

Here's my Study Abroad Story

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CIEE Santo Domingo: Liberal Arts

Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic

Major: Sociology and Spanish (Dual)

Program: Significantly improve your Spanish language skills, while developing a critical appreciation of the Dominican Republic and Caribbean. Through CIEE electives, specialized study tracks, and direct enrollment in a number of local universities, study abroad in Santo Domingo allows you to pursue your interests and explore the country and region alongside local and international students in a variety of academic settings. And with homestays, internships with local grassroots organizations, volunteer opportunities, and a variety of activities and excursions, studying abroad in the Dominican Republic offers you a uniquely immersive intercultural experience. With CIEE Santo Domingo you will improve your Spanish language skills significantly through advanced-level courses, partake in an optional development internship working with local organizations, take part in excursions to sites of cultural importance, including the colonial zone, an anthropological museum, ecological preserves, and trips to the Samaná Peninsula and the Cibao region and enjoy a specialized track in Caribbean Studies, non-credit volunteer opportunities, and the support of peer advisors.

Typical Day: I would usually wake up at around 8:30 and eat breakfast prepared by my host mum. Breakfast would usually consist of either tea, biscuits, and fresh fruit, or oatmeal and fruit. After breakfast, I would walk to the main street (a 7 minute walk) to catch a *gua-gua* (a small mini bus) to the local university. Usually, at the *gua-gua* stand, I would meet up with my other friends on the program, so that we could ride to class together. At CIEE Santo Domingo you have 3 locations from which you can choose to take your local classes. These three universities are INTEC, UASD, and Bono. I took classes only at Bono, a small Jesuit university in Santo Domingo. My classes were small in size and were lecture style. After class at Bono, I would return to my homestay for lunch (and a nap, if I could fit it in). My lunch, which my host mum would prepare and leave for me before she went to work, would usually consist of spaghetti in a tomato sauce, and meat. After some downtime at home, I would walk to the CIEE program center for my afternoon classes. Almost everyone lived within walking distance of the program center, in the residential area of Gascue. Classes at the program center were all taught in Spanish by local

professors, and were discussion based, for the most part. Also, classes at the program center were very small (4 - 8 persons), which was great because we were able to really hone in on improving our language skills. After classes, which would end around 5:00 pm, I would either stay at the program center for a bit, socializing with my friends in the program, or to use the Wi-Fi, which I did not have at home. Some of my friends lived very close to me, so we would walk home together, stopping by Bon (delicious frozen yogurt place), or a *colmado* (small shop/ corner store) to get a snack. After, I would return home to do my homework and relax with my host family— my host mum and her mother, my *abuelita*. Around 7:30 or 8 pm, I would eat dinner, which usually consisted of *mangu* (mashed green plantains), avocado, scrambled eggs and sausage. This was one of my favourite Dominican meals! After dinner, and a bit of chatting, I would retire to my bedroom to finish my homework and go to bed.

Highlights: I loved the Caribbean Studies track that was available at CIEE! Because of the focus of my major (Latin America and the Caribbean), this academic track allowed me to really engage with the subject of my interest. Additionally, the field trips and excursions that the program provided, truly enriched our time in the Dominican Republic. For example, we took the cities of Cibao and Samana, which exposed us to the rich cultural history of the Dominican Republic.

Challenges: One of my biggest challenges was getting adjusted to the Dominican social life outside of my home. Being from the Caribbean myself, I mistakenly thought that Santo Domingo would be very similar to my Caribbean country. And while there were many similarities, there were many more differences. Learning how to navigate a new social space, that was so familiar yet so different, was a challenge; but it was also an exciting and beneficial experience as well.

Advice: If you can, take a class at Bono with Pablo Mella! Latin American Thought was one of the most engaging classes I've ever taken, despite some of my initial reservations about taking a philosophy class in Spanish. In general through, try to stay positive, and treat challenges like a learning experience — make the best of your abroad experience!

