

## Message from Schneider



*Schneider Saint Surin is one of the university students sponsored by the Foundation. This is part two of his report on his experiences in becoming a university student in the Dominican Republic.*

“Hi folks, this is me one more time. Schneider is with you for the second time with the last part of my schooling story in the DR.

The time had come for me to leave my country (Haiti). it was such a heartbreaking moment for me, my family and friends!

I remember, my Dad had gathered the family together and explained to me life outside of parents’ watch. It was a whole bunch of Dad’s talk!

One part in our dialogue which keeps flashing in my head now and then is when he said, “Schneider, I know you’re a responsible young man. I do believe you’re going to perform great work. Always remember the main reason you’re going to the DR and make the family prouder of you. You know the challenge we have. Lead your life in the right path. The time has come for you to go and get what you exactly wanted and dreamed about ages ago. And we’ll be waiting to see your success within a few years. These are what will keep your mom and I alive!

Well, this very last part is one of those things which keeps motivating me the most.

Shortly afterwards, I received some life coaching for my time in the DR from Mr. Engel, and also received some tips for safe travel, because this was going to be my first time traveling in an airplane. I had to take an airplane. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, all the borders were closed. Anybody who’d go to the DR would have to go by airplane.

On the next day, so early in the morning, I’d already packed everything and the time had come to leave the

village. Before I left, my father woke up everyone in the house and we prayed for about 30 minutes and we hugged each other. My dad with one of my best friends (Lorvens Révolus) went with me to PAP to the airport.

One little quick sequence in the story that I want to explain is something that happened at the airport -- due to that, I was on the verge of losing my flight that day. What really happened? When I went through the checking-in department and when I started talking to the receptionist man, here’s how it went:

**Desk man:** You won’t be able to make that trip!  
I shockingly replied!

**Me:** Would you mind telling what really is going on?

**Receptionist man:** Because you have a one-way ticket, you will need to book the return ticket even if you might not be certain that you’re coming back at that given time.

**Me:** How come? I’m going for studying there!

**Receptionist man:** Can I see your paperwork, or the acceptance letter from the university?

**Me:** No! I don’t have all that.

**Receptionist man:** Do you have a student visa?

**Me:** No!

**Receptionist man:** You’re going to work on all of these when getting there, right?

**Me:** Yes!

**Receptionist man:** So, with that being said, you’re actually going there as a tourist. The DR authorities established a principle, which is, “Tourists will be able to remain for 30 days in the DR. If you stay longer, you will be charged a fee for violation.” This won’t actually lead to any problem for you as soon as you pay the fees (The monthly checking in thing). All this means they expect you to be back to your resident country within the 30 days. Therefore, you need to have your return ticket.

**Me:** Oh okay, I understand! So, can I still make the flight today?

**Desk man:** Yes, but you need to book the return ticket right now before it’s too late.

**Me:** Thank you so much, I’ll see what can be done!

**Desk man:** Go quick!

Mr. Engel has always been farsighted. Before I left, he had sent me a text “I’ve topped your mobile account so that you can contact me if there’s anything”.

But, unfortunately, that wasn’t an option, because before I entered into the entrance door to the airport, I gave my sim card to my friend! And he and my dad had already left. Telling you the truth, I was under so

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much pressure. A lot of things were crossing through my mind at that time. If somebody would look at me in the eyes, they would be able to tell every ongoing thing with me. I was thinking deeply; and I was like, I think I need to find something. Let me locate a free Wi-Fi place. So, I did. I successfully found it, and got in communication with Mr. Engel. I explained the situation and when he went on the airway company website, which is Sunrise, he was unable to find any available flight. That was the most frustrating part for me. But a few seconds afterwards, Mr. Engel was like, "Oh Schneider, I think I found something; but before we proceed, go and ask them, can it be any other airline company?" And I ran so quick to ask! So, the guy said, "It doesn't matter as long as you have the booking confirmation number of the ticket." And I said, "Okay, thank you!" All of these, I was in so much rush. And I said to Mr. Engel, "Yes, it can be any."

And Mr. Engel was like, "There's another airway which is operated by the company you're having your flight with. So, we're going for it?"

I said, "Yes"

Mr. Engel send me a screenshot of the ticket confirmation number. I went so quick to the checking department. They verified so quickly that I don't think they even got the chance to check my bag and suitcase. A guy came out of nowhere and asked, "Are you the one who had trouble with your return ticket?" I worriedly replied, "Yes it's me." Then he said, "Follow me!"

I ran and ran fast to the security gate. Took off my belt, my shoes, my phone, computer --everything which is related to metallic. And I passed to the other side so fast, grabbed my shoes, my belt, every other thing and ran and ran. The guy was like, "Make it faster, faster." I ran and quickly climbed into a bus on the airstrip that led to the airplane. I think I was the last person who got on the plane. I even didn't sit in my right seat.

Whooooohh, it was sooo messed up with that trip! haha! But I eventually caught the plane -- successfully!

Flying in an airplane for the very first time was such a great experience for me. The feel that I had! I'm not finding the exact words yet to explain; but It was wonderful!

November 29th 2020 12:30PM, I landed. It was an hour flight or even less than that. There were some things I felt when the plane was exactly landing on the airstrip

and while rolling. I started missing my hometown horribly. I felt so strange. I got to a point where I said, "Oh my God, this is not my country. Let me return to my hometown. Life will be too hard for me here! No friends, no close family, oh no, it's going to be so hard for me." These were my anxieties!

Strangely and suddenly, there was a voice in my head which went like "Henceforth, this will be your new home for a period of time, unfortunately. And I started feeling better and better. I had a family member (a cousin) who came and picked me up. While I was in the car I was enjoying the views of the country. Mostly they were buildings and things I used to see in movies. Haha.

We arrived. It was something like a 3-hour and 30-minute drive to our destination. The first city where I stayed for a short period of time here is called "La romana". In English this means "The Roman", although it isn't a place in Italy.

My cousin explained to me a few things about here in the DR, because he has been living here a long time. However, I kept feeling so strange!

My cousin helped me, exploring more things in the DR. While I said the DR, it's because, basically, all the territory is almost all along the same line. If you can really deal with the one city, you will have less work when moving to other places.

So, my cousin took me out, showed me places and interacted with some natives, etc.

But as for when he was communicating with them, he was upstream and I was downstream. It had nothing do with the little Spanish I'd learned from school. I couldn't even catch a single word. Telling the truth, it was so hard for me at the very beginning! it took me days until I started feeling like myself.

Later on, I moved to another city which is closer to the capital called Boca Chica, which I would consider to be my home town. There, I explored more things in the DR. It's a touristic place, nice beach, great restaurants, amazing hotels and stuff. It is a cool place. Different kinds of nationalities go there for events, stayed there and helped me adapt faster. And I also learned what being in quarantine really means while in the Dominican Republic. Places had a so limited time to be open. You were given a limited time to be out. So, you weren't even able to stay in front of your house or else you would be arrested for law violation and would be charged, I assume. The world had changed in a glimpse!

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### Schneider at his New University

A short time later, I would locate to a Spanish school (UNAPEC) to start learning some new skills. This is such great school, very highly rated; but it is mostly a trade-school. But teaching a lot of languages and teaching in some other fields too, it could also be considered a university.

I had a hard time dealing with their money. In Haiti the highest paper bill amount that we have is 1,000HTG. However here it is a 2,000DOP. and as for as the case of coins, it took me longer than a month to really understand because coins can be a bunch of different kinds of money here. In Haiti, what we consider to be 1 HTG, here it is 5DOP: and in Haiti we have the 5HTG coin. Here there's a 10DOP. And the 1DOP coin here looks just like 1HTG in Haiti. I mean in their shape. It was so hard to get used to! Haha 😊!

As for as communicating with the people, when I would go to the public places, especially at the bank, I would always speak English. Well, English is not their main language. But most of them can understand a little bit of it; and English has a high value here as well. They love English so much!

I remember, I asked myself a question. The question was, "Schneider, are you going to speak English for the whole time remaining here, even doing your schooling in English?" And I replied to myself "What a stupid question!" And my head was like, "No, you stupid brother, this will make you a paranoid person." And suddenly, It was like, "Yes, I think you're right!" But, obviously, I was talking to my own self, haha 😊!

Since then, I started putting the little Spanish I had into action. That doesn't mean I did not get stuck in many conversations, but I always have the greatest backup

which is English. Sometimes, when I speak it, I have to translate from English to Spanish.

The most challenging part for me in speaking Spanish is with the pronoun and the article. You need to know by heart whether the word is a feminine word or masculine word, and also the different structures when forming sentences in the plural.

The articles with feminine words are La and una. The plural is Las. The articles with masculine words are El and un. The plural is Los. That is such a challenging part in speaking Spanish! But it shouldn't really be something difficult for Haitians, because we have that same structure in common in French.

I also learned how hard it is to get along with other folks, those who are Dominicans (Dominicano/a). It's true we're sharing the same island; but I tell you what. We have a big invisible high wall between us.

First, a different culture (Sports, music, language, food). Second, different aspects in view and perception. Third, back to the history. Our ancestors left many bad memories for us (harmful, hurtful, brutal, savage and cruel). This is why the DR and Haiti sometimes are having bad times; and when these kinds of conflicts are happening, the Haitian folks are paying the consequences. But, it is mostly the illegal Haitians living here that experience it.

Most Dominicans don't consider us to be a guest but an enemy. But, truly a lot of them, like a very large number, have a big heart and consider us like family. Those who are so kind with us call us, Hermano/a or Primo/a. The first word means brother/sister and the second one means cousin.

Fourth, different skin color. Of course, there are some black Dominicans. The Dominicans mostly call the Haitians "Moreno" for men or "Morena" for the female, which means "Niga" in English. I don't think it is nice to say personally. But, we're fine with it, because it is considered to be a nickname. They call the black Dominicans that as well, if I'm not mistaken.

Well, these are some of the not so polite sides here in the DR.

Back to the Spanish thing, I think I learned Spanish in something like 9-10 months because I had to jump into college right so quick.

Getting to college wasn't just a walk in the park, especially with all the paperwork. The FDF board knows

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what I'm talking about and Mr. Engel personally. He even flew here to the DR to bring his assistance to the process. My visa was about to expire. We'd gone to embassy to embassy. We just wanted an extension. Unfortunately, the DR does not operate like the US. We had to explore more and more -- as much as we ever could! We finally went to the foreign affairs office where we met a Dominican guy who decided to help us the quickest way possible. But it wasn't with an extension. It was for an entire visa renewal. The price was for me to travel back to Haiti to the DR consulate in the northern part of the country in Cap Haitien. I had to stay there just for 4/5 days at most. But due to the bouncing strike in Haiti, I had to stay 15 days altogether.

With regards to my paperwork, that was such a long nightmare for both me and the FDF board! I was not really aware of the steps that I needed to go through in order to get everything all set for college, nor at the right time. I also got the wrong person working on it. That led us to start with a new process over and over. All this lasted so long because of the ongoing crisis in Haiti. When I say starting over, I mean starting with the process back in Haiti, getting the documents from the educational ministry and legalizing them (officially stamped and sealed) and going through many different departments and then going to the Dominican consulate for a verification. I think this process should have lasted for 30 days at most. But it took much, much longer. As for the steps in Haiti, it was never the right time to work on all these things because the strikes that the country has been dealing with. It sometimes gets even quite grueling whenever the crisis grows stronger. Added to all these things, the DR government shut down their diplomatic affairs with Haiti. But eventually, all the procedures came across on the right path.

Long story short, the time came for me to eventually start with college. The college's name is UTESA (Universidad Tecnológica de Santiago). I still remember that day as if it was yesterday. I remember the feeling I had when the day had come, the time while I was in the car, when I got at the admission office, and the entrance test that I had. It was nothing but first-rate. God was on the move!

I do not really have much to say about my time in school. Because COVID-19 prevented us from having many in-person classes, we mostly had blended courses, although we did have some great times. When

classes were about to come back to in-person classes for the new session, we had an assignment that I really enjoyed. It was something like a survey. We were separated into several groups to walk the street, wisely ask people to share a little of their time with us and to answer a few questions. Most of the questions had to do with their time spent in the quarantine, their state of mind in different aspects, how did they maintain contact with other people? Did they think it was the end of the world? Etc. It was sooo amazing and enjoyable with some answers of the people!

In the long run, I had to ask the FDF to be able to transfer to another school called PUCMM (Pontificia Universidad Católica Madre y Maestra) for the best education, although the previous school is a wonderful school. But, this new school, wooh! I love it! The transfer has been made successfully. It wasn't really a lot of bureaucracy to go through.

I haven't yet explored much here, but so far, so great! Well, I think I'm getting to the conclusion of the article. I am more than thrilled to resume my life as a foreign student in the DR lasting 2 years, 2 months and 8 days. This text is finally done, finished on February 8 at 2:34AM. Hopefully you enjoy my story and in case you are interested in knowing a part that I did not mention, please suggest it and I would be more than happy to go through it also.

Stay in good shape, you all!

God bless,

Schneider Saint Surin

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The Fond Doux Foundation engages friend-to-friend with people in and around the village of Fond Doux, Haiti, helping to provide better access to medical care and health education, improved nutrition through agriculture and animal husbandry, educational scholarships, and intercultural faith-based activities. FDF is a 501(c)3 organization based in Durham, North Carolina.