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## La República Dominicana: Las Terrenas

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# LA REPÚBLICA DOMINICANA

## LAS TERRENAS



### Summer Camps

Off the sandy beaches of Las Terrenas, The Dominican Republic, lies La Fundación Mahatma Gandhi and an energetic, ambitious, kind-hearted, and humble man, José Bourget, founder of the foundation. With the help of Bourget, six interns from the College of Saint Benedict and Saint John's University lead summer camps at the foundation and in a nearby neighborhood. Children picked up trash, learned about dental hygiene, participated in new games, banged on musical instruments, and shouted out their favorite foods while learning about nutrition. The children in Las Terrenas and neighboring communities enjoyed summer camp activities but what the interns of 2014 learned was the impact of their small actions. The children in Las Terrenas relished in coloring, mask-making, singing, receiving new toothbrushes, or getting small fruit cups. We believed we were the instructors but, in turn, the children taught us that what may seem like the smallest, most insignificant actions, can mean the world to another person.



### Housing

Throughout the course of our two-month stay in the Dominican Republic, we alternated housing. As we moved from place to place, week-to-week, we were exposed to all types of living arrangements. We began our stay in a lovely, white stucco beach house peering out over the ocean from where it sat on the hillside. Here, we felt spoiled; we did not expect our internship to begin in a vacation-style villa. Then, we were taken to El Jamito for our homestays and this is where we were humbled. Families here had no running water (showers consisted of a five-gallon bucket of water and bowl for scooping out water), electricity frequently shorted out, and some families lived with dirt floors. From El Jamito, we were whisked off to the big city of Santo Domingo where we stayed with family friends of Bourget. Once again, we were spoiled; this family had air-conditioning and beautiful, modern homes. After our time in the big city, we returned to Las Terrenas for another week in an Eco lodge, which kept us close and personal with nature. Following the lodge, we arrived at what would be our home for the next month, Casa Paz, a quaint home that we grew to love. We learned the meaning of adaptability during our immersion into the diverse socioeconomic backgrounds of the Dominican people.



### Community Involvement

Throughout our stay, we kept in touch with several people within the community. We worked with a friend of Bourget, Robinson, who was a primary figure in La Unión de Juntas de Vecinos De Las Terrenas, an organization dedicated to community development. With Robinson, we attended union meetings, scouted out areas for placement of basketball hoops, drafted documents to send to the mayor, and we simply enjoyed being around his contagious spirit. We also worked with Robinson's mother to help her establish a coconut candy business. Additionally, we spent time helping a group of young boys to obtain uniforms so that they might once again attend school. Outside of Las Terrenas, the interns also painted the water tower of El Jamito with a scene representing the values and interests of the community. While we may not have completed all the tasks that we set out to accomplish, we walked away having touched the hearts of many, just as they touched ours.



### Food and Travel

The Dominican Republic is rich with a plethora of food varieties and an abundance of beautiful sites and attractions. Being a Nutrition major, I was constantly intrigued by the foodstuff of the Dominican. Vendors sold fresh cantaloupe, mangos, bananas, potatoes, onions, papaya, watermelon, cucumbers, and tomatoes on the side of the street for just a few American dollars. What I would not give to always have fresh, newly-picked produce at such a low cost! Besides my bizarre obsession with fruits and vegetables, the rice and beans staple, fresh fish, occasional octopus salad, and outrageously delicious pizza always amazed me. Other than food, we took several trips throughout the Dominican Republic. We went ziplining through the hills, slid down waterfalls until we dropped into deep pools of water, visited Christopher Columbus' house, hiked through rivers and along jungle-like territory, and jumped off cliffs into the most beautiful lagoons. In the Dominican Republic, we experienced more adventures and foods than we could have ever imagined.

