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FACULTY TRAINING MANUAL - ACADEMIC COMPONENT:
INTERNATIONAL STUDENT VOLUNTEERS

A Project
Presented to the
Faculty of
California State University,
San Bernardino

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts
in
Education:
Environmental Education

by
Jessica Sue Niven
June 2005

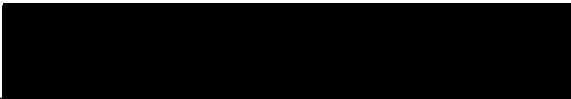
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Approved by:



Dr. Darleen Stoner, First Reader



Dr. Gary Negin, Second Reader

May 18, 2005

Date

ABSTRACT

This faculty training manual is a comprehensive approach to teaching and understanding environmental education within the context of different cultures. It looks at what shapes environmental attitudes and how these attitudes vary between cultures. Abroad programs, like International Student Volunteers (ISV), provide students with a unique opportunity to partake in cross-cultural experiential learning. This manual outlines factors that can influence that learning process and provides suggestions to maximize it.

The faculty training manual provides a common foundation for all faculty, regardless of their academic field. It includes background information specific to each country that ISV operates in, sample discussion lesson plans, information on environmental education, ethnocentrism, and ecotourism, and a clarification of the difference between conservation and preservation. It consolidates information on a variety of aspects of each country, including geography, culture and ethnic identity, class structure, social structure, the capital, trade, and environmental issues.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank Dr. Darleen Stoner for her immense help and encouragement this year. She taught me that it is possible to have passion and awareness while simultaneously wearing the hat of an environmental educator. I thank her for listening to my rants this past year and being there to bring me back from the feeling that all was lost. Most of all, I thank her for believing in my ability to finish this project when, at times, even I questioned my sanity at attempting it.

I would also like to thank my Grandpa George. He is a true example that one should never stop learning and listening to those around you. I credit him with my passion for exploring the world, which is where this project stemmed from. Without him, this project would not exist. He has shown me unconditional love for which I will never be able to fully express my gratitude. To Grandpa, I would like to say, "I will change the world because I have your words of support always in my heart."

DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this project to my mother, who has always been a constant source of inspiration and a true example that dreams can come true.

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CHAPTER ONE

BACKGROUND

Introduction

International Student Volunteers (ISV) is a non-profit public benefit corporation that provides international travel programs for university students. These programs combine conservation, education, and recreation into one program for students who are interested in volunteering their time in communities abroad. The month-long program is divided into two-week sections: a community development or conservation volunteer work project and an outdoor adventure tour. ISV works with students from the United States, the United Kingdom, Canada, and Australia. For many students, this experience with ISV is their first time traveling abroad or experiencing a different culture.

Students participating in ISV programs are guided by faculty and have the option of receiving academic credit through the University of California, Santa Barbara. Faculty facilitate the learning process for participants through leading student discussions on issues specific to the host country, assigning grades based on journal work, participation, and overall attitude, and encouraging

students to interact with local communities. Faculty are required to possess either a master's degree or doctorate in any field. Their diverse backgrounds make it difficult to maintain a uniform standard of environmental or cultural education for students on programs in different parts of the world, or even between programs in the same country.

The purpose of this project is to develop a training manual (see Appendix) that will provide a common foundation for all faculty, regardless of their academic field. It will include background information specific to the country in which the faculty will be working, sample discussion lesson plans, information on ethnocentrism, and distinctions between common terms in environmental education. ISV combines environmental and cultural education into one program. It is therefore imperative that the faculty are aware of significant environmental issues, both current and historical. These will be included in the manual for each country. To ensure that the faculty are prepared to facilitate interactions between program participants and local communities, the manual will also provide information on customs, including greetings, traditions, and social structure.

Faculty must lead by example. This training manual will help them understand their role in the ISV program and in facilitating their students' educational and cultural experiences. The manual will include suggestions for both educational and cultural encounters and sample discussion lesson plans to aide in this.

ISV offers a variety of experiences, both in developed and developing countries. Each program is unique. It is important that faculty understand some of the differences and similarities that they will encounter in their cultural exchange programs. This will enable them to facilitate a more smooth transition for student participants into life within their host country, thereby allowing students to take full educational advantage of the month-long program.

CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Introduction

International Student Volunteers (ISV) provides a unique educational experience for students from different countries throughout the world. ISV faculty assume the role as educational facilitators to student participants during their month-long program. In order to maximize the potential of this experience, ISV faculty must be knowledgeable about environmental education, the difference between conservation and preservation, the definition of ethnocentrism and its impact on intercultural communication, and the significance of abroad programs as learning experiences.

Definition and Goals of Environmental Education

Throughout its history, the field of environmental education (EE) has traveled through a variety of definitions. A currently accepted definition is "environmental education is aimed at producing a citizenry that is knowledgeable concerning the biophysical environment and its associated problems, aware of how to help solve these problems, and motivated to work toward their solutions" (Stapp et al., 1969, p. 31).

According to the landmark Tbilisi Declaration of 1977, there are five categories of environmental education objectives: awareness, knowledge, attitudes, skills, and participation. Effective EE must address these five components (The Tbilisi Declaration, 2001). Awareness and knowledge deal with helping individuals to become more aware of, sensitive to, and knowledgeable of the total environment and its problems. Attitude is the component that covers general feelings of concern for the environment and the motivation to take action and utilize the skills learned through EE. Participation refers to the necessity of providing an opportunity to work toward the resolution of environmental problems.

At its core, environmental education (EE) is a holistic approach to the broader fields of education and overall understanding. The Tbilisi Declaration cites the importance of using EE to look outward to the community and states that EE "should involve the individual in an active problem-solving process within the context of specific realities" (p. 14). Participants in ISV programs have a very unique opportunity to study and understand EE within the reality of a different culture.

EE has often been associated with environmentalism, a term which has negative social stereotypes. According to

Disinger (2001), "environmentalists believe in managing the environment in such a manner that all negative effects by humans will be avoided and/or completely redressed" (p. 3). This is often associated with what some would call radical social or political behavior, embodied in groups like Greenpeace. Many people feel that these groups are too extreme and create a negative perception of environmentalism.

Although many environmental educators are environmentalists, the two terms are not synonymous. The inherent associations that people make between the two has frequently caused people to shy away from environmental education. Although environmental educators may be environmentalists, and vice versa, the two terms are not synonymous. This leads into what is called the "two hat" problem (Hug, 2001).

The "two hat" problem deals with the perception of environmental educators by the public, including industry, utilities, labor, business, media, and the general public (Hug, 2001). Society has historically equated the term environmental educator with environmentalist; the idea that both fall under "one hat." Due to this "one hat" perception, environmental educators are often brushed aside as environmentalists, or what the public view as

troublemakers. This scenario limits the effectiveness of environmental educators because their message is dismissed before it is understood. To overcome the problem of public perception, environmental educators must familiarize themselves with all sides associated with an issue, support the right of each advocate to be heard, and provide the opportunity for informed debate (Hug, 2001).

The job of environmental educators is to ensure that they are upholding the goals of EE. An environmental educator is defined as "any world citizen who uses information and educational processes to help people analyze the merits of the many and varied points of view usually present on a given environmental issue" (Hug, 2001, p. 47). Wearing the hat of an environmental educator requires remaining value-free. It is essential that students are presented with all sides of an issue and allowed to come to their own conclusions.

The future of EE depends on the ability of future generations to be aware of the impacts of culture and development on environmental views. There is a relationship between socio-economic development and the improvement of the environment (The Tbilisi Declaration, 2001). Education abroad programs, like ISV, place students in areas where they are able to experience different

stages of socio-economic development first-hand.

Faculty-staff need to take advantage of this learning opportunity and explore this aspect of EE.

The Significance of the Difference Between Conservation and Preservation

The history of the environmental movement has been characterized by theoretical debate and disagreement over practical applications of each theory. One central debate is between the philosophies of conservation and preservation. The two terms are often, mistakenly, used interchangeably, but they are not synonyms. It is essential to make the distinction between the two terms to fully understand the complexity of the environmental movement and to thus effectively be able to teach environmental education.

The conservation movement began during the early part of the 20th century with Gifford Pinchot. Nicknamed "The Forester," he is considered the founder of the conservation movement and was one of Theodore Roosevelt's chief lieutenants. The definition of conservation used by Pinchot was "the use of natural resources for the greatest good of the greatest number for the longest time" (in Herfindahl, 1965, p. 229). According to this definition,

conservation is the use of natural resources for the benefit of the people.

When people hear the term conservation, they are not generally opposed to it. However, the problem comes when people consider how the three variables, greatest good, greatest number, and longest time, can be maximized simultaneously (Herfindahl, 1965). Conserving one resource may mean sacrificing another. There are many vested interests in the environmental movement and dealing with natural resources, from business, to government, to private citizens. Some see a dollar sign on natural resources while others see enjoyment and escape. It is these differences in perception that can create heated debate around the idea of conservation.

Another conservation idea Pinchot used was that "conservation implies both the development and the protection of resources, the one as much as the other" (in Herfindahl, 1965, p. 230). The problem with this idea comes in defining development. Some will see a housing development or shopping center; others a national park with an interpretation center or hiking trails. These varying views of the same term have led to a history of conflict within the conservation debate that is still prevalent today.

Pinchot placed development as the primary goal and everything else, including conservation of the natural resources, secondary. He stated that "the first principle of conservation is development, the use of the natural resources now existing on this continent for the benefit of the people who live here now" (in McConnell, 1965, p. 191). This statement was made to combat the perception that conservationists promoted the idea that natural resources should be withheld, or preserved, for future generations. Conservationists made a clear distinction between the goals of conservation and those of preservation.

Central to Pinchot's perception of conservation is the concept of human control over nature. He stated that "the first duty of the human race is to control the earth it lives upon" (Pinchot, 1967, p. 45). This control manifests itself largely in development in modern day. Most conservation areas contain roads or highways, are logged, mined, or used, and generally open to development in one form or another.

On the other end of the spectrum of the environmental movement is the idea of nature preservation. Preservation is a term that "embraces the whole spectrum of groups interested in preserving various aspects of nature as she

is" (Herfindahl, 1965, p. 231). This definition implies a "hands-off" approach to dealing with nature. From this explanation, it is clear that there exists a natural, and very real, conflict between conservation and preservation.

Simply put, preservation leaves nature, or any area, alone, free from the influence of humans. This is different from the conservation approach, in which humans control nature. True preservationists believe that humans have no place within the natural realm. According to Disinger (2001), the preservationist perspective says "the world should be left to its own devices to function according to the laws of nature, with effective elimination of human impacts" (p. 3). Preservation focuses on the need for nature to be allowed to function independently of humanity. This contradicts the central theme of conservation; that it is the right and duty of humans to control the environment and its natural resources.

To many outside, and some inside, of the environmental movement, conservation and preservation appear synonymous. Yet, the two terms illustrate some of the different approaches to dealing with the relationship of humans to the environment and natural resources. Although there can be disagreement between, and varying

degrees among, conservationists and preservationists, it is necessary to understand the two approaches to environmental practice in order to effectively teach environmental education.

Definition of Ethnocentrism and Its Impact on Intercultural Communication

There are two approaches to intercultural communication, functional and dysfunctional (Fong, 2004). The functional approach is positive and nurturing and results in increased understanding and educational potential in intercultural interactions. It is characterized by acceptance and openness to new experiences, essential elements of effective global education programs. The dysfunctional approach is negative and hostile, characterized by suspicion, fear, and ethnocentrism (Fong, 2004).

The concept of ethnocentrism has influenced intercultural communication for centuries. According to Jandt (2004, p. 76), ethnocentrism refers to "negatively judging aspects of another culture by the standards of one's own culture." This impedes understanding between cultures because it implies a right or wrong perception. The idea of right and wrong emphasizes difference and judgment over understanding and education.

Another aspect of ethnocentrism is the attitude of the superiority of one's own culture over another culture or cultural person (Fong, 2004). Ethnocentrism is a result of a person's socialization, "the process by which we all come to believe that there is a 'right' way to think, express ourselves, and act" (Cushner & Brislin, 1996, p. 5). It is the idea that there are norms and rules of behavior that govern an individual's actions. People become accustomed to a cause and effect relationship between their actions and the actions that they solicit. These relationships provide security in knowing how to interact with others of the same culture in the most productive and clear ways. However, the same cause and effect relationships may not translate across cultures which can create misunderstandings, anxiety, and resentment. These feelings are associated with ethnocentrism and inhibit cultural exchange and education.

In order to maximize the educational potential of abroad programs, like International Student Volunteers (ISV), it is essential that ethnocentric attitudes are minimized or eliminated. The goal of abroad programs is to provide cultural experiences to their participants. This requires making students aware of ethnocentric attitudes they may possess and opening them to new experiences.

Giving participants the tools needed to employ a functional approach to intercultural communication will ensure more effective and complete exchange of ideas and skills between cultures (Jandt, 2004). It will also allow participants to embrace the richness and knowledge that is supplied by other cultures.

The Significance of Abroad Programs as Learning Experiences

As abroad programs become increasingly popular with undergraduates throughout the US and the world, we must examine the reason why and the impacts of such programs on the individual. According to Laubscher (1994), "the number of educational abroad programs has shown an increase each year since 1951" (p. xii). As the number of programs has increased so has the number of undergraduates who choose to participate in them. There are a variety of options for educational abroad programs, ranging from university-run to those run by private or not-for-profit organizations. Regardless of the affiliation, "education abroad is becoming widely recognized as an important component of undergraduate education" (Laubscher, 1994, p. xii).

The majority of undergraduate learning occurs within a classroom. This results in theoretical knowledge but little practical applications to real life experiences.

Participation in an educational abroad program provides an opportunity for students to apply their knowledge and test it within the realm of everyday life (Laubscher, 1994). This can apply to many areas of knowledge, from cultural interactions and perspectives to community development and environmental issues.

Educational abroad programs are an experiential form of learning, whereby students can gain perspective, not only on their own culture, but also on a global scale. Students are often taken outside of their comfort zone and forced to examine their reality in the context of another culture. This occurs due to exposure to a different way of life that challenges each student's idea of socially and culturally defined perspectives. The relativism provided by the educational abroad program "plays a significant role in the students' personal development in a multicultural world" (Laubscher, 1994, p. 82).

The idea of a global community is difficult for many to embrace without ever having experienced something outside of their own culture. Stereotypes are common, especially regarding things that are foreign or unknown, and they can hinder intercultural communication. This leads to an important outcome of educational abroad programs. Participants may gain an appreciation for how

stereotypes impact global attitudes. For many it may be the first experience at being different or being part of the out-group, a term which refers to "people who are kept at a physical or emotional distance" (Fong, 2004, p. 8). Many people who live in, work, or visit another country or culture will experience, at least initially, similar feelings of being a member of this out-group.

Participating in an educational abroad program often can be challenging to students because it forces them to reevaluate themselves and their perceptions. Scharfstein (1989) states "the attempt to enter into an alien culture is likely to be difficult and even painful, but is correspondingly important and rewarding" (p. xiii). The process of having to live and work within a foreign culture is a very powerful learning experience.

To understand environmental education, it is essential to understand that people who live under different circumstances make different moral judgments. This occurs because "every person is formed by the particular cultural environment in which he lives" (Scharfstein, 1989, p. 3). Different backgrounds, including culture, religion, and economic class, shape and create value systems and moral codes of conduct. These vary between, and within, cultures. Students participating

in educational abroad programs are able to interact with different people and different cultures, and thus are provided a very unique and powerful learning experience.

An educational abroad program can have lasting effects on students. It can impact their perceptions of their home country and influence their global perceptions. A global perspective or understanding is important in the field of environmental education. There are many different perspectives on an issue and intercultural experiences have the potential to make students more sensitive to this.

An educational abroad program can also provide a more clear illustration of cultural differences through experiential learning than a classroom setting can. According to Laubscher (1994), "self-analysis and introspection are inevitable and desirable outcomes of any educational process" (p. 84). These outcomes are directly facilitated by educational abroad programs. By taking students out of their own cultures and comfort zones, they are forced to examine their history and perceptions within the context of another culture.

APPENDIX

FACULTY TRAINING MANUAL - ACADEMIC COMPONENT:
INTERNATIONAL STUDENT VOLUNTEERS

INTERNATIONAL
STUDENT VOLUNTEERS:

FACULTY

TRAINING MANUAL -
ACADEMIC COMPONENT

THE INTERNATIONAL STUDENT VOLUNTEERS (ISV) MISSION

“To combine Education, Conservation, and Recreation into the ultimate summer adventure experience through an outward extension into communities abroad”

Welcome to ISV! We look forward to working with you this year to provide the experience of a lifetime for our student participants. Here is some background information to help you better understand the overall ISV program and your role within it.

International Student Volunteers (ISV) provides a unique educational experience for students from different countries throughout the world. ISV faculty assume the role as educational facilitators to student participants during their month-long program. In order to maximize the potential of this experience, ISV faculty must be knowledgeable about environmental education, the difference between conservation and preservation, the definition of ethnocentrism and its impact on intercultural communication, and the history of ecotourism.

Environmental Education

Throughout its history, the field of environmental education (EE) has traveled through a variety of definitions. A currently accepted definition is “environmental education is aimed at producing a citizenry that is knowledgeable concerning the

biophysical environment and its associated problems, aware of how to help solve these problems, and motivated to work toward their solutions” (Stapp et al., 1969, p. 31).

According to the landmark Tbilisi Declaration of 1977, there are five categories of environmental education objectives: awareness, knowledge, attitudes, skills, and participation (2001). Effective EE should address these five components. Awareness and knowledge deal with helping individuals to become more aware of, sensitive to, and knowledgeable of the total environment and its problems. Attitude is the component that covers general feelings of concern for the environment and the motivation to take action and utilize the skills learned through EE. Participation refers to the necessity of providing an opportunity to work toward the resolution of environmental problems.

At its core, environmental education (EE) is a holistic approach to the broader fields of education and overall understanding. The Tbilisi Declaration cited the importance of using EE to look outward to the community and stated that EE “should involve the individual in an active problem-solving process within the context of specific realities” (2001, p. 14). Participants in ISV programs have a very unique opportunity to study and understand EE within the reality of a different culture.

The future of EE depends on the ability of future generations to be aware of the impacts of culture and development on environmental views. There is a relationship between socio-economic development and the improvement of the environment (The Tbilisi Declaration, 2001). Education abroad programs, like ISV, place students in areas where they are able to experience different stages of socio-economic

development first-hand. Faculty should take advantage of this learning opportunity and explore this aspect of EE.

Environmental education is not synonymous with environmentalism. An environmental educator is “any world citizen who uses information and educational processes to help people analyze the merits of the many and varied points of view usually present on a given environmental issue” (Hug, 2001, p. 47). Working as an environmental educator requires you to remain value-free. It is not an advocacy position so it is essential that students are presented with all sides of an issue or problem and allowed to come to their own conclusions.

Conservation and Preservation

The history of the environmental movement has been characterized by theoretical debate and disagreement over practical applications of environmental theory. One central debate is between the philosophies of conservation and preservation. The two terms are often mistakenly used interchangeably, but they are not synonymous. Rather, they illustrate two of the different approaches to dealing with the relationship of humans to the environment and natural resources. It is essential to make the distinction between the two terms to fully understand the complexity of the environmental movement and to thus effectively be able to teach environmental education.

Conservation is defined as “the use of natural resources for the greatest good of the greatest number for the longest time” (Herfindahl, 1965, p. 229). The term

originated in the early part of the 20th century with a man named Gifford Pinchot. Conservation implies human control over nature, often in the form of development. Most conservation areas contain roads or highways, are logged, mined, or used, and generally open to development in one form or another.

Preservation lies on the other end of the spectrum. Simply put, preservation leaves nature free from the influence of humans. This is very different from the conservation approach, in which humans control nature. True preservationists believe that humans have no place within the natural realm. From this explanation, it is clear that there exists a natural, and very real, conflict between conservation and preservation.

Ethnocentrism

The concept of ethnocentrism has influenced intercultural communication for centuries. According to Jandt (2004, p. 76), ethnocentrism refers to “negatively judging aspects of another culture by the standards of one’s own culture.” This impedes understanding between cultures because it implies a right or wrong perception. The idea of right and wrong emphasizes difference and judgment over understanding and education.

Ethnocentrism translates into an attitude of the superiority of one’s own culture over another culture or cultural person (Fong, 2004). It is a result of a person’s socialization into the norms and rules of behavior that govern an individual’s actions within a culture. There exists a cause and effect relationship between the actions and

the response that they solicit; however, the same cause and effect relationship may not translate across cultures. This can result in misunderstandings, anxiety, and resentment and can inhibit cultural exchange and education.

In order to maximize the educational potential of ISV, it is essential that ethnocentric attitudes are minimized or eliminated. This requires students recognizing their own ethnocentric attitudes, and being able to set these aside, in order to embrace the richness and knowledge of another culture. Faculty can help to facilitate this process.

Ecotourism

The term ecotourism first appeared in the 1970s as a result of concerns over the negative impacts of traditional tourism on the environment and local communities. The rise of the global environmental movement during this time period further emphasized the need for an alternative to mass tourism. Scientists, park officials, and environmental organizations began to draw attention to the loss of habitat and rainforest on a global scale. It was their belief that the only way to protect such areas was to make sure that people in and around them saw the benefits of having them to bring in tourist revenue (Honey, 2003).

During the late 1970s, The World Bank and the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) closed down their tourism departments and stopped lending money for tourist agendas. People also began to seek pristine places to travel overseas and the

desire for prepackaged trips, such as cruises, declined. The tourism industry was forced to go in a new direction: ecotourism.

According to The International Ecotourism Society (TIES), ecotourism is defined as “responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment and improves the well-being of local people” (2005, paragraph 1). This industry focuses on the impact of the travel experience on three things: the traveler, the environment, and the people of the host country. Under the goals of ecotourism, all of these impacts must be positive. Ecotourism has broader implications on how people should travel and how the tourism industry should theoretically be (Honey, 2003).

TIES cites seven major governing principles for ecotourism. These are that ecotourism minimize impact; build environmental and cultural awareness and respect; provide positive experiences for both visitors and hosts; provide direct financial benefits for conservation; provide financial benefits and empowerment for local people; raise sensitivity to host country’s political, environmental, and social climate; and support international human rights and labor agreements (2004). Ecotourism, as an industry, focuses on raising awareness, for both the traveler and host, in a variety of areas. It also provides an alternative for many local communities struggling to survive in the global economy. It gives communities a sustainable alternative to environmentally destructive practices, often by showing that the economic benefits generated by ecotourism outweigh those from the exploitation of natural resources.

The ecotourism industry took off in the 1990s as public interest centered more on travel experiences within different cultures rather than package deals. The

popularity that the industry found led to the corruption of the original concept of ecotourism in many areas. Currently, what many people advertise as ecotourism falls into one of three categories (Honey, 2003). The first is ecotourism “lite” businesses, which are characterized by their use of some environmental practices but not all. The second is called green washing scams, a term that refers to businesses that use green marketing principles but fail to translate them into real life practice. The third is genuine ecotourism, which refers to businesses that implement and follow environmentally and socially responsible practices.

In 2002, the Quebec Declaration stated that “different forms of tourism, especially ecotourism, if managed in a sustainable manner, can represent valuable economic opportunity for local and indigenous populations and their cultures and for the conservation and sustainable use of nature for future generations” (World Ecotourism Society, 2002, paragraph 13). Ecotourism has the potential for a positive global environmental impact. It has the ability to shape beliefs and lifestyles by changing attitudes about the value of nature.

The future of ecotourism depends on the global ability to ensure that the theoretical practices of ecotourism translate into reality. One way to ensure this is through the green certification program. The certification measures the benefits to host countries, local communities, and the environment. Businesses who receive this certification must be practicing the principles of ecotourism, not just fall under the umbrella of the term. This program will help to keep ecotourism businesses honest and guarantee that travelers looking for the ecotourism experience will find it.

AUSTRALIA

Quick Facts

Source: The world factbook. (2005). Retrieved March 3, 2005, from <http://www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/>

Area: 7,686,850 square kilometers

Population: 19,913,144

Term for citizens: Australians

Language: English, native languages

Currency: Australian dollar (approx. 1.26 Australian dollars/1 US dollar)

Capital: Canberra

Religion: Anglican 26.1%, Roman Catholic 26%, other Christian 24.3%, non-Christian 11%, other 12.6%

Government type: Democracy, federal state system that recognizes the British monarch as sovereign

Chief of State: Queen of Australia Elizabeth II

Military: Australian Army, Royal Australian Navy, Royal Australian Air Force, Special Operations Command (all voluntary at age 16)

Literacy rate: 100% (age 15 and over can read and write)

Climate: Primarily arid to semi-arid, temperate in the south and east, tropical in the north

Natural hazards: Cyclones along the coast, severe droughts, forest fires

Environmental Issues: Soil erosion from overgrazing, industrial development, urbanization, and poor farming practices; soil salinity rising due to the use of poor quality water; desertification; clearing from agricultural purposes threatens the natural habitat of many unique animal and plant species; the Great Barrier Reef off the northeast coast, the largest coral reef in the world, is threatened by increased shipping and its popularity as a tourist site; limited natural fresh water resources; the depletion of the upper level of the ozone layer over the Antarctic region

Australia is the sixth largest country in the world and lies in both the Southern and Eastern hemispheres. It is located southeast of Asia in the region known as Oceania, between the Pacific Ocean and the Indian Ocean. Based on its geographic isolation from other land masses, Australia has developed unique flora and fauna, including the only egg-laying mammals on earth, the platypus and echidna.

Geography

Australia covers an area of 7,686,850 square kilometers, with deserts that cover approximately 18% of the total land area. A small amount of forested land is found in the Eastern Highlands, Tasmania, and scattered coastal forests in the northwest and southwest. The Central Plains and the Western Plateau contain grasslands which are used for grazing and support the majority of the livestock industry. The country has no international borders but the mainland has 36,735 km of coastline. The Coastal Shelf of Australia runs around the entire country. This shelf is home to the Great Barrier Reef, which lies directly off the coast of Queensland and encloses 207,000 square kilometers of key marine ecosystem.

It is divided into six states, Queensland, New South Wales, Victoria, Tasmania, South Australia, and Western Australia, and two territories, the Northern Territory and the Australian Capital Territory. In addition to the six states it also has a number of external territories, including the Coral Seal Islands, the Heard and McDonald Islands, Christmas Island, Norfolk Island, the Cocos (Keeling) Islands, Ashmore and Carter Island, and the Australian Antarctic Territory. One-third of the country is desert and one-third is semi-desert. The country contains large mineral and energy resources.

Australia is divided into four general topographic regions. The first is the Eastern Coastal Plain, which is a low-elevation sandy region along the eastern coast. The second region is the Eastern Highlands, which runs parallel to the east coast from Cape York to the southern edge of the continent. They run undersea off the coast until

they surface again to form the island of Tasmania. This region has an altitude ranging from 300 m to 2,100 m and contains the majority of the country's mountains. To the west of the Eastern Highlands is the third region, the Central Plains. This region is comprised of horizontal sedimentary rock. It is also home to one of the largest internal drainage areas in the world, the Great Artesian Basin, which underlays almost one-fifth of the entire continent. The final topographic region, the Western Plateau, is the largest region and accounts for approximately two-thirds of the country. It is a desert region on top of ancient rock shield and averages 305 m above sea level.

The highest point of the mainland is Mount Kosciuszko, located in New South Wales, that lies at 2,228 m above sea level. The lowest point is found in South Australia, the dry bed of Lake Eyre, and lies at 15 m below sea level. This is a salt lake that was only full three times in the 20th century, so it is often dry and a vast sheet of salt. The majority of the country lies at a low elevation, with only 6% of the entire country rising above 610 m.

Ten of the highest mountains in the country, including the Australian Alps, are found in the Great Dividing Range. This range runs north-south and is located in the Eastern Highlands. Other mountain ranges are found in the Western Plateau but they are mainly characterized by widely separated small mountains. The Hamersley Range is located in the northwest, and there are three ranges on the eastern side of the country, the Macdonnell, Musgrave, and Petermann, which all run east-west. The entire country is on the Australian Tectonic plate so there are no major faultlines or active volcanoes on the main island.

The climate of Australia does not support many large, permanent lakes. The largest natural freshwater lake, Lake Māckay, measures 3,494 square kilometers and is located in Western Australia. The Murray-Darling River system, located mainly in New South Wales, supplies 80% of the water for irrigated land and is thus considered the most important river system in the country. Each major population center has a reservoir for water supply and hydroelectric power source.

Culture and Ethnic Identity

Australia's cultural and ethnic history has been largely defined by immigration. Before WWII, the majority of the immigrants came from the British Isles. After the war, non-European immigration, mainly from the Middle East, Asia, and Latin America, increased. Currently, it is estimated that one in every four Australians is foreign born. Until the 1970s, the population was largely European due to strict immigration policies. Since then, Asian immigration has largely increased. Australian culture is largely a result of its European roots but there it has also been influenced by the country's unique environment, its native Aboriginal culture, and its neighbors.

Prior to the arrival of European settlers in 1788, Australia was inhabited by an indigenous population of Aboriginal people. There were many communities and distinctive cultures that reflected a deep connection with, and knowledge of, the land and environment. Although there is still an Aboriginal population in Australia, there is not one single indigenous culture, but rather a mixture of both contemporary and

traditional thoughts, ways, and practices. There are no Aboriginals who have not had contact with modern Australia society, and all Aboriginals are now Australian citizens.

In the south, part-Aboriginal groups have sought to maintain their Aboriginal identity to distinguish themselves from other Australians. Their Aboriginal heritage serves as a status marker. Aboriginal groups in the north have focused on the concepts of land ownership and control. There is a large amount of mineral exploitation taking place on the Aboriginal reserves so they are seeking compensation and a fair share in the economic benefits. Overall, Aboriginal numbers have greatly declined as a result of dispossession, poverty, disease, and cultural displacement.

Australia has been criticized by many human rights organizations and the United Nations for their historical treatment of Aboriginal populations. From the 1880s to 1970s the Australian government took children from Aboriginal parents citing a law aimed at improving standards of education. The children were then placed in government-run institutions or the church. These children became known as the “stolen generation” (Country Watch, Political Conditions, 2005).

Australia is one of the most urbanized countries in the world, although its population density averages barely 2 people per square kilometer. Less than 15% of the population lives in rural areas. Tribal Aborigines still lead a semi-traditional settled life in the more remote areas of northern, central, and Western Australia. Aboriginal migration to more urbanized areas is increasing in the south among Aborigines of mixed descent. Today, intolerance of urban Aborigines exists among much of the

urban population which leads to misunderstandings and tension between the two groups.

Class Structure

Australian society is traditionally egalitarian and many believe that it has avoided the least attractive aspects of capitalism. They have managed to maintain a relatively small gap between the rich and the poor in comparison to many other developed countries. This gap, however, increased significantly in the late 20th century and continues to do so.

Historical interactions between races are largely reflected in current class conditions. With the arrival of British colonizers, the Aborigines were driven off of their native lands, marginalized, and denied access to the economic development of the country; they endured nearly two centuries of repression. Now, generally speaking, Aborigines are the poorest, least educated, least healthy, and most exploited members of Australian society. The highest drug addiction and alcoholism rates within Australian culture are found among Aborigines. They have the lowest incomes, when compared to other Australians, with the average wage for Aboriginals being half the average national wage. The unemployment rate is approximately four times the national average.

Class divisions follow similar patterns to many other developed nations. The lowest class is comprised mainly of Aborigines, due in large part to their post-colonialism positions within society. The working class is comprised of people

who do not control the means of production but who work under those that do. The majority of workers in Australia fall into this category. Members of the ruling class have a dominant relationship over laborers. They own or control the means of production. Another significant class is called the old middle class. This term refers to people who are self-employed and do not use wage-laborers. It is important to note that origin and gender play a large role in determining an immigrant's place within the class structure.

The Australian labor force is divided into three sections; agriculture comprises 5% of the labor force, industry is at 22%, and services at 73%. The discrepancy between the rich and poor is similar to many developed nations, although not as dramatic, with the lowest 10% earning 2% on the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and the highest 10% earning 25.4%. The unemployment rate is 6%.

Social Structure

Immigration has had a significant impact on numerous facets of Australian culture, including economic activity, cultural development, political change, and many of the attitudes and ideologies that define it. The large amount of immigration, and the subsequent variety of cultures, has limited the creation of one social structure. Much of the social structure is dependent upon the traditional backgrounds of many Australians.

Of the remaining indigenous population, only one-quarter are pure Aborigines and still live the traditional semi-nomadic hunter-gatherer lifestyle. Another one-quarter of the population live in urban areas and the remaining members live in

rural areas. Many still emphasize the traditional ideas of kinship and walkabouts, the desire to revisit the sacred sites.

The Capital City: Canberra

Canberra was chosen as the capital site in 1909, following the inauguration of the commonwealth in 1901. The city is located in the southeastern corner of the country, approximately 240 km southwest of Sydney, on a plain at the base of the Australian Alps. It lies in the district of New South Wales and occupies part of the Australian Capital Territory.

Traditionally the economy of Canberra has centered on government jobs and is home to the Parliament House and the High Court of Australia. It is also home to the Australian National University and many other institutes of technical and further education. The main industries are the light industries and the tourism industry, which is on the rise. Farming takes place on the outskirts of the city.

The city has expanded a great deal since its founding. Because of this, only the center and inner suburbs follow the original plans. Residential development is found largely in what are known as satellite towns, including Weston Creek, Belconnen, and Tuggeranong. The major water source for the city is the Murrumbidgee River which runs through the center of it. The city center and some suburbs were significantly impacted by wildfires in early 2003.

Trade

Historically, Australia's main trading partner was Great Britain. However, this trading relationship has been significantly reduced in the past couple of decades. As it declined, trade with the United States and Japan increased dramatically, to one-fifth and one-eighth, respectively, of the overall trade. Other major trading partners include China, South Korea, Germany, and New Zealand. In 1983, Australia and New Zealand signed the Australia and New Zealand Closer Economic Relations Trade Agreement (CER) which eliminated duties and commodity quotas between the two countries. In 1995, the CER joined the Association of Southeast Asian National Free Trade Area (AFTA), which promotes trade and investment between the two areas.

Overseas trade is the most important trade component of the Australian economy. The value of Australian exports equals approximately one-sixth of the total Gross Domestic Product (GDP). Of this, minerals, mainly coal, account for nearly one-third of export income. Other significant minerals are gold and iron ore. Agricultural products make up one-fifth of exports. Estimates from 2003 show Australia's main export partners are Japan (18.1%), US (8.7%), China (8.4%), South Korea (7.4%), New Zealand (7.4%), and the UK (6.7%). Leading imports are machinery and transport equipment, electronic and telecommunications equipment, chemical and petroleum products, and food and beverages. Import estimates from 2003 show the main sources as the US (16%), Japan (12.5%), China (11%), Germany (6.1%), and the UK (4.2%).

Environmental Issues

Due to Australia's geographical isolation from other land masses, it has a unique biological heritage, which includes marsupials and distinctive bird life. This biological heritage is threatened by habitat loss and the introduction of non-native species. These two environmental issues are resulting in a loss of biodiversity.

Another major environmental issue centers on land degradation from tree cutting, mining, and intensive agriculture. Australia only has one forested area which is located on the island of Tasmania, in the southeastern part of the country. These ancient forests have been logged largely by Japanese corporations for the giant eucalyptus trees. The trees support a diverse ecosystem, including many endangered plants and animals. It is estimated that 5 million tons of Tasmanian forest is logged each year.

The soil in Australia faces environmental challenges in the forms of erosion and increased salinity. Erosion occurs as a result of overgrazing, industrial development, urbanization, and poor farming practices. Fertilizers used for farming increase the salinity content on irrigated farmland. This is compounded by the fact that, in some cases, the water used for irrigation is also salty.

The region has an irregular natural rainfall pattern which magnifies the desertification effects of intensive farming and ranching. The majority of Australia has an arid to semi-arid climate meaning that there is a limited supply of fresh water. This is a chronic problem that continues to increase as the demand for it increases.

The Great Barrier Reef, the largest coral reef in the world, is located off of the northeastern coast of the country. It is an extremely popular tourist site and known for its biodiversity. This popularity threatens the environmental health of the Reef. Increased shipping also negatively impacts the Reef ecosystems.

An environmental issue directly affecting Australians is the depletion of the upper level of the ozone layer over the Antarctic region. This is caused by the release of harmful chlorofluorocarbons into the atmosphere. The use of these pollutants has been virtually eliminated in developed nations but they can still be found in developing nations and on the black market. It is estimated that the ozone layer will be able to repair itself within the next 50 years if no further damage occurs.

COSTA RICA

Quick Facts

Source: The world factbook, (2005). Retrieved March 3, 2005, from <http://www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/>

Area: 51,100 square kilometers

Population: 3,956,507

Term for citizens: Costa Ricans (locally called Ticos)

Language: Spanish (official), English

Currency: Costa Rican colon (approx. 485.84 CR colones/1 US dollar)

Capital: San José

Religion: Roman Catholic 76.3%, Evangelical 13.7%, Jehovah's Witnesses 1.3%, other Protestant 0.7%, other 4.8%, none 3.2%

Government type: Democratic Republic

President: Abel Pacheco

Military: No military branches

Literacy rate: 96% (age 15 and over can read and write)

Climate: Tropical and subtropical, dry season from December-April, rainy season from May-November, cooler temperatures in highlands

Natural hazards: Occasional earthquakes, hurricanes along the Atlantic coast, frequent flooding of lowlands at onset of rainy season and landslides, active volcanoes

Environmental issues: Deforestation and land use change largely a result of land for cattle ranching and agriculture; soil erosion; coastal marine pollution; fisheries protection; solid waste management; air pollution

Costa Rica's development differed from that of its neighboring countries because it lacked some important qualities to make it appealing to colonization. After the first European landfall, made in 1502 by Colombus, Costa Rica was mistakenly named the rich coast due to a misunderstanding about gold and other valuable minerals in the area. The lack of these resources and the fact that it did not have a large indigenous population, thus there was not an easily exploitable labor force, made it

unappealing to colonization. Due to the lack of colonization, Costa Rica developed as an individualistic society that focused largely on democratic and egalitarian principles. It achieved independence from Spain in 1821, when it joined the Central American Federation. It then became a formally sovereign nation in 1838, when it withdrew from the Central American Federation.

Geography

Costa Rica covers a total area of 51,100 square kilometers (sq km) and is the second smallest Central American nation behind El Salvador. It is bordered by Nicaragua on the north, the Caribbean Sea on the east, Panama on the southeast, and the Pacific Ocean on the southwest and west. The length of its borders total 639 km, which is divided between Nicaragua at 309 km and Panama at 330 km. It has an additional 1,290 km of coastline, 212 km on the Caribbean and 1,016 km on the Pacific.

The Caribbean coast is characterized by gray or black sand beaches and is generally flat and open. Alternatively, the Pacific side has mountainous peninsulas, coastal lowlands, bays, and deep gulfs. The two coasts are also distinguished by different climatic conditions, partly a result of the three mountain ranges that bisect the country from northwest to southeast.

The country's geography is shaped by its unique location. It sits on the boundary where the Pacific's Cocos Plate meets the crustal plate that lies under the Caribbean Sea. The movement of the Cocos plate, at 10 cm/year, creates occasional

earthquakes. This distinctive geography has also created one of the most active volcanic regions in the world, making Costa Rica home to seven active volcanoes.

There are four principal mountain ranges in the country, all of which are a part of the Andean-Sierra Madre chain that runs along the western shore of the Americas. The Cordillera de Guanacaste is volcanic in origin and runs 70 miles from Nicaragua to the Cordillera Central. This second major range is located to the east and contains the Meseta Central, home to over one-half of the Costa Rican population. The third range, Cordillera de Tilarán, is located in the southeast and is home to Arenal Volcano, one of the world's most active volcanoes. Cordillera de Talamanca, the last major range, is found on the southern part of the country. This range contains Chirripó Grande, the highest point in Costa Rica with an elevation of 3,819 m. The mountain ranges and active volcanoes reduce the arable land to approximately 53% of the total land area. Although the mountains reduce the amount of arable land, they also provide altitude which, when combined with the rich soil from the volcanoes, provides ideal conditions for coffee growing. Because of this, coffee exports have traditionally been the principal force of economic growth for the country.

Costa Rica is characterized by its variety of landscapes, including snow-covered mountains, seasonal marshlands, and rain forests. Elevation plays a major role in determining the climate of each area. There are a large number of rivers that flow through, and within, Costa Rica but very few lakes. The largest lake is Laguna de Arenal (Lake Arenal), which is man-made and was created in 1973 by a dam built for hydroelectric power.

Culture and Ethnic Identity

Costa Rica has often been referred to as the “Switzerland of Central America” because of its commitment to neutrality; it abolished its army in 1948. In 1987, then-President Oscar Arias won the Nobel Peace Prize for his work in promoting global peace and neutrality. This neutrality became a stable defining fixture of Costa Rica when, in 1993, the country proclaimed permanent neutrality.

People of Costa Rica are internationally referred to as Costa Ricans, although they are locally known as Ticos. Currently the majority of the population, 97%, is of European stock rather than mestizo, a mixture of European and indigenous populations. This population is primarily from Spain. Another 2% of the population is of African-Caribbean descent. Jamaicans originally migrated to Costa Rica to work on railroad construction and after became employed in banana cultivation. This portion of the population was mainly concentrated on the Caribbean coast of the country, but recently has migrated to other areas.

The original inhabitants of the area were the Costa Rican Indians. Most of the remaining Indians live in reserves established by the government and only comprise approximately 1% of the total population. The largest of these reserves lies in the Talamanca, located in the southeastern part of the country. Much of their land is currently facing pressures from cattle ranchers, farmers, mining, and exploration.

Class Structure

Costa Rica is the most egalitarian society within its region, largely as a result of the traditional role of the government as the mediator between classes. It has the best public education system in Central America and a state-sponsored infrastructure of health services. There are broad social welfare and public health services, although these programs have been declining in recent years due to funding issues.

Costa Rican society has been traditionally characterized by flexible class lines. Educational opportunity is, in theory, largely independent of class lines. These two characteristics have helped to create a substantial and stable middle class. Because Costa Rica does not have a military, the class structure and political system have had the freedom to evolve without the threat of military influence. This has led to political and social realms that emphasize human rights and democracy.

Although Costa Rica is the most egalitarian society in the region, 20.6% of the population still lives below the poverty line. This is compounded by an unemployment rate of 6.7%. The poorest 10% of the population earns approximately 1.1% of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) while the highest 10% earns 36.8%. This shows a wage discrepancy that is on the rise. In comparison to its neighbors, Costa Rican society is considered prosperous. The growth and urbanization of the country has largely paralleled the growth of industry. Currently the majority of the labor force, 58%, is in the service industry, while 22% is in industry, and 20% is in agriculture.

Social Structure

A central distinction between Costa Rica and many of its neighboring countries is that Costa Rica has a highly developed family code. Under this code, the husband and wife have equal rights and duties. The degree to which this is practiced varies between regions, and there are noticeable differences between urban and rural residents.

It is often said that the women's movement of Costa Rica resembles that of feminism in developing countries. Historically, there is a good record of the employment of women in governmental positions, ranging from cabinet-level to vice-presidential posts. Although women's rights are more talked about within this country than many others, the real-life situation for women has not greatly improved as a result of the women's movement and women still receive significantly lower wages than men do.

The Capital City: San José

San José became the national capital in 1823 and now serves as the capital of both the country and the San José province. It lies on the Meseta Plateau Central, a fertile area suitable for growing coffee and grazing cattle. San José serves as the political, social, and economic center of the country. It is also located on the Pan American highway and is the center for air and rail transportation. San José is home to the University of Costa Rica and the Open University, along with many cultural sites, including the National Theater.

San José originally developed slowly as a tobacco center during the Spanish Colonial Era. During the 20th century it experiences rapid growth, both in population and in area. Much of this growth was controlled and large sections of the built-up area developed on a grid pattern. Since 1950, the number of industrial establishments increased to more than twice the previous number. The light industry is big, with a focus on food and beverages, textiles, chemicals, and electrical machinery.

Trade

Until the middle of the 20th century, coffee and bananas were the economic mainstays for the country. As word spread about the unique and bountiful biodiversity that existed in Costa Rica, tourism became more popular. Currently, the major source of the country's income comes from the ecotourism industry. There have also been increases in the area of high technology, such as computer components.

Costa Rica's location gives it relatively easy access to many large trade markets, including the North and South American markets and Europe and Asia by sea. The United States is Costa Rica's most important trading partner, with over 200 American companies producing goods within Costa Rica.

Trade for Costa Rica has been largely influenced by two main agreements with the United States. In 1984, the US created the Caribbean Basin Initiative (CBI), officially called the Caribbean Basin Economic Recovery Act. This was a trade and investment program intended to encourage economic development and political stability and to control Soviet-Cuban influence in the Americas. It gave US textile and

apparel industries a major role in trade and investment in areas affected by the CBI, including Costa Rica. The CBI is characterized by the unequal distribution of benefits between the US and CR. Today, the US still continues to profit at the expense of less-developed countries.

The second influential agreement is the Central American Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA), which Costa Rica joined in January of 2004. This agreement is viewed by many as a potentially devastating force for many Central American farmers, including Costa Ricans. CAFTA will effectively bind the economies of Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua, and the Dominican Republic to the United States. Much of the country remains divided on this issue and during August of 2004 there were widespread protests throughout the country in opposition to Costa Rica's participation in CAFTA. Many fear that it will benefit the US at the detriment of Central American farmers by opening Central American markets to US subsidized agriculture and eliminate tariffs on many staple crops. This could negatively impacts farmers who depend on the market for their livelihood. The true effects will be seen within the next 15-20 years as CAFTA is fully implemented.

The major exports for Costa Rica are coffee, bananas, sugar, pineapples, textiles, electronic components, and medical equipment. Estimates from 2003 are the major export partners the US (14.2%), Guatemala (3%), and Nicaragua (2.7%). Major imports are raw materials, consumer goods, capital equipment, and petroleum, with the major suppliers being the US (23.2%), Mexico (4.7%), and Venezuela (3.2%).

Environmental Issues

Costa Rica is home to approximately 6% of the world's biodiversity. The country's biodiversity is seriously threatened, primarily by deforestation, timber exploitation, and habitat loss. A major cause of deforestation is the clearing of land for cattle ranching. There is a large amount of pressure from both the cattle and farming industries to continue clearing land. The logged wood is also used for export and creating wood products that are popular with tourists. Cleared land and trampling by cattle has led to increased soil erosion and silt build up in waterways. Another environmental issue is the depletion of marine fisheries as a result of over-fishing.

The agricultural industry has had negative impacts on the Costa Rican environment. Many pesticides that have been outlawed in developed nations are still widely used in Costa Rica. The result is contamination of nearby areas and water sources. Workers are not often provided with adequate protection or education regarding the pesticides and, in some areas, there have been marked increases in the numbers of birth defects and cancer cases in communities surrounding the plantations.

DOMINICAN REPUBLIC

Quick Facts

Source: The world factbook. (2005). Retrieved March 3, 2005, from <http://www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/>

Area: 48,730 square kilometers

Population: 8,833,634

Term for citizens: Dominicans

Language: Spanish

Currency: Dominican Peso (approx. 28.89 DR pesos/1 US dollar)

Capital: Santo Domingo

Religion: More than 95% Roman Catholic

Government type: Representative Democracy

President: Leonel Fernandez Reyna

Military: Army, Navy, Air Force (all voluntary at age 18)

Literacy rate: 84.7% (age 15 and over can read and write)

Climate: Primarily tropical, rainy season from May-October, dry season from November-April, rainfall not uniform throughout country

Natural hazards: lies in the middle of the hurricane belt, subject to severe storms from June-October

Environmental issues: Water shortages, soil eroding into sea damages coral reefs, deforestation

The Dominican Republic is known for being the first place that Christopher Columbus and his men settled in the New World. It is located five hundred miles southeast of Florida on the Caribbean island of Hispaniola, which it shares with Haiti. It occupies the eastern half of the island. The Dominican Republic has been an independent republic since 1844, when it gained independence from Haiti, not Spain, unlike any other Latin American nation.

Geography

The Dominican Republic covers an area of 48,730 square kilometers, with 1,575 kilometers of coastline that runs along the Atlantic Ocean, Caribbean Sea, and Mona Passage. It shares a border of 388 kilometers with Haiti, a country that has largely influenced the history of the Dominican Republic. It contains 20 geomorphologic zones, ranging from peaks over 10,000 feet above sea level to Lake Enriquillo, the lowest part of the country located in the Southwest corner of the country.

The country's geography has impacted many aspects of the culture, including development. The eastern third of the country is the most developed due to the influence of the four major mountain ranges on accessibility to other areas. The mountain range that runs from the northwest corner of the country to the southwest corner has isolated the west and southwestern areas from development. These areas are characterized by extreme poverty and neglect.

The first of these four ranges is the Cordillera del Norte (Northern range) that runs from Montecristi to San Francisco de Macorís. This range contains the Cibao valley, also called La Vega Real, which is the main supplier of agricultural products for the country. The Cordillera Central (Central range), the second range, is the largest, with the highest mountains, and begins in Haiti and runs northwest to southeast. Further south this range subdivides into an eastern branch, Cordillera Oriental, and a southern branch, Sierra del Siebo, which is home to Santo Cerro where Columbus

planted the first cross of the Americas. The third range is the Sierra de Nieba (Nieba range) which runs 62 miles from the Haitian border to the Yaque del Sur River. The Sierra de Baoruco (Baoruco range), the fourth range, runs southwest from Haiti and contains Lake Enriquillo.

Of the 108 rivers in the Dominican Republic, only three of them, the Ozama, Higuamo, and Yuna, can accommodate large ships. They are used for transport of goods, both within the country and for export. There are numerous dams and artificial lakes located on rivers running east and west that aid the fishing industry.

There are ten national parks in the Dominican Republic: Parque Nacional Armando Bermúdez (located in the Cordillera Central), Parque Nacional del Este (located in the southwest corner of the country), Parque Nacional Los Haitises (located at the throat of Bahía de Samaná), Parque Nacional La Isabela (located on the north coast), Parque Nacional Isla Cabritos (located within Lake Enriquillo in the south), Parque Nacional Jaragua (the country's largest park), Parque Nacional José del Carmen Ramírez (bordering Parque Nacional Armando Bermúdez), Parque Nacional Monte Cristi (located in the extreme northeast), Parque Nacional Sierra de Baoruco (located in the southwest), and Parque Nacional Submarino La Caleta (located 22km east of Santo Domingo).

Culture and Ethnic Identity

People of the Dominican Republic are referred to as Dominicans. Their cultural and ethnic identities have evolved throughout the history of the Dominican

Republic. However, it has only been during the last quarter of a century that Dominicans have dealt with their true ethnic origins.

Dominicans are mainly a combination of Spanish, Taíno, and African, all of which are reflected in their culture and customs. Of the variety of heritages, Spanish was the most influential. For many centuries, Dominicans did not acknowledge their African heritage, a heritage that was the result of large numbers of African slaves brought to the island of Hispaniola during colonial times. Darker members of the population were called Indios, although there is no evidence of Indian heritage. Currently, the majority of the population is classified as mulatto.

A source of national pride is the presence of Taíno Indians on the island. The Taíno Indians were members of the Arawak group which came from the Orinoco-Amazon basin and migrated north to settle in the Caribbean islands, including Hispaniola. Enriquillo was a Taíno Indian who stood up to Spanish colonists to defend the rights of his people and he became known as the hero of Bartolomé de Las Casas Historia de las Indias. Enriquillo is considered both a romantic and national symbol to the Dominicans. The Taíno Indian population on Hispaniola was eradicated as a result of abuse, overwork, introduced disease, and starvation that occurred while fleeing the Spanish during colonization.

Class Structure

The Dominican Republic has a hierarchical class structure that is based on wealth, education, political access, and race. There is a strong class system that divides

its citizens. The elite represent the smallest class but are also the most powerful. This group is then divided into two subgroups, the gente de primera (“first-class people”) and gente de segunda (“second-class people”). The middle and lower-middle classes are made up of people who work in public or private sectors. They have no independent source of income and are dependent upon the nation’s economy. This group faces difficulty because there is no established system of social security so they must save for retirement throughout their working lives. Within this society, skin color is considered a key for upward mobility, with lighter colored skin equaling more chances to get ahead.

The lower class is divided into urban and rural dwellers. Lower class members make a living any way that they can because there is no federally operated social welfare program. Urban poor face high unemployment, few labor rights, and virtually no unionization. The majority of them are employed in free-trade zone companies. The rural poor are usually able to cultivate food for their consumption as land is passed down from generation to generation. Most of this group are wage dependent and work on someone else’s land. They also tend to have larger families so they have more people to work on the farm. However, this keeps children from school and contributes to illiteracy rates and helps to perpetuate poverty.

The lowest class is made up of Haitians who were brought in to cut sugarcane. There is a history of discrimination against these immigrant workers based on negative stereotypes. Anti-Haitian sentiment is still prevalent among many Dominicans.

The Dominican Republic is marked by significant income inequality, with the poorest half of the population receiving less than one-fifth of the GNP and the richest 10% earning almost 40% of the GNP. This income inequality results in 25% of the population living below the poverty line. The situation is compounded by the country's unemployment rate of 16.5%.

Social Structure

The family unit is the most important social unit. Loyalty to family is taught from a young age and engrained within the individual. Dominicans find social identity and comfort in family. Interaction between families is often dictated by their position in the class system, with families of similar resources or backgrounds cooperating and helping one another. Generally, the man assumes the dominant role within the household and the woman is expected to defer to him. The woman may be dominant in some cases, including if there is no man, if he has limited resources, or if he is unassertive.

Distinct gender roles are prevalent within the culture of the Dominican Republic. They place an emphasis on physical appearance and, for women, beauty is of tremendous importance. This changes when a woman reaches middle age, when she is given a large amount of respect, regardless of her social status. One of the central important concepts is that of motherhood. A mother is expected to have a close relationship with her children while a father remains a strict disciplinarian. It is considered improper for a father to show affection toward his children.

During the last decade, gender roles have been increasingly challenged.

Women who challenge the traditional ideas tend to be either of the lowest or highest class. Poor women work by necessity and are forced to challenge the traditional gender roles that dictate that the man works and the women is in charge of the home. Middle and upper class women have become increasingly competitive in the workplace as they have more access to education. In general, Dominican women have a higher educational level than men because more women complete high school. In spite of this, women still receive lower wages.

The Capital City: Santo Domingo

The capital of the Dominican Republic is the city of Santo Domingo. This was the first European city in the Americas and it is home to the first University of the Western Hemisphere, Universidad de Santo Tomás de Aquino, founded in 1538. The city stretches over 249 square miles, the result of rapid, uncontrolled, and poorly planned growth. Santo Domingo is an area with extreme noise and environmental pollution, including a lack of adequate water and electricity supply, lack of proper means of disposal of garbage and sewage, and high crime rates.

The growth is an outcome of industry and free-trade zone enterprises, created by the Caribbean Basin Initiative. Foreign owned factories, specializing in the garment industry, are major employers. Unfortunately, these factories have some of the lowest wage distributions in the Caribbean. Currently, the Dominican Republic's main export

is clothing, which far surpasses other traditional products, including sugar, tobacco, and produce.

The Caribbean Basin Initiative and its Effects

The Dominican Republic has political, economic, and strategic dependence upon the United States, making the U. S. its most important international relationship. In 1984, the U. S. created the Caribbean Basin Initiative (CBI), officially called the Caribbean Basin Economic Recovery Act. This was a trade and investment program intended to encourage economic development and political stability and to control Soviet-Cuban influence in the Americas. It gave US textile and apparel industries a major role in trade and investment in areas affected by the CBI, including the Dominican Republic. The CBI is characterized by the unequal distribution of benefits between the US and the DR. Today, the US still continues to profit at the expense of less-developed countries.

This Initiative increased the Dominican Republic's economic and political dependency on the US. This dependency was promoted through free-trade and new forms of market oriented investment with tariff reductions designed to provide incentives for American corporations. These incentives encouraged investment in non-traditional export oriented industries, including the textile and garment industries. The instatement of the CBI thus accelerated free zone development. Free zone manufacturing contributes little to the country's gross national product (GNP) but

employs a large portion of the industrial labor. At least 70% of the free zone companies within the DR produce garments.

The labor force is divided into three major areas, agriculture which employs 17% of the labor force, industry at 24.3%, and services and government at 58.7%. There are six major industries within the Dominican Republic, tourism, sugar processing, ferronickel and gold mining, textiles, cement, and tobacco. The main agricultural products are sugarcane, coffee, cotton, cocoa, tobacco, rice, beans, potatoes, corn, bananas, cattle, pigs, dairy products, beef, and eggs.

Environmental Issues

Although the government has begun to establish more environmentally sound measures, such as managing natural resources and diversifying their energy supplies, the Dominican Republic suffers severe environmental problems. The major environmental issues are water shortages, soil erosion into the sea and subsequent damage to coral reefs and mangroves, and deforestation. These are largely a result of the over-exploitation of natural resources.

Deforestation is a result of timber exploitation for energy resources. Although commercial tree cutting was outlawed by officials in 1967, pine, hardwood, and other tree cover currently only cover about 10% of the country. The deforestation now occurs mainly as a result of the actions of farmers and developers, rather than the timber industry. A side effect of the deforestation is increased soil erosion. Another

cause of the increased erosion is the slash and burn agricultural techniques that are practiced in much of the country.

NEW ZEALAND

Quick Facts

*Source: The world factbook. (2005). Retrieved March 3, 2005, from
<http://www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/>*

Area: 268,680 square kilometers

Population: 3,993,817

Term for citizens: New Zealanders (locally Kiwis)

Language: English (official), Maori (official)

Currency: New Zealand dollar (approx. 1.35 NZ dollars/1 US dollar)

Capital: Wellington

Religion: Anglican 24%, Presbyterian 18%, Roman Catholic 15%, Methodist 5%, Baptist 2%, other Protestant 3%, unspecified or none 33%

Government type: Parliamentary Democracy

Chief of State: Queen Elizabeth II

Military: New Zealand Army, Royal New Zealand Navy, Royal New Zealand Air Force

Literacy rate: 99% (age 15 and over can read and write)

Climate: Temperate with sharp regional contrasts

Natural hazards: Earthquakes are common, though not usually severe; volcanic activity

Environmental issues: Deforestation; soil erosion; native flora and fauna hard-hit by species introduced from outside; hole in the ozone layer over the Antarctic region

New Zealand is comprised of a series of islands in the South Pacific Ocean. An interesting fact is that the country has no native land mammals; current populations were brought to the islands during colonization. The country received full internal and external autonomy through the Statute of Westminster Adoption Act of 1947, although this had been true for many years.

Geography

The country of New Zealand lies to the Southeast of Australia and the Tasman Sea. It is a series of islands, the two main islands being the South Island and the North Island. These two islands are separated by the Cook Strait. New Zealand shares no borders with other countries but has 15,134 km of coastline. This creates a generally mild oceanic climate with little variation, although temperatures are generally cooler in the south and vary by location and altitude. The terrain is very mountainous, with less than one-quarter of the total country lying below 200 m.

The South Island is the larger of the two main islands, with an area of 149,883 sq km. A central feature of this island is the Southern Alps that run 483 km along the length of the island. The country's highest point, Mt. Cook, is located within this mountain range at an elevation of 3,764 m. There are three main regions on the island, the Canterbury plains in the northeast, the central mountain highlands, and the narrow western coast. The mountain interior of Otago, known as the wettest part of New Zealand is also found on this island.

The North Island has an area of 114,669 sq km. Most of the terrain on this island is characterized as hill country, although the mountain highlands are an extension of the Southern Alps. The island is divided into four main regions, the narrow mountain highlands in the east, the central volcanic plateau, the mainly low-lying narrow northern peninsula, and small patches of coastal lowland. The island lies near the boundary of the Australia and Pacific tectonic plates which has created a

number of volcanoes on the island. The movement of these two plates sometimes causes avalanches in the Southern Alps. Lake Taupo, the largest natural lake in the country with an area of 606 sq km, is found on the North Island.

In general, rivers are fast-flowing and shallow. This has made them especially appropriate for hydroelectric power production but limited the navigability to few rivers. New Zealand's longest river is the Waikato which has a length of 425 km.

A third of the country is environmentally protected in parks and reserves, with a total of 14 national parks. Three-quarters of the plant species found in the country are endemic to New Zealand, meaning they are only found here. The forests are considered among the most ancient in the world. They consist primarily of temperate rainforest which used to cover the majority of the country. Throughout history it has been reduced and it now extends over only one-quarter of the country.

Culture and Ethnic Identity

People of New Zealand are called New Zealanders. Their cultural and ethnic identities are results of the country's close proximity to other Polynesian islands and its history of interaction with the British. A symbol of national identity is the national culture that has emerged which includes some elements of Maori traditions.

The indigenous population of New Zealand is the Maori, believed to have come from the Polynesian islands. In 1840, New Zealand became an official British colony. At this time, the Treaty of Waitangi was signed which outlined Maori rights to land. The treaty is still used today to protect the Maori's right to land. The treaty has

been repeatedly violated by the British and the subsequent government, creating a climate of resentment and conflict that still persists today.

The majority of contemporary New Zealand citizens are European in origin. The largest minority is Maori and there are smaller populations of Pacific Islanders, Chinese, and Indians. Although Maori have legal equality with people of European descent, many feel as though this does not translate into reality. Many Maori believe that they would have to compromise their traditional values in order to fit into modern society because it is largely European based. This becomes more of an issue for Maori as their sense of Maori cultural identity becomes stronger. Racial tensions do exist within New Zealand but they are considered minor when compared to many other parts of the world.

European culture predominates but attempts are made to preserve traditional cultures, like that of the Maori. For the most part, immigrant groups tend to assimilate into the European lifestyle. Some groups, in particular Tongans, Samoans, and other Pacific Islanders, still maintain and follow many of their native customs. Many Maori feel that they are caught between assimilation and preservation of their traditional culture. Since 1950, there has been an increased effort to preserve and revive Maori artistic and social traditions. During the late 1980s, Maori activism for social and economic rights increased. This shift set the stage for more tense race relations during the latter part of the 20th century. Minority rights, multiculturalism, and race-related issues play a large role in contemporary politics.

Class Structure

New Zealand is characterized as a bicultural society with a traditionally egalitarian social structure. Overall, New Zealanders enjoy a high standard of living. Most families own homes, and there are policies to ensure that this trait crosses class boundaries. State housing programs facilitate mortgage loans for people with a modest income and there are government subsidies provided for those of low income. Class divisions, and their impacts on the housing market, may become more apparent in the near future as these programs are being phased out. There is also a universal provision for health care so most receive free care and, at the least, basic costs are covered for all. New Zealand has one of the oldest social security systems in the world.

Inequalities in access to rights and education characterize much of modern day New Zealand. A white New Zealander is four times more likely than a Maori to attend university. Maoris own only 5% of the freehold land of the country. During recent decades, Maoris have become more urbanized, politically active, and culturally assertive.

The labor force of New Zealand is divided into three sections, with 65% working in services, 25% working in industry, and 10% in agriculture. There is a marked difference in the distribution of wealth in the society, with the lowest 10% of the population earning approximately 0.3% of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and the highest 10% earning 29.8% of the GDP. The unemployment rate is relatively low, at 4.7%.

Social Structure

Maori and Europeans intermarry freely and share similar ways of life, although some aspects still remain distinctly Maori or European. As the majority of New Zealanders moved to urban areas the social structure shifted to reflect more stereotypically westernized values, like individuality.

Immigration has had a significant impact on numerous facets of New Zealand culture, including economic activity, cultural development, political change, and many of the attitudes and ideologies that define it. The large amount of immigration, and the subsequent variety of cultures, has limited the creation of one social structure. Much of the social structure is dependent upon the traditional backgrounds of many New Zealanders.

The Capital City: Wellington

In 1865 the capital of New Zealand was transferred from Auckland to Wellington. Wellington is located in the extreme south of the North Island. At the center of the city lies Mt. Victoria at 196 m high. A large part of Wellington is constructed on land that was reclaimed from the bay. It lies on a fault zone so it is subject to periodic earthquakes. It is linked to the rest of the North Island by rail and road ways and is also home to a ferry that connects it to the South Island. The city surrounds the harbor of Port Nicholson, which ranks among the world's best harbors. Port Nicholson has access to the Tasman Sea on the west and the Pacific Ocean on the

east. This location allows easy access for shipping and has made Wellington the nation's transport and communications center.

The economy of the city is primarily service based, with a particular emphasis on finance, business, services, and government. The capital controls banking, finance, and is home to the central governmental offices. Tourism is also an important industry within the area. Although traditionally a popular spot for manufacturing, this industry has been on the decline since the late 1980s.

Trade

Historically, Great Britain was one of the most significant trading partners of New Zealand, although this relationship has decreased in recent years. As trade with Great Britain decreased, it increased with Japan, the United States, and East Asian countries. Another significant trading partner for New Zealand is Australia. In 1983, New Zealand and Australia signed the Australia and New Zealand Closer Economic Relations Trade Agreement (CER) which eliminated duties and commodity quotas between the two countries. In 1995, the CER joined the Association of Southeast Asian National Free Trade Area (AFTA), which promotes trade and investment between the two areas.

Trade is an important component of New Zealand's economy. The major exports of New Zealand are dairy products, meat, wood and wood products, fish, and machinery, dominated by meat and dairy products. Estimates from 2003 are that the largest markets for NZ exports are Australia (21.8%), the US (14.6%), Japan (11%),

China (4.9%), and the UK (4.8%). Major imports for New Zealand are machinery and equipment, vehicles and aircraft, petroleum, electronics, textiles, and plastics. The major import suppliers are Australia (22.2%), the US (11.8%), Japan (11.8%), China (9%), and Germany (5.3%).

Environmental Issues

The main environmental issues affecting New Zealand are deforestation, soil erosion, the negative impact of introduced species on native flora and fauna, and a hole in the ozone layer over the Antarctic region. The country is an island biome. This results in a unique array of species. The introduction of non-native species, such as the rabbit, has caused a significant decline in native plant and animal species, many of which are threatened with extinction. There are many factors contributing to the loss of biodiversity.

Native species are also threatened by development and modern land-use practices. Agriculture is one of the most economically important industries in New Zealand. Intensive agriculture has led to increased pollution and erosion. Recently the government has created natural resource management laws that focus on sustainable development and sustainable land use.

Another important industry is the timber industry. The result has been an increase in deforestation and a loss of biodiversity. Deforestation has led to habitat loss, land degradation and increased erosion.

Like Australia, New Zealanders are directly affected by the thinning of the upper layer of the ozone layer over the Antarctic region. As a result, they experience intensified UV radiation which is believed to cause increased cases of cataracts and melanoma. The government has imposed regulations and laws to limit the emission of dangerous atmospheric pollutants in order to minimize or eliminate further damage to the ozone layer.

An area of particular concern for New Zealand is global warming because of the potential rise in sea level. Although the majority of the country is high elevation many of the surrounding islands are not. New Zealand would be directly impacted by the effects of a rising sea level on low-lying islands, as a destination for immigration and aid.

ROMANIA

Quick Facts

Source: The world factbook. (2005). Retrieved March 3, 2005, from <http://www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/>

Area: 237,500 square kilometers

Population: 22,355,551

Term for citizens: Romanians

Language: Romanian (official), Hungarian, German

Currency: Leu (approx. 27,817.64 Romanian leu/1 US dollar)

Capital: Bucharest

Religion: Eastern Orthodox (including all sub-denominations) 87%, Protestant 6.8%, Catholic 5.6%, other (mostly Muslim) 0.4%, unaffiliated 0.2%

Government type: Republic

President: Traian Basescu

Military: Ground Forces, Naval Forces, Air and Air Defense Forces (AMR), Civil Defense (age 20 for compulsory 12 month service, reduced to age 18 during wartime, voluntary at age 18)

Literacy rate: 98.4% (age 15 and over can read and write)

Climate: Temperate; cold, cloudy winters with frequent snow and fog; sunny summers with frequent showers and thunderstorms

Natural hazards: Earthquakes, most severe in south and southwest; geologic structure and climate promote landslides

Environmental issues: Soil erosion and degradation; water pollution; air pollution in south from industrial effluents; contamination of Danube delta wetlands

Romania is located in Southeastern Europe between Bulgaria and the Ukraine.

The area was under communist rule until February of 1990 and remnants of this can still be found in aspects of Romanian society, including its environmental issues. Since the fall of the communist regime, the Romanian government has taken steps, both politically and socially, to move toward a more democratic society. Romania is

characterized by the unity of the people, both in material and cultural aspects, that is believed to be a result, at least in part, of the geographical formation of the country.

Geography

Romania covers an elliptical area of 237,500 square kilometers on the Balkan Peninsula. Its land borders total 2,508 km, shared with Moldova (450 km), the Ukraine (362 km on the north and 169 km on the east), Bulgaria (608 km), Hungary (443 km), and Serbia and Montenegro (476 km). It has 225 km of coastline.

Romania is comprised of three main geographical regions. The first is the Carpathian Mountains, which are a series of major mountain ranges that run north and west in the center of the country. To the west of this mountain range is the second region, an area of large plateaus. The third geographical region lies east of the mountains and is characterized by low-lying plains. The plains run to the Black Sea and into Europe's second largest delta region, where the Danube meets the sea. This area is the source of the majority of the country's agricultural output.

The country occupies the majority of the lower basin of the Danube River system and the hilly eastern regions of the middle Danube basin. The Danube River is one of the largest rivers in the region, bringing water from the Alps to the Carpathian Basin. It is shared by eight countries, Germany, Austria, Slovakia, Hungary, Yugoslavia, Bulgaria, Romania, and Russia and functions as a major transportation route in and between countries. It has been deepened and widened to make it accessible to large ships. The Carpathians form a natural barrier between the two

Danube basins. There are over 500 protected areas within Romania, including 12 national parks, 3 biosphere reserves, and 1 world heritage site, the Danube Delta.

Culture and Ethnic Identity

People of Romania are referred to as Romanians. Throughout history, Romanian culture and its ethnic identity have changed, largely as a result of social and global forces. The area, especially the ethnic make-up of the country, was largely impacted by the first and second World Wars.

Ethnic Romanians comprise approximately 90% of the population and trace themselves to Latin-speaking Romans. Hungarians and Roma, commonly known as gypsies, are the principle minorities in the country. The minority population is largest in Transylvania and Banat, located in the northern and western parts of the country. Before WWII, minorities comprised over 28% of the population. During the war, this population decreased by more than half due in part to the loss of two major border areas, now the countries of Moldova and Ukraine. Since then, a large part of the Jewish community has emigrated to Israel, causing their population to shrink to less than 15,000 from over 300,000. Another major emigration trend involves ethnic Germans, more than 2/3 of which have emigrated to Germany. Religious affiliations within the country are likely to follow along ethnic lines.

Traditional folk arts continue to play a significant role in modern Romanian culture. These include dance, woodcarving, ceramics, weaving, embroidery of

costumes and decorations, and folk music. The traditional folk arts flourish in many parts of the country. Two other important cultural aspects are poetry and theater.

Class Structure

The legacy of the Romanian communist era is still evident in many aspects of Romanian society. Since the end of the communist era, the government has taken steps to move toward a more democratic society, to ensure civil liberties, and to respect human rights. The last five years have seen the introduction of new protections for the Roma.

Overall, the country has an educated and well-trained work force, yet Romania has one of the lowest standards of living in Europe. The unemployment rate is 7.2%, with almost half of the population, 44.5%, living below the poverty level. The lowest 10% of income earners receive 3.2% of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) while the highest 10% receive 25% of the GDP. The labor force is divided between the three largest industries, with 41.4% of the population employed in agriculture, 27.3% in industry, and 31.3% in services.

Social Structure

Romanian society is traditionally close-knit and family-oriented. For the most part, children grow up surrounded by their immediate family and grandparents as well as other relatives. Because of this, many Romanians are very group-oriented. This can

be seen in an abundance of parties and celebrations. This also may be a result of a population density estimated to be more than 250 people per square mile in 1995.

Romanian society places a large emphasis on aesthetics. Children are brought up by their parents and school to conform to their social group. This comes in the form of classes on behavior, manners, and grooming at all levels of education. Although conformity is stressed and taught, people are also encouraged to maintain an element of individuality.

Students at Romanian universities tend to be fairly politically active and played a large role in the revolutionary movement to eliminate communism in the country. There are many free-press newspapers throughout the country, including a variety of student newspapers and publications.

The Capital City: Bucharest

Bucharest was proclaimed the capital of the Romanian state in 1862. It is located in southern Romania, in the middle of the Romanian plain. The city lies between the Carpathian foothills and the Danube River, on the banks on the Dimbovița River. It serves as the economic, administrative, and cultural center of Romania. It is also a major transportation center for the country. After nationalization of the land in 1948, a result of the rise of communism, there was significant growth of large-scale products and architectural uniformity.

The city is home to many institutes of higher learning, including the Technical Institute of Bucharest and the University of Bucharest. It is also home to several

metallurgical and engineering plants. The major industries are engineering products, such as machine tools and agricultural machinery, electrical and automotive equipment, buses, trolleybuses, and many other goods. Bucharest produces one-fifth of the total industrial output of Romania.

Trade

Prior to 1991, trade was restricted by the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (Comecon). Comecon was the coordinating body for the economic interests of the Soviets and was dissolved at when the communist regime fell. Since that time, Romania has made efforts to increase trade with both developing countries and industrialized Western nations.

The modernization of the Romanian economy has led to increased foreign trade. Foreign trade has continued to rise in the country post-1991 and Romania now has trading relationships with more than 100 countries. Currently, there is an emphasis on exports of mainly textiles and footwear, metals and metal products, machinery and equipment, minerals and fuels, chemicals, and agricultural products. Romania's main export partners, as estimated in 2003, are Italy (24.3%), Germany (15.7%), France (7.4%), the UK (6.7%), and Turkey (5.1%). Import commodities include machinery and equipment, fuels and minerals, chemicals, textile and products, basic metals, and agricultural products, with the main import partners being Italy (19.6%), Germany (14.9%), Russia (8.3%), and France (7.3%).

Environmental Issues

The environmental issues facing Romania are largely a remnant of the country's communist era, which ended in February of 1990. During this time, the government focused on exploiting the area's natural resources with little regard for environmental impact. Like much of Eastern Europe, Romania has a history of heavy industry. It currently faces environmental challenges related to its metallurgical, oil refining, and petrochemical sectors. These include overall water pollution, and specifically contamination of the Danube Delta wetlands.

The Danube River brings water from the Alps to the Carpathian Basin, gathering water from many tributaries which run through the some of the most industrialized areas in the region. The Danube is subject to large amounts of pollution based on its location and role as a large transportation route through Eastern Europe. The Danube Delta is currently facing threats from the drive to develop tourism and build both resorts and sport facilities in the area surrounding the Delta. The development threatens bird and animal breeding grounds in the area.

Although there are over 500 protected areas within Romania, guidelines and enforcement of environmental policies are rare. Other environmental issues are soil erosion and degradation and air pollution in the south from industrial effluents. In many areas, air pollution still exceeds acceptable levels.

DISCUSSION TOPICS

Discussions should run approximately 1-1 ½ hours in length. It is your choice to either facilitate group discussions during the adventure tour or to assign them to academic credit students. As part of the academic component, academic credit students must lead at least one discussion during their volunteer work project. Depending upon the number of academic credit students in your group, you may choose to have them work individually or in groups.

Faculty are required to hold a total of six discussions during the two-week volunteer work projects and another four during the two-week adventure tour. The goal of these discussions is to encourage students to reflect on their own experiences, both at home and in their host countries. Discussions are designed to enhance the overall experience by providing information on a variety of topics.

Reflection is an important component to any experiential program as it helps the participants identify important elements and “analyze these elements in greater depth, considering the perspectives of both thinking and feeling” (Knapp, 1992, p. 36). On an ISV program, the analysis leads students to increased understanding of an experience and allows them to create a plan for future action. During the reflection/discussion process, information is sorted by students and they are often forced to examine their personal perceptions and beliefs. It follows that “it is the reflection process which turns experience into experiential education” (Joplin, 1981, p. 17).

Another important element of this reflection is that it needs to be public, as in the form of a discussion. In the ISV setting, it is truly the students who are responsible for their own learning. The faculty's job is to facilitate and guide students through the reflection/discussion process, allowing students to embark on the educational journey of their experience. Because students are ultimately in charge of their own learning, discussion can evolve in various direction, based upon the group member's experiences. To accommodate this, it is necessary for the faculty to remain flexible in the discussion outlines and expectations.

As each faculty has a unique background and expertise, you are encouraged to draw upon your knowledge for interesting discussion topics. You can also encourage students to look for topics of interest that they encounter within their host country and would like to discuss. It is important to be flexible, as the members of each group may have different areas of interest and background information. The following are six sample discussion topics you can refer to.

Discussion #1 – Cultural Experiences

What is culture?

- Culture is the “sum total of ways of living including behavioral norms, linguistic expression, styles of communication, patterns of thinking, and beliefs and values of a group large enough to be self-sustaining transmitted over the course of generations” (Jandt, 2004, p. G-3).

Has anyone experienced feelings of uncertainty here? When? Why? (*This can also be done as a brainstorming activity to encourage participation)

Do you think you would have had those same feelings if you were raised in this culture? Why or why not?

Have any behaviors stood out to you as different from what you would see at home?

How do you feel about the differences that you’ve witnessed?

Discuss ethnocentrism.

- Negatively judging another culture by the standards of one’s own culture
- Emphasizes judgment over understanding and thus limits the educational opportunity and learning potential of a cross-cultural experience

Do you possess any ethnocentric views? (*You may want to use the brainstorming technique again)

How do you think these ethnocentric views impact intercultural communication?

What can you do to minimize these impacts?

Discussion #2 – Environmental Problems and Issues

Distinguish between a problem and an issue.

- A problem refers to something that everyone agrees is negative and should be addressed
- An issue refers to something that is debated, meaning that there is not an agreed upon right or wrong position. A problem becomes an issue when people do not agree on the solution.

What are the environmental problems and issues specific to your country?

Do you think that local values affect the attention given to environmental issues or problems? How?

Do you think that these cultural attitudes influence environmental policy? Why or why not?

Have you seen any examples of this?

Do you think that the environmental issues or problems can be addressed and solved? Why or why not?

If the society is a developing country, should there be concerns about the environment before the people's basic needs are met?

Can environmental concerns and basic needs be woven together as they are addressed?

Do you think the difference in the development levels of countries throughout the world impacts the global environmental movement? How?

Discussion #3 – International Relations/Influence

What does the term international influence mean to you? (*Have students brainstorm words, industries, ideas, etc.)

- International influence can refer to a variety of things, including commercial products, advertising, television, movies, mannerisms, slang, etc.

Do you think your host country is subject to a significant amount of international influence? Why or why not?

Is your answer is yes, are there any areas of society that are more heavily influenced?

Why do you think this is the case?

What examples have you seen of international influence in your host country?

(*Brainstorm examples so students have a visual to refer back to)

Do you think there is any connection between the level of development of the country and the degree of international influence?

- For example, are less developed countries more or less susceptible to international influence?
- Why or why not?

Compare international influence in your home country with international influence in your host country. Are there any similarities? Any differences?

How does this concept of international influence impact international relations? Think about the different sectors of society: economy, military, religion, social, environmental, etc.

Are there any countries in particular whose influences dominate in your host country?

Discussion #4 – Conservation vs. Preservation

Distinguish between conservation and preservation

- Conservation refers to using the natural resources for the greatest good of the greatest number for the longest time. This term implies management and use and is often associated with development in one form or another.
- Preservation refers to leaving nature free from the influence of humans. True preservationists believe that humans have no place within the natural realm.

What are examples of conservation from your host country?

What are examples of preservation from your host country?

Which is more prevalent, conservation or preservation?

Do you think that a country's level of development impacts the level of conservation or preservation? Why or why not?

Thinking about your personal environmental philosophy, are you more aligned with conservation or preservation? (*Have students stand up and form a line with conservation at one end and preservation at the other. Tell them to choose the place on the line where they believe their environmental philosophy is located and stand there.)

Are there any experiences that have shaped your beliefs?

Read the following scenario (or create your own):

There is a wooded area near your home that you grew up hiking, camping, mountain biking, or generally using. Usage of the area has increased in recent years causing concern among environmental groups about the well-being of the plants and animals of the area. Lately, the government has been facing a considerable amount of pressure from these environmental groups to close the area to human use and allow the natural ecosystem to restore itself. What are your feelings on this issue?

*Students may experience many reactions to this scenario. Often they will say that they want to be able to use the area for their outdoor activities. During the conservation-preservation line-up, students tend to align themselves more closely with preservation; yet often, when confronted with a scenario similar to this one, they may shift toward more of a conservationist approach. This is a good time to discuss that many people are ideological preservationists but when it comes to the reality of their lifestyles they are conservationists.

*Have students repeat the conservation-preservation line-up in relation to where they fall in the previous scenario.

How do the actions and beliefs discussed in this scenario relate to your everyday life?

How do the actions and beliefs relate to your decision making?

Discussion #5 – Environmental Sensitivity

What is environmental sensitivity?

- Environmental sensitivity refers to the importance or value that an individual places on the environment based on their previous experiences.
- Environmental sensitivity can shape an individual's behavior and lifestyle choices.

Discuss environmental sensitivity

- Experiences people have throughout their lifetimes that increase their awareness or concern for the environment
- Examples can include camping, hiking, fishing, watching a natural area succumb to development, time at the beach, etc.

How does environmental sensitivity vary between cultures? Between economic classes?

How is environmental sensitivity acquired in your host country?

How is it acquired by different economic classes and those in different locations (i.e. urban vs. rural)

Is it affected by the level of development within a country?

Does a country's level of development affect the areas that are important to its citizens and government? For example, do developing nations need to focus more on meeting

the basic needs of the people rather than on addressing environmental issues or problems?

How can we increase environmental sensitivity in our home countries?

Discussion #6 – Ecotourism

What is ecotourism?

- Ecotourism is “responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment and improves the welfare of local people” (The International Ecotourism Society, 2004, paragraph 1)

Have you seen any examples of ecotourism here?

How does ecotourism differ from traditional tourism? Think about the environment, local communities, the economy, wildlife, types of people attracted by the two industries, etc.

Do you think your host country has big draws for the ecotourism industry? Why or why not? Give some examples.

Who benefits from ecotourism in your host country? Encourage students to think about all parties involved, humans and wildlife.

Can you think of any problems that could occur within the ecotourism industry? For example corruption, exploitation, unequal distribution of funds, over-crowding, etc.

Does your host country take any steps to ensure the purity/non-corruption of the ecotourism industry? How?

Discussion #7 – Volunteerism

What is volunteerism?

- The act or practice of doing volunteer work in community service

How did you decide to do this volunteer work?

Have you ever done other volunteer work?

Can you think of any organizations, other than ISV, that are centered around the concept of volunteerism? Discuss both governmental and non-governmental organizations (NGO's).

Compare and contrast governmental organizations like the Peace Corps with NGO's.

Do you believe that there is a difference between them? Why or why not?

Do you think one might be more effective than the other? Why or why not?

Do you believe that the effectiveness of governmental organizations and/or NGO's is subject to the global political climate? Why or why not?

Do you favor one group of organizations, governmental or non-governmental, over the other? Why or why not?

Sample discussion topics
for academic credit students

1. Discuss the various ways that ecotourism is tried in this country.
2. How has volunteerism impacted your host country?
3. Choose an environmental issue that is affecting your host country. Discuss possible solutions to this issue.
4. Are there distinct gender roles within your host country? What might these be a result of? How have they impacted the social structure within your host country? Compare and contrast the gender roles of your host country with those of your home country.
5. How did your actual experience in your host country compare with what you were expecting? What was similar? What was different? Are there any things that you were completely surprised by?
6. Discuss the trade industry, both domestic and international, of your host country. What are the major imports and exports? Do international trading relationships affect the daily lives of this country's citizens? How?

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