

Dominican Republic

At the end of their AFS exchange in the Dominican Republic, we asked some recent AFSers from the USA to answer two questions:

- ❑ What elements of your host culture, compared to US culture, did you find most difficult to adjust to in the areas of family, school and/or social life?
- ❑ Please note any advice you would like to share with AFSers destined for your host country.

Here are some of their responses:

In school I was expected to complete all assignments the same way as a Dominican student, which is too much time to ask for. One of my families was extremely controlling: go on a walk was about all they let me do. I made friends from talking to everyone I met on the street or on public transport. That was how I met my girlfriend, and my best friend, and the family that became more like a family than any host family had. I met the best friends I have ever had, who are Dominicans.

Ethan, Year, 2009

In the Dominican Republic the families are much stricter. They are also far more family oriented than Americans tend to be, children help a lot more around the house, and are more respectful of their parents. School is far less strict, and there is less focus on sports, academics and extracurricular activities than American schools. Social life there is more flexible in the DR.

Kiya, Year, 2007

My advice would be not to expect much before February, because most students get families who live and die by what AFS says. Therefore you won't be able to explore much about your city or the country, you'll pretty much be trapped. When February does come, use your days wisely because you only get 14 to travel around. But the good news is that the other AFS students will feel like family, you won't be able to hold back your excitement when you see them! They will pretty much be your best friends because the Dominicans aren't very trustworthy sometimes, and they will talk about you and start rumors so just be prepared to let it roll off your shoulders.

Sukience, Year, 2007

Religion is not the only point to focus on when considering the Dominican Republic. The way you act is very important. Schools are small and social circles are even smaller. Gossip spreads like wildfire. It is simply a part of life there, a way to get by. Also keep in

mind that does not mean that you should gossip as a newcomer. Daily family-shared meals all consist of rice, beans and chicken. It sounds good enough, and sure, it is, but be ready to eat it every day for an entire year. Lastly, the Dominican Republic is a country centered around Machismo.

Katherine, Year, 2007

Talk a lot, smile, and be friendly. If you are shy, or quiet people might think you are arrogant. Also remember you are a visitor to this country, so be respectful of the beliefs and customs of those around you.

Kiya, Year, 2007

Gender roles are much more defined in Dominican culture. Many female students will find that they are not able to be as independent in the DR as they are in the U.S. Also, Dominican families treat their children differently than children in the U.S. This was a very difficult adjustment for me.

Lara, Year, 2004

Really try to enjoy yourself and experience the Dominican life. Try to do everything that you know you cannot do here in America. Also never be afraid to speak to people and make new friends despite how ashamed you may be of your Spanish.

Adrienne, Year, 2004

Try to be open-minded at the beginning, but don't forget who you are. Dominicans are very warm people and are very proud of their country. You will be amazed by how fast the year goes by, so take advantage of the time that you have. Take the time to figure out who you are and how you relate to different cultures. At the same time, try to maintain your personal integrity, adapting to the culture without losing yourself.

Lara, Year, 2004

