



# Helping Hands Unlimited

*Sharing the Son with those we serve*

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## Team Member's Guide To Enhance Your Mission Experience

This guide is a result of experiences, suggestions and even a few not-so-good experiences that should help you prepare for your trip to the Dominican Republic. Helping Hands Unlimited has been working with your team leaders to put this trip together. This guide is a compilation of ideas which will hopefully help you to prepare for your trip.

The most important thing to do is to ask questions. You can ask your leaders. You can also contact Helping Hands Unlimited to ask them. Our phone number is 765-730-3618 or our e-mail [helpinghandsu@gmail.com](mailto:helpinghandsu@gmail.com) If we do not know the answer, we will find out.

**Our Commitment** is to the mission work that we are involved with in the Dominican Republic. We are there to provide assistance where we can to help open the door for sharing the Gospel with all Dominicans. Our second commitment is to you to help you effectively work and minister to help people in need. If you have a special talent or skill that you feel you would like to put to work in an effective way, please let us know about it so we can try to plug you in to some things where you can effectively serve.

**A Brief History** is always helpful. Helping Hands Unlimited is mission organization with a lot of experience in setting up meaningful mission experiences for teams such as yours. Besides work teams, in the Dominican Republic we work with Christian schools, providing them help and we operate sponsorship programs for their students. We also work with a home for girls, a Christian radio station, churches, and some other small programs. Our website has current information about our work.

Our bottom line is that in everything we do there needs to be the opportunity to share God's love and to provide each person with the opportunity to make an educated decision to accept Christ. We also want to see relationships built. The ministries we work with are having an impact on their communities. They are giving people hope.

Dominicans are a warm, loving and friendly group of people. It is our hope that you have the opportunity to get to know a few of them personally while you are there.

At this point, let's get into some of the important things you need to think about before you get there.

### **Cultural Issues**

Be prepared for culture shock. If you have never been there, you will experience it. The Dominican culture is much different than in North America. If you feel a little overwhelmed, talk to someone about it. It helps to share that experience with someone else. It may also give you a different perspective on what you are experiencing.

You need to realize you are an ambassador of the country you are from. You need to be on your best behavior. The guesthouse has several rules that will be presented to you on your arrival. Following them is in your best interest and the best interest of the mission. Remember, if all else fails, you could be asked to leave but only as a last resort.

### **A Few Rules**

There are a few rules that will help you out on your stay. We will present them to you when you arrive. We do ask that you follow those rules. Many relate to your safety.

One thing we do ask is that you are cautious in handing things out to people or kids. Please think about it before you do it. At times, there have been mini-riots in the frenzy of trying to get whatever is being handed out. We do ask that you do not give things out outside the gate at the guesthouse. If you have questions about giving something out, ask us where and how to do that. The Dominican Republic is a relatively safe place as long as you use common sense. We recommend that you travel in groups. It is not good to be alone in a foreign country. We also ask that individuals do not leave the guesthouse compound at night, even in small numbers. If you need to go somewhere, we will help you out. Petty thievery and robberies are the two largest crimes in the DR. That is the reason for using caution.

The one other word of caution comes from the desire of young Dominican males to romance young American women and hopefully find a way to America. (and for any guys, vice-versa) Some of the things that young women do in North America are translated as being sexually promiscuous. Men also need to consider their actions as well. Please be aware of what you are communicating through your words, dress and actions. We want you to have a good trip and you will have one if you follow the above advice.

We try to provide as much protection for your things at the guesthouse as we can but sometimes things happen, especially when we are gone for the day. That is the reason we do collect passports and money and try to keep it safe while you are there. For those of you smarter than us, you may think you can take care of your own passport. We had one of those people on a recent trip. Someone broke into their room at the resort and took their money and their passport. Everyone else's was safe in our procession. We do know the process on how to get a replacement passport rather quickly but it usually ends up costing \$300 US or more to do this. That extra cost would be at your expense. That is why we say we are not responsible for lost or stolen articles but we will do everything we can to help protect them.

### **Passport and Immigration Information**

Having a current passport is a requirement for all trip participants. Your passport must have at least 30 days left from the beginning of your trip before it expires.

You will not need a visa but you will need a Visitor's Card (now more like a receipt). The card needs to be purchased at the arriving Dominican airport prior to going through Immigration. It is on the right as you enter the Immigration Hall. The permit will cost you \$10 US cash. You can purchase it by standing in line to purchase it from a live person in the kiosk or you can use the ATM-like machines next to the kiosk. Usually there is no line at the machines. The purchased card (or receipt-like paper) needs to be handed to an inspector before going through the area where your passport is stamped. This is the area where you will need to show your passport and immigration form. You should have received this during your flight. If not, forms are available in the Immigration hall. Just a heads up; When you leave the country, you will be filling out another similar form before enter the secured area and pass through Customs before you go to your gate.

**One important note:** On the forms both coming and going, there are two lines that can be a little confusing. They are the embarkation and disembarkation lines. You will only fill in one of those lines. When you arrive, fill out the embarkation line. List the city you are arriving in (ei: Santo Domingo and your flight number). When you leave the country, fill out the disembarkation line. List the city you are departing from (ei: Santo Domingo and your flight number). One other note: list the reason for your trip as "Pleasure".

We will provide your group leader with the address to use as your in-country destination. This address can also be used as directions for any lost luggage will be delivered by the airlines. Please make sure your HHU host receives the lost luggage tags as soon as you can get them to that person. That is one reason to make sure you hang on to your luggage tickets. The other reason is you will need those tickets to match with your luggage when you depart the luggage area at the Santo Domingo airport.

### **Insurance**

Helping Hands Unlimited has purchased an insurance policy for you. This is a medical / travel policy. Details of the policy coverage can be seen on our website. The policy was purchased for you through Seven Corners. The actual policy is from Lloyd's of London. The most recent copy of our policy can be viewed on our website under Trip /

2015 Insurance Information (<http://helpinghandsunlimited.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/01/Insurance-Information.pdf>).

You need to understand the limits and amount of coverage. Most generally, Dominican healthcare requires cash payments upon service. We will try to help by lending you cash for the payment but we expect reimbursement as soon as possible. Once you return home, you can submit your documentation to the insurance company for reimbursement. The coverage starts the morning of your flight to the Dominican Republic and normally covers you until the day you return, ending at mid-night. In the event you need medical care while you are traveling, you can use your own medical insurance or the trip's insurance. For that reason you will be sent by email an insurance card with the policy information. We suggest you print that off and bring it with you and your trip.

You need to understand this is limited coverage and you will be responsible for any expenses not covered by this insurance coverage.

If you would like to purchase additional coverage, please let us know and we will give you contact information for the company we are using. We can provide you with the names of some companies that do provide this insurance (but we do not endorse any company).

#### **Important Notice regarding the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act**

This insurance is not subject to, and does not provide certain insurance benefits required by the United States Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act ("PPACA"). The insurance benefits provided by this policy are stated in your policy documents, and do not include any additional benefits required by the PPACA. The PPACA requires certain U.S. residents and citizens to obtain PPACA compliant insurance coverage. In certain circumstances penalties may be imposed on U.S. residents and citizens who do not maintain PPACA compliant insurance coverage. You should consult your attorney, insurance agent or tax professional to determine if the PPACA's requirements are applicable to you.

#### **Health Information**

Helping Hands Unlimited highly recommends that you have an up-to-date tetanus vaccination. Medical personnel only need to make sure that they have been vaccinated for Hepatitis. There are other recommended vaccinations. We recommend you talk to your healthcare provider about what they feel is necessary. Then you need to make a decision regarding what you would like to do. None of the vaccinations are mandatory for travel at this time. More information can be found at the website for the Center for Disease Control.  
<http://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel/destinations/dominican-republic.aspx>.

There are some mosquito carried illnesses in the DR. The easiest way to avoid problems is to use insect repellent (with DEET) multiple times during the day (including before you go to bed.)

Cholera is sometimes a health issue in the Dominican Republic. We will do everything in our power to make sure you have good food and drinking water available for your use (both at our guesthouse and at the work site). Please do not use water out of the faucet for anything that goes into your mouth. Brush your teeth with bottled or treated water. We will provide times when we will have chlorine water available for you to sanitize your personal water bottles. We suggest (if you are concerned) for you to talk to your healthcare provider to get a prescription of Cipro for you to use in the event you get diarrhea.

Clean purified drinking water will be available for your use. We will have an Igloo container with fresh purified water available most of the time. Occasionally we will have Gatorade available, too. Bottled water and soft drinks are usually safe if used straight from the bottle. We will be using purified ice. Not all ice is purified, so please be careful.

Hydration is very important. A key sign that you are hydrating properly is if you urinating at your normal times and amount. If you are not, you need to drink more water or Gatorade. This is a very serious concern regarding keeping you healthy during your trip.

We will have a first aid kit available for your use during the trip.

The places we will take you to eat are relatively safe. There are always a few common precautions to consider. First is to be cautious about eating uncooked foods. Salads look great but unless they are washed in treated chlorine water (which is the case at the guesthouse); they can cause you some problems. We do not recommend that you eat food from the street vendors or small shops. One exception is when visiting in Dominican home; coffee and soft drinks are usually safe. So are cookies and pastries. When in doubt, don't eat it. It is better to be safe than to pay for it later.

***If you even become just a little ill, please let us know right away.***  
***We do have access to professional medical care.***

### **If You Want it, Bring It**

Whether it is medical equipment and supplies or construction tools (whatever your team is doing), if you think you will want it, bring it. In some cases, it might be found, so it is appropriate to bring money along to purchase things like that. Medical supplies and instruments are not that easy to find. If there is something you want, it is best if you bring it with you.

We always encourage you to leave that tool, instrument or supplies for future groups to use.

### **What To Wear**

We ask that you dress rather conservatively. Shorts should not be any shorter than the length of your fingertips. Halter tops and spaghetti string tops are prohibited. Sleeveless tops are fine as long as they are conservative. It is always good to bring a good skirt and blouse or good dress pants and a nice shirt for the occasions to go to church, out to supper or other special occasions. Please be sure to bring good comfortable shoes, whether work or casual shoes. T-shirts, shorts and jeans are fine during the work day and most evenings, as long as we are not going to someplace special (such as church or a restaurant). You can wear what you want while we are at the resort.

Laundry services vary at the places we take teams. We will let you know if it is available prior to the trip, but if you do not hear from us, you need to assume there is no laundry service available during your trip.

If you wish to leave some of your clothing for needy people, please feel free to do so. Please make sure the clothing is usable. We normally allow the guesthouse people to distribute the clothing after we leave or we can take them to the Girl's Orphanage.

### **What To Pack**

Luggage you don't mind getting damaged	Insect Repellent (that includes DEET)
Sunscreen, sunglasses, hat	Kleenex & Toilet Paper (travel packs)
Soap	Hand Sanitizer
Toiletry articles	Personal medications (in original containers)
Flashlight and extra batteries	Personalized water bottle
Camera (not an expensive one)	Spending money
Work gloves	Spare eye glasses
Swimsuit	Towel and washcloth

We do encourage you to bring snacks and any group games you can play in our spare evening hours. There is a swimming pool we can use at the guesthouse.

Things like your mp3 players are fine with us as long as your leaders are fine with them. We would suggest not taking them outside of the location we will be staying.

### **What Not To Pack**

Needless to say..... **\*\*LEAVE YOUR VALUABLES AT HOME\*\***

**Calling Home**

Regular calling and texting fees on a cell phone are very expensive. We recommend everyone just set their phones on Airplane Mode and turn on your Wifi while in the DR. Most generally we will have access to the internet at the guesthouse. Remember, the service is usually slow. We suggest you keep your use to a minimum so others can check emails. The service may be good enough that you will be able to talk to someone at home through Facebook phone, Skype, etc.

HHU will try to post photos and brief reports on the HHU Face book page. Please let your relatives and friends know they can look at Helping Hands Unlimited's Facebook page. It is also easy to access the Facebook page through a link at the top of the HHU website.

**Emergency Phone Calls (from home)**

We have 2 phone numbers to use in the event someone back home needs to contact you in the event of an emergency. Those numbers are 1-809-665-5601 or 1-829-709-7550. Even though they may ring into a voicemail, please do not leave a voicemail message on these Dominican numbers. If you cannot reach a live person at either number, please call 765-730-3544 and give the message to Carol Meyer. She knows how to find us quickly. Please use any of these for emergencies only. Please use these numbers if your flights are delayed and you will arrive in the Dominican Republic at least an hour later than what you told us.

There is no incoming regular mail. Please do not send anything by UPS or other carriers without first checking with us. Most generally these types of shipments will get hung up in customs and not make it there on time.

Time Zone—Atlantic Standard Time (Same as Eastern Daylight Time during the summer, one hour earlier during the winter months). Flight times are on local time.

**Luggage Requirements**

We always suggest you go to the website of your airlines to see what their requirements are.

The following information comes from the American Airlines website and is subject to change at any time by the airlines: As of this writing, you are permitted to take one carry-on bag and one personal items (such as a purse, computer bag, etc.) The size limitations are listed below. You are allowed one checked bag for free. Any additional checked bags will cost \$40 US for each additional bag.

***Number of Bags Allowed\****

*One personal item: No charge*

*One bag carry-on: No charge*

*One bag checked: No charge*

***Size and Weight Per Bag Allowed\****

*36 in/91 cm (total dimensions)*

*45 in/115 cm (carry-on) No larger than 22 in/56 cm long, 14 in/36 cm wide and 9 in/23 cm high*

*62 in/158 cm (checked)*

*\*\*50 lbs./23 kgs (checked)*

\*\* They really do mean 50 lbs. and not 51 lbs. If you have any doubt, it is better to go a little lighter rather than trying to be exact. If the HHU rep happens to be traveling with you, they normally have a luggage scale to help to get your luggage weight under the limit.

We highly recommend that your luggage is either a suitcase or duffel. Please do not consider cardboard boxes as luggage. We have seen problems with both the airlines and customs when things are shipped in boxes. This section is subject to the rules of each airline and can be changed at any time.

Remember, part of the insurance policy we have on you covers some travel items, including lost luggage.

**Luggage Labeling**

Your luggage should have your name and home address on it.

Lost luggage is the responsibility of your group. Work with your team leader to report the lost luggage before you leave the baggage area at the airport. The airlines will need to know where to deliver the lost luggage. Your group leader will have the information of where you will be staying. In the event you are arriving on a different flight, we will send you this information prior to your trip. We suggest you print this off and take it with you. Please hang on to the tags for your lost luggage. Once you arrive at the location where you will be staying, please tell the HHU representative about your lost luggage and give them your luggage tickets. Most generally the luggage is delivered during the day while you will be away. We will make sure someone is there to receive your luggage when it arrives.

While we are on the subject of luggage, after you pick up your luggage off the carousel in Santo Domingo, you will need to present your airline luggage claim stickers as you and your luggage are leaving that area.

**Taking Photos**

Taking photos is fine as long as you use some common sense when taking a photo. It is always nice if you ask someone if you can take their photo before you take it. For example, all you need to ask is "Photo?" They will understand and shake their heads yes or no. Please be sensitive to the situation you are in and use your discretion in taking photos. If you question whether it is okay to take a photo, please ask the HHU representative.

Please do not bring expensive cameras or video equipment without talking to us first. Sometimes, the bulk of the camera and long lenses are very intimidating. An inexpensive pocket camera will provide you with good quality photos without offending someone (and making you look like you are rich).

HHU also takes some photos and videos of the trip. Many times we make most of these photos available on Shutterfly for trip members to download after their trip. We also use photos on our daily Facebook postings during the trip. We will use our best discretion and try not to post photos that reflect a negative image of anyone (team members or the people we are serving). Helping Hands Unlimited does occasionally use photos and videos taken during trips to promote the work of Helping Hands Unlimited. Those photos could possibly be used in presentations, on brochures, on our website, on Facebook and in other advertising opportunities. We use our best discretion in using these photos and videos. Helping Hands Unlimited does not ask everyone to sign waivers allowing us to use any images of you. If you do not want your image(s) used, we ask that you tell us and we will avoid using any photos of you and / or your group.

**Money**

You will not need much spending money since most of your expenses are covered with your fees. But if you want to purchase any personal items, like souvenirs, ice cream, offerings or whatever, it is nice to have some cash with you.

We will do what we can to exchange money for you. Currently the exchange rate is about \$23 US will give you \$1,000 RD. The best way to handle this is for every exchange you will need one \$20 bill and \$3 \$1 bills. Please do not count on us to make change in US dollars. That is the reason we ask you to bring exact change in those multiples. (This section is subject to change if the exchange rate varies.)

**Tipping**

At the restaurants and other places we go as a group, the HHU representative will take care of the tipping. There are a couple of exceptions to this. One is when we are at the resort, if you allow one of the bell boys to take your luggage to your room. In that case, you need to give the bell boy a tip.

The second exception is at the guesthouse. We have a small tip built in for them but it is minimal. What we suggest is that we tip as a group. If you would like to participate, please give your contribution to the HHU representative. They will then divide the money up among the guesthouse staff. This is not part of their pay. They

are making a little money for their work. The tips help them and their families when there are no groups there and they do not have work to do.

### **Attention Student Sponsors**

If you sponsor a student at one of the schools we sponsor and you would like to see your child, please bring your information with you and give it to the guesthouse hosts when you arrive. You will need the child's name and number and what school they attend. Every effort will be made to give you the opportunity to see your child before you leave. It is appropriate to give gifts to the student. We do ask that you do not give them money.

If you do not sponsor a student and you wish to, you can do it either before your trip or during your trip (or after, for that matter) by going to our website at [www.helpinghandsunlimited.org](http://www.helpinghandsunlimited.org). Once you select your child, remember their name and number and give it to the HHU team as soon as you can after you arrive. Please complete the online registration form and submit it. Helping Hands Unlimited will confirm it on the website when the child's photo is replaced most generally with a brief "Thank You". Once you are home, you will receive information about the sponsorship by regular mail.

We occasionally have teams that find children on the street and then ask us to get them in one of our schools so an individual or team can sponsor that child. We cannot do that. Children need to go through the process set up by the individual school. These schools have various requirements for entrance (that includes testing). Helping Hands Unlimited does not have or want any influence in saying who can go to the school(s). That is a school decision that we respect. If someone in your group would like to sponsor a child, they can do so through our website while they are there or once they return home. Once they send the online registration, they can then go meet the child they have decided to sponsor. Please do not put pressure on us or the schools to bypass this request.

### **Those back home can follow your trip online**

Time and internet service permitting, we try to put up new information every evening. We will only do this on "working" days. You can find us on Facebook at <https://www.facebook.com/pages/Helping-Hands-Unlimited/116553875078935>. Or, for those more computer challenged, you can send them to our website. On the right side of the Home page is an orange button that says "Current Trip Update". That will take them to the Facebook page with the trip updates.

### **Something else for the people back home**

Be sure to tell other people that you are going on this trip. It may encourage others to go. It may result in them wanting to help you with your expenses. Most importantly, it could result in them praying for you while you give of your time to serve others. Thank you for giving of your time, your resources and yourself to serve the Lord in the Dominican Republic.

### **One other Disclaimer**

We will do everything humanly possible to greet you at the airport when you arrive and get you back to the airport a couple of hours ahead of your flight home. In our 15 years of serving groups, we have seen a few flights canceled for weather reasons and the groups needed to stay an extra day or two until they could get a flight home. Our HHU representative will do everything they can to help accommodate your team. You need to realize there is a cost for the extra days. Most generally, you will be responsible for the actual cost of the extra room and board and transportation costs to get you back to the airport. This does not happen very often but you need to realize it is possible and understand the extra days are at your expense.

### **[www.HelpingHandsUnlimited.org](http://www.HelpingHandsUnlimited.org)**

Our website is a good source of information about Helping Hands Unlimited, our ministries and our trips. Please take time to visit the site. Please consider sponsoring a child. If you sponsor a child in one of the Santo Domingo schools, we will do everything we can to arrange for you to visit your child.

There is no such thing as a bad question. Please feel free to ask your group leader or if you wish, please contact us at Helping Hands Unlimited. Our e-mail address is [rmeyerhhu@gmail.com](mailto:rmeyerhhu@gmail.com) or call us at 765-730-3618.