

An-ti-ci-pa-tion (2008 edition)

Observations/ suggestions for La Romana, Dominican Republic 2008 (Dr. Bob)

1. General

Having observed and/or led many short term mission teams in La Romana from the United States over the past 15 years, most associated with various churches from around the country, I have seen that the teams who benefited the most - no matter their association - had an idea of the “why” of the trip before they traveled.

Our mission work trip is only Saturday to Saturday, 24 hours x 7 days, 168 hours – those hours speed by, believe me. It is good to have an idea in your mind of what you want to do in La Romana, what you want to give and what you expect to receive, before you leave the US. Your “why I came” may be revised (even daily) during the mission week anyway, and may not be the same on Saturday #2 as on Saturday #1.

Homework lesson #1: a place to start; WHY? Why am I making this trip? (there is no “right” or “wrong” answer here). This can be your first journal entry.

2. Cultural

We are being watched in La Romana. Every week there appears at Casa Pastoral (Avenida Santa Rosa #37, our address in La Romana) a new group of obvious north Americans – white, lost, and still wondering “why?” The people of the Iglesia Bautista Misionera Haitiana (IBMH, “our” church) know who we are: we are the new recruits to the mission there. The neighbors of Casa Pastoral know who we are: we are the visiting members (for a week) of the IBMH around the corner. We know who we are: we are the representatives of our church at home, the Second Baptist Church of Calais Maine. Eyes will be on us to see how we behave in all those roles; we do stick out with our white faces and white legs.

So this is why we have some rules; Bob’s short list:

- a. behave like you are being watched
- b. speak and dress appropriately at all times
- c. observe the team covenant rules
- d. defer to your team leaders.

We are visiting the Dominican Republic, another country, right? It looks like another country, but so do the country pavilions at Disney Epcot; this is not Epcot. This IS another country with a different language, different laws and customs, different church rules, and we are guests there. Do not expect Dominicans to conform to north American ways of doing things; we conform to theirs.

This brings me to one of the most difficult adjustment (for some): *island time*. We north Americans are so used to looking at our watches and trying to be punctual; that is common courtesy here in the US. In the Dominican Republic time is just another island breeze that comes and goes; we have a schedule to adhere to, but don’t get your coconut confused if our Dominican friends are way

off when expected to be on our norteamericano schedule. Go with it. You will be back to your clock watching here in the US soon enough.

3. Life at Casa Pastoral, and nearby

You will be secure in a locked compound in the city of La Romana. We have mens and womens dorms, also with locking doors. The mens dorm is a walk around the corner, just outside the compound, but also locked. These dorms MUST be locked at all times; there is considerable street traffic and little banditos can sneak in and out in a flash. Your team leaders will have keys which need to be guarded at all times. At night we have a night watchman.

Santa Rosa Avenue is VERY noisy. If you have trouble sleeping in a noisy area, bring ear plugs (this applies to the womens dorm. The mens dorm is like paradise, sort of).

Ladies of the church cook and clean for us. There are sheets, pillows, and pillowcases; bring your own towels (and bedding if you wish to leave it behind). The ladies cook our meals on American, not island, time, so if our schedule calls for breakfast at 7AM and dinner at 6PM it will be ready then, and *you be ready too*. We do not start eating until everyone is assembled, so think of your team mates and be on time please.

Casa Pastoral is home to some members of IBMH. This home is downstairs from the womens dorm. So this is someones home we are coming in to; please be considerate of their space and time.

Near to Casa Pastoral there are several gift shops (gifts are also available within the compound from a church member, Abdias), pizza/ice cream/fried chicken places, the phone store to phone home, and an ATM (pesos) and places to change dollars to pesos. *Do not travel alone. Let a team leader know if you are leaving the compound.*

4. Specific medical and personal considerations.

- a. required for the trip: Tetanus immunization, up to date (this might require a booster shot for some, if not updated within the past 10 years – ask your physician.
- b. Hepatitis B immunization required for medical team members, recommended for others.
- c. Hepatitis A immunization recommended but not required. (We live in a clean place, but work in dirty ones; observe personal cleanliness/hygiene).

d. Malaria prophylaxis, recommended, not required. We are recommending prophylaxis against Plasmodium falciparum malaria for this trip, based on recommendations of the Centers for Disease Control (www.CDC.gov). (Your physician will specifically prescribe for you. The adult dose is chloroquine phosphate 500. mg weekly, the first dose taken one week before arrival, then weekly while in country, and then weekly for four weeks after leaving the risk area - all doses taken on the same day of the week. Chloroquine should be taken on a full stomach to lessen the risk of nausea and upset stomach). Your physician will want to know this fact: all the Plasmodium falciparum malaria in the Dominican Republic is chloroquine sensitive.

d. mosquito repellent. Mosquitos are the most dangerous animal in the world – forget the Grizzlies or the Great White Shark – as mosquitos can carry numerous serious diseases. Malaria is one such disease against which we have prophylactic medication (chloroquine), but there are other diseases against which we have none. The CDC recommends insect repellents that contain DEET (30-50%) for the best protection.

e. other personal meds, etc. Besides your personal toilet kit (toothpaste, soap, shampoo etc), we recommend a couple of things: waterless hand wash and baby wipes (you can nearly take a body bath with one or two of these if need be – a practical skill you will learn while you are there). Pepto-Bismol and Imodium (loperamide) tablets – store brands OK. Not everyone will need these, but some team members should carry them.

5. Spiritual/ Personal Growth

We do go to church in La Romana and/or kilometer 6, Beraca Church, at least Sunday morning, usually Sunday evening, and other times during the week when the church has activities (we are welcome at all of these activities/ services).

We are very fortunate to have our pastor with us on this trip; our schedule will include devotional time. Do bring 1) your Bible if you are a faithful reader, and 2) another reading piece in the area of personal/ spiritual growth (not a novel), a Max Lucado book or similar.

Journal. You likely have started this already in Maine, but DO keep it up in La Romana; those hours (only 168 hours, remember) of the week not only speed by, but they become a blur. A journal will be the only true way you have of reconstructing your thoughts and ideas after you have returned to Maine. You will find time for this on our team schedule.

Homework assignment #2. Background reading. I have several books to recommend for you quick readers but the one I would suggest to start, as a general history of the region, is Caribbean by James Michner. This is

a big book showing the European introduction into the Caribbean; Michner wrote historical novels with accurate history, events, and people, but fictional depictions of life.

“Those who do not read have no advantage over those who cannot.” – attributed to Mark Twain.

6. Packing

- what to bring for yourself (see separate “personal packing list”)
- what to bring to give away (see separate list “medicines we always need”)

Passport/ visa. Make a photocopy of your passport front page; you can carry this with you in case you need an ID, and we will lock up your actual passport until the trip home. A visitor visa is required for entry into the Dominican Republic; you buy this at the airport on arrival in Santo Domingo, before Customs; this costs \$10US (at my last visit) – bring a \$10 bill for this.

On the airline we each are allowed one carry-on, one personal piece (purse, briefcase, or camera bag), and two checked bags (NOT more than 50 lb each – WEIGH). The checked bags can have personal items that do not fit in the two carried ones, but as a team we count on the checked bags for our supplies; the supplies for our trip are largely medical (there are some other items: school supplies, toys, etc.)

Follow the Transportation Security Administration (TSA) rules for carry on items.

We should be able to bring some school supplies, toys, sports equipment etc; this will be discussed as a team. We cannot bring enough of these extras for everyone - our priorities are to the medicines and medical supplies.

The suitcases should be filled to capacity for the trip down; they can be empty on the trip back, or filled with Dominican coffee, vanilla, and memories. You begin this week with an open heart and a full suitcase, and you will return with a full heart (guaranteed) and an empty suitcase.

7. Last word (for now)

I would like to offer at this point some focused and insightful pearls of wisdom and advice, but I am not that wise.

Some things I do know: I know that you will get out of this week at least what you put into it, not speaking of material things but of the energy you bring and the compassion you show. The light of our own candle is not diminished by lighting someone else’s. I know that if you have been led to this time and place with needs, either for yourself and your own spiritual growth, or for unselfish needs, that those needs can be met. Let go!

This week can be something special, or something usual – either way I know that it can be something meaningful to you, if you let it.

And speaking of “something”, and in the way of the last word: some “something” always goes a little bit wrong with our best laid plans – a lost bag, a last minute schedule change. Be cool; that is why we make so many plans ahead of time, so that we can be ready for the little surprises.

Not to worry. Be happy. Live on *island time*, for just this time.