

Environmental Service in the Dominican Republic

In partnership with Rustic Pathways Travel
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Open to grades 9-12

Dates of Travel: December 9-17, 2016

Travel Fee: \$2600

Minimum number of students: 12

Course Description:

This hands-on course will allow students to explore how environmental challenges can be addressed at the grassroots level. Working with a local marine research and conservation group, students will learn about the issues involved in marine protection and conservation in the Dominican Republic. From their home base in the beach town of Bayhíbe, students will examine coral reef health and explore the indigenous and invasive species that are part of the reef's ecosystem. Service learning projects include the construction of coral structure, performing erosion analysis, marine monitoring of dolphins and joining an ongoing reef analysis study. Students also explore the interrelationship between connecting ecosystems, and how urban development impacts environmental protection efforts. In addition to their work in the field, the group will learn more about the history and culture of the DR.

Days on Campus – December 6-7, 2016

Students will spend two days on preparing for their trip by learning more about the Dominican Republic and the environmental issues they will be examining while there.

No class meeting on December 8 to pack and prepare for travel.

Travel to Dominican Republic

Day 1 – December 9, 2016

Upon arriving at Las Americas International Airport (SDQ) in Santo Domingo and meeting our Rustic Pathways staff, the group will take a short bus ride to their new home in the beach town of Bayahíbe. After enjoying a late dinner, the group will check in to the hotel.

Day 2 – December 10, 2016

Today after breakfast it's time to begin your hands-on marine training! The group will head over to the Fundemar offices, a marine research and protection agency established to address the issues affecting the marine environment in the Dominican Republic. The group will meet the Fundemar team, learn more about the organization's mission, and discuss the dolphin and marine life conservation projects they will be working on during the trip. Because we know there's no better way to learn than jumping in, be ready to get in the water right away as you familiarize yourself with the tools and techniques of marine life conservation. For the day, the group will divide up to accomplish two different projects. The two groups will spend the morning working on either coastal cleanup or marine monitoring.

Then you'll have a laid back lunch back in town and after get right back to it for more service in the afternoon. Before dinner the group will also have some time to relax on the beach or join in a pickup game of volleyball with the locals. Can you catch a little of the local accent?

Tonight following dinner, the group will re-convene for the first of its nightly discussions and reflections. Especially after the first full day in country, these reflection periods are an essential part in processing the travel experience. Students will also be given time to journal each day and encouraged to reflect on their experiences both individually and collectively.

Day 3 & 4 – December 11 & 12, 2016

For the next two days spend your days working on marine life and costal restoration service projects. Work with Fundemar to measure Bayahibe's beach erosion, a factor that impacts coral reef health, as well as the health of the animals that call the reef home. You'll also build buoys out of recycled materials that will serve as moorings for fishing boats and keep fishermen from dropping anchors on the fragile coral reefs. Other projects include the construction of coral structure, performing erosion analysis, marine monitoring or doing reef analysis. These projects may alter closer to the time of your program, but are great examples of your projects. After a long day working in the field with researchers, the group will be sure to enjoy a typical Dominican dinner and take in the beautiful colors of the Caribbean sunset on the white sandy beach.

Day 5 – December 13, 2016

We hope you got a good night's rest because today you'll be working alongside the research team at *Fundemar* to learn about the history of the lionfish in the Caribbean. This invasive species poses a significant threat to the ecosystem of the Dominican coast and is a major project priority for Fundemar. You'll get a chance to work with a taxidermist to learn about lionfish anatomy and physiology, and hone your own recipe for cooking this fish – a project that has been taking off in recent years to encourage restaurants to help control the populations of this destructive (yet delicious) species.

Day 6 – December 14, 2016

In the morning, the group will continue monitoring dolphin activity and restoring coral reefs by gathering water samples. After enjoying a typical Dominican meal on the beach, the group will return to the Fundemar office to analyze their samples and study how the condition of the water impacts marine life. To further understand the connecting ecosystems, the group will head to Padre Nuestro to visit the springs that bring water to the ocean. The group will also explore the cave paintings of the ancient Taino people who lived in the Dominican Republic, and learn more about the nation's history.

Day 7 – December 15, 2016

The group will take a break from service work today and take a catamaran tour to Saona Island, where you will learn about the beautiful national park and enjoy its beautiful beaches. Meet some conservationists working with turtle populations on the island, swim and snorkel in the ocean, and visit the natural pools. Before dinner, get

together with the Fundemar team for a final reflection of the week and do a presentation on the work you have done. In the evening, the group will gather for a final evening discussion to reflect on the things they've seen, the people they've met, and the perspectives they've gained during their trip.

Day 8 – December 16, 2016

After packing their bags and enjoying a leisurely breakfast, students will head back to Santo Domingo to enjoy their last day in the city. Explore the Zona Colonial, a UNESCO world heritage site and home to the first university, cathedral and hospital in the Americas. The group will take a guided tour of the walled city and learn about the deep history of this first European settlement. Then have a special dinner and dance show at a typical Dominican restaurant.

Day 9 – December 17, 2016

Enjoy your last Dominican breakfast before heading to the airport for your flight home. We are sure your exciting week of service and adventure in the Dominican Republic will be an experience you never forget!

WHAT IS INCLUDED

- Roundtrip airfare from Los Angeles
- 8 nights' accommodation
- All meals in Dominican Republic
- All activities as outlined in itinerary
- All airport taxes and departure fees
- All fees, community service donations, and guide tips

WHAT IS NOT INCLUDED

Insurance coverage; any applicable luggage fees imposed by airlines; airport meals or snacks.