



Puerto Plata Field Placement Program



Program Overview

Comunidad Connect offers an immersive field placement experience for social work students seeking meaningful, community-rooted practice in the Caribbean. Based in Puerto Plata, Dominican Republic, students spend several months to a full year embedded alongside local organizations, gaining hands-on experience at the intersection of international development, public health, and community empowerment.

Placements are tailored to each student's academic focus and professional goals. Practice areas include monitoring and evaluation, marketing and communications, education and awareness, project design, research and data collection, policy and administration, nonprofit leadership, and grant development.

Students work directly with Comunidad Connect staff and a network of trusted community partners, building bicultural competencies and a deep understanding of sustainable development in action.

Housing options include homestays with local Dominican families — offering a rich cultural immersion experience — or independent apartment living for those who prefer greater autonomy.

Our Locations



Dominican Republic



Nicaragua



United States



Who We Are

Comunidad Connect brings together volunteers, donors, friends, students, neighbors and community leaders to address the social determinants of health and improve the quality of life of families living in poverty. We believe everyone has the right to make a difference.

Our Guiding Principles



Asset-Based Approach

We start with community strengths and assets, building on existing resources and capabilities rather than focusing solely on deficits.



Relationship-Centered

Authentic, long-term relationships are the foundation of all our work, creating trust and enabling sustainable collaboration.



Community Leadership

Local communities lead their own development process; our role is to support, amplify, and help resource their vision.



Co-Investment Model

All stakeholders have something to contribute - time, skills, or funding - which opens space for co-creation of projects and shared ownership.

Our Team



Jon R. Thompson

Co-Founder & CEO, Comunidad Connect

Jon co-founded Comunidad Connect in 2007 on a simple conviction: lasting change requires genuine partnership, not charity. What began as grassroots community development in Nicaragua has grown into a multi-country network impacting tens of thousands of lives through healthcare, housing, clean water, and education. The Atlanta Journal-Constitution named him a “Hometown Hero,” though he describes himself simply as a bridge-builder.

In 2009, Jon launched Cultural Connections to prove that mission and financial sustainability aren't mutually exclusive. Now in its 16th year, the program has engaged over 2,000 volunteers, partnered with dozens of private and public universities and generated over \$5 million to fund community programming across three countries. That proven infrastructure is what makes Comunidad Connect uniquely positioned to host transformative, well-supported internship experiences in the Dominican Republic.



Eurel Gonzalez

Country Director, Comunidad Connect Dominican Republic

Eurel brings over two decades of on-the-ground experience in the Dominican Republic, with deep roots in community health, deaf services, and social development. As Country Director for Comunidad Connect DR, he leads the local team that designs and oversees all in-country programming—making him the operational backbone of every internship experience we facilitate.

A trained communicator, entrepreneur, and community leader, Eurel combines institutional knowledge with authentic local relationships that take years to build. His on-the-ground presence ensures interns receive not just structured programming, but genuine community access, supportive supervision, and meaningful work that creates real impact.



Yarisleidy Cortez

International Programs Strategist, Comunidad Connect

Yarisleidy is an expert in social program design, community engagement, and sustainable development across Central America and the Caribbean. Her career grew directly out of fieldwork with Comunidad Connect in Nicaragua, where she developed the cross-cultural fluency and community trust that make effective internships possible.

Yarisleidy drives Comunidad Connect's program strategy and leads a team of dedicated staff and community partners - helping ensure that interns are not just placed in communities, but are prepared, guided, and integrated in ways that benefit all stakeholders. Her people-centered approach and regional expertise are key assets in facilitating internship experiences that are rigorous, ethical, and genuinely transformative.



Our Impact

Since 2007, we've been creating measurable change in communities across Nicaragua and the Dominican Republic.

4,000+

community members with improved healthcare access

150+

families with improved housing

500+

youth engaged in development programs

2,000+

volunteers and service learning participants



Where We Work

Puerto Plata

Our work here focuses on building strong partnerships with local organizations and adapting our health, housing, and youth programs to meet the specific needs of Caribbean communities.



About Puerto Plata

Puerto Plata is one of the oldest cities in the Dominican Republic, founded in the late 1400s during the early Spanish colonial period and later developing into an important port for trade in the 19th century. This history is still visible today in the historic center, where colorful Victorian-style architecture and a lively central square reflect both its rich past and vibrant present.



Fortaleza San Felipe



Centro Histórico



Teleférico de Puerto Plata

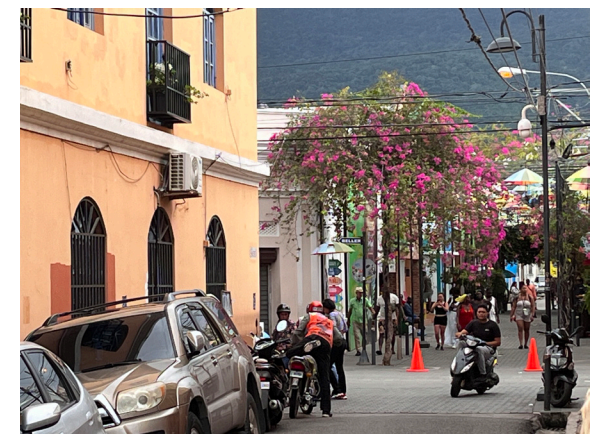


Life in Puerto Plata is pretty laid back and simple. People don't rush much, and daily life tends to revolve around basic routines, spending time outside, and being around friends or family. The warm weather and beach setting make it easy to relax, and overall the pace of life is slower compared to busier cities.

Lifestyle

Culture

Puerto Plata offers a rich cultural experience shaped by music, local traditions, and strong community ties. Daily life is social and welcoming, making it easy to build connections and feel part of the environment. It's a great place to gain real-world experience while being immersed in authentic Dominican culture.



Accommodation

Homestay

Experience Dominican life from the inside. Homestay students enjoy a private room and shared living spaces within a welcoming local family's home, with three meals a day prepared fresh, as desired. Centrally located and ideal for shorter placements, this option is perfect for students looking to deepen their Spanish fluency and cultural proficiency organically, every single day.

The Guest House

The Guest House offers a comfortable, fully furnished living experience in the heart of a traditional Puerto Plata barrio, giving interns and students the opportunity to immerse themselves in authentic local culture. With amenities like Wi-Fi, shared and private living options, a rooftop terrace with ocean and mountain views, and easy access to beaches, shops, and transportation, it's an ideal home base for a long-term stay.



All units include utilities, Wi-Fi, and basic amenities.

Cost Breakdown

Accommodation

Unit Type	Monthly Cost	Details
The Guest House Shared Kitchen Room	~\$350/month	Individual rooms with shared kitchen
The Guest House Independent Apartment	~\$480/month	Full apartment with own bathroom, kitchen, and living area
Homestay	\$250/month	Private room with shared bathroom in a home with vetted local family (English/Spanish/ASL)

Meals

Daily Food Budget (Dining Out for All Meals)	~\$25 per day	Covers three meals daily at modest, local restaurants offering good-quality food.
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*Food costs can be reduced significantly by cooking at home using the shared or private kitchen facilities.

Local Phone Plan

\$15-\$20/month

*These are estimates from March 2026 and should be used for reference only. Every experience is different and Comunidad Connect program expenses vary based on a number of factors. Please contact us directly for more information.

Estimated Monthly Budget

Expense	Monthly Cost
Lodging	\$350-\$500
Food (~\$25/day eating out)	~\$750
Local Phone Plan	\$15-\$20
Total Estimated Monthly Cost	~\$1,115-\$1,270



Additional Notes

Puerto Plata is the Dominican Republic's third-largest city — navigable, welcoming, and alive with possibility. A major cruise ship destination, the city pulses with tourist energy and vibrant local commerce by day, then settles into a warm, small-town rhythm by night. Currently experiencing significant revitalization and growth, Puerto Plata is an exciting place to live and work, offering students a dynamic, evolving community to call home.



Are You Ready?

Your global experience starts here.

Schedule your info session today!

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