



CULTURAL GUIDE TO THE DOMINICAN REPUBLIC

Transition Center
George P. Shultz National
Foreign Affairs Training Center
Foreign Service Institute
U.S. Department of State

CULTURAL GUIDE TO THE DOMINICAN REPUBLIC

Prepared for the

OVERSEAS BRIEFING CENTER
FOREIGN SERVICE INSTITUTE
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE

by Christine L. Miller and Ardeth K. Hines, 1985
revised 2004

This paper was prepared to support training activities. The views expressed are those of the authors and do not represent the official position of the U.S. Department of State.

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INTRODUCTION

The Dominican Republic is located on the island of Hispanola, the second largest island in the Caribbean. Haiti occupies the western third of the island, and the separate isles of Cuba and Puerto Rico lie to the west and east respectively. Florida is about 600 miles northwest. The climate is tropical, hot, and humid most of the year. There are about 9.6 million Dominicans, of whom about 2.5 million live in Santo Domingo, the capital. Underemployment is a serious problem, and there are all the signs of poverty one is used to in an underdeveloped country, as well as overwhelming wealth.

Many writers consider the Dominican Republic as having an ethnic and cultural identity problem, but, to most of us viewing the uniquely Dominican style and flair for living, that seems inaccurate. The country's long, turbulent history has left it with numerous present problems, not the least of which is corruption at every level of government. Nevertheless, it is a lively and viable society, where democracy is alive and well, where business opportunities exist, and where development is highly visible throughout the country.

PART I

THE LANGUAGE

Spanish is the official language of the Dominican Republic, brought to the country by its original colonizers. They “were seafarers and navigators, and the Spanish they brought to the island was the dialect of their home, Andalucia. Castillian gentlemen, bringing their own dialect and mannerisms, arrived much later and had a lesser effect on the development of speech patterns. Spanish quickly took over the language spoken by the native population, and few vestiges remain of the original Indian tongue. (The Indian words that did survive, however, did not take root in the Dominican vocabulary alone but found their way into many European languages as well. Some commonly used words of this origin are: cannibal, canoe, hurricane, hammock, potato, maize, savannah, and tobacco.) If the Indian languages suffered when pitted against the invading Spanish, the African dialects fared even worse. Early evolution of the Dominican patterns of speech paralleled development of its culture—domination by the Spanish and sublimation of the Indian and Negro.” (Weil, pp. 54–55)

Both Weil and author Henriquez Urena suggest that many archaic speech patterns exist in the

Dominican Republic. According to Weil, the Spanish spoken in the 1970s bore a strong resemblance to that spoken by the first Spanish settlers in 1493. An extensive list of examples can be found in *El Espanol en Santo Domingo*, by Pedro Henriquez Urena.

In part because of these archaic speech patterns, in part because of the influence of the Cibaena dialect (native to the northern Cibao Valley), because of Haitian Creole brought in by immigrants, as well as the class and education differenced among Dominicans, both fledgling and fluent Spanish speakers may well have difficulty in understanding Dominican Spanish. However, local friendliness and helpfulness overcome most difficulties.



The original settlers brought their native Spanish dialect from Andalucia (number 5) in southern Spain.

Antonio Zaglul, Dominican psychologist, writer, and formerly Ambassador to Spain, wrote a series of satirical newspaper articles some years ago in which he

suggested that Dominicans had discovered a truly basic Spanish. Surprisingly bitingly, he says, “with a vocabulary of fewer than two hundred words, our compatriot is perfectly well furnished. For an unknown word (especially a noun) one looks for a substitute, usually an obscene word, or slang.” Zaglul lists the following all-purpose substitutions: cosa, vaina, and pendeja. (Probably the most frequently heard exclamation anywhere in the country is the obscenity, “coño!”)

COMMUNICATIONS

The newcomer will immediately see that language here is casual and friendly. For those who have just learned Spanish and find “usted” easier than “tu”, the Dominican preference to “tutear”—that is, to use the informal “tu” rather than the more formal “usted” may be disconcerting. But it is not hard to take social cues from those with whom one is conversing.

Appropriate greeting forms include the standards from basic Spanish courses:

“Buenos dias, buenas tardes, buenas noches.”
Less common are “¿Como esta usted?” and “¿Que tal?” Dominicans prefer these, the usage, “¿Que Hay?”, “¿Como estamos?” and simply, “Hola”. (“¿Que Hay?” is condensed from “¿Que hay de nuevo?” or “¿Que hay de bueno?”) Two other common greetings are “Saludos” and “Mucho gusto de verte.”

Other popular expressions include:

“No me di cuenta” “I didn’t notice/realize that.”
“Hablar ingles” means, figuratively, to talk business, talk “turkey.”
“Bregar”, as in, “aqui estoy bregando” means “here I am, toiling away.”
“Ahora” means right now, this very minute whereas “Ahorita” means in a little while. This is opposite to the usage of many other Spanish-speaking countries.
“Funda” is a little bag, instead of the usual Spanish word for bag.
“Bolsa” Here, “bolsa” is slang for scrotum.
“Caldero” is an “olla,” pot.
“Nevera” is a refrigerator.
“Goma” is a “llanta” or tire.
“Colmado” is the corner store, the “tienda.”

“Guagua” is a small bus.

“Publico” is a taxi shared by a number of people. They are licensed by the municipal government, and wise people always take those with the medallion of license on the front doors. These little cars follow fixed routes and are one of the hazards of driving here, for they stop just past the corner on the right side of the street and for drivers turning into that lane they are frequently invisible.

“Chin” is a little bit. “Da me un chin de cafe, por favor.”

“Chele” is a penny. It derives, through 18th-century pirates and smugglers, from the English “Shilling.”

“Tigre” usually means an unemployed teenage male who hangs out on street corners. Used for a mature male, it can be a reference to his youth, and is not always perjorative.

“Vaina” literally, “green beans”, but used as a noun to mean almost anything. Perhaps the closest American usage is the word “thing” or “annoyance/bother.”

“Merengue” is the local music, It comes fast or modern, and slow, or old-fashioned, “authentic.”

“Chiripas” are odd jobs.

Many fruits and vegetables have local names not included on the usual lists:

“Guineos” are the usual bananas sold in the United States.

“Lechosa” is a papaya.

“Patilla” or more commonly, “sandia,” is watermelon.

“Habichuelas” are “frijoles,” the dry red beans used in the United States for making chili con carne.

“Tayota” is “guisquil,” vegetable pear, or “coyote squash” in California and “mirliton” in Louisiana. It is a light green, pulpy squash with a smooth seed, not found in temperate climates.

SOCIAL DISTANCE

The degree of touching among Dominicans, as in a number of Latin cultures, is greater than what would generally be seen in the United States. It is very common to see people of the same sex walking hand-in-hand or arm-in-arm. Women usually kiss on the cheek when greeting friends and acquaintances of both sexes. Men kiss women but not other men, although they may or may not embrace each other depending upon how close the friendship is. Many Dominicans, especially those who come into frequent contact with Americans, realize that Americans are not as physically close as Dominicans tend to be and may therefore extend a hand for a simple handshake. However, Americans will find that the expatriates living in Santo Domingo also become more physically close than the folks at home.

GIFTS AND BONUSES

Sending flowers to a hostess, especially if the party is in your honor, or if the invitation is somehow particularly important or pleasing to you is socially correct, though hardly required.

Commonly, birthdays are celebrated only by children. Wedding gifts should be sent from the shop as soon as the invitation arrives.

Gifts and favors offered under circumstances other than birthdays, weddings or as bonuses may seem to cause distinct uneasiness. Dr. Zaglul discusses this in *Apuntes*. He says that it is generally accepted, if rarely mentioned, that any unsought gift or favor brings with it a hidden demand, a hook or “gancho.” It is uncommon for gifts to be given or favors to be done without an assumed quid pro quo. If foreigners do not understand this assumption, they cannot understand suspicion of their gifts.

Servants receive a bonus equal to one month’s pay just before Christmas. This enables them to celebrate their own holidays with more ease. For servants who have not yet worked the full year, one pro-rates the amount for the time they have worked. Employers often give gifts as well. In addition, servants will usually appreciate old clothes and anything else that might be otherwise discarded.

ENTERTAINING

A very common kind of party is to invite people to a country house for a barbeque. This is an informal afternoon and/or evening of visiting, swimming, horse riding, or cock fighting, culminating in a feast. Often, the evening continues with dancing, and it is definitely a chance to learn the merengue among friends. Dress, as usual for women, is elegant but informal, the atmosphere is relaxed, and such invitations usually include the whole family.

Cocktails and cocktail-buffets are even more common. The cocktail portion of the evening is usually much longer than is customary in the United States, and the dinner portion, if any, commensurately later. It is not the rule here for hosts to pour drinks without asking if a guest wants more; Dominicans do not push alcohol on their guests. The buffet will usually be a very full one, although salads and vegetables will be fewer than meats, fowl, and fish.

Seated and buffet dinners are also common, although buffet dinners are more the rule. Again, the cocktail hour will be long and the meal a banquet. For small parties, everyone may be seated at a small table, and service will be family-style. The hostess usually serves, and spends much time waiting on her guests. If there are enough drop-in guests, the hostess may never sit down at all.

Invitations may be either phoned or written, but are usually rather specific. It is polite to arrive about

a half-hour after the appointed time, unless the hosts are military people in which case you may arrive closer to the hour. Arrival more than an hour late will require some reasonable explanation.

SOCIAL GATHERINGS

The Malecon is a favorite gathering place for residents and visitors to Santo Domingo. The Malecon is a long oceanside park beside George Washington Avenue. The ocean view and refreshing breeze bring many people out for an early morning jog, an evening stroll or a carriage ride. Saturday and Sunday nights the traffic is heavy and the atmosphere lively. There are a number of eating establishments and popular outside beer gardens (cervaceros). Some of the sights include merengue bands, art peddlers, tightrope walkers, and peanut vendors, not to mention young lovers of all ages, beggars, and prostitutes.

The Malecon is open only to foot traffic and bicycles on Sunday for what is known as the Malecon Libre, or Free Malecon. During this time, the street is held clear of traffic and vendors set up shop and families head to the water for a lazy Sunday afternoon stroll along the shore. Cyclists take advantage of the only place in town where they can safely venture the boulevards, and tricycles and roller bladders come out. Often, business promoters set up stages and sponsor puppet shows and live music, and a snow cone or cotton candy is never far away.

People also gather at the beach or at pools. A number of hotels offer inexpensive memberships to their pools and tennis clubs. Boca Chica is the closest swimming beach to the city of Santo Domingo, about a forty-five minute drive by car or “guagua.” It is a white sand beach with shallow water both clear and warm and is popular with both natives and visitors alike. At its outside cafes, one



An oceanside park, the Malecon is a favorite gathering place for residents and visitors.

can rent a table for a small fee and enjoy food and drink service all day. Boat rides, inner tubes, wind surfboards, and paddleboats are available for rent for a reasonable fee. Here, as along the Malecon, the atmosphere is friendly and the rum and cold beer are plentiful. (Ed. note: this author left a beach blanket on the Boca Chica beach, and when we went back to look for it several hours later, it was still there.)

And then, of course, there’s baseball. And it’s good!

WEDDINGS AND FUNERALS

Considering the complexity of wedding arrangements and the local problems of electricity, delivery, traffic, and those natural disasters common to the tropics, it will be no surprise to learn that weddings here may start several hours late. But sometimes a wedding starts exactly on time, so it is necessary to know the family in order to know at what time to arrive at the church. Dress is much as it is in the United States: very formal weddings frequently find the guests as well as the bridal party in long dresses. Congregations do not divide into groom’s side and bride’s side, so guests sit where they please. At the



Difficult driving in Santo Domingo frustrates most Americans.

end of the ceremony, it is common for all guests to swarm into the main aisle following the newlyweds out; sometimes floral decorations prevent this. The usual service is a wedding mass, followed by a reception.

With the invitation there may be included cards from one or more gift shops. Each shop has a list of everything the groom and bride would like to receive from that store, with prices. This obviates the arrival of three purple tea cosies, and other horrors of American weddings. Gifts should be sent from the shop as soon as the invitation arrives. If you know the family well, and want to provide something else, or if cards do not arrive with the invitation, selections from Freeport shops and other imports are suitable. Bibelot. Objets d'art, household items, linens, silver, appliances and other impersonal gifts are all acceptable. If you do not receive a thank-you note within a month or so, it is as polite here as in the United States to inquire if the gift arrived.

Most other kinds of celebrations are familial and follow forms usual to us. In the case of a death, the interment commonly takes place within 24 hours. This means that, on hearing of a death, people drop everything immediately to go to the funeral. It is polite to visit the family within the week after a death but it is not the custom to take a gift of food.

After the initial week of mourning, a Mass of the Seventh Day is announced, and family and friends attend.

SHOPPING

Shopping in major stores is very similar to shopping in the United States although one will notice that there are many more salespeople to attend to the shopper. The salesperson assists the buyer and writes a receipt for the merchandise. The buyer may bargain with the sales person, although in the major departments stores the discount is not very great. Next, the buyer takes the receipt and the merchandise to the cashier or is escorted to the cashier by the salesperson. The cashier takes the money or charge card and the merchandise is packed by someone else and given to the buyer. Often this requires duplicate copies of the receipts and doublechecking of merchandise. The process is slightly more time consuming than in the United States but it certainly brings the buyer into contact with more people. This system is not used in the major supermarkets that are nearly indistinguishable from U.S. supermarkets.

Stores are generally open from 9:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m. and from 3:00 p.m. to 6:00 p.m. Monday thru Saturday. Many supermarkets are open over the lunch hour. At this time there are fewer customers in the store but fewer cashiers as well. A very complete shopping guide can be found in *Settling In...A Practical Guide to Living in Santo Domingo* by Anne Gross and Gwen Merrill. This very useful book can be purchased at a number of locations in Santo Domingo or online.

TRANSPORTATION

It has been said that North Americans are the most intolerant drivers in the world and it is, therefore, no doubt that driving in Santo Domingo is the most difficult area of adjustment for most Americans. It

is the source of endless conversation and frustration.

The most confusing aspects of driving patterns for the newly arrived American are the number of unmarked intersections and the directions given by the traffic police. Regardless of hand signals, officers present their profiles to the lanes that have the right of way. They are broadside to the traffic they stop.

Until the arrival of the SUV, modern cars were once smaller than when Trujillo laid out the streets, but the land markers have not been changed. They are ignored. Sometimes traffic lights are too, so it is not wise to be first off when the green light goes on. Right turns on red lights are permitted, and may be demanded by the cars in the rear.

A serious hazard is that the right lane of major streets is used by the taxis, “publicos,” which follow set routes about the city—and travel slowly looking for a fare. Usually battered, these small cars stop when hailed. Following the right lane or turning right into a major street therefore calls for great care. In addition, most major intersections have their complement of fruit vendors, beggars, and street children washing windshields. People will hold up traffic to buy bananas, adding another hazard to street corners.

Traffic follows clear patterns, but the logic may not be immediately clear to the newcomer. This must be learned by paying close attention. Unless an American has come immediately from Rio de Janeiro, Tokyo, or New York, it may appear intimidating. It is absolutely necessary to drive defensively because it is not the custom to look out for other drivers. At the same time, idealized American driving habits may prove hazardous to one’s health and one’s fenders if indulged in too extensively.

Other forms of transportation include publicos, taxis, and guagua (buses). Publicos are privately



“Publico” refers to “public” cars or taxis licensed by the municipal government and shared by a number of people.

owned cars that are operated as shared taxis. They follow a designated route and pick up and discharge passengers along the way. The fare depends upon the route traveled. During peak hours, many people will crowd into these vehicles. (A publico may be turned into a private taxi by negotiation with the driver.)

There are private taxis, but because of the numerous publicos, they are usually only found around the major hotels and listed in the yellow pages. Usually it is best to establish a fare before the trip starts because the cabs are not metered. Tips are appreciated.

Although it has been recently improved with new busses, service in Santo Domingo is still unable to meet the growing demand. When operating, the cooperative bus network follows specific routes and charges low fares. Service may be irregular, and there will be over-crowding. Busses frequently break down, and may not return to service quickly or at all due to parts shortages. The city responds to these problems with the limited resources it has. Late busses come less and less frequently, providing a credible, if overused excuse for the maid’s late arrival or absence!

TELEPHONING

Limited telephone service exists in the Dominican Republic. That is to say, not all homes and businesses are served and the waiting list is long. It has been known to take several months to a year to receive a new phone line, especially in newly developed areas. Public phones located throughout the city cost one peso per call (five pesos to a cell phone), although they are frequently out of service or lack phone directions. Connections may be poor. However, service is improving; one can direct dial to the United States now.

Home telephone service is generally good. The phone usually stays in the landlord's name, so houses with phone service command higher rent. If service is interrupted, repairs may take a long time. Because of heavy rains, lines frequently cross and wrong numbers ensue. If one should have to apologize for reaching the wrong number several times in succession, a simple "Excusame" is sufficient and common—even if that is not quite correct Spanish!

"Hello" is used to answer the phone and "bye-bye" to end a conversation. The person dialing often says, "Con Juan, por favor" or "¿Quién habla?" It is never wise to answer the second question, but if the call is to a wrong number, the response is simply, "Estas equivocado." It may be best to clarify the situation by asking, "¿Que numero estas marcando?" (The more formal verb is rarely used in this situation.) Because the phone number usually stays with the house, it is wise to have any former residents' current numbers at hand.

The phone book is much like those in the United States. The area code for the Dominican Republic is 809. Bills are delivered to the house and can be paid at many locations around the city. There will be one quite close to any house or apartment one may rent.

PERSONAL SERVICES

Many personal services are available in Santo Domingo. There are beauty shops (unisex and single sex), barber shops and individuals in every neighborhood offering hair cutting and styling, dying, curling as well as pedicures and manicure, massages, and facials. Appointments are rarely necessary except on Saturdays, or with an individual. If you do need to set up a particular time, it is best to go to the shop and discuss the particular time and attendant. Regular appointments are accepted, of course. Although neat and clean and cheerful, shops are not up to U.S. health inspection standards. Current fashions follow American leads, and U.S. and other imported cosmetic products are available. Coffee is always served; tips are appreciated.

There are many gymnasiums scattered around the town, including a new Body Shop Gym, U.S. Standards facility, Gold's Gym, with both gentlemen's and ladies' sections, and also a Women-only Gym. Many gyms offer saunas and massages, and these are also available at clubs and hotels.

If your pet needs grooming as well, there are dog-grooming establishments. Some offer house service and chauffeur service as well.

THEATERS AND CINEMAS

The only difference between these activities in the Dominican Republic and ours is that dressier dress prevails there. Theatres may be so thoroughly air conditioned as to freeze the unwary so it is wise to wear something with a jacket that can be removed until one knows which places are



The Bellas Artes Theater is one of Santo Domingo’s oldest landmarks.

cold and which not. The same wisdom will have you carrying a fan, too—just in case.

English is the favored language for movies, and subtitles are of course provided. Concession stands are all available inside the lobby of the theater, just like in the United States. Waste cans are not always available, so as at home, watch where you step and sit. American films generally arrive here three months after U.S. release, with special effort made for exciting offerings during Christmas and “Semana Santa,” Holy Week, when the schools are closed. Foreign films are also popular, and, again, they will usually have Spanish subtitles for major sequences.

The theatres at the Plaza de la Cultura and also the old Bellas Artes Theatre host many fine cultural

events at reasonable cost. Dress is informal or semi-formal. The National Theatre at the Plaza tries to stay on schedule by announcing a minute-by-minute countdown of show time at the beginning of a performance and at intermissions, but the older Bellas Artes uses the more traditional dimming of the lights. Do not expect things to be later than fifteen minutes after the announced time, or you may be disappointed and miss a good show. Patrons are, of course, seated during performances. Except for gala programs, these are free as in the United States.

RESTAURANTS

Travel brochures describe dining here as an art. Numerous restaurants offer ethnic cuisine in a

variety of settings. This city boasts a variety of fine restaurants serving “criollo” (local) as well as French, Italian, Spanish, German, Chinese, and South American cuisines.

A hierarchical order exists in the serving staff at all restaurants. Diners may expect to be waited on and served by several different people with results either amazing or irritating. Evening meals start late and continue at a leisurely pace. Various techniques are employed to summon the attention of the staff that do not require one to remember who originally served the table. Finger snapping, hissing noises, and calling “muchacho” or “mozo” are a few techniques used here that do not result in spilt coffee or a pie in the face. A quiet hand motion is considered to be the most polite method, however. A check is never volunteered and must, therefore, always be requested. Do not expect to be ushered out in a hurry; it is considered rude to present a check to customers while they are enjoying the evening.

The dress found in restaurants is stylish and generally more formal than what would be found in the United States. It is important to remember that often restaurants are over-airconditioned and a sweater is necessary.

Restaurants are required by law to include a ten-percent service charge to all bills. An additional ten percent should be left for good service. It is polite to refrain from tipping any more.

HOTELS

There is a wide spectrum of services available, with new first-class hotels coming into operation all the time, especially on the North Shore. This includes the Puerto Plata area, and Sosua. (It is still possible to find small cottage rentals even on the North Shore, however, which offer a simpler than resort-hotel vacation life if you want it.) Package deals, many “all-inclusive”—

meaning that food and drinks are included in the price—can be arranged through travel agencies. A ten-percent service charge is added by law, and other tipping is at one’s discretion.

Some of the best resorts include Casa de Campo, not far out of Santo Domingo itself, the Club Med, Jack Tar Village, and Playa Dorado. The latter two are on the North Coast.

TRAVEL

The Ministry of Tourism offers assistance and information by contacting the Minister of Tourism in Santo Domingo at Tel 809-688-5537 or e-mail: rafaelsubervi@dominicanrepublic.com.

A good map and basic Spanish are needed for travel outside Santo Domingo or the Puerta Plato area. Be aware that road signs may be confusing or non-existent. Air-conditioned buses drive major routes, and opinion is divided as to how good the service is. Camping is permitted along beaches and in wilderness areas. Permission must be obtained for travel to some areas of the country designated as national parks. This can be done through the National Park Service in Santo Domingo, which also arranges day-long guided tours by bus to the National Parks of Los Haites and Isla Soma.



The entrance to Casa de Campo, a luxury resort not far out of Santo Domingo itself.

PART II

SOCIAL RELATIONSHIPS

Anyone familiar with Latin culture will be surprised at the apparent lack of formality here, readily observed by the use of “tu” and by the smiling, friendly faces. However, the same people who are so openly friendly function within the boundaries of a class society. They may be extremely friendly and genuine with a perceived equal, deferential with someone who holds a higher social position, and at the same time aggressive and demanding to those of a lower class. The perpetuation of these attitudes reinforce the notion that “The Dominican Republic is a deeply divided and unequal society. Vast gaps separate the classes, and the stark realities of class separation can be found everywhere—in clothes, housing, language, opportunities, jobs. As with many racially complex societies, these differences are both socioeconomic and racial.” (Wiarda and Kryzonek, p.51)

This does not discount the fact that there is class mobility from lower to middle class, and even onto the old, traditional upper class. Through education, entrepreneurial spirit, and professionalism, a racially mixed, small middle class is emerging. This group currently makes up about thirty-eight percent of the population. In light of the current economic

problems facing the country, the middle class will be the focus of political attention, in part because of the disproportional power to shape the future of the society.

SOCIAL GROUPS AND ROLES

The extended family is alive and well in the Dominican Republic. In this small country, where everyone knows everyone else, family ties are crucial in both business and politics. Marrying into the “right family” is a major concern parents have for their children.

Another important factor is that “machismo” must not be overlooked. For all intents and purposes, men control the power and the money of the country.

“The outward concern to appear strong and domineering, the prideful prance when others are looking, the sexual comments to passing females, the camaraderie among males, and the double standard that applies in the relations of husbands, wives, and mistresses, are but a few of the manifestations of an underlying need to appear superior and in control, sexually and otherwise. Male children are coddled, spoiled, and not disciplined; certainly this early experience is reflected in their later social and political behavior.” (Wiarda, p.19)

Through education, entrepreneurial spirit, and professionalism, a racially mixed middle class is emerging that now makes up about 38 percent of the population.

Organized women's groups such as "Mujeres en Desarrollo" (Women in Development) are slowly raising the consciousness of a few. And, although women are presently involved in every profession, as well as in industry and business, this is a new phenomenon of the developing middle class. The younger professional women, of upper or middle class status, may still live at home until they marry or if they divorce. Women's lives, while not as restricted as formerly, tend still to fall within traditional parameters.

There is a great deal of chivalry and deference for wives as well as other women, and special courtesy for the old. It is almost impossible, for example, for a woman to change a tire! However, young women especially the more blonde or "rubia," continually receive compliments in any public situation. If rejecting these remarks is the intent, it is impossible to do so by any means other than a stone face

and studied avoidance of eye contact. Any other response, no matter how rude, is considered positive.

Dominican culture values non-aggressive, non-assertive behavior for women. Women are expected to be more religious than men, and to preserve the traditional values. It is usually an old matriarch who preserves the family's protective traditions such as collecting the first rainwater of May for bathing, any superstitions, and any herbal lore of the family or neighborhood. Docile behavior is valued to such an extent that it is unwise to inquire too closely about children in a family. It is not at all unusual for a man to bring his illegitimate children home

to be reared by his wife; the natural mothers in these relationships are generally said to be dead and are not spoken of. Men commonly value such proofs of their virility.

Single people coming to the Dominican Republic will find that they are openly pursued by members of the opposite sex: even married people are not off limits. This is not to say that people here are promiscuous, but rather that they may juggle several relationships at the same time. The divorce

rate is one of the highest in the world. This does not indicate that marriage is not highly regarded. It is common for a man whose wife or woman has proved unfaithful not only to kill her and her lover, but to kill the children and himself as well.

Entertaining is almost never single-sex; men rarely hold stag or poker parties to the exclusion of their wives. Women will not only express their opinions freely in

the room where they commonly gather at any dinner party larger than eight couples, but they may join the men's groups. A woman who does this will not be excluded from the conversation, nor even frowned on; she is only unexpected! There are, however, still clubs that women can only join if sponsored by a man and places where women can only go if accompanied by a man.

While not as restricted as earlier, women's lives in the Dominican Republic tend still to fall within traditional parameters.

OFFICE BEHAVIOR

Behaviors one sees at the office do not differ greatly from the United States. The Dominicans are, perhaps, more socially graceful

and are not as eager to get immediately down to business but rather spend more time inquiring about friends and relatives. This grace also shows in the eloquent greetings in letters.

Dominicans rarely confront a supervisor with a problem but, instead, present a hypothetical case for solution. At the same time an employee is not likely to volunteer to take extra responsibility but may not hesitate when asked.

SERVANTS

In dealing with servants and other employees, it is extremely important to control one's temper. As a rule, North Americans are more brusque than is polite in a Latin culture, so under pressure of anger it is important to be extremely polite.

Certain practices may at first catch an American off guard. For example, while it is not common here to send a servant's children through school, neither is it unheard of. Servants may apply to employers for emergency aid, but they would generally seek aid through their extended family first. The wise employer will keep track of small loans, subtracting from pay or bonus later.

Servants have very definite job descriptions and often resist enlarged duties even for increased pay. Much of this is due to their perceived status. When asked to do a task above their status, they become intimidated and often do not do the job well. When asked to perform duties of lower status, they become offended. An example of this is asking a houseboy to shine shoes when one can find shoeshine boys roaming the streets in search of work.



Architecture in the Dominican Republic shows traces of Spanish influence.

PART III

BASIC CULTURAL VALUES

This is a small, traditional society in which everyone knows everybody. People therefore know what to expect of each other, getting and giving support and help within the extended family. No onus is attached to helping, or asking help of, people one knows; it is both accepted and expected. However, people feel very visible, and sometimes resent being forced into assigned roles. The rules are well understood and sanctions are strong against those who depart from the accepted. Those who opt out through alcoholism, for example, are pariahs, locked away, not admitted to exist, as are other undesirables such as crippled children. Both big-city privacy and anonymity are missing.

Status is provided by one's lineage, familial relationships, and economic standing; it is demonstrated by dress, possessions, and deportment. Therefore, money should be spent on these things as well as for the day's pleasures because money may not be so valuable tomorrow. The appearance of virtue is also important for status. But since "everybody knows," a really honest or virtuous person has immense earned prestige.

Children are not encouraged to experiment; rather they are encouraged to learn how things are and have been and will be done. They expect to live as their parents have, and in large part, they do so. The values and concepts of the past are highly

valued; older people do know best here. Adolescent rebellion is not yet too common.

While everybody deplores others' laziness, and wishes people worked harder, physical labor is either a hobby for the well-to-do, or for those who can earn a living no other way. Work is only for survival, in most cases. Haitians are usually employed for hard-labor jobs such as cutting sugar cane. Workaholism is rare.

CULTURAL SENSITIVITIES

Regardless of their personal beliefs or appearance, Dominicans believe Dominicans to be white, Catholic, and Spanish. Intellectuals here look to Spain as much as to the United States for approbation. Even though the folk religion shows strong African influences and its herb lore owes much to the original Taino Indians of the island, people think of themselves as Catholic regardless of daily practice. It is Catholicism that marries and buries them, and blesses the official functions of the culture. Ironically, Holy Week is often spent camping at the beach.

People describe themselves as "canela," cinnamon, and use the word "indio" on official documents in place of black. Historically, this is due to the atrocities committed here by blacks during the Haitian occupation, and the fear continues to be fueled by horror stories of voodoo practices among the immigrants and along the border. Dominicans consider themselves to be racially unprejudiced; North Americans dark enough to be taken for Haitians will bear the onus of anti-Haitian feeling.

None of these are topics that Dominicans willingly discuss.

Many Dominicans have very strong ties to the United States, especially to New York. Anything denigrating New York could be offensive.

This warmth of feeling exists side-by-side with the fact that Dominicans usually consider North Americans to be very cold people. Our attitude toward contact is no touching; Dominicans touch people. We like several more inches between people than Dominicans are comfortable with. You can see this in the soap operas, "telenovelas"; the North American viewer sees a couple so close together that he expects a clinch, but in reality the actors are in a scene discussing the weather. Our concept of privacy eschews staring; what North American women consider ogling is quite complimentary here.

There are a number of armed guards around Santo Domingo protecting stores, houses, and VIPs. In addition, most houses in the wealthy and middle-class neighborhoods have barred windows. Fortunately, the crime rate is relatively low and does not usually involve personal assaults.

Santo Domingo is not a noisy city, although the open construction and the use of concrete do make the houses more like sounding boards than the well-insulated houses of a temperate climate. It is a fairly clean city, with regular garbage pickup, grass cutting, and clearing of vacant lots. There is one noticeable sanitation problem due to a low water pressure; frequently facilities in rest rooms do not work adequately. For this reason, it is polite to throw used toilet paper in a wastebasket usually placed in the corner of the stall rather than into the commode, to prevent blockage. Some landlords prefer this behavior at all times in order to avoid any plumbing problems. Also, it is wise to carry one's own supply of toilet paper, especially when taking small children to the zoo, going to a ball game, or otherwise venturing out beyond the first-

class tourist hotels, fine restaurants, and the National Theater. Avoid gas station restrooms at all costs for reasons of personal hygiene in many respects.

Many Americans have had difficulties in business dealings and contractual arrangements with Dominicans. This is due in part to language problems, flexibility of time, and misinterpretation of good intentions, which, in a Dominican frame of reference, are often all that is necessary to satisfy the terms of a contract. In reality, various obstacles may make the end product greatly different from what was originally proposed.

Dominicans are by and large conservative, modest people, although first impressions may lead one to think otherwise. Nude bathing is illegal but it does take place at private beaches. It has proved scandalous both to Dominicans and Americans taking children for a family vacation at Club Med at Punta Cana on the East Coast, a resort frequented mainly by European and American tourists.

Two other aspects of Dominican life that may cause some problems for some North Americans are that it is considered appropriate for men to carry guns, and that alcohol is always available at parties, even those ostensibly for small children. Drinking is much more a part of family life here than it is in many parts of the United States.

The basic misconceptions that confuse relationships between North Americans and Dominicans can be attributed largely to the media. Movies and TV present us as aggressive and sexually promiscuous, an impression reinforced by the frank and open behavior our culture encourages. Similarly, life on a tropical island is presented as a long romance, an impression reinforced by the Dominican habit of moving slowly and gracefully, standing close together, and touching often. To be aware of these stereotyped misconceptions is to make the adjustment process easier.

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