

## Planning Your Trip: A Guide for Volunteers

*Saludos* volunteers and families of volunteers. Thank you for choosing to do good work with Una Vida. This toolkit lays out everything you'll need to be prepared--and feel prepared--for a challenging and rewarding trip. It's the necessary slew of checkmarks that stand between you and the sweetness and tartness of fried *maduros*, the electric twang of *bachata*, and the teathy smiles of your host-mother. It's flush with critical forms to be returned to Una Vida, important policies of the non-profit, frequently asked questions, a tried-and-true packing list, and even a list of books about the Dominican Republic you might love (because we do).

### Really Important Forms Checklist

These forms you must complete. Please turn in completed and (where indicated) signed forms as soon as possible.

- Application, with photocopy of passport (pg 9)

There is a non-refundable application fee of \$100 per volunteer that is immediately applied to the overall cost of your trip. This is our way of saying: are you in or are you out? If you're only kinda in, don't be shy. Let's talk about it! ([info@una-vida.org](mailto:info@una-vida.org))

- Volunteer Contract (pg 11)

These are Una Vida's expectations for all volunteers. Your safety, in addition to the safety of others, and the reputation of the non-profit, depend on your respecting this contract. Una Vida's policy is a zero tolerance for alcohol consumption by under 21 year-olds in the DR. Breach of this or any other portion of the contract is grounds for early departure from the DR at the volunteer's expense.

- Release and Waiver (pg 12)

This legal document requires the signature of both the volunteer and the parent of the volunteer in the case that he/she is a dependent.

- Medical & Food Allergies (pg 14)

- Scholarship (pg 15) – *this form is optional.*

Una Vida maintains a scholarship fund to assist students with difficulty funding their trip. The maximum scholarship is \$300 per student. In return, students that receive a scholarship are expected to donate time to Una Vida and the community. For tips on fundraising, see "Fundraising Resources" at the end of this toolkit.

## Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)

Q: *How does the housing situation work? Will I be alone or with another volunteer?*

A: Una Vida staff will arrange housing based on the size and preference of each group. You may or may not be presented with the choice of going solo or with another volunteer, but if you are, here's the scoop: historically, volunteers that go solo—with or without Spanish language skills—get a lot out of their host-family experience.

Q: *Are the host families supportive of Una Vida's policies?*

A: On the whole, yes. Some volunteers have, however, been offered alcohol (a small amount with dinner, typically) by their host families. Culturally, this is the normal and hospitable thing to do. In this scenario, of course, it is your job to politely decline.

Q: *Is there anything disrespectful, any cultural blunder that I should be aware of?*

A: Generally speaking Dominicans are very laid back and easy going. At the dinner table, it's a good idea to eat heartily, even if you're not thrilled with the dish. If for some reason you just *cannot* eat what's served, use the phrase "me hace dano" (pronounced: me ah say danyo), meaning it hurts my stomach, with lots of empathy and good humor. Regarding coffee, Dominicans drink small amounts in part because it's expensive, so be careful not to serve yourself a venti .

Q: *Will I eat all my meals with my host family?*

A: You will typically eat three meals a day with your family. In the case of a day-long excursion into Haiti or elsewhere, be sure to let your family know you won't be home for lunch.

Q: *Should I help my host family with things like dishes and laundry?*

A: It's these small and humble acts that show the most respect to and appreciation for our host families.

Q: *What if I don't speak Spanish?*

A: You're not the first. Facial expressions and primitive sign language are your allies. Learning basic words and phrases—showing due diligence with a pen and notebook—is a good way to bond with your hosts.

Q: *What kind of accommodations should I expect in terms of shower, bathroom, etc.?*

A: Accommodations vary from host to host but be prepared for cold watered bucket baths. It is what it sounds like, except more enjoyable. Most houses have basic plumbing. Note, however, that used toilet paper and feminine hygiene products always go in the trash can next to the toilet.

Q: *Do I need to get any vaccinations or medications?*

A: In a word: talk to your doctor. Opinions do vary, particularly regarding preventative malaria medications. Again, talk to your doctor. Also, Una Vida is here to help. Acidophilus, a beneficial bacteria supplement, helps prevent digestive problems associated with a foreign diet.

Q: *Should I bring a journal?*

A: Yes! You really should.

Q: *Should I bring my own snacks?*

A: It's a good idea to have a few bars in your backpack just in case. Gobs of peanut butter out of the jar have also been a popular snack/treat.

Q: *Should I bring make-up?*

A: No. But, if you insist, know that it will be appropriate only when going out at night.

Q: *As a female, should I be aware of male Dominican charm?*

A: Yes, indeed. Dominican men make a lavish display of their attraction to you in the form of cat calls and adoring looks. This can be an appreciated self-esteem boost, but, if entertained, can also be a significant distraction from the goals of the trip: to do a job and learn about a culture. Remember that you represent Una Vida.

### Tried and True Pack List

Due to possible tight sleeping quarters be mindful of how you pack. As Americans, we tend to bring too much. Also, be aware of airline restrictions regarding carry-on bags (liquids, knives, etc.).

#### Personal Items:

- Passport and second form of ID (Driver's license, state ID card, or school ID card)
- Framed photo to leave with your host family
- Journal and pens
- Headlamp or flashlight and extra batteries (small flashlights are good to give families when you leave)
- Camera and extra batteries
- Compact English-Spanish Dictionary
- Hat (fully brimmed is best)
- Work gloves
- Sunglasses
- Sunscreen/lip balm
- Benadryl stick
- Bug spray (Deep Woods Off/Sportsman is quite good)
- Old pillow case or garbage bag for laundry
- 5 plastic grocery bags
- 5 large Ziploc bags
- Watch with alarm or travel alarm clock
- Packaged snacks (granola bars, cliff bars etc.)
- 2 two-quart water bottles (one goes in your backpack for the flight)
- Ear plugs (it gets loud!!!!)
- Swiss army knife or Leatherman (optional)

#### Clothing Items:

- Water shoes and/or Teva type shoes (for bathing in the river)
- Tennis shoes/hiking boots (for day to day work and hiking)
- Sandals or shoes to wear at night (a little more dressy)
- One pair of dress shoes (men)
- 2 swim trunks or bathing suits (women must wear tank top over bathing suit)
- 2 towels (a bath size towel and a thinner one for a quick dry)

- 4 pairs of shorts/Capri's
- T-shirts/tank tops (for work)
- 2 pairs of long pants
- 2 collared shirts for gentlemen for night time
- 1 or 2 cotton dresses or skirts and tops (on disco nights, you will want nice, modest clothes)
- Light sweater or hoodie and sweats (for nights in the mountains)
- 6 pairs of socks
- 6 pairs of underwear
- Lightweight cotton sleep attire (boxers and t-shirts work great)

Toiletries:

- Toothbrush
- Toothpaste
- Deodorant
- Shampoo (in a small bottle)
- Body soap
- Hand sanitizer
- All purpose wipes (good for when water is limited)
- Tissues

Gifts: gifts are really nice to bring as a thank you to your host family. In addition to thank you notes and your framed photo, think about bringing one or two (not all!) of the following: handmade anything (always the best!), T-shirts or baseball caps, kitchen towels, pot holders, and wipeable/flannel-backed table cloths. Also think about things like playing/Uno cards and nail polish, which are gifts but also activities to do with your fam.

Do **Not** Pack:

- X Too much
- X Large amounts of cash (Una Vida will exchange your dollars to pesos for you)
- X Travelers checks
- X Hair dryers
- X Curling or Flat irons
- X Too much make – up
- X Electronics\* (including iPods!)
- X Anything you would be devastated to lose

\*Bring cell phones for in-transit communication. They'll be taken and stored for you in Santo Domingo for safe-keeping.

## Una Vida Book Club

These are the books that have grounded us, inspired us. We encourage our volunteers to begin their journey well before they get on a plane with something(s) from this list.

On the Dominican Republic:

- *In the Time of the Butterflies*, Julia Alvarez
- *Before We Were Free*, Julia Alvarez
- *How the Garcia Girls Lost Their Accents*, Julia Alvarez
- *Why The Cocks Fight: Dominicans, Haitians, and the Struggle for Hispaniola*, Michele Wucker
- *The Feast of the Goat*, Mario Vargas Llosa and Edith Grossman

On Haiti:

- *On That Day Everybody Ate: One Woman's Story of Hope and Possibility in Haiti*, Margaret Trost
- *Pathologies of Power – Health, Human Rights, and the New War on the Poor*, Dr. Paul Farmer
- *Brother, I am Dying*, Edwidge Danticant

On International Development & Social Service:

- *Half the Sky: Turning Oppression into Opportunity for Women Worldwide*, by [Nicholas D. Kristof](#) and [Sheryl WuDunn](#)
- *Development as Freedom*, by Amartya Sen
- *Creating a World Without Poverty*, Muhammad Yunus
- *Mountains Beyond Mountains*, by Traci Kidder
- *The Blue Sweater*, by Jacqueline Novogratz

## Fundraising Resources

Many participants fundraise through tax deductible donations from family, friends, and local businesses, sometimes the entire cost of the trip. The following letter is a template; use it for inspiration for your own letter or just tweak a few things to add your own touch. Stuff the letter in an envelope with one or two articles from the Press Page of the website and you're on your way. Good luck!

Dear family and friends,

This summer I'm planning to travel to a rural part of the Dominican Republic with a small non-profit called Una Vida, a 501(c)3 non-profit that is dedicated to building community and inspiring change, both here and in the developing world- specifically the Dominican Republic.

The trip is a service-learning trip, meaning we'll work on projects—health, housing, education, etc.—while we soak up the lessons of cross-cultural exchange. We'll live and eat with Dominican families, and travel to rural mountain villages and markets.

In preparation for the trip, I'm not only reading up on the DR, but scrambling to fundraise the cost of my trip. I'm asking family and friends as well as local businesses to chip in to get me there.

If you make a check out to Una Vida with my name on the memo line, Barbara will send you a receipt (it's tax deductible!). You can send it to:

Barbra Gronberg  
PO Box 751495  
Petaluma, Ca 94975

Thank you so much! Also, check out [unavida.org](http://unavida.org) and see some of the amazing work that's already been done...

Sincerely,

John Smith

Some participants have taken their letter stuffing a step further to solicit non-monetary donations from specific local businesses. This of course is going above and beyond, and not technically related to your personal fundraising effort, but something that people have done with great success in the past preparing for the DR. The following letter to a dentist could be modified to solicit footwear from a shoe company or little league equipment from a sporting goods store....

Dear Dr. Ramos,

This summer I'll be spending two weeks on a service-learning trip to the Dominican Republic and Haiti with a 501(c)3 non-profit called Una Vida.

Una Vida has conducted construction, education, and public health-based projects in a rural corner of the Dominican Southwest since 1996. Founded by a high school teacher, formerly a Peace Corps volunteer in the very village we serve, the organization knows the community—and it's needs—intimately.

I'm writing you to ask for your help with one such need: dental hygiene supplies. Dental care for the very poor in the DR and Haiti often means pulling teeth when it gets bad. We need toothbrushes, toothpaste and floss to assist the local clinic in putting the emphasis back on prevention. Any donation is much appreciated.

Thank you so much for your time. Please feel free to visit [una-vida.org](http://una-vida.org) or contact me with questions or concerns at \_\_\_\_\_@\_\_\_\_\_.com

Sincerely,

John Smith



**Una Vida Application**

1 of 2

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Parent name (If Participant is under 18): \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Cell number: \_\_\_\_\_

Parent or guardian cell number: \_\_\_\_\_

Fax number: \_\_\_\_\_

Name as it appears on passport: \_\_\_\_\_

Passport number: \_\_\_\_\_

Passport expiration date: \_\_\_\_\_

**Emergency Contact Information:**

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Contact number: \_\_\_\_\_

Relationship to you: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

**\*Applications will be processed upon receipt of a \$100.00 non-refundable application fee. This amount will be credited towards the cost of the trip.**

**\*To participate in the trip minors must actively participate in Una Vida. This includes meeting attendance, fundraising participation (if \$ is needed), and participating in community service activities. We understand that grade checks will be made and my child must maintain at least a 2.0 GPA, as well as have no disciplinary actions against him/her.**

Parent/Guardian Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ DATE: \_\_\_\_\_  
Minor Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ DATE: \_\_\_\_\_

**Application Continued**

2 of 2

The following answers will be kept confidential. Please be thoughtful and honest.

1. What is your motivation for wanting to participate in this trip?
2. Have you ever lived in, worked in, or traveled to another country? Please explain.
3. Are you currently volunteering locally? If yes, which organization? If not, Why?
4. Do you have any specific skills/talents you would like to share on this trip? If so, please tell us about them.
5. What concerns might you have about traveling to a developing country?
6. What else would you like to share about yourself?

Parent/Guardian (for volunteers under 18):

1. Does your child possess the positive qualities needed to participate in this trip? Please Explain.
2. Why do you want your child to participate in this trip?
3. Does your child have any special needs? (Allergies, medical etc.)

**4. Una Vida does NOT allow minors to drink while in the Dominican Republic, although it is culturally acceptable. Do you believe this will be a concern for your child?**

**Volunteer Contract**

**Name of participant (please print):** \_\_\_\_\_

**As a volunteer, I agree to:**

\_\_\_\_\_ abstain from the use of alcohol (minors 21 or younger), use discretion with the use of alcohol (adults), nor will I use any illegal substances. I understand that I am placing Una Vida staff and other participants at risk if I choose to use alcohol or illegal substances. I understand that it is socially acceptable for minors to drink in the Dominican culture. I also understand that there is a strong possibility that members of my host family will offer me alcohol and that I am expected to say NO to any offer of alcohol given to me.

\_\_\_\_\_ Advise Una Vida staff if I have knowledge that any minor involved in the trip is drinking or using illegal substances.

\_\_\_\_\_ Remember that I have come to learn, not to teach. I'll resist the temptation to inform our hosts about "How we do things".

\_\_\_\_\_ Respect the host's religious views.

\_\_\_\_\_ Respect the group and the team leaders and their decisions.

\_\_\_\_\_ Refrain from gossip.

\_\_\_\_\_ be creative and supportive when things do not go as planned.

\_\_\_\_\_ Refrain from any activity that could be constructed as romantic interest toward a Dominican or fellow team member.

\_\_\_\_\_ Respect curfew as determined by Una Vida staff. As a courtesy to the team leaders, and for your own safety, an adult must know of your whereabouts at all times.

\_\_\_\_\_ Abide by the regulations, as explained by Una Vida staff. I also understand that if I do not comply with any or all of these regulations I could be asked to return to the United States or have another consequence, as decided by Una Vida staff. If I am required to return to the United States before the end of the trip, my family will be responsible for any and all additional expenses.

**Signature of Participant:** \_\_\_\_\_ **DATE:** \_\_\_\_\_

***To be completed by Parent/Guardian of volunteer under the age of 18***

As a parent/guardian, I am supporting my child's decision to participate in this trip. By signing this pledge, I understand that if my child does not comply with any or all of these regulations as outlined by Una Vida my child could be asked to return to the United States or have another Consequence, as decided by Una Vida. If my child is required to return to the United States, due to the breaking of this pledge, before the end of the trip, I will assume any and all additional financial expenses.

**Signature of Parent/Guardian:** \_\_\_\_\_ **DATE:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Release and Waiver of Liability**

**Please read carefully! This is a legal document that affects your legal rights!**

**Name of participant (please print):**

THIS RELEASE AND WAIVER OF LIABILITY (the "Release") executed on this day of \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, (year), by \_\_\_\_\_ (the "Volunteer" or "Parent/Guardian of a Volunteer"), in favor of Una Vida, a California nonprofit corporation, its directors, officers, employees, and agents (collectively Una Vida).

I, the Volunteer (and Parent/Guardian of the Volunteer), desire to work as a volunteer for Una Vida and engage in the activities related to being a volunteer with Una Vida. I, the Volunteer (and Parent/Guardian of the Volunteer), Support my child's desire to work as a volunteer. I understand that the activities may include but are not limited to traveling to and from the Dominican Republic, travel within the Dominican Republic, constructing and rehabilitating residential buildings, consuming food and living in accommodations available and provided in the Dominican Republic, and all activities included throughout the trip.

I, the Volunteer (and Parent/Guardian of the Volunteer) hereby freely and voluntarily execute this Release under the following terms:

**1. Waiver and Release:**

**I, the Volunteer (and Parent/Guardian of the Volunteer) hereby release and forever discharge and hold harmless Una Vida and its successors an assigns, and/ or any other volunteers on this trip from any and all liability, claims, and demands of whatever kind of nature, either in law or in equity, which arise or may hereafter arise from Volunteer's activities with Una Vida. I, the Volunteer (and Parent/Guardian of the Volunteer) understand and acknowledge that this Release discharges Una Vida, and/or any other volunteers on this trip from any liability or claim that I, the Volunteer (and Parent/Guardian of the Volunteer), may have against Una Vida, and/or any participants on this trip with respect to any bodily injury, personal injury, illness, death, or property damage that may result from Volunteers activities with Una Vida. I, the Volunteer (and Parent/Guardian of the Volunteer) also understand that Una Vida does not assume any responsibility for or obligation to provide financial assistance or other assistance, including but not limited to medical health or disability insurance in the event of injury or illness.**

**2. Insurance:**

**I, the Volunteer (and Parent/Guardian of the Volunteer) understand that Una Vida does not carry or maintain health, medical, travel or disability insurance coverage for any Volunteer. I may purchase any of these at my own expense.**

**3. Medical Treatment:**

**I, the Volunteer (and Parent/Guardian of the Volunteer), hereby release and forever discharge Una Vida, the Petaluma City School District and/or any volunteer on this trip from any claim whatsoever which arises or may hereafter arise on account of any first-aid treatment, or other medical services rendered in connection with Una Vida or in the case of a minor child, with the decision by an representative or agent of Una Vida to exercise the power to consent to medical or dental treatment as such power may be granted and authorized in the Medical Release form.**

**4. Assumption of Risk:**

I, the Volunteer (and Parent/Guardian of the Volunteer), understand that time with Una Vida may include activities that may be hazardous to the Volunteer, including but not limited to, construction activities, transportation, and moving of supplies. I, the Volunteer (and Parent/Guardian of the Volunteer) recognize and understand that my time with Una Vida may, in some situations, involve inherently dangerous activities. I, the Volunteer (and Parent/Guardian of the Volunteer) hereby expressly and specifically assumes the risk of injury or harm in any and all activities and release Una Vida from all liability for injury, illness, death, or property damage resulting from volunteering.

**5. Photography and Video:**

For and in consideration of my participation in Una Vida I hereby unconditionally grant Una Vida the right to use my name and photographs in any manner deemed fit by Una Vida, for the promotional, advertising, and informational purposes for Una Vida.

**6. Other:**

I, the Volunteer (and Parent/Guardian of the Volunteer) expressly agree that this Release is intended to be as broad and inclusive as permitted by the laws of the State of California, and that this Release shall be governed by and interpreted in accordance with the laws of the State of California. Volunteer agrees that in the event that any clause or provision of this Release shall be held to be invalid by any event that any clause or provision of this release shall be held to be invalid by any court of competent jurisdiction, the invalidity of such clause or provision shall not otherwise affect the remaining provisions of this Release which shall continue to be enforceable.

To express my understanding of this Release, I sign below.

Name of Parent/Guardian of a Minor Volunteer: \_\_\_\_\_

Parent Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ DATE: \_\_\_\_\_

Name of Volunteer: \_\_\_\_\_

Volunteer's Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ DATE: \_\_\_\_\_

**Medical Release Form**

Emergency Treatment Release Statement: I hereby authorize Una Vida staff to render medical treatment to myself/son/daughter \_\_\_\_\_, which, in their judgment, is necessary in the event of illness or injury. I understand that I may or may not be contacted regarding this treatment

**Signature of Participant or Parent/Guardian if under 18** \_\_\_\_\_

**Date** \_\_\_\_\_

Participants Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date of Birth: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Home Phone number: \_\_\_\_\_

Father's Contact Number: \_\_\_\_\_

Mother's Contact Number: \_\_\_\_\_

Additional Contact Emergency Number: \_\_\_\_\_

Relation to Family: \_\_\_\_\_

Please list any and **all allergies, special medical conditions**, special medications, special dietary needs, or health problems with which Una Vida should be aware:

Please list any and all medications that participant/minor takes on a regular basis. Include amounts taken, number of daily doses and whether you want this medication to be administered by Una Vida or whether they will take it themselves:

Are there any medications that you know of that are contraindicated for medications participant/minor is currently taking on a regular basis?

Does participant wear glasses? \_\_\_\_\_ if yes, he/she must bring an extra pair.

Date of last tetanus shot: \_\_\_\_\_

Name of Family Doctor: \_\_\_\_\_

Office Phone Number: \_\_\_\_\_

Medical Insurance Carrier and Policy Number: \_\_\_\_\_

Name of

Dentist: \_\_\_\_\_

Office Phone Number: \_\_\_\_\_

Dental Insurance Carrier and Policy Number: \_\_\_\_\_

**Una Vida- Scholarship**

**Name:** \_\_\_\_\_  
**Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

The anticipated cost of the trip is \$1,650, plus the cost of the airfare (to be determined, approx \$700.00+/-). We have had great success with fundraisers and with support letters sent to family and friends asking for a tax-detectable donation (see support letter). Local businesses also support our trip. Una Vida is committed to the ideal that all people, who desire to go, should be able to participate, regardless of their financial situation. Those who hope to receive financial assistance need to complete this form. Scholarship papers must be turned in with your application. The maximum financial assistance available, per participant, will be no more than \$300.00. Those who receive scholarship funds through Una Vida will be required to work, at the rate of \$10.00/hr, providing services to local families and agencies as designated by Una Vida.

**Please answer the questions below.**  
**How much financial assistance do you anticipate you will need?**

**Have you sent out letters to your family and friends? When will you send them, if not already sent?**

**Numerous people need financial assistance, so your full participation is needed in order to receive funds.**

**Parent/Guardian**  
**Signature:** \_\_\_\_\_  
**Date:** \_\_\_\_\_  
**Participant Signature:** \_\_\_\_\_  
**Date:** \_\_\_\_\_