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Kimaya Bok



Dominican Republic Seita Scholars Study Abroad

CEHD 3050

My study abroad experience in the Dominican Republic changed my life! I will forever be grateful that I had the opportunity to study abroad in the Dominican Republic. I would recommend studying abroad to other Seita scholars! I would tell other seita scholars that no matter how great I say it will be and how much of a wonderful time they will have. It is so sad to think that so many students miss out on such a wonderful opportunity because they take it for granted. In my entire life, I had a dream of studying abroad and experiencing a different environment. Before I left for the Dominican Republic I was nervous and scared. I could not wait to embark on all of the adventures that I knew the Dominican Republic could offer, but I was afraid of not knowing anyone, and being alone. I never felt alone and I fell in love with the Dominican Republic from the moment I stepped off that plane. I met so many people from all over the world and also people from different states in the United States whenever we would go out for dinner every day. Even walking through a place like Zona Colona was a cultural experience. One of the best parts of studying abroad was being able to make new friends. I can now say I have friends in the Dominican Republic and I have been staying in touch with them on social media.

I learned so much about myself and I'm so grateful for meeting new people. The Dominican Republic has a strong cultural identity. When we think of the Dominican Republic, we often think

about the stereotypical bachata dancers that eat plantains or drink tropical drinks; however, the Dominican Republic is much more than that. The Dominican Republic stood out to me because I felt I knew so much and so little about it. I realized that I knew about the American perception of the Dominican Republic and not the real country. I will always have so many beautiful memories of my experience in the Dominican Republic. Having the opportunity to spend time with people in the Dominican Republic opened my eyes to the way that things are done in other countries.

Cristo Rey public school



A little public school called Cristo Rey is situated in one of the least developed regions of the Dominican Republic. Imagine being ill by the water you drink while growing up in a slum, struggling for food and your survival. Imagine yourself as a child with aspirations that you are dubious you would be able to realize owing to a lack of finances and support. Imagine being unable to behave normally as a child because you are forced to mature into an adult at such a young age.

Due to having experienced terrible events in the past, I was able to connect with some of the pupils during my visit to Cristo Rey Public School and I saw myself in those students. Due to language issues and the fact that most of the pupils were so shy, it was initially difficult to communicate with the students. The pupils became more communicative and at ease when we started working on the career college. The majority of pupils desired careers as baseball players, flight attendants, models, attorneys, and physicians. Hearing them talk about their goals and how driven they were to change underprivileged neighborhoods and free their families from poverty was inspiring.

I recall talking with their teacher Miquel about the resources the school needed to support the pupils after I finished working with the students. He informed me that a shortage of resources was a significant problem for the school and that occasionally teachers would spend their funds to provide the pupils with supplies. Fighting poverty and fostering social and economic progress in a nation both depend heavily on education. In the DR, where more than 40% of people live in poverty, there are few educational options and resources. The lowest classes suffer the most as a result of these obstacles' effects. Because the entire experience was so delicate and I had to see myself through those pupils, it affected me when we left Cristo Rey Public School. Even though I was supposed to encourage the students, it was them who had actually inspired me .

UNIBE & UASD



During my study abroad I was able to visit two universities. One of the universities was a public university called UASD and UNIBE. My experience in the two universities was quite different. The students at the public university were very welcoming and outgoing. When I was around them I was very comfortable and it was very easy for me to keep our conversations going. Before I left we were able to exchange our contact information and I can now say I have friends in the Dominican Republic. I didn't like my experience at the private university because the students were very ignorant and they were not social. Which made me feel so uncomfortable because and confused. I had to come up with different topics such as what activities we do at Western Michigan University and that was something that caught what made them open up. During my experience at the two universities, I was able to learn so much about the Dominican Republic's education system. In the Dominican Republic, there are two main types of universities: private and public. Private universities are privately owned and funded through tuition fees and donations, while public universities are government-funded institutions. This discussion aims to provide a more detailed analysis of the key differences between private and public universities in the Dominican Republic and shed light on why public universities have higher enrollment than private universities. One significant factor that influences higher enrollment in public universities is the cost of education. Public universities in the Dominican Republic generally have lower tuition fees compared to private universities.

This makes them more accessible to a larger portion of the population, especially students from lower-income backgrounds. The lower financial burden attracts a significant number of students who may not have the means to afford private university tuition fees. Public universities in the Dominican Republic often offer a broader range of academic programs and faculties compared to private universities. This diversity gives students more options to choose from based on their desired fields of study. Public universities usually have a well-established curriculum, covering various disciplines such as medicine, engineering, humanities, and social sciences. For instance, the Universidad Autónoma de Santo Domingo (UASD), a prestigious public university in the Dominican Republic, offers over 200 undergraduate and graduate programs across multiple faculties. This extensive program selection showcases the academic breadth and reputation that public universities can offer. What I learned from the two universities is that "It is your character and behavior that determine your worth as a person. Anyone with enough money can buy any

expensive things they desire, but no one can buy class. This was one of the things I had witnessed with the students from the private university compared to the students at the public university.

Muñecas Limé, also known as Dominican faceless doll



During our second day in Santo Domingo, we went for a tour around Zona Colonial with our tour guide. The tour guide was able to show us around so many historical buildings in the Zona Colonial area. During our tour, we came across a souvenir store that was selling faceless dolls and I was so confused why the dolls didn't have any of my eyes. The tour guide was kind enough to explain

that the dolls are known as the Muñecas Limé, also known as Dominican faceless dolls. Faceless dolls are traditionally handcrafted dolls made in the Dominican Republic. These dolls are unique because they have no facial features, representing the idea that beauty comes from within rather than from external appearances. They are typically made with colorful fabrics and are dressed in traditional Dominican clothing. The dolls are often used as decorative items and are also seen as symbols of Dominican culture and heritage. The purpose of Muñecas Limé is primarily artistic and cultural. They serve as a way to preserve and promote Dominican traditions and craftsmanship. These dolls are often used in cultural events, exhibitions, and as souvenirs for tourists visiting the Dominican Republic. They have also become popular collectibles among locals and visitors alike. Before I left the Dominican Republic I was able to purchase the faceless dolls for my mother. If there is anything I have learned regarding the faceless dolls is that we are all the same, beautiful, and unique in our ways .

The Dominican Republic Capital



During my visit to the Dominican Republic Capital, we were shown around the entire building. The building had a lot of historical pictures on the wall such as their former presidents. After the tour we were able to sit and listen to one of their deputies speak about the Dominican Republic laws and their entire government. The deputy we met was called Deputy Jose Rodriguez and he spoke to us regarding a bill he had presented to the House of Chamber regarding early child

marriages in the Dominican Republic. Deputy Rodriguez asserts that poverty is a significant factor in the occurrence of child marriages in the Dominican Republic. The early child marriage law was passed in the Dominican Republic in 2021 to protect girls and young women from the harmful effects of child marriage. Child marriage is a violation of human rights and can have a devastating impact on the lives of girls and young women, including increased risk of early pregnancy, childbirth complications, and maternal mortality, as well as limited educational and economic opportunities. The new law prohibits marriage for anyone under the age of 18, with no exceptions. I went on into asking him a question regarding whether the bill he had presented regarding child marriages was going to make an impact and he stated that It is too early to say definitively whether the new law has had a significant impact on child marriage rates in the Dominican Republic, but it is a positive step in the right direction. The law has been praised by human rights groups and advocates for girls' rights, who believe that it will help to protect girls from early marriage and the harmful consequences that it can have on their lives.

If there is anything I have learned throughout my entire visit to the Dominican Republic capital is that marriage is a terrific means to bring together two souls who are grown enough to handle life's obstacles because it is a pure bond of love and harmony. Child marriage, however, is an unethical approach to joining two individuals who do not even understand the realities of life. They are somehow persuaded or compelled to be married to an unknown person even if they have no idea how to handle good and terrible scenarios. Gender inequality and the idea that girls and women are somehow less valuable than boys and men are the main causes of child marriage in the majority of underdeveloped nations and some African societies. Child marriage is a difficult topic. The practice is fueled and maintained by poverty, illiteracy, cultural norms, and insecurity. The 'weight' of your daughter's marriage can be seen as a way to lessen financial stress by shifting it to her husband's family. Young women should be allowed to go to school and to fulfill their dreams.

The Unknown Black woman who built the 1st Hospital in the DR



During our tour in the Zona Colonial area, we came across an old building and the tour guide informed us that it was the first hospital that was built in Santo Domingo by an African woman. Since the tour instructor did not reveal her name, I decided to look up her name and learn more about who she was. The name of the African woman healer who built the first hospital in Santo Domingo in the 1500s was never discovered for several reasons. First, women in general were not given much credit for their accomplishments in the 1500s. Second, this woman was African, and at the time, Africans were considered to be inferior to Europeans. As a result, her contributions were often overlooked or ignored. Finally, there is very little written documentation about her life and work. What little we know about her comes from oral histories and accounts from Spanish colonists. The works of the faceless black heroine, which have been suppressed by colonial authorities for many years, were depicted in records from the 16th century that was found by scholars at the Dominican Studies Institute at the City University of New York. Many descendants of enslaved Africans in Santo Domingo claim that the heroic healer's name has not been prominently mentioned in history books because efforts have been made to downplay her contributions to the city's healthcare system. Her name was never discovered. She provided her services at the location of the San Nicolás Hospital in Bari. She is thought to have taken advantage of her vast knowledge of African herbal medicine and applied it to treat the illnesses of individuals who sought her help. She was praised as being devout and giving free medical care to a lot of the needy. I'm really glad I learned a tiny bit about her past, and I hope her name gets out there one day.

In conclusion , As an international relations major, the idea of studying abroad was clearly a positive development in my academic career. Studying abroad was a life-changing experience that provided me with the ideal chance to advance my language skills while exploring the country and mingling with the locals. I choose to study abroad because I usually find that learning is more fun when I'm in a different setting. I have held the opinion that studying abroad is useful for a variety of good reasons. It goes without saying that studying abroad and pursuing a profession in international relations will help me learn things and experience things that a typical classroom setting would not be able to. A new cultural environment can be intimidating at first, but for me, it was thrilling. I was able to tackle new challenges, find new solutions, and identify new qualities and abilities.

