

Donate Your Deposit to Win an Adventure!

"Congrats! You're a Dream Vacation Grand Prize Winner!" It took a few seconds for me to realize what I was reading. I had taken a Mandarin Foreigner class at the Global Language Network earlier in the year, and as a result, had won a fantasy vacation to the Dominican Republic. After the reality sunk in I was very excited because it was unexpected, and I always wanted to visit the Dominican Republic, a country in a Caribbean Island known for clear, turquoise water, white sand, beautiful people, music and dance such as Meringue, Bachata, and Reggaeton.

I embarked on the eight-day trip to the Dominican Republic on August 10, 2015. The prize included a four-night stay for two in an all-inclusive resort of Gran Bahia Principe. I decided to take my aunt as my companion on my prize vacation. The luxury resort Gran Bahia is in La Romana, which is about an hour west from Punta Cana, and the establishment is located right next to the beach. When I arrived, I was welcomed by marble floors, friendly staff, and a welcome cocktail; knew then that I was ready for this vacation.



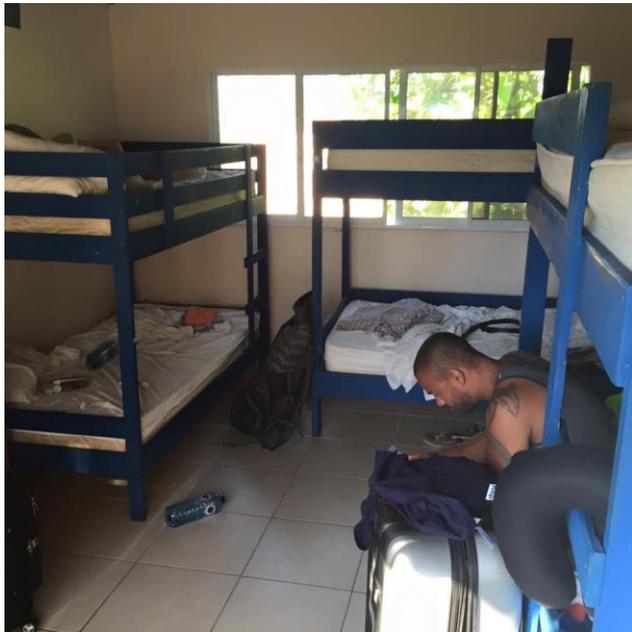
When I hear the term all-you-can-eat, I am usually prepared for sub-prime quality food, but the food served here was amazing and well presented. If you still want a different experience, you can make a reservation in one of many restaurants within the establishment, where they offer a full service with specialized menu, but still all-inclusive for the most part. We went to a couple restaurants and I had a seafood dish with a lobster (with extra cost) because yes, it is a vacation! Alcoholic beverages were also included in the all-inclusive portion of the experience; you can imagine how much fun I had with that.



I have to admit that this trip was a very different style from the way I usually travel. I am a proud frugal traveler (the cheapest place I have stayed is \$0.75 a day in Guatemala) and I usually don't stay in a nice hotel, let alone a resort. Well, it was the first time I stayed in a luxury resort, and it was a stress-free, nice experience. I was so relaxed, and enjoyed catching up with my aunt on the beach with a cocktail or beer in my hand. The four-day stay went by very quickly, but my adventure didn't end there; I had decided to stay a few extra days to see the country outside the resort as well.



After we dropped off my aunt at the Punta Cana airport, I tried convincing the shuttle driver to take me to Bavaro, a tourist area nearby, and after offering a tip, he decided to take me there. Once we arrived, I somehow managed to find a cheap hostel in this expensive resort area, and it was exactly the way I like them to be – overcrowded bunk beds, hostel staff who seemed to live there, and friendly fellow backpackers from all over the world. I like this formula because I can 1) save money 2) find local information from the staff, and 3) make friends to hang out with.



I relaxed in the hostel for a while, and then took off to check out the beach. The road became sandier as I got closer to the water. The vast view of the green ocean unfolded, and the warm breeze hit my face with the smell of hot sand and salt. There was a liberating sound of waves and serenity that I had forgotten in the busy life in D.C.



I enjoyed the lone walk along the beach, getting my feet messy with the fine sand. And I came across a scene I did not expect at all: an old bearded man with a guitar on a little rocky island with a dead tree. I could barely hear the sound of the guitar, but it was very soothing. I looked around and there was no one. He was playing the guitar in complete solitude. There was something really captivating about this scene, and for some reason, I felt that the world would fall apart if he stopped playing the guitar. I was so curious; it became my mission to find out about this man during the stay.



I encountered another interesting scene along the beach. There was a sunken ship and two local kids were playing in it.



“¡Venga sin miedo!” The boy saw me taking pictures and invited me into the ship. His name was Jose and he responded to my questions with “yeah!” like an American. He went back to play with the girl, and then started jumping off the boat for fun. This is probably one of the best pictures I have ever taken!



Each morning, I pondered what I should do that day on the bunkbed, scratching mosquito bites from the previous night. I didn't plan, and that's how I like to travel.



For some reason, there were lots of Russian stores in this area. I saw a sign “магазин” which I recognized thanks to the Russian Tourist class I took in Spring 2014. The trip was very interesting in terms of language experience too. I got to practice a little bit of Russian at the Russian store and French with some Haitians. My happiest moment was when someone asked me if I were a Dominican because of my Nicaraguan campo-accent from my Peace Corps service, which also “se comen la S al hablar.” The security guard guy at the Russian store let me take a picture with their parrots.



Did I say I love lobsters? I found this little restaurant along the beach and I feasted on a delicious buttered giant lobster. The server was very friendly and told me a little bit about the mysterious old man. Apparently he is pretty famous in the area.



Every local I talked to told me that Playa Macao was the best beach around Bavaro. I was convinced and I decided to go, but in the cheapest way. In this town, you see more motor taxis than regular taxis, and they are cheaper, but in general they were meant to service short distance. One thing I like about Latin America is that you can negotiate anything, and this was no exception. I found a guy who would take me to the beach, wait while I hang out at the beach, and take me back to the town. The ride was pretty scary on the highway though...



The beach was beautiful, and I found a small restaurant where I ordered a whole salty fried fish.



I made new Brazilian friends at the hostel, and we did a tour to Sanoa Island and went out for drinks! They taught me some Portuguese too – foi muito lindo!



The vacation had to end and the wonderful time passed so fast. I had to find the way back to the airport. Being cheap and all, I refused to pay \$50 for a shuttle service. I called up the guy who took me to the beach and he took me on the bike to the airport for \$10. I'd definitely come back to this beautiful country, and I will visit the other side of the country next time.



So, what do you say? You can win an adventure like this if you participate in the sweepstake by donating the deposit for the class. I donated my deposit because it was cheap in the first place, and I had a great time in the courses I had taken with GLN. I was happy to pay such a small amount to receive such a valuable experience! I'd like to see the courses available to people who are interested in learning languages in the future, and I knew that my small donation would make a difference. There are many ways to support GLN, and I encourage you to support GLN in any way you can!