocado. Just as in Spain, the largest, most important meal of the day is
lunch. Its most typical form, nicknamed La Bandera ("The Flag"), consists of rice, red beans, and meat (beef, chicken, pork, or fish), sometimes accompanied by a side salad.

- **On campus (UNIBE):** Unibe has three cafeterias on campus, and there are two or three in the vicinity. A traditional lunch costs around $RD 250.
- **In Hospitals:** All hospitals have cafeterias where you can purchase food, snacks, sandwiches, drinks, etc.

Recommended Restaurants

**Typical food:** Adrian Tropical, El Conuco, Buche e Perico, Jalao, El meson de Bari, De Luis Parrillada.

**International:** Segafredo, Francesco (Italian), El Rey del Falafel (Middle Eastern), El Agabe (Mexican), Museo del Jamon, El Gallego (Spanish), Yokomo, Yao, Vetros (Japanese).

**Seafood and more:** Café del Sol (Juan Dolio), Boca Marina, Neptunos, Pelikano (Boca Chica).

**Sightseeing**

**Popular places for visiting in Santo Domingo**

**Zona Colonial (Colonial Zone)**

- Nicola di Bari Hospital Ruins
- The Cathedral (First cathedral in America)
- Museo de las Casas Reales
- Alcázar de Colón
- Ruinas de San Francisco (San Francisco Ruins)
- Grupo Bonye (performances dance, traditional music, salsa, merengue) every Sunday at San Francisco Ruins. Free.

**Plaza de La cultura**

- Museo del Hombre Dominicano (Dominican Man Museum) (left)
- Museo de Historia Natural (Museum of Natural History)
- Museo de Arte Moderno (Modern Art Museum)
- Cinema Café
- Teatro Nacional (National Theatre)

**TIPS**

**Communications**

Certain telecommunication providers in the U.S., including Verizon, offer international roaming data plans allowing you to use your mobile device in the DR. Be sure to ask your provider for details prior to your arrival, as it can be very expensive. Alternatively, with an “unlocked” mobile device with a SIM card, you may purchase a SIM card from one of the main providers, e.g., Altice, for a nominal fee of around 100 pesos upon arrival to the DR. With this option, you can simply "recharge" your telephone.
as needed by purchasing credit in the amount of your choosing, thereby allowing you to make/receive calls and send/receive text messages nationally and internationally. Data plans are also available using a SIM card, though this option has yet to be explored. Relatively inexpensive basic mobile devices that allow SIM card use can also be purchased in the U.S. or after arrival.

**Internet Access**

**In Santo Domingo**

UNIBE offers free Internet access on campus. Your host family will also have Wi-Fi.

**Electricity**

The power sockets in the Dominican Republic are of type A (left) and B (right). Because the standard voltage and frequency are the same as in the U.S. (110 V and 60 Hz, respectively), you will not need a power converter. However, you may want to bring an adaptor kit with you just in case.

![Power Sockets](image)

### General Precautions

- Stay up-to-date on local news and official travel information from the U.S. Embassy.
- Avoid walking alone, especially late at night. Use a taxi under those circumstances.
- Always use only properly identified public transportation.
- Do not leave valuables in common areas.
- Do not carry large amounts of money or valuables that may attract unwanted attention.
- Avoid wearing fine jewelry or anything that looks expensive. Be cautious when using your phone in public.
- Keep a small amount of spending money in an easily accessible place, and more cash and important documents hidden somewhere safe.
- Keep your living space locked and windows closed when you are not home.

### Food and Water Safety

Please consume only bottled water during your stay in the Dominican Republic. Avoid tap water and ice cubes; fruits and vegetables that haven’t been peeled, cooked, or boiled; and street food, including ice cream. We suggest placing a small water bottle in the bathroom for brushing teeth and one in the kitchen for making coffee or rinsing fruits and vegetables that will be consumed raw.

**Social Context**
Though the Dominican Republic has experienced tremendous economic growth over the past fifty years, that growth has not been equitable. The poorest 50% of the population receives less than 20% of Gross Domestic Product (GDP), while the richest 10% receives nearly 40% of GDP. This vast income inequality has resulted in a dual society of haves and have-nots. A recent analysis among twelve Latin American and Caribbean (LAC) countries indicates that many people living in the Dominican Republic are highly vulnerable to disease and lack financial protection against illness and healthcare costs. The Demographic Health Survey (DHS) revealed that 43.8% of women who received four years or less of primary education became pregnant during their teenage years, compared to 13.3% of women who completed secondary or higher education.

The fourth most frequent cause of death among women of reproductive age in the Dominican Republic, gender-based violence is a major health issue. The complex relationship between the Dominican Republic and Haiti is reflective of a history of highly uneven development. There are an estimated 500,000-1,000,000 documented and undocumented Haitians living in the Dominican Republic, many of whom are living in extreme poverty. This makes Dominican-Haitian relations much more than a border issue. In addition, Haitians seeking healthcare services in the Dominican Republic, such as women traveling from Haiti to give birth and return afterwards, puts an additional strain on the healthcare system. In addition to the migration of people across the border, there is also considerable movement of commodities between the two nations.

Healthcare System in the Dominican Republic

The public healthcare system in the Dominican Republic underwent wide-ranging reforms from 1996-2000 which focused on the improvement of healthcare standards and enhanced access to medical facilities. The Social Security Reform Law, established in 2001, introduced a compulsory national health insurance system providing free healthcare services to all citizens and legal residents in the country. The Dominican Republic’s health care system is three-tiered:

- **Contributive Regime**: Financed by workers and their employers
- **Subsidized Regime**: Financed by the state for the poor, unemployed, disabled, and indigent
- **Contributive Subsidized Regime**: Financed by independent professionals, technical workers, and self-employed persons themselves, but subsidized by the state instead of an employer

With approximately 75% of the population dependent on the public healthcare system, the nation’s limited resources are greatly strained. Public hospitals face shortages in staff and medical equipment, resulting in long waiting lists for public patients. The reality is that most end up paying out-of-pocket expenditures for medical supplies and various services. This can be explained by the fact that the government only devotes around 1% of GDP to healthcare. Over half of all health expenses wind up being funded by the people themselves. The best hospitals in the Dominican Republic are located within the capital city Santo Domingo, as well as Puerto Plata and Santiago. Meanwhile, patients in remote regions of the country have limited access to healthcare and must travel to urban areas for emergency or specialized healthcare services. Private healthcare facilities offer the highest level of medical care in the country. Medical tourism is an emerging industry in the Dominican Republic, gaining a reputation for its cosmetic surgery in private healthcare facilities.
Doctors and children protesting the Dominican government after eleven neonates in the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit died during the course of one shift due to a lack of oxygen and electricity for proper functioning of monitors and equipment. Posters read: (Children have a right to health; Children deserve quality attention).

Recommended Resources

Books

- Control of Human Parasitic Diseases by David Malyneux
- Manson Tropical Diseases by Jeremy Farrar
- Parasitosis Humanas (Human Parasitosis) by David Botero, Marcos Restrepo
- La Fiesta del Chivo by Mario Vargas Llosa
- En el Tiempo de las Mariposas by Julia Alvarez
- El Cristo de la Libertad by Joaquín Balaguer
- La Isla Al Revés Haití y el Destino Dominicano by Joaquín Balaguer
General Information

Introduction

The global health elective site in the Dominican Republic has undergone some changes since the inception of our partnership with the UVMLCOM/WCHN Global Health Program in 2012, namely the expansion of our partner sites. In 2015, the UVMLCOM/WCHN Global Health Program signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with Universidad Iberoamericana (UNIBE) and other teaching Hospitals including AIDC, HGPS, HUMNSA, and HGRDMVS. Consequently, in addition to receiving an introduction to the Dominican medical and education systems, you will spend two weeks in a small outpatient clinic at the Community La Barquita, an underserved community in Santo Domingo, with family medicine residents from Hospital General Plaza de la Salud (HGPS). Meanwhile, the remaining four weeks will be spent in the specialty of your choice. We currently offer the following clinical rotations:

- Cardiology - Internal Medicine at AIDC
- OB-GYN - Neonatology at HUMNSA
- Pediatrics - Infectious Diseases at Robert Reid Cabral
- Children’s Hospital (UNIBE teaching-affiliated Hospitals)

Your schedule during inpatient hospital rotations will generally begin around 7:30 a.m. and end by mid-afternoon. Some hospitals will require participation in 24-hour shifts/night calls as part of your rotation.

You will have the opportunity to attend afternoon classes with UNIBE medical students as well as weekly meetings with the Site Director for debriefing sessions and informal medical Spanish lessons. You will also have the option of pursuing an independent study, under supervision of Dean Dr. Marcos Núñez and Site Director Dr. Jomar Florenzán, in a topic related to relevant health issues in the Dominican Republic.

UNIBE is continually working toward improving the global health elective experience. Your feedback is very important to us. We hope you enjoy your time in the Dominican Republic.

About the Program

The UVMLCOM/WCHN Global Health Program provides motivated medical students with an introduction to global health through participation in U.S.-based didactics and experiential learning at various international sites. Having worked with a diversity of underserved populations both within the U.S. and overseas, our global health faculty members each bring their unique experiences to the program. Ultimately, the Global Health Program aims to inspire medical students interested in working with medically underserved populations around the globe and better prepare them to practice in low-resource settings.
Site-Specific Preparation for Your Elective

Global health elective participants must complete an application form and provide required documents to the International Office Coordinator eight weeks in advance. For details, please contact your institution’s global health coordinator.

During the elective, physicians, faculty, and residents do not need a medical license to practice in the DR. Everyone works with a group of DR-licensed physicians. Despite your assignment to a medical team, it is the local physicians and institutions that are responsible for direct patient care and documentation of care.

The following checklist should be completed prior to departure:

1. Contact the Global Health Program Coordinator for flight information.
2. Contact the Dominican Republic Site Director for transportation, housing, and rotation arrangements as well as orientation information.
3. Schedule a travel clinic appointment for vaccinations and malaria/HIV prophylaxis.
4. Enroll in travel and emergency assistance insurance.
5. Subscribe to International SOS (This is a UVM university Requirement: http://internationalsos.com).
6. Register with the U.S. State Department and Smart Traveler Enrollment Program (STEP) to inform them of your travel and lodging arrangements (travelregistration.state.gov/ibrs/ui/).
7. Notify your banks and credit card companies of your travel plans to prevent them from being blocked or cancelled.
8. Verify with your insurance company that you are covered to be treated at the affiliated hospitals in the DR.
9. Ensure the following documents are sent to the DR Site Director at least two months prior to your visit:
   a. Global health elective application form (for students and residents only)
   b. Emergency form
   c. Copy of your passport
   d. Immunization status report, which must include hepatitis B or titers (if vaccine administration date exceeds ten years), varicella or titers, TD booster
   e. Resume
   f. Intention letter and recommendation from the UVMLCOM/WCHN Global Health Program
   g. Letter of Good Standing from your home institution (which can usually be obtained from the Office of Student Affairs or Office of Student Conduct)

How to Obtain a Visa:

Visas are not required for U.S. citizens traveling to the Dominican Republic for tourism-related purposes. However, student or working visas are required for U.S. citizens intending to study or work in the DR. For the purpose of global health electives, students and faculty are considered tourists. Visitors from all nations must purchase a tourist card (which is not a visa) for $10 USD upon arrival at the airport. This card is valid for one month only, which means you will be charged a
fee upon your departure for travel days that extend beyond that time period. Because most global health electives span six weeks, the fee can range from $20-$100 USD.

**Personal Health and Safety**

**Medical License and Health Insurance**

Before traveling, you must contact your health insurance company to verify that your plan provides international coverage including the Dominican Republic. It is your responsibility to acquire proper medical coverage in case of accident or illness.

**Site-Specific Personal Health and Safety**

Your well-being and safety are very important to us. Participation in an elective outside the U.S. increases your exposure not only to minor inconveniences but potentially to serious threats to your personal health and safety. Please review the Code of Conduct for means of reducing risk while traveling abroad, and the general Elective Guide for health and safety information. The information detailed below relates specifically to the Dominican Republic. As always, your travel health provider and the Center for Disease Control (CDC) are the most reliable and up-to-date health information resources.

The prevalence of HIV/AIDS in the Dominican Republic in 2014 stood at approximately 0.8%, which is relatively low by Caribbean standards, with an estimated 62,000 Dominicans living with HIV/AIDS. In contrast, neighboring Haiti has an HIV/AIDS rate more than double that of the Dominican Republic. Transmitted by the Aedes Aegypti mosquito, Dengue has become endemic to the island, especially in Haiti. Chikungunya and Zika are transmitted by the same mosquito and endemic as well. There are cases of malaria in the border towns and tuberculosis (TB) remains endemic with an incidence of 70 per 100,000 persons. Case detection rates and cure rates remain below the Stop TB targets at 60% and 75%, respectively. Multi-Drug Resistant Tuberculosis (MDR-TB) and TB/HIV co-infection are major challenges for the Dominican response to TB.

Maternal mortality is 100 per 100,000 and infant mortality 22 per 1,000. Leading causes of maternal morbidity and mortality include hemorrhage, sepsis, hypertension, and obstructed labor. The high rate of cesarean sections also increases the risk of complications. Major causes of infant mortality include newborn asphyxia, sepsis, and low birth weight.

Teen pregnancy is a major issue in the Dominican Republic. Twenty-point-six percent of teens (aged 15-19) are currently pregnant or mothers. Adolescent pregnancy is associated with poor health and social outcomes for both mother and baby. The practice of abortion is illegal in the Dominican Republic in all cases including conception following rape, incest, and health- and life-threatening complications.
About the Hospitals

Institutions in the DR that are affiliated with UVMLCOM/WCHN include:

- Universidad Iberoamericana (UNIBE) School of Medicine
- Asociación Instituto Dominicano de Cardiología (AIDC)
- Hospital General de la Plaza de la Salud
- Hospital Universitario Maternidad Nuestra Señora de la Altagracia (HUMNSA)
- Hospital General Regional Dr. Marcelino Vélez Santana

Asociación Instituto Dominicano de Cardiología (AIDC)

The Board of Cardiology, founded on November 24, 1962, became known as the Dominican Foundation Cardiology (FDC) in February 1972. The FDC is incorporated as the World Heart Federation that has its seat in Geneva, Switzerland, and holds the phrase "Education, Services and Research" as its slogan. With its strong commitment to serving low-income populations, much of its work is concentrated in the Dominican Institute of Cardiology in Los Ríos, Santo Domingo, through which services are provided to cardiac patients. Its current staff is composed of 60 cardiologists and cardiovascular surgeons, in addition to gastroenterology, nephrology, neurology, hematology, and urology staff, among others.

The IDC offers a three-year cardiology fellowship program, provided in collaboration with the Ministry of Public Health and affiliated with three local universities (Universidad Autónoma de Santo Domingo (UASD), Universidad Iberoamericana (UNIBE), and Universidad Pedro Henríquez Ureña (UNPHU)) whose medical students enroll in cardiology and physiopathology practice courses. It also receives Internal Medicine and Family Medicine residents from other teaching hospitals for rotations. With fourteen matriculated residents per three-year cycle, this program has graduated over 200 cardiologists.

The IDC offers outpatient, inpatient, intensive, post-surgical, intensive, radiology, echocardiography, electrocardiography, and 24/7 emergency services as well as others including cardiac catheterization and pacemaker placement. They also run a donation program whereby pacemakers are reused. The IDC has nine hemodialysis machines and performs open-heart surgery (coronary artery bypass graft, valve replacement, congenital heart disease, and aortic dissection repair).

Universidad Iberoamericana (UNIBE) School of Medicine

The UNIBE School of Medicine, founded in 1982, was one of the first academic programs offered by the university. The institution also offers fifteen undergraduate programs and over thirty graduate programs in different areas including arts, business, education, engineering, health sciences, and law. UNIBE is distinguished in its commitment to exploring the use of new paradigms and learning
models in medical education. The program has undergone many innovative changes in order to integrate basic and clinical sciences, incorporate learner-centered teaching methods, and foster the development of student skills through the use of standardized patients and simulation. UNIBE’s academic mission is to educate physicians who are committed to offering quality attention, efficiency, and compassion in a variety of healthcare settings, with an emphasis on primary care.

Values

- Academic excellence
- Active participation of its student body
- Critical thinking
- Diversity
- Equity
- Ethics
- Innovation
- National and cultural identity
- Respect for the environment
- Sense of community

Services and programs available for international visiting students:

- Community service
- Clinical rotations at HGPS (www.hgps.org.do) and INDEN (inden.org.do)
- Lectures in English
- Global health elective
- Simulation Lab

Hospital General de la Plaza de la Salud
Hospital General de la Plaza de la Salud (HGPS) is a non-profit entity with self-management in the selection and recruitment of staff and formulation and use of its budget. The medical institutions of the Plaza de la Salud, including the General Hospital (HGPS) and the Centers for Diagnostics and Advanced Medicine and Medical Conferences and Telemedicine (CEDIMAT), were part of a concept created by Dr. Juan Manuel Taveras Rodriguez, a world-renowned Dominican medical specialist who is considered the father of Neuroradiology. In 1996, President Joaquin Balaguer designated by decree an area of 221,030.62 square feet (20,534.417 m²) for these buildings. Divided into equal parts between HGPS and CEDIMAT, the area shares its grounds with other health institutions including the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO/WHO), the Emergency Operations Center (COE), and the Presidential Commission for AIDS (COPRESIDA), among others. The initial construction was built with funding provided by the Dominican State.

HGPS medical staff is composed of specialists, sub-specialists, and general or internal medicine practitioners grouped into the following departments: internal medicine and specialties, general surgery and specialties, OB-GYN, gastroenterology and endoscopy, pediatrics and specialties, family medicine education and research, and orthopedics and traumatology.

Other services offered include diagnostic imaging, pathology, geriatrics, physical medicine and rehabilitation, dentistry, laboratory and blood bank, cardiology, onco hematology, ophthalmology, breast pathology, emergency medicine, nursing, pharmacy, nutrition, and social work.

Each year the HGPS benefits more than 13,000 low-income patients who receive up to a 40% discount or are exempt from payment according to their financial condition. The HGPS receives a grant from the Dominican government that covers the annual cost of exemptions and discounts to patients with limited resources.

Since 2003, the HGPS is a teaching facility with three medical residency programs in the areas of family and community medicine, medical emergency and disasters, and rehabilitation medicine, which are all supported by the Universidad Iberoamericana (UNIBE). At present, the HGPS has become a major center for training and education for the health science faculties of major universities in the country, including UNIBE, INTEC, UNPHU, UCE, UASD, and the Catholic University Santo Domingo (UCSD), for both its undergraduate and graduate programs. The HGPS is recognized as a center of excellence in Dominican medicine, setting quality standards for the entire country.

La Barquita Community
La Barquita is an impoverished sector in Santo Domingo with a population of approximately 8,000 inhabitants in 1,876 homes (983 inhabited by owners, 645 rented, and 51 ceded or borrowed). The neighborhood was established following the Revolution of 1965 when peasants were migrating to the Dominican capital, mainly to Los Mina. However, many claim that it is following Hurricane David in 1979 that the area received its largest number of emigrants.

In the following decades, the growth of this town transpired independently of the City Council and Central Government without any oversight, social planning, or urban planning. This gave rise to what we know today as La Barquita, a neighborhood that still struggles to provide its inhabitants with basic services fifty years after its founding. Its name refers to a small barge which was used to transport animals and good across the Ozama River. This practice lasted until 1978 when then-president Joaquín Balaguer completed the construction of the Gregorio Luperón Bridge or Puente de La Barquita, as it is also known.

Hospital General Regional Dr. Marcelino Velez Santana

The Regional General Hospital “Dr. Marcelino Vélez Santana” is a public tertiary care hospital located in the Las Palmas municipality of Santo Domingo Oeste, in the province of Santo Domingo. They also have two primary care centers which are located in the Las Palmas and El Libertador sectors, within the Herrera sector.

The hospital aims to provide compassionate, high-quality primary and tertiary care in their primary care units (UNAP) and main office. The emergency department is open 24/7 while the outpatient clinics are open twelve hours per day.

Hospital Universitario Maternidad Nuestra Señora de la Altagracia
It was inaugurated on October 24, 1949 and opened to the public on October 24, 1950, with the title of Maternity Hospital Julia Molina. A four-floored reinforced concrete building with a capacity of 400 beds and 300 cradles, its construction cost one million pesos.

In 1961, Dr. Joaquín Balaguer made a request to the president of the time to change the name to the Nuestra Señora de la Altagracia Maternity Hospital. The new name went into effect in 1961.

On October 1973, the Autonomous University of Santo Domingo declared the Maternity Hospital as a teaching hospital, and the first residency program in Obstetrics and gynecology in the Dominican Republic was created in July 1973. On July 1, 1975, the first group of resident doctors officially matched by the SESPAS contest entered. The first graduation was held on June 30, 1975.

The Maternity Hospital of Our Lady of Altagracia is a public hospital that, by governmental support and donations, treat patients free of charge. In 2016, it was estimated that roughly 1.5 million deliveries had been made in this hospital since 1950. With patients from all over the country and abroad traveling to the hospital for care, the hospital has long been a pillar in the nation’s medical development, training generations of specialists from different areas and providing quality services to millions of Dominican and international women.
Accommodation

Santo Domingo: You will stay with a host family in Santo Domingo during the duration of your global health elective.

Transportation

Travel arrangements should be made through Aeropuerto Internacional de las Americas (SDQ). For safety reasons, daytime- especially early morning hours- are recommended for arrival.

Upon arrival, you will need to pay a visitor fee of $10 USD for a tourist card that will be valid for one month. A member of your host family, holding up a card with your name, will greet you at the airport.

Public Transportation in Santo Domingo

**Public cars and buses** are a reliable means of transportation. Be sure they are properly identified. The one-way cost ranges from $25-$40 RD depending on the distance.

**Metro (subway):** There are currently two metro lines, both of which are very safe. A metrocard can be purchased for $20-$60 RD.

**Caribe tours:** This bus is for traveling outside Santo Domingo. The price varies depending on the distance, averaging $250 RD.

**Taxi:** For your safety, we highly recommend transport by taxi only during late-night hours (after 10 pm).

**Taxis Companies** Apolo Taxi: 809-537-0000; Taxi Express: 809-537-7777.
Finances

The currency in the Dominican Republic is the Dominican peso (DOP, $RD). One U.S. dollar is equivalent to about 47.5 Dominican pesos. For currency exchange, we recommend a bank, ATM, or one of the many money exchange companies in Santo Domingo. We do not recommend airport exchange services because the exchange rate in town is better. Most establishments in Santo Domingo accept credit cards.

Additional Tips

Packing list for the hospital and for leisure activities:

- Alcohol preparation pads
- All-purpose laundry detergents for hand washing, and clothespins
- Blood pressure cuff
- Casual clothes (jeans, t-shirt, sneakers)
- Disposable gloves
- Flashlight/headlamp
- Hand sanitizer
- Mask
- Mosquito repellent
- Plenty of cash in small bills
- Plug adaptor (see “Electricity” section)
- Professional attire (skirts and dresses at or below the knee and modest blouses for women, and button-down shirts, ties, slacks, and dress shoes for men)
- Pulse oximeter (optional)
- Reflex hammer
- Scrubs
- Stethoscope
- Sunscreen
- Swimsuit
- Toiletries, including products for contact lenses
- Towel
- White coat
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