



History comes alive for Volunteers – Thanks Friends of the DR!

As Peace Corps volunteers, at times consumed with either the struggles of cultural integration, plain ol' homesickness, or the excitement for the profound experience that lies before us – it is easy to forget the vast historical uniqueness of this vibrant, Caribbean island of Merengue and Bachata.

On November 29th, Friends of the DR graciously facilitated a guided tour for more than 20 volunteers to cultivate their enthusiasm and knowledge of the Colonial Zone in Santo Domingo. Tour guide Dr. Lynn Guitar's expertise provided participants with an in-depth perspective, which spanned not only across the island but also to the rest of the Americas, Europe, and the world!

The gateway to the “New World,” home of the first University and Cathedral in the Americas, Santo Domingo was once a strategic center in the hemisphere for political, economic, social and intellectual life. Walking her streets accompanied by a diversity of fact-filled historical anecdotes provided inspiring insight into the socio-economic conditions in which volunteers interact on a daily basis.

From “La Calle de las Damas” (The Street of the Ladies) where wives of Spanish gentry took their evening stroll to the baptismal site of Juan Pablo Duarte and the nearby overarching ramparts that once defended the capital from the piracy of Sir Francis Drake – history came alive.

Volunteers on the tour witnessed sites of some of the most famous and heated debates on “equality.” The tour ventured the streets where Bartolomé de Las Casas demonstrated himself as an early proponent for human rights through his advocacy for the fair treatment of the Tainos. Moreover, we continued to The Fortaleza de Santo Domingo, a military structure built in 1505 that stands in remembrance to the multitude of voyages it sent off to the Americas in search of wealth and power, resulting in the conquest of countless cultures. This affluence from abroad was once again channeled through Santo Domingo, the treasury office, and ultimately off to Sevilla, Spain, where it served to strengthen the Spanish quest for European supremacy.

At first glance, the humble historical remnants of the Colonial Zone are deceiving, yet a leisurely evening walk accompanied by one who is knowledgeable of its profound richness can open the door to a fascinating storybook past.

Thank you “Friends of the D.R.” and Dr. Guitar for a Dominican historical reawakening!

Tico Cross
IT for Education
El Limón, San José de Ocoa

& the rest of the PCVs on the 2003 Colonial Zone Tour

