

# Safety Tips

For School participants in the Dominican Republic

2019



# Dear participant,

We are very happy to host you this year as an AFS student in Dominican Republic. We urge you to start preparing for your trip right now by studying as much Spanish as you can and by learning more about our country. We have put together this handbook that covers some of the aspects of life in the Dominican Republic to help you prepare for and be safe during your stay. This is a small “book “you must read and you can keep during your experience.

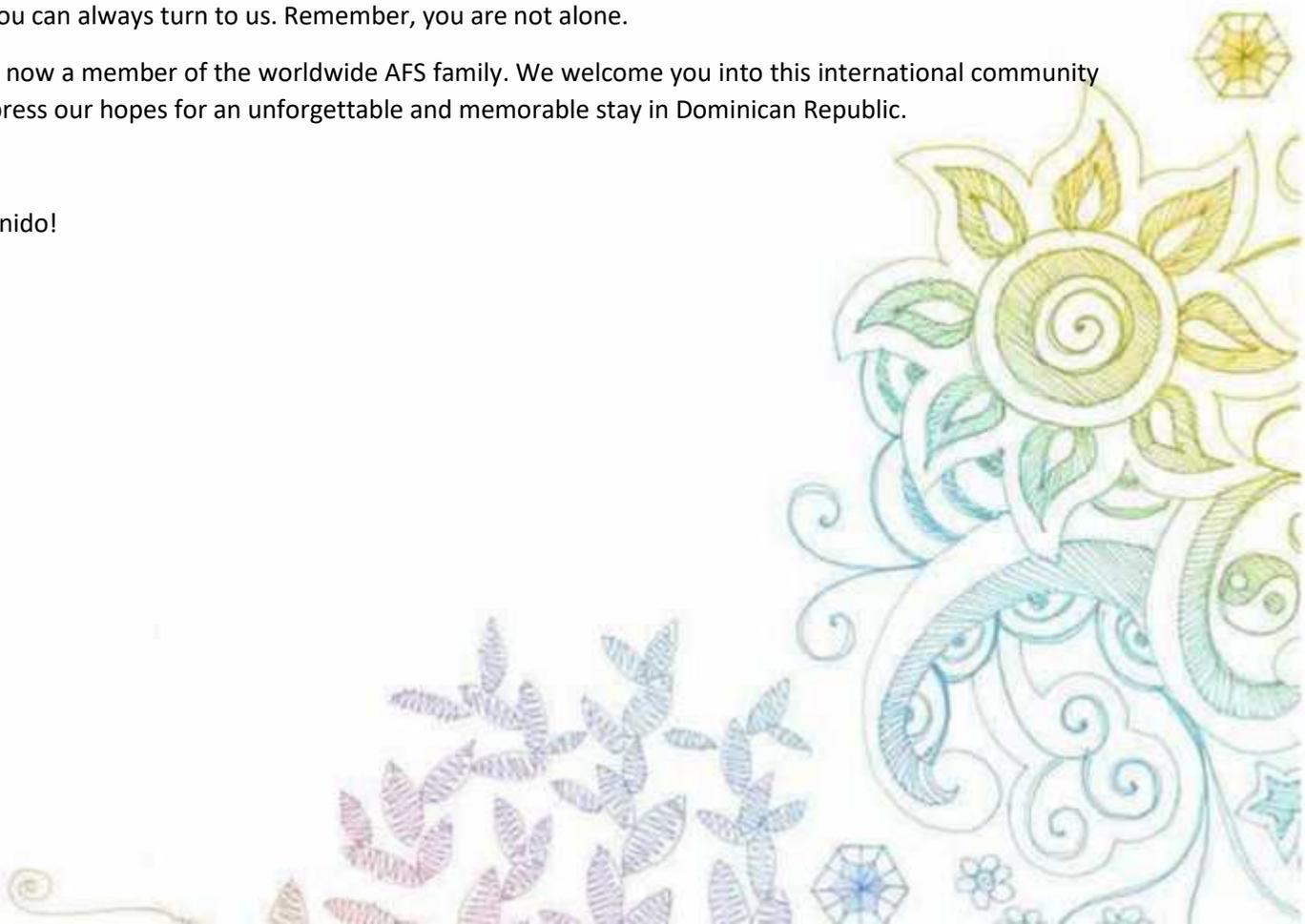
Dominican host families are willing to open their homes and hearts to participants from partners’ countries, to teach Dominican culture and customs and to share with the participants the nuances of daily living. Our host families are as varied as those of any country. We have families with children, with no children, extended families that may include grandparents, aunts, uncles and cousins. We have families who live in mansions and drive expensive cars and limousines and other families who rely on public transport. All of these families have something unique to offer the participant. Naturally they want something in return and this can be as simple as becoming a part of the family.

Your AFS experience will be a time of personal growth; it will have its good and not so good times, and it will demand your effort and interest in adapting to another very different way of living. **ACTIVE PARTICIPATION WITH YOUR HOST FAMILY IS OF GREAT IMPORTANCE**, as are the other aspects of your stay, such as school and community involvement.

We would like you to feel confident about getting in touch with us at any time during your stay. AFS Dominican Republic: our Central Office, members of the local committee and your contact person are willing and ready to help you. Whether you are in need of advice, guidance or just someone to lend a hand, you can always turn to us. Remember, you are not alone.

You are now a member of the worldwide AFS family. We welcome you into this international community and express our hopes for an unforgettable and memorable stay in Dominican Republic.

¡Bienvenido!



# Introduction



A primary objective of experiential learning programs such as those offered by AFS is to help you learn through observation, question, dialogue, discussion and experience. AFS staff and volunteers understand that the opportunity to learn is great, but it is not necessarily easy. You will encounter complex situations along the way and there is potential for confusion, fear and misunderstanding. If you were left to your own devices, the consequences could be very distressing. For these reasons, with the help of host families, local community AFS contacts and school personnel, AFS has devised the system of "program support" for all participants providing a wide range of supportive activities and services. The purpose is to provide a "safety net"... a consistently supportive environment in which you can ask questions, obtain advice and help.

AFS cannot supply all the possible answers, but through our support system, we can help guide you toward asking appropriate questions.

It is not possible to try to anticipate all situations pertaining to individual safety concerns. Many of these issues are specific to individual countries or parts of a single country. In general, AFS recommends you talk with your host family, local AFS contact person, staff from the host school and/or AFS staff as soon as you arrive to your host family - host community about any of the information in this guidebook and any question you may have about specific personal issues. Should you have any question before your arrival to the Dominican Republic, please ask AFS in your home country.

The Dominican Republic is a country full of culture, traditions, color and friendship. Hoping that your AFS stay is a pleasant one we ask you to observe these suggestions. These are useful for your own safety.



# I. Practical Information for living in the Dominican Republic:

We are sure that you are going to have a wonderful year and learn a lot about the Dominican Republic and about yourself. In your own culture, you have been learning since birth to understand what the best way to behave in most situations is. Soon you will be in a new culture, and you may not be aware of all the “clues” and signs as to what is proper and acceptable.

Many of the common sense things you do in your country will apply to your stay in the Dominican Republic. The best thing to do is to discuss any concerns you have with your host family and local AFS volunteers. But you must also be responsible for yourself. After spending a couple of days getting to know your family, please sit down with them, and discuss the information contained here. It’s important to clarify with them anything you don’t understand about the advice or language and words given here.

## General Recommendations

- AFS Dominican Republic keeps your airline ticket. It will be given back to you before departure to your home country.
- Always change your foreign money at a bank or authorized exchange house. Also you can use almost every major credit card or a debit card. You may want to open a savings account in a local bank where your natural family could make wire transfers regularly. Your host family can help you in this.
- Don’t wear valuable jewelry and carry only the amount of money you’ll need for each day.
- Do not walk or visit alone poorly lit areas.
- Do not leave any belongings in a visible area of a car.
- Never trust your belongings to strangers.
- When having any medical assistance, please ask for the bill to your name or to the name of AFS República Dominicana.



## Your Host Family

Just like your natural parents, your AFS host family's first concern will be for your well-being and safety. Most families are very strict and have rules that need to be followed. Some families will tell you what they expect

of you and let you make your own decisions. Your family may want you to ask their permission before you make any plans that are different from your daily schedule.

Almost all families like to know where their children are most of the time, so you should tell them where you are going and how long you'll be out before leaving the house. Phone if you will be late or will be going somewhere else afterwards. You should also check with them before you make an appointment to make

sure that it will not conflict with plans they might have made. We ask all our host families to review family rules and expectations when you first arrive. Please ask questions about anything you don't understand or about anything that confuses you.

We encourage you to start communication with your host family as soon as you have information about them. Send pictures or letter over email, facebook or whatsapp. It is also nice if your natural parents get in touch with them as well. Let them know about you and your family, your regular activities, your values. At the same time, ask about the family, what they do, what their values are.

These are some helpful questions that you should ask your host family once you meet them:

- Do you always lock your doors and windows? If not, when?
- Do you have a first aid equipment box? Where is it?
- What should I do if an emergency occurs? Who should I call?
- How should I answer the phone? What information should I not give out to strangers?
- Where do you keep the emergency telephone numbers?
- What should I do if I am alone and a stranger is at the door? What should I tell him/her?
- Are there any appliances that could cause a problem and that I should be aware of?
- Am I going to have a house key?

## Your Personal Belongings

Always keep your valuables locked in a safe place. Many Dominicans homes have domestic help; it may be tempting for maids and other house help to see money, jewelry, or even small appliances lying around. Please be sensitive to this and prevent any uncomfortable situation.

## Spending Money

Always consult with your host parents before making major purchases or expenses. They may know where prices are better or how you can get a better deal. However, do not “show off” excessive cash availability or purchase capacity. This is not well seen. Remember your family may be an accommodated family or they may be making an effort to host you. Be sensitive to them.

It is better to bring an international credit card and some cash for the first days. If you'll be bringing all your cash with you, open a bank account as soon as you get to your hometown. Ask your host family for help in opening a bank account.

# 2. The rules of AFS

There are three (3) strict AFS rules that apply to all AFS participants everywhere.

- No drugs
- No driving
- No Hitchhiking



Involvement, possession and/or use of drugs are not allowed by AFS, unless medically prescribed. This is also illegal in the Dominican Republic. Participants have no immunity from the local laws governing use of or involvement with illegal drugs.

All AFS participants are forbidden to drive any motorized vehicle. This rule applies to driving anywhere: private land, driveways or parking lots. This rule includes forbiddance of driving trucks, motorcycles, motor scooters powered bicycles, jet skis and any other form of mobilization using a motorized engine. While hitchhiking may be a common form of traveling in some countries, it is considered a very dangerous activity in the Dominican Republic. AFS participants may not hitchhike.

All AFS participants must obey the laws of Dominican Republic. **AFS cannot protect you if you disobey any law.**

If you are involved in any of these behaviors or break any other local laws, you may have serious legal problems. From an AFS perspective, these rules are not debatable. You will be returned to your home country immediately.



**Also, the AFS program in the Dominican Republic has three additional rules:**

- No Alcohol Abuse (Drunkenness)
- No Missing School or School Responsibilities (Project responsibilities for community service project)
- Trips and visits are regulated

**The Dominican Law states that the legal drinking age is 18 years old.** However, this law poorly followed. You will have to deal with the responsibility of having strong alcohol available. Should you have problems dealing with drinking or become drunk, you may be sent back home immediately.

You need to remember that you are enrolled in a School or Community Service Program. **This means that your school or CPO project is a very important component of your new life in the country.** They will allow you to interact with people such as your classmates and teachers, do things together and learn the local language and culture. **Neglecting school/project attendance or school/project responsibilities is also a reason for being sent back home early.**

In the event that an AFS'er is arrested, for any reason, the natural family is responsible for paying all attorney's fees and fines involved. Please keep in mind that an individual whom the police seek to interrogate has the right to have legal counsel present during any interrogation and also has a right to remain silent during such interrogation. AFS can help you find a local attorney, but your natural parents are responsible for paying the attorney fees. AFS cannot protect you against the local law. Things like drug involvement, shoplifting, destroying other people's property and public sexual behaviors are forbidden by law. If you ignore these laws, you may be arrested. **Jail facilities and systems are very dangerous and unhealthy in the Dominican Republic. You don't ever want to be arrested.**

## 3. Tips for personal safety

### Inside Home

As mentioned above, Dominican host family feels great responsibility for your safety and wellbeing as for one of their children. Consequently, they may seem overprotective toward you with many rules restricting your day-to-day activities.

Safety practices vary considerably from one country to another, from one community to another, even from one family to another. You have to discuss how your family copes with these issues:

- How do you secure your house? Do you lock doors and windows? All the time or only at night?
- If a stranger comes to the door, is it safe to open the door?
- Who do I call/where should I go/ what should do if arriving home, without a key, to an empty house? Your neighbors? Which ones?
- If there is a problem while I am alone at home, whom should I contact?

- How should a fire or other emergency be handled? Where are emergency phone numbers listed? Does the family have first aid equipment? Where are they?
- What should I say when answering the phone? How much information can I give on the phone? Is there information that the family doesn't give out?
- Are there any appliances or mechanical things in the home that might cause problems and of which I should be aware?

## Telephone

When answering the phone, it is usually normal practice to say “Hola”, “Aló” or “Buenos Días” It is advisable not to give out any information such as phone numbers, address, or names to strangers on the phone. If the caller asks you what number he or she has dialed, ask him/her what number is trying to reach. If the number is different, tell the caller that he or she has reached the wrong number and needs to try again. **Never give out a credit card number over the phone.**

if someone calls and tries to use bad, sexual, or obscene language with you on the phone, hang up. Do not give out any information; do not tell the caller where you are, if you are home alone, or what your plans are. If the person calls back, hang up immediately.

## Answering the Door

Religious groups and sales people sometimes come to the door. Always ask who is at the door or look in the peephole before opening it. Do not invite a stranger into the house. Speak to your host family for specifics on how to answer the door, as it varies in different communities.

## Locking Doors and Windows

**Ask your family** if they lock all doors and windows when leaving the house or while they are still at home. Some communities do not lock doors and windows but others do. If your home has an alarm system, learn how to use it, and memorize the alarm code. If you find that someone is entering the home illegally, such as a robber or burglar, get out immediately, run to a neighbor’s house or other area where people are, and call your family’s emergency number (mom/dad cellular phone, contact person or AFS emergency phone).

## Internet Use

Here are some general tips for helping to ensure you and your host family’s safety and privacy when using the internet. If your family does not have internet your school may have.

- Keep your passwords private, even from your best friend! Your online service will never ask for them, so neither should anyone else
- Use only your log-in name and/or e-mail address when chatting or sending e-mail
- Never give out personal information like your name, address, or phone number
- Don't share photos of yourself, your family, or your home with people you meet online
- Always delete unknown e-mails without opening them. They can
- contain destructive viruses or links to pornographic material. Ask your host parents when in doubt.

- If a person writes something that is mean or makes you feel uncomfortable, don't respond.
- Remember that nothing you write on the Web is completely private -- including e-mail. So be careful and think about what you type and who you tell.
- Not everyone is as nice, cute, and funny as they may sound online. Never make plans to meet an online "friend" in person.
- WHEN IN DOUBT -- always ask your host parents for help -- and just LOG OFF if you're not sure! You can always go back online later.

Remember to limit your time on the net as it may limit your interaction with the family and will make them feel you are not interested in them.

## Outside the home

**You should always ask your host family before going out** or about any situation which you feel uncertain or frightened. When you are asked to go out with your friends, please obtain permission from your host family before agreeing to go anywhere. Always make it a rule to tell your host family your plans. Generally, when you leave home for a party or to go out with friends, you should let the host parents know where you are going, with whom and at what time you will be back. If possible, you should leave the phone number of the home you will be visiting. When discussing your plans with your host family, you should ask them if there is anything risky about where you are going or what you plan to do. In addition to these basic guidelines, **you and your host family should discuss the following:**

- Are there guidelines about where it is safe/ unsafe to walk during the day? After dark? Where it is safe/ unsafe to wear jewelry?
- Is it safe to walk around this neighborhood after dark?
- Are there areas in the community or city where it is not safe for young people to be? At night? During the daytime?
- What to do if I get lost?
- What information do I need to leave for my host family when I go out without them?
- What should I do if I get lost or separated from my friends? Whom can I ask to help? How do I use the public telephone? What if I don't have the proper change for a public phone? what if I can't find a public phone?
- Are there guidelines for using public cars, subway or bus?
- Is it appropriate for a boy and girl to go out alone or is it customary that they be accompanied by an adult or another young person?
- Is it safe to accept rides from friends and/or school acquaintances in their cars?

Violence has increased considerably in the Dominican Republic in the last few years. Newspapers, radio, and television make eco of the increasing cases of murder, rape, kidnapping, etc. There are a lot of stereotypes about violence on the Latin-American streets. Most likely, you will not encounter these types of extreme violence, as AFS students are not placed in areas that are considered unsafe. However, it is important to remember that the Dominican Republic is a developing country which includes small towns and big cities, nice neighborhoods and slums. Community safety is different in every area. **Ask your host family what areas or streets to avoid, and listen to these warnings. Be a "street smart."**



- Do not act or look like an easy target - look confident!  
**Keep your head up and your step firm.**
- Know what and who is around you and where you are going at all times
- If you see or sense problems on your way, just change your route and prepare to
- run away if necessary
- If you are unable to run away, give the person anything they ask for and try not to make them angry

Unfortunately, nonviolent or petty crimes exist in many parts of the country. Beware of pick-pocketing especially in crowds and larger cities. **It is advisable not to carry more money with you than you intend to spend that day. Also, be cautious when taking money out of a wallet or bank cashier. Do not show anyone the money you have with you.**

Be careful when using telephone cards and bank cash cards in public places. Stand in front of the machine, and cover the numbers on your card so that no one can see the numbers, especially the Personal Identification Number (PIN).

When waiting for public transportation, it is a good idea to wait in a lighted area where people are within shouting distance. Ask your family if your community is safe to walk in at night. In some places, it is advisable to walk with someone else.

Avoid people on the street who look like they may be under the influence of drugs, or alcohol. They can be unpredictable and bring about potentially harmful situations. If they say something to you, it is best to ignore them and walk away.

When approaching your home at night, firmly hold your key for easy access and protection. Ask your family if they leave any lights on when leaving the house

Although the Dominican Republic is a tourist country that does not mean that everybody loves and takes care of foreigners. Unfortunately, racism and abuse exist. Furthermore, as a foreigner in the Dominican Republic, you may find different treatment will be given to you. Some people may be eager to be your friends. Others may try to take advantage of you in hopes that as a foreigner, you may not understand the Spanish language or Dominican culture. It is important that you be aware of your surroundings and of the people you are talking to. Do not immediately trust people who are not well known to your host family or the local AFS volunteers.

## Medications

Bring adequate supplies of all medications in their original containers, clearly labeled. Carry a signed, dated letter from the primary physician describing all medical conditions and listing all medications, including generic names (If carrying syringes or needles, be sure to carry a physician's letter documenting their medical necessity). Pack all medications in hand luggage. Carry a duplicate supply in the checked luggage. If you wear glasses or contacts, bring an extra pair.

Be aware of food and Water, Diseases from food and water are the leading cause of illness in travelers. Follow these tips for safe eating and drinking:

- Wash your hands often with soap and water, especially before eating. If soap and water are not available, use an alcohol-based hand gel (with at least 60% alcohol).
- Drink only bottled or boiled water, or carbonated (bubbly) drinks in cans or bottles. Avoid tap water, fountain drinks, and ice cubes. If this is not possible, learn how to make water safer to drink.
- Do not eat food purchased from street vendors.
- Make sure food is fully cooked.
- Avoid dairy products, unless you know they have been pasteurized.

Diseases from food and water often cause vomiting and diarrhea. Make sure to bring diarrhea medicine with you so that you can treat mild cases yourself. Most cases of travelers, diarrhea are mild and do not require either antibiotics or anti- diarrheal drugs. Adequate fluid intake is essential.

## Immunizations

The following are the recommended vaccinations for the Dominican Republic.

Hepatitis A vaccine is recommended for all travelers over one year of age. It should be given at least two weeks (preferably four weeks or more) before departure. A booster should be given 6-12 months later to confer long-term immunity. Typhoid vaccine is recommended.

Rabies vaccine is recommended only for those at high risk for animal bites, such as veterinarians and animal handlers. In the Dominican Republic, rabies occurs most often after contact with street dogs or wild animals, particularly the small Indian mongoose.

Tetanus-diphtheria vaccine is recommended for all travelers who have not received a tetanus-diphtheria immunization within the last 10 years.

Measles-mumps-rubella vaccine: two doses are recommended (if not previously given) for all travelers born after 1956, unless blood tests show immunity.





## 5. Recent outbreaks

Although Dengue fever has not spiked in the Dominican Republic since 2007, this mosquito borne disease continues to be endemic to the island. Malaria, also spread by mosquitoes, is the other ever present health threat about which travelers should know before arriving. The following information provides a description of the risks and symptoms of both diseases:

**DENGUE FEVER** is a viral infection caused by the bite of female Aedes mosquitoes.

**Risk factors** Dengue occurs more frequently during warm, humid seasons, and transmission is more intense in urban areas, including downtown business areas. Mosquitoes that transmit dengue (Aedes mosquitoes) are day biters. Be especially vigilant applying repellent during daytime hours when in areas of high dengue risk. Peak biting times are usually during the early morning hours and again from late afternoon to dusk. The risk is higher for those staying in places with nearby stagnant water reservoirs and no mosquito protection, but transmission can occur in any urban setting.

**Symptoms** Victims experience a sudden onset of high fever, headache, generalized weakness, and intense muscle, joint, and low back pain (hence the term, "break bone fever") within 3 to 14 days (on average 4 to 7 days). A subtle rash appears in up to half the people affected, although some have a bright red rash with scattered clear spots. Treatment is purely supportive. Those with persistent high fever should seek medical attention as soon as possible. Dengue hemorrhagic fever (DHF) and dengue shock syndrome (DSS) are rare but may occur in people who previously have been infected with one strain of dengue virus and are later infected by a different strain (there are 4 strains). DHF and DSS begin like classic dengue but progress to abdominal pain and vomiting.

**MALARIA** is an acute and sometime chronic infectious disease due to the presence of protozoan parasites within the red blood cells. It is transmitted to the human by the bite of the infected Anopheles mosquito. The blood of a human infected with malaria infects the mosquito and the cycle continues. Four different species of the causative organism Plasmodium, can cause different degrees of illness.

**Risk:** Periodic outbreaks of malaria have occurred in some tourist locations, such as Punta Cana, La Romana or the Haitian border areas. Thus, if traveling in a high-risk area, apply repellent from dusk to dawn. The risk also increases during wet seasons when accumulated water causes mosquitoes to breed.

**Symptoms:** Nighttime fevers, chills, body aches, headaches, nausea, and vomiting and/or general malaise can range from mild to severe. Incubation, or the time before symptoms appear varies from 7 to 30 days. Preventative Treatment: There are medicinal regimens that may help you

avoid Malaria (in addition to taking measures to repel mosquitos), however, there is no one method that can protect completely against the risks of contracting malaria. Chloroquine (taken weekly) is the recommended prophylaxis in the DR. This treatment should be started one week prior to possible exposure. Prophylaxis is recommended for people traveling to remote areas of the country, high outbreak areas and especially along the Haitian border.

**Chikungunya disease and cholera has also been present in the Dominican Republic since few years ago.**

**Zika's mosquitos it's also present in the Dominican Republic, but there haven't been cases until the moment.** The transmission of Zika is made by the same mosquito as dengue and chikungunya (day biters mosquitos). With the exception of pregnant woman, many people infected experience no symptoms. Others feel mildly ill, with symptoms such as conjunctivitis (inflammation of the eyes), joint pain, itchy rash and sometimes fever. There is no cure for Zika, Dengue or Chikungunya fevers. The treatment is only to alleviate symptoms and the foremost recommendations are to rest, drink plenty of fluids, and to use only paracetamol or dipyrone. The disease goes away on its own in about a week.

## Precautions

Wear sun block regularly when needed. Avoid sun exposure as main Dominicans do. Insect protection measures are recommended.

Avoid contact with stray dogs and other animals. If an animal bites or scratches you, clean the wound with large amounts of soap and water and contact your host family and local health authorities immediately.

# 6. Useful Facts

## Cleanliness/Neatness

Dominicans put great emphasis on cleanliness and neatness: in their own bodies, in the house, in each bedroom and in the ones around them. Everyone is supposed to take at least two showers a day, to change clothes, to change underwear every day to use deodorant, brush his/her hair and teeth, etc. Boys are expected to get a haircut on a regular basis. Girls are supposed to wear bras and shave their legs and underarms all the time. It's possible that girls have to wash their own underwear separately.

Please buy a local deodorant (not spray) as soon as you arrive to the country. Even though you can bring your own from home, it may not be effective in tropical weather.

## Insects

One of the reasons why families give so much importance to cleaning the house is because our country is located in the tropics, where insects abound and reproduce quickly. Your family will surely be doing all efforts for their own comfort too, to keep insects out of the house. But don't go hysterical if you see a cockroach.... just kill it!!! You should bring bug repellent with you (or buy it here in pharmacies) to use in the first weeks, mosquitoes may be giving you a warm pointy welcome during this time.

## Cities

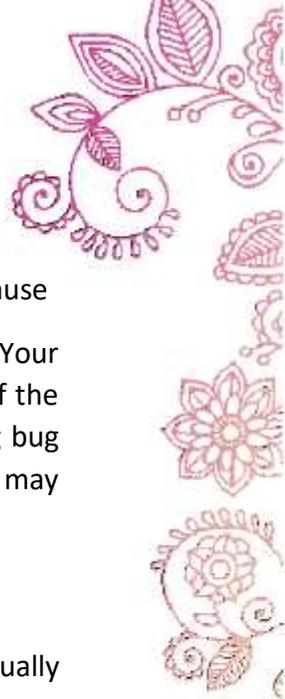
The life in most local towns is centered on a park and a Catholic Church, which are usually located in the middle of the town. Around these two elements are situated most important things: schools, post offices, banks, etc. Most towns have a baseball field, since baseball is far the most popular sport in the country and a common distraction on weekends. Other sports practice may be available, especially volley-ball, basketball, among others. Football, soccer and hand ball are not widely practiced locally.

You use the public transportation (carro público, motoconchos, guaguas, metro, taxi) to move around the town.

## Telephone

The telephone system in the Dominican Republic has the ultimate advantages and equipment. Long distance phone calls are easy to make. There are several options to call home. There are communication centers where you can make phone calls. In this case, you pay at the end of the service. You can also buy a calling card and then use it from any telephone. This method has the advantage that you have already paid in advance, so there won't be any financial surprises afterwards. Internet and purchasing a personal cell phone or cell phone connection are also options for keeping connected. Again, do not let them interfere with your interaction with the local people, specially your host family.

Both, communication centers and calling cards are cheaper than calling from a regular house phone. These options we just gave are the best for you in case you want to call you family but if you have no other option, you can ask your host family to call with their phone, **don't forget to tell first and ask for the phone bill when it arrives. Local calls are charged by minute, so you should just use the phone for a short time. Besides, your host family may want to use the phone as well. Always be sensitive to time when using the phone.**



## Mobile Phones

Cellular phones are widely used in the country. There are several providers from which to choose, such as Claro, Altice, Viva and Tricom. Each of them offers various plans, including pre-paid plans. **Talk to your host family** to get advice about which plan-company may be more suitable for your needs and region.

## Electricity

The voltage is 110 v, even though 220v is used for air conditioners. Due to economic problems, electricity is not sufficient and it is very expensive so, **you should help your family in saving electricity** (for example, use the air conditioning only during the night, switch off all your equipment when you are not at home...). Daily blackouts are common in some areas of the country, usually they can last few minutes or hours. Many host families might have a power generator or an inverter to provide electricity during **blackouts**, but there is certain equipment you are not allowed to use while having these on. **You better ask your family** what the restrictions are in these cases. It is also possible that your own electrical appliances (blow dryer, electric shaver, etc.) do not work or work inadequately due to voltage differences. Better check this out with an electrician before loading your luggage with these items. Remember that in many case, during the blackouts, flushing water may not be available. Normally the host families have the equipment for alternative way to use the water to shower (tank and bucket), drink and cook.

## Water

You must be really careful with the water you are drinking. Check that it comes from a closed bottle, and **do not drink water from the sink in any case**, because it can be contaminated with bacteria and parasites. You can use it only if you boiled it first, but you can use it to wash yourself.

Also, be really careful with the ice in your drinks and ask if they used purified drinking water or not.

Notice that in case that the lights goes off, it's possible that running water cannot be available. In this case, people use a big tank of water (that is disinfected properly with chlorine, to prevent the formation of bacteria and mosquitos), and a bucket to shower.

## Standing out

Remember that you will look different as compared to most Dominicans, so people will stare at you. Relax and be friendly; this will quickly enable you to become friends with practically everybody in town. **Girls: Men will probably make remarks about you when**

**you walk on the street. Don't worry about it, just keep walking and don't pay attention to them. It is important to dress modestly.** Always wear bras and don't show more of your skin that your host mother or host sister does. If you want to minimize "standing out", try to dress/act more like those around you. This applies to both girls and boys.

## What to wear

Dominicans tend to be formal and take a lot of care in how they dress. For special occasions, nice shirt, trousers, dress or skirts, as well as sleeved blouses or tops are expected. Always look at what your family is wearing and/or what other people are wearing and consider it when choosing your own gown. When people go to social activities, it is very common to ask what the dress code is.

Girls, try to use your pants higher than you may regularly do as per the recommendation above. Your underwear should never be visible. **Otherwise, local men will get a wrong impression of you.**

Boys, notice your host brother or host father's hairstyle as well. Ask them if the length of your hair and/or regular style is appropriate for school and other activities. Your underwear should never be visible.

## Machismo / Gender Discrimination

You will notice there are different rules and social expectations depending on the gender. Men mostly have social privileges, such as less house chore expectations, curfew, behavior, etc which women don't have. This is something difficult especially for girls. However, you shouldn't try to fight against this, because the society just won't accept it. You may present your point of view, but in the end must follow (but of course- this does not mean share opinion) whatever the host family, volunteer, school or society imposes you. This is part of respecting the social codes.

## Religion

The official religion in Dominican Republic is Roman Catholicism. Religion has a lot of importance in our society and is part of our daily life.

There are several different kind of Church in the country, and they have different behaviors regarding the church attendance. For example, some people goes to church also during the weekdays, and every mass can last three hours. Usually they are more conservative in the way of dressing and do not hang out a lot. These families usually pray a lot, even at home, and they expect the student to respect their religion.

If you don't feel comfortable with it, just talk with your host family and volunteers, and try to find a compromise. You are not expected to share it, or to convert to their religion,

but to respect it. Remember that religion is a quite important part in our culture, so try to see it in a different way.



## 7. Threatening Situations

If a person holding a gun, knife, or any other weapon ever confronts you, follow his or her instructions. Give the person whatever he or she wants (for example, your wallet, watch, or jewelry). Remember, your possessions can be replaced, your life cannot.

If someone appears angry or gets hostile towards you, do not try to reason with them. In the unlikely event that you feel threatened, leave the situation as soon as possible. Try to get to a well-lit area with other people around, report the situation to your host family and/or the police. Always report any dangerous situation or person to your host family and/or contact person. They will advise you what to do.

### Uncomfortable Social Situations

In any situation that you may encounter during your stay in the Dominican Republic, it is important to keep in mind that you should not compromise your personal moral values or do anything that makes you feel uncomfortable while you are here on the AFS program. While it is important for an exchange student to be open-minded, adventuresome, and accepting of the host culture, this does not mean you should ignore everything you have learned in your home culture. It is always a good idea to observe the behavior of those around you then follow what your inner voice tells you about what you have learned concerning right and wrong.

## 8. Natural Disasters



### Hurricanes

Dominican Republic is located in the natural route for tropical storms and hurricanes. Fortunately, major hurricanes hardly ever touch us or affect us seriously. Always be with your host family when a storm or hurricane is coming. They'll take good care of you and will move you to a safer place if needed.

### Know What Hurricane WATCH and WARNING Mean

**WATCH:** Hurricane conditions are possible in the specified area of the WATCH, usually within 36 hours.

**WARNING:** Hurricane conditions are expected in the specified area of the WARNING, usually within 24 hours.

The International Red Cross Recommendations, which your host family may be already familiar with:

## Prepare a Personal Evacuation Plan

- Keep the telephone numbers of these places as well as a road map of your locality handy.
- You may need to take alternative or unfamiliar routes if major roads are closed or clogged.
- Listen to local radio or TV stations for evacuation instructions. If advised to evacuate,
  - do so immediately.

## Take these items with you when evacuating:

- Prescription medications and medical supplies
- Bedding and clothing, including sleeping bags and pillows
- Bottled water, battery-operated radio and extra batteries, first aid kit,
- flashlight
- Maps
- Documents including: Social Security card, proof of residence,
- insurance policies, birth certificates.



## Assemble a Disaster Supplies Kit Including the Following Items:

- First aid kit and essential medications.
- Canned food and manual can opener.
- At least three gallons of water per person.
- Protective clothing, rainwear, and bedding or sleeping bags.
- Battery-powered radio, flashlight, and extra batteries.
- Special items for infants, elderly, or disabled family members.
- Written instructions on how to turn off electricity, gas and water if authorities advise you to do so. Know What to Do When a Hurricane WATCH Is Issued
- Talk to your host family and AFS Contact.
- Listen to local radio or TV stations for up-to-date storm information.
- Prepare to bring inside any lawn furniture, outdoor decorations or ornaments, trashcans, hanging plants, and anything else that can be picked up by the wind.
- Prepare to cover all windows of your home. If shutters have not been installed, use precut plywood as described above. Note: Tape does not prevent windows



from breaking, so taping windows is not recommended. Recheck manufactured home tie-downs.

- Check batteries and stock up on canned food, first aid supplies, drinking water, and medications.

## Know What to Do When a Hurricane WARNING Is Issued

### Talk to your host family and AFS Contact.

- Listen to the advice of local officials, and leave if they tell you to do so.
- Complete preparation activities.
- If you are not advised to evacuate, stay indoors, away from windows.
- Be aware that the calm "eye" is deceptive; the storm is not over. The worst part of the storm will happen once the eye passes over and the winds blow from the opposite direction. Trees, shrubs, buildings, and other objects damaged by the first winds can be broken or destroyed by the second winds.
- Stay away from floodwaters. If you come upon a flooded road, turn around and go another way. If you are caught on a flooded road and waters are rising rapidly around you, get out of the car and climb to higher ground.

## Know What to Do After a Hurricane Is Over

- Keep listening to local radio or TV stations for instructions.
- If you evacuated, return home when local officials tell you it is safe to do so. Inspect your home for damage.
- Use flashlights in the dark; do not use candles.

For official government information concerning weather conditions please visit:

**ONAMET** [www.onamet.gov.do](http://www.onamet.gov.do)

**Centro de Operaciones de Emergencia dominicana (COE):** [www.coe.gov.do](http://www.coe.gov.do)

**Embajada de EE.UU.** <http://santodomingo.usembassy.gov/hurricane.html>

**National Hurricane Center:** <http://www.nhc.noaa.gov/gtwo.php?basin=atlc&fdays=2>

## Earthquakes

### The International Red Cross Recommendations:

#### **Know What to Do When the Shaking Begins**

- DROP, COVER, AND HOLD ON! Move only a few steps to a nearby safe place.
- Stay indoors until the shaking stops and you're sure it's safe to exit.
- Stay away from windows. In a high-rise building, expect the fire alarms and sprinklers to go off during a quake.
- If you are in bed, hold on and stay there, protecting your head with a pillow.
- If you are outdoors, find a clear spot away from buildings, trees, and power lines. Drop to the ground.
- If you are in a car, stay in the car until the shaking stops.

#### Identify What to Do After the Shaking Stops

- Check yourself for injuries. Protect yourself from further danger by putting on long pants, a long-sleeved shirt, sturdy shoes, and work gloves.
- Check others for injuries. Give first aid for serious injuries.
- Look for and extinguish small fires. Eliminate fire hazards. Turn off the gas tank or line if you smell gas or think it is leaking. (Remember, only a professional should turn it back on.)
- Listen to the radio for instructions.
- Expect aftershocks. Each time you feel one DROP, COVER, AND HOLD ON!
- Inspect your home for damage. Get everyone out if your home is unsafe.
- Use the telephone only to report life-threatening emergencies.



# 9. Emergencies

While one can never anticipate an emergency, one of the best ways to deal with emergency situations is to be prepared. You should always carry identification, as well as contact telephone numbers. That way, if there is an emergency, you can get help.

Ask your host family to provide you with the telephone numbers for all emergency situations:

- House phone number
- Host-mom, host dad, host-brother and host-sister's personal cell phone numbers
- Police
- Doctor
- Your local AFS volunteer or AFS contact person.

*In the event of a personal emergency, accident, or sickness:*

Call your host family first. Let them know what happened and where you are. If you are unable to reach your family, call your local contact person. If you have an emergency during regular office hours (Monday thru Friday, from 8:30 AM to 5:30 PM), call the AFS Central Office at 809-338-8383 or (809)200-8018 from provinces free of charge.

The AFS Emergency Cell Phone Number is 809-519-0513. This number is always available (24 hours, 7 days a week). It is important that you memorize it. It is also printed on the back of your AFS ID Card, which you should always keep with you.





## Conclusion

The best general advice AFS can provide regarding issues of personal safety is as follows:

- Get to know the host culture through questions, dialogue and discussion with your host family, peers and the AFS local contacts.
- Take seriously any concerns expressed by your host family, school and/or AFS volunteers and follow their advice.

As stated in the Participation Agreement document that you signed prior to leaving home, the AFS Central Office will make recommendations and give guidelines for physical welfare and security. Take this advice seriously and comply with these guidelines.

As you will be taken care of by family, volunteers and AFS Staff, we are looking forward a wonderful year with us!!!





## Contact info

### **AFS Dominican Republic**

National Office in Santo Domingo

Address: Juan Isidro Ortega St. #17, Los Prados, Santo Domingo.

Telephone: 809-338-8383

Fax: 809-621-8519

Email: [info-dominicanrepublic@afs.org](mailto:info-dominicanrepublic@afs.org)

Web: [www.afs.do](http://www.afs.do)

Work Hours: 8:30 am a 5:30 pm from Monday to Friday

In case of emergency: 1+ 809-519-0513

