

# International Block Information Booklet

## For Parents & Students

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## International Block

*“A tourist is forever an outsider – at best a fleeting presence in the lives of local people. To feel the heartbeat of a people and truly understand who they are one needs to be among them. When one shares in the life of the family and works alongside the citizens in the cultural and economic development of their community one experiences the peoples’ struggles and their successes.”* -- David Peacock – ICE Teacher/Coordinator (York Region Public School Board)

Toronto District Christian High School believes that Christian education is more than absorbing information. As a school we are committed to, “learning for service in the light of God's word”. In our work, and especially in this program, we strive to serve with an attitude of walking along side strangers with an expectation of learning from the stranger. God's revelation calls for a response. We hope to nurture in our students a love and awe for God and all he has created. We want to help teens understand and live out their calling to be agents of his grace and love in a hurting world. We also recognize that students are on a lifelong spiritual journey; we look for growth and authenticity, not perfection, while giving leadership and encouragement. Ultimately, we aim to engage culture, not shy away from it, confident that God is in control of the world. Too often we seek out and experience God solely in parts of our lives, but not with our whole being or in all of our experiences. We want to experience God in the now; experience him in every aspect, in every part of each day, for our world belongs to God.

Embarking on an International Block trip provides opportunities that cannot be matched anywhere else. It is a challenging experience; but, experiences that are challenging are often the most rewarding. If your child is chosen, this educational experience will likely stretch him or her socially, spiritually, physically, and culturally. It will be necessary to communicate in Spanish and to work with and trust others in group situations. This program offers a fantastic opportunity to engage in a new learning environment and experience a completely new culture. Through these challenges your child will learn more about him/herself, society, and the world than could be learned in most other places.

What are our goals for this program? We hope the International Block program will:

- Foster understanding of cross-cultural sensitivity and development issues
- Promote the study of Spanish and further overall communication skills
- Develop transferable life skills and attitudes including, adaptability, analysis, confidence, gratitude, independence, initiative, integrity, organization, perseverance, problem solving, responsibility, stress management and time management
- Develop and encourage leadership abilities
- Encourage students to share and apply one’s International Block experience through future involvement in church, school or other communities, in Canada or abroad
- Experience God in the now

## Program History

The TDChristian International Block has a rich and varied history and is ever-evolving as we strive to provide the best possible program to our students.

Year	Location	Duration	Gender Ratio	Chaperones
2007	Belize	14 weeks	6 female 2 male	Will Kamphuis (teacher at Hamilton District Christian High School)
2008	Belize	8 weeks	2 male	Worked under Albert and Romalda Zantingh
2009	Honduras	8 weeks	8 female 7 male	Rachael Weening (teacher) Monika Hintz: TDChristian and Redeemer grad Eric de Ruiter: TDChristian grad
2010	Dominican Republic	8 weeks	9 female 7 male	Rachael Weening (teacher) Monika Hintz: TDChristian and Redeemer grad Nick Weening: TDChristian grad
2011	Dominican Republic	8 weeks	9 female 9 male	Rachael Weening (teacher) Jillayna Visser: TDChristian grad Jeremy Baker: TDChristian grad Peter Kooy: TDChristian grad
2012	Dominican Republic	8 weeks	8 female 8 male	Rachael Weening (teacher) Erica Racanelli: TDChristian grad Katie Ryzebol: TDChristian grad Colin Kalverda: TDChristian Alumnist Mark Speelman: TDChristian grad
2013	Dominican Republic	8 weeks	12 female 9 male	Rachael Weening (teacher) Erica Racanelli: TDChristian grad Miraya Goot: TDChristian grad & former participant Brad Kooy: TDChristian grad Nick Weening: TDChristian grad Peter Groot: TDChristian grad William VanderWier: TDChristian grad
2014	Dominican Republic	8 weeks	12 female 7 male	Rachael Weening (teacher) Erica Racanelli: TDChristian grad Olivia VanMeggelen: TDChristian grad & former participant Sarah Connell Brian Bergsma: TDchristian grad Don Helleman

**Criteria:**

Students should be at least 16 years old. These students must be patient, driven, flexible, prepared to be stretched, able to work independently, be ready to take on physical challenges, and be ready to take risks. At the same time, they must be able to work in a team because the block group will be a unit for the entire semester. Finally, because of costs the students must have the drive and means to raise funds.

Students are chosen based on:

1. Essays detailing why they want to go, what they think they will learn, and what they could offer to the block class. How the student writes is not nearly as important as what is written. It should be at least one page.
2. An interview with a member of the administration and Rachael Weening.
3. Input from the entire TDChristian staff, specifically with respect to the students' capabilities for working in a team and taking initiative. Staff is also asked about student's attitude, integrity, willingness to be uncomfortable, self-awareness, emotional stability, physical conditioning and language ability.
4. Their ability to work in and out of class.
5. Their overall school behaviour.

**Costs**

The anticipated cost to students and their families for the 2014-15 iBlock Program is about \$4300 above regular tuition. TDChristian subsidizes the program as well. This money covers transportation, living (including food), and traveling. Costs do not include personal toiletries, spending money, vaccinations, passport, health insurance or health coverage. When applying, a \$500 deposit is required to indicate a student's commitment to entering this program. Cheques will be returned to those who are not selected. Families who have concerns about finances should contact the Finance Office. We do not wish to eliminate students solely on the basis of money.



## Dress Code

Females	Males
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- all skirts and shorts must go <b>to the knee</b></li><li>- no tank tops</li><li>- t-shirts must fully cover the shoulder</li><li>- tight clothing is prohibited</li><li>- skirts are mandatory for church and when teaching</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- must have t-shirts on at all times, even when working in construction</li><li>- dress pants and a collared shirt are required for church</li><li>- no tank tops</li></ul>

## Packing List

- BIBLE, journal and Spanish notebook
- Spanish/English dictionary
- 1 beach towel, 1 bath towel, 2 wash-cloths
- watch (NOT an expensive one)
- work gloves
- hat, bandannas
- work shoes (suitable for construction)
- *comfortable* shoes (with treads) for hiking
- sunglasses and sunscreen
- mosquito repellent (good stuff)
- sandals, flip flops
- flashlight and batteries
- boxers/underwear, socks
- shampoo, conditioner, soap, chap stick, deodorant, toothbrush, toothpaste etc...
- pens and pencils
- incredibly solid, amazing water bottle
- 7 to 8 t-shirts
- bathing suit (girls – nothing skimpy. Be respectful)
- 2 pairs of work pants (not jeans: bring something lighter)
- a couple pairs of shorts, capris
- optional: rain coat (or a coat that doesn't absorb water)
- snack food
- personal medication
- sweatshirt (likely will be wearing this the day we leave)
- a light jacket (likely will be wearing this the day we leave)
- pyjamas
- \$200 American money is recommended
- sturdy backpack (as your carry-on)
- nail clipper, hair brush
- ear plugs (sleeping)



## Passport:

All team members will need to acquire a passport. Participants must ensure their passport is valid until May after their return. Since it can take 10 weeks for a passport



to arrive it is recommended that this item is taken care of as soon as possible.

### Living Arrangements

While in the Dominican Republic the team usually stays at two different bases. Both bases have running water, showers, rooms with bunk beds and a large meeting/family room. The pictures



below are from the base in Santo Domingo

where the team spends the majority of their time. **Schedule**

When in the Dominican, students need to be ready to embrace living “Dominican style”. They need to be flexible and adaptable. Although they do have arrangements with various placements, much of the schedule is determined on a day-to-day basis. Some of this is due to the teams contact's availability to oversee construction projects, the availability of materials and local school schedules. Much of it is simply due to the Dominican culture. Students will not have set weeks at specific places. Their weeks will often have a variety of activities. As a result, there will not be a clearly defined schedule before departure.

### During the 2013-14 trip students spent:

- several construction projects (hauling concrete & building rooms)
- working at a shop,
- teaching at various schools
- spending time at a orphanage
- visiting a village
- miscellaneous, other jobs

### Medical Information

In the event of a medical issue while in the DR, every measure will be taken to provide the best available care. When in Sabana Grande, medical help is not as readily available as in Santo Domingo. The base in Santo Domingo is close to a medical clinic which is run by the Luke Society. It has limited supplies as it relies on donations. In Santo Domingo there is also a hospital within a short drive. Although medical insurance is absolutely necessary, if a student uses either the clinic or the hospital's services for minor procedures, the student will be required to pay cash. The amount of paperwork required to go



through insurance for small procedures is too cumbersome. Procedures and medications are very cheap. For example, in the past, a student got three stitches and it cost \$6.

### Prior to Departure

- Each member must acquire their own medical insurance for travel outside of Canada.
- Once insurance has been acquired, the necessary information (policy number, name of company etc...) must be passed on to Ms. Weening.
- In addition to insurance, each member must get the proper immunizations prior to the trip. It is ideal to do this 4-6 weeks before departure.
- It is possible to get these immunizations from a family doctor, however, most people are forced to go to a travel doctor. Travel doctors charge a fee for the consultation and then for the shots. Be sure to check your specific drug plan as many will cover these costs
- Mandatory shots are an updated tetanus, updated Hep B and a Hep A vaccination
- Different travel doctors make different recommendations. Some may suggest malaria or other medications. Please make your own decisions based on the information given.
- If you're looking for a travel clinic, go to [www.york.ca](http://www.york.ca) and type in "travel clinic" into the search box on the top of the page.



### While in the Dominican Republic

Each trip will be different from each of the trips before, even when returning to the same country. Generally, in the Dominican Republic there are two bases which the team will stay at. One is in Santo Domingo and the other is in Sabana Grande (the star) which is north-east of Santo Domingo. Throughout their stay, It is highly likely that students will travel throughout the country. During the 2013-14 trip the students went to Sabana Grande, Santo Domingo, Altagracia, and the Dump Village.





## **Airport**

Traveling with a big group can be quite a challenge. It is not usually possible to check-in as one big group, so when you arrive at the airport you are encouraged to stand in line and check in with your child. The group as a whole will then move on to customs. When departing, all students are required to wear their team t-shirts.

## **Reporting while away**

Similarly to the schedule, students and parents must be ready to embrace living “Dominican style”. Due to the nature of the country and culture, both parties must be willing to be flexible and adaptable. In the Dominican, just because something is planned does not ensure it will be done. Students and parents must be ready for this. The culture tends to be relationship focused, not time driven.

Students will have access to email once per week on Sunday afternoons when the class goes to an internet cafe. The amount of time they spend on the internet is, usually, on up to the students. However, on weekends when we have excursions, such contact will not happen. Also, when we spend time at the base in Sabana Grande, internet is not available at all. Therefore, depending on the schedule, there will be weeks without direct contact from the students.

Ideally, students will have access to Skype once per week, usually on Sunday evenings. This contact is limited to a half an hour maximum. With limited access to computers, numbers and number of people who want to access home, this is often quite a process.



Detailed updates regarding the day-to-day activities of the entire group are provided by the students via blog posts online. These updates are glimpses into the lives of the group and, as a result, these updates will be lengthy.

## **Reintegration after the trip**

The return to Canada is usually near the end of April. Regardless of what day of the week the team returns, the goal is on the students to go to school on the next available school day. After spending one day at school as a group, all students must take the following two school days off. They are not allowed to be at the school.





Reintegrating into Canadian life is one of the most interesting parts of this entire experience. As a class, much time is spent talking through experiences both in the Dominican as well as the experiences surrounding coming back to Canada. Time is spent debriefing, discussion and working through the situation as a group. By this point in the program students are very open with the teacher and, as a result, the students are quite open with respect to the highs and lows of returning to regular Canadian life. As can be expected, many of them have questions regarding what is expected of them now and what they should expect from others.

Each student has a unique personality, therefore there is no set protocol on how to deal with reintegration. As parents, you

know your children and have to react and respond accordingly. Having said that, in many situations there is a strong desire for students to be heard. Often, the students' biggest struggle is with wanting and needing someone to really listen to them; they crave someone to take time with them. They crave to have a listener who is excited and engaged.

Often there is a disconnect between what the students expect and what parents expect. It is important that parents and children take time to communicate. Before leaving the Dominican, students are encouraged to go home and be as open and willing to share as possible. Depending on the student's personality, this can be difficult as students are trying to process all that they saw, experienced and learned. Parents need to be intentional with their children. They need to set aside time to interact with their child soon after they arrive home. They need to make time to listen and engage in their stories. The students have two days off of school and this time is to be used to think, process and reflect.



**Program Timeline** (the time for applying may be changed to the winter for fall 2015-16)

Month/Time	What is to be done
Mid- April	Bring sheet and post-dated cheque to the office indicating your interest
May	Week 1: Information meeting for interested students and parents/guardians. Essay is due Week 2: Consultation with staff regarding interested students Week 3: Interviews with interested students and parents/guardians
June	Announcement of team
Summer/Fall	Fund-raising
Fall Semester	English Independent reading
December	All funds are due to the office (last day before Christmas break)
January	Appointment with travel doctor
February	Week 1: - Given to the teacher: permission forms, insurance information, photo-copy of passport - Given to the parents: DR contact information - Done by the parents: register with Foreign Affairs Canada  Week 4: - 2 days off before departure  Throughout: - Spanish preparation, prepare for service, donation collection, research cultural norms and customs, compare social institutions in Canadian society to those in Central America, and develop group cohesion and teamwork skills.
March	In the Dominican Republic
April	Return at the end of the month. Go to school for the first school day after we're back. Students are at home for the next two school days.
May and June	Class time after the trip will be used to debrief, complete International Block course work, work on summative assignments or ISUs, and, where applicable, complete the fourth credit.

**Meetings**

Month/Time	Purpose
May	Information regarding the program
June	Exhibition Night from the current year's participants Meeting (during lunch) with students regarding fund-raising and passports. Form letter is handed out.
Fall semester	Meetings (during lunch) with students to touch base and get a fundraising update
February	Within two weeks of departure date there will be an evening meeting to go over questions, final details and to fill suitcases with the collected donations

## Curriculum

The following is a list of credits that students have received as a result of their participation in the TDChristian International Block class.

Year	Grade 11	Grade 12
2009	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Spanish Level 1 (LWSAD)</li> <li>Interdisciplinary Studies (IDC30)</li> <li>Americas: Geographic Patterns and Issues (CGD3M)</li> <li>English 11</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Spanish Level 1 (LWSAD)</li> <li>Interdisciplinary Studies (IDC40 or IDC4U)</li> <li>Environmental Resource Management (CGR4M)</li> <li>Spare</li> </ul>
2010	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Spanish Level 1 (LWSAD)</li> <li>Interdisciplinary Studies (IDC30)</li> <li>Americas: Geographic Patterns and Issues (CGD3M) or Canadian and World Issues (CGW4U)</li> <li>English 11</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Spanish Level (LWSAD)</li> <li>Interdisciplinary Studies (IDC40 or IDC4U)</li> <li>Canadian and World Issues (CGW4U)</li> <li>Spare</li> </ul>
2011	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Spanish Level 1 (LWSAD)</li> <li>Interdisciplinary Studies (IDC30)</li> <li>A perspective course (HRT3M or HRE23)</li> <li>English 11</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Spanish Level 1 (LWSAD)</li> <li>Interdisciplinary Studies (IDC40 or IDC4U)</li> <li>Family Studies (HHS4M)</li> <li>Spare</li> </ul>
2012	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>2 Co-op credits</li> <li>Social Justice (HSP3MG)</li> <li>English 11</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>2 Co-op Credits</li> <li>Social Justice (HSP3MG)</li> <li>Challenge and Change (HSB4MG)</li> </ul>
2013	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>2 Co-op credits</li> <li>Social Justice (HSP3MG)</li> <li>English 11</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>2 Co-op Credits</li> <li>Social Justice (HSP3MG)</li> <li>Challenge and Change (HSB4MG)</li> </ul>
2014	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>2 Co-op credits</li> <li>Social Justice (HSP3MG)</li> <li>English 11</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>2 Co-op Credits</li> <li>Social Justice (HSP3MG)</li> <li>World Issues</li> </ul>