



## ○ discovering THE DOMINICAN REPUBLIC

Natural crises such as hurricanes and tropical storms are a recurring threat to poor communities and to the living conditions and incomes of the population. Explored and claimed by Christopher Columbus on his first voyage in 1492, the island of Hispaniola became a springboard for Spanish conquest of the Caribbean and the American mainland. In 1697, Spain recognized French dominion over the western third of the island, which in 1804 became Haiti. The remainder of the island, by then known as Santo Domingo, sought to gain its own independence in 1821, but was conquered and ruled by the Haitians for 22 years; it finally attained independence as the Dominican Republic in 1844. However, this independence was volatile and didn't bring any sense of stability to the people.

This country of great potential has been a victim of economic and political strife. After a period of persistent internal conflict and a pseudo-democratic regime, the Dominican Republic established a functioning democracy in 1978. These political problems have impacted the economic success of the country despite the proximity to the U.S. and being a desirable tourist destination. Natural disasters in the form of hurricanes have not made development easy either. The influence of Roman Catholicism can be seen throughout the country and impacts the belief system of most Dominicans. Deeper yet is the problem of worldview. Success is viewed with contempt and jealousy.

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Note: Recognizing that information on the Dominican Republic is readily available on the Internet, we encourage you to learn as much as you can about the political background, history, geography, economics and culture of this amazing country. This document provides a general overview, with some specific information that will help short-term teams appreciate the Dominican Republic even more and understand our work. Going to the Dominican Republic as part of a short-term team is different from a leisure trip or traveling for business. The information provided here can help you prepare for a potentially life-changing experience. Sources used for some country facts include CIA: The World Factbook and BBC News.



## QUICK FACTS

**Full Name:** Dominican Republic

**Population:** 10.2 million (UN, 2010)

**Capital:** Santo Domingo

**Area:** 48,072 sq km (18,696 sq miles)

**Major Language:** Spanish is the official language, but English and French are spoken in tourist locations.

**Major Religion:** Roman Catholic, Protestant, Jewish minorities

**Life Expectancy:** 70 years (men), 76 years (women) (UN)

**Monetary Currency:** Dominican peso

**GNI Per Capita:** US \$4,510 (World Bank, 2009)



## PASSPORT/VISA

A passport is required for all travelers to the Dominican Republic. We strongly encourage you to apply for a U.S. passport well in advance of anticipated travel. For those who already have a passport, be sure that your passport is valid for at least six months beyond the intended stay in the Dominican Republic. If you have a passport from a country other than the U.S., you may need to take extra measures to ensure smooth entrance into and exit from the Dominican Republic. Consult the host country consulate to find out what measures need to be taken.

In addition to a passport, some countries require a visa for entry. Visitors who do not obtain a Dominican visa prior to entry must purchase a tourist card upon arrival to enter the country. Tourist cards cost \$10, which must be paid in U.S. currency. Tourist cards may be purchased at the Dominican Embassy in Washington or Dominican consulates prior to arrival, as well as at Dominican airports at the time of entry. Tourist cards normally permit a legal stay of up to 60 days. Visit the Embassy of the Dominican Republic website for the most current visa information.

## WEATHER

The Dominican Republic can be described as a tropical maritime, with little seasonal temperature variation. The average temperature is around 80 F. August is the warmest month of the year, and January is the coolest month. Officially, the Caribbean hurricane season runs from the beginning of June to the end of November. Historically, most hurricane activity in the Dominican Republic's part of the Caribbean has taken place in the months of August and September.

## FOOD

Food for the Hungry will provide breakfast, lunch and dinner during the whole trip. Meals will be a mix of local Dominican fare and some American favorites. Dominican food has a good deal of variety, but the staples are rice, brown beans, plantains (fried or mashed) and meat. However, meat is a luxury that some families can rarely afford. Fruits, such as mangos, papayas, pineapples and coconuts, are also a huge part of their diet. Please come with an open mind about trying new foods and combinations. If you have any food allergies or special dietary needs, please communicate those to FH/US ahead of time.

Avoid eating any food that hasn't been provided by or







approved by Food for the Hungry staff. Eating something from a local vendor or from a street market could lead to sickness. Drink only the bottled water provided by FH staff. Also use it for brushing your teeth and taking any medicines. If you are served ice in a drink, please verify that the water is okay by consulting with your Team Coordinator.

### VACCINATION INFORMATION

In addition to applying for a passport, you will also need to research vaccinations for your trip well in advance as some vaccinations take time

or need to be given in a series to be effective. The best advice regarding vaccinations and any other medications can only come from a qualified physician. Please make an appointment with your family doctor and share with him/her where you are going, how long you will be there and what activities you will be participating in. In consultation with your doctor, you can decide which vaccinations and/or medications will be best for you.

To better familiarize yourself with travel health, please visit the Center for Disease Control's website at [www.cdc.gov/travel](http://www.cdc.gov/travel) prior to your visit with your doctor.

### CLOTHING

Our dress code is a sign of respect for the people you will be working with, as well as to convey a conservative Christian lifestyle. The general rule of thumb for dress in the Dominican Republic is conservative. Wearing appropriate clothing will open the door for establishing good relationships with the community members.

While in the community and during tourism days, team members should wear long pants and loose-fitting T-shirts. If the team is attending a church service, women should wear long skirts and loose-fitting blouses, and men should wear long pants and collared shirts. When working on construction projects, it's OK for women to wear pants. If your schedule permits time at the beach, ladies should wear one-piece bathing suits or a two-piece worn under tank top and shorts. Except when in the hotel, team members should always wear close-toed shoes.

Out of respect for cultural sensitivity, we request your cooperation in submitting to FH's policy in regard to piercings, tattoos and radical haircuts. For more details about this topic, please talk to your team leader.

### COMMUNICATION

You will likely be without telephone and/or e-mail access during your time in the Dominican Republic. While these services may be readily available, especially in major cities, your schedule will be packed with

*Please do not bring the following:*

- Shorts
- Tight or revealing clothing (pants, jeans and shirts)
- Low-cut shirts (scoop neck or V-neck)
- Tank tops
- Excessively low-rise jeans or excessively baggy pants
- Shirts that reveal the midriff
- Clothing that has inappropriate or questionable words or pictures
- Clothing with rips, holes or stains



activities. This will help you to focus your energy and attention on the transformative work of the Lord and to help maintain a cohesive group dynamic. We encourage you to leave your cell phone at home and inform your family and friends that you will be unavailable until you return to the States.

If there is an emergency in the country or community where you are serving, your Team Coordinator will contact your family and appropriate people at your home church. Before you leave the U.S. you will be given a U.S. phone number and other details, which you will pass on to your family and close friends. If there is an emergency in the U.S. while you're on the field, your family member or friend may call that number. Your Field Liaison will assess the call and facilitate communication with you or the field staff as necessary.



### TRANSPORTATION

Your team will travel around the country mostly in mini- and full-size buses. All transportation will be provided by FH. Your drivers will either be FH staff or

hired by a reliable company that FH frequently uses.

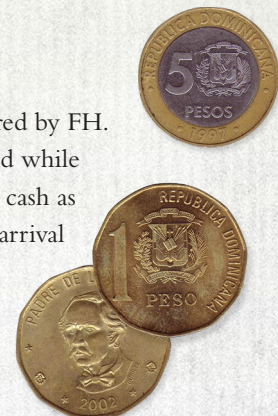
Driving in the Dominican Republic may be a new experience for you. The roads are likely to be bumpy and winding. You may feel that the vehicle you are in is uncomfortably close to the vehicle or pedestrian beside it. Streets may seem overwhelmingly crowded. Traffic signs may not always be followed. Remember that you are in good hands. Your driver is a professional and used to the traffic conditions. Keep your hands, feet and belongings inside the vehicle at all times. If you experience car sickness, sit in the front or take an appropriate medicine for motion sickness.

### LUGGAGE

Luggage should be limited to one checked bag and the allowed carry-on for each team member. While most airlines will allow two checked bags, large amounts of luggage are difficult to transport while in-country. All team members will be responsible to carry their luggage, and vehicle space is limited, so be conservative when packing. Any extra bags should be used to transport ministry supplies. While working in the communities, your luggage will be safe at the hotel. You can bring a backpack for water bottle, sun block, camera, snacks, etc. Please refer to your teams training materials for a packing list.

### MONEY

While with Food for the Hungry, all transportation, food, lodging and water are covered by FH. You will only need money for souvenirs and shopping that you will do in-country and while traveling. A suggested amount for this purpose is \$100 to \$200. It is advisable to bring cash as U.S. dollars are widely accepted. You may exchange money in the airport upon your arrival if you want, but you will also have other opportunity to exchange money. Bring bills no larger than \$20 and be sure that the bills are crisp and new (no more than 5 years old) to ensure acceptance.





## ELECTRONICS

You may bring cameras (disposable, standard or digital), iPods, cell phones and other small electronic devices. We want you to be able to take pictures and capture videos and share these incredible moments of transformation with family and friends back home. However, you assume all risks of damage, loss or theft of your belongings. Keep in mind that you will be kept quite busy, and there will not be a lot of time to use many electronic devices. Also, electricity may not always be available to recharge electronic equipment, including cameras and camcorders. Please bring extra batteries. When in public, don't display expensive electronic items or any items that may just appear expensive.



## PHOTO POLICY

All photos or videos should be taken with utmost discretion.

Upon arrival in the country, your Team Coordinator will explain the country's photo policy. Some considerations:

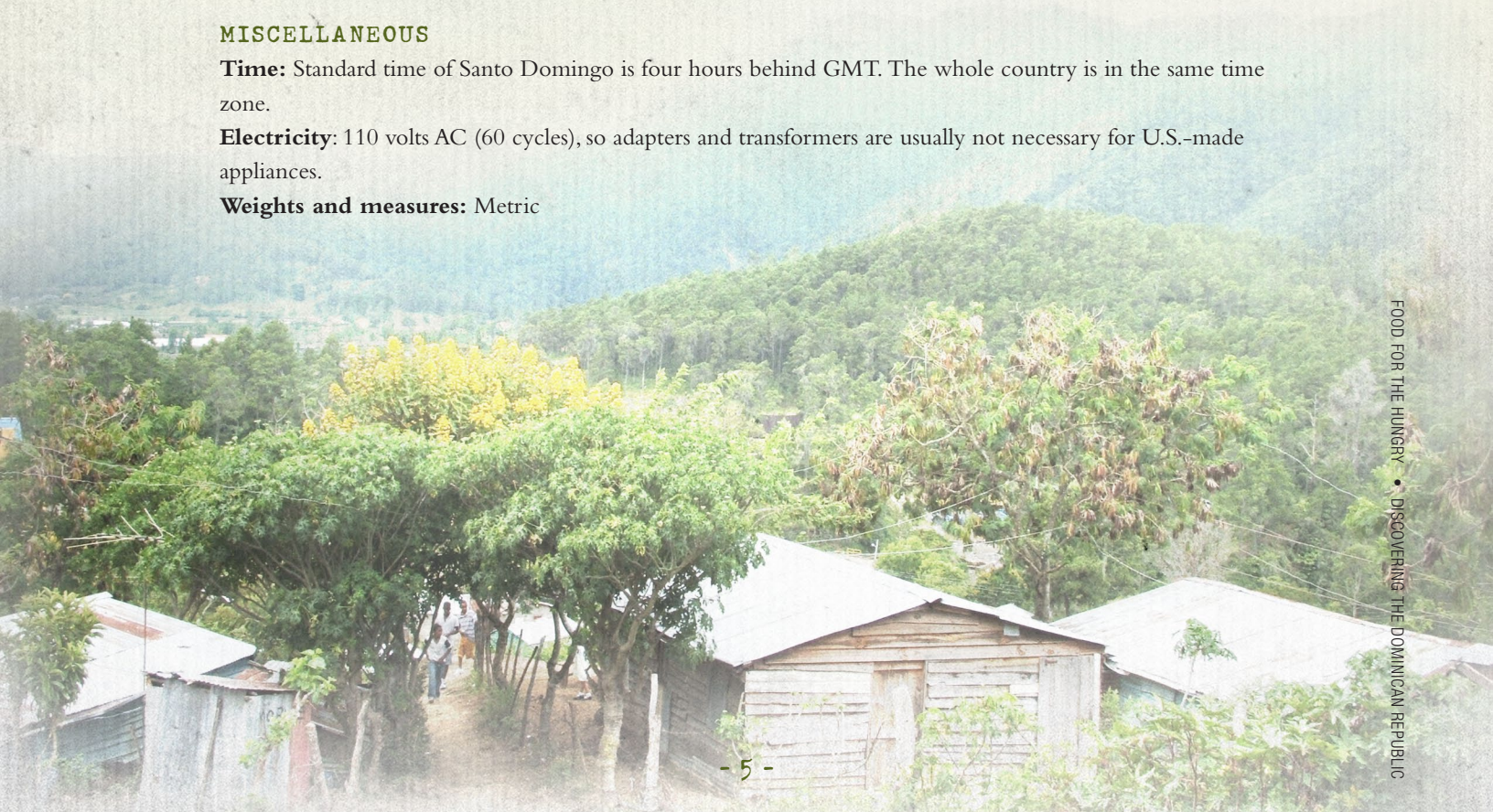
- Make sure the focus is on relationships and the ministry, not pictures.
- When possible, ask before taking pictures.
- Designate a photographer. Rather than taking the same picture on 12 different cameras, take the picture with one or two cameras and share when you get back.
- Be sure that any picture you take conveys dignity for the person in the picture. If you will not remember the names of the people in the story or the significance of the photo, re-consider the need for taking a photo.

## MISCELLANEOUS

**Time:** Standard time of Santo Domingo is four hours behind GMT. The whole country is in the same time zone.

**Electricity:** 110 volts AC (60 cycles), so adapters and transformers are usually not necessary for U.S.-made appliances.

**Weights and measures:** Metric







### FH HISTORY & PROGRAMS

FH began working in the Dominican Republic in 1979 as an emergency response to survivors of Hurricane David. In 1988, FH established a Child Development Program in Elias Piña (near Haitian border). Over the years, the program expanded to include health and development projects to improve people's lives and their capacity to solve problems in the community. A reproductive health program was added to teach families about HIV/AIDS and sexually-transmitted diseases, breastfeeding, birth spacing, and how to detect and prevent breast and cervical cancer. FH conducts Bible studies to help children and adults grow spiritually.

FH/Dominican Republic serves 21 communities in three regions: Monte Plata, Elias Pina and Distrito Nacional. Following are the current programs:

**Child Development:** Focuses on three critical needs of children: (1) Low level of schooling and of school performance, (2) Low level of physical protection of children at home, (3) The social pressure of youth to involve in vices and socially dysfunctional practices such as early sexuality, crime, etc.

**Church Development Plan:** Trains pastors and church leaders in holistic ministry, mentors church leaders, encourages local churches to implement service projects, and encourages believers to serve as community leaders.

**Water and Sanitation Program:** Builds latrines, water wells with pumps and water storage tanks; trains families on potable water handling; trains community leaders to maintain water systems; and encourages church members to contribute to water-sanitation development.

**Reproductive Health:** Teaches women of child-bearing age how to stay healthy during pregnancy.

**Samaritan Strategy:** Trains pastors and church leaders in holistic ministry and outreach to communities.

**Teams Ministry:** Brings churches and short-term teams into the DR to develop a long-term relationship with communities and assist with the long-term development goals and projects.

### *Prayer Requests*

- Pray that the national leadership of Dominican Republic would ask God for wisdom and courage in running the country.
- Pray for FH's activities in the country, that God would use these outreaches to lift Dominicans out of physical and spiritual poverty.
- Pray that our staff would have compassion, wisdom and sensitivity so they can effectively reach out to the poor and most vulnerable.

