

DR 2019 Mission Trip

Christ Episcopal Church, Valdosta GA

Notes for Team Members on Smartphones and Laptops

These notes are based on my experiences in using smartphones and laptops in the Dominican Republic on twenty-nine trips since June 2010, including nine of Christ Church's mission trips. My most recent trip was in February 2019. I am assuming conditions in June 2019 will be the same as in February 2019, but of course that is not certain. I regret the length of this document, but the subject is complicated, difficult to summarize, and has financial implications. Failure to plan properly for international use can incur steep financial charges – Julius Ariail

The question of whether or not to take a smartphone or a laptop on a mission trip is one that can only be answered by each individual mission trip member. In general, they are not necessary for the successful outcome of the mission trip. As a part of my mission team assignment, I will have a Dominican Republic smartphone (809-653-0433) and a United States smartphone (229-563-0209) fully equipped for international use, and can relay emergency text, email, and voice messages to any team member and facilitate emergency communications from the DR back to family members in the US. Both smartphones access my email at this address: <julius.ariail@gmail.com>. I will also have a laptop that I can try to connect to the internet as needed, although internet conditions at the Campamento sometimes make this difficult to do. In an emergency, I can take the laptop into the neighboring city of Jarabacoa and easily connect it there.

If I cannot be reached using this email address or any of the telephone numbers, contact Patricia Martin, head of the mission team support office at the DR diocesan office in Santo Domingo: <drequipos@gmail.com>; cell (829)429-6906.

The three preferred ways to contact a team leader while the team is in the Dominican Republic:

- 1) Text message to 229-563-0209**
- 2) Text message to 809-653-0433**
- 3) Email to <julius.ariail@gmail.com>**

These devices should be brought on the trip only if needed for other, individual reasons. If a team member decides to bring them, then that team member has to make provisions to secure them at all times, to re-charge them, and to connect them to the Internet if those communication functions are desired. Misplacing a smartphone or any other expensive electronic item while on the trip tends to be disruptive, especially if the team is in transit from place to place and needs to

maintain a certain schedule. If they are brought, a recommended practice is to secure them with a passcode so the device cannot be used by another person if found. In general, these devices may attract unwanted attention from others and are considered “attractive nuisances.” Necessary precautions must be taken.

One popular use of smartphones on a mission trip, of course, is to use them as cameras. In this case, communications arrangements are not necessary while in the DR, so the smartphones can be left in airplane mode for the entire trip to function as a camera and photo file storage device. In airplane mode, no data is transmitted or received, and so there are no data charges.

One communication method that is also free to use is wifi. We expect that there will be a reliable wifi network in the hotel we will be using in Santo Domingo for the night of June 23. At the Campamento in El Pedregal, wifi will probably not be available. While using wifi, the smartphone should be set to “airplane mode + wifi” to block any cell phone data usage during that time so as to avoid international charges.

In the event that one elects to use the full capabilities of a smartphone for voice, text messaging, email messaging, and “web surfing” while in the DR, then one should contact the smartphone’s US-based carrier network to purchase an international voice, or voice & data plan, before leaving the US. If this is not done in advance, and if the smartphone is used to connect for voice calls and/or data transmissions while in the DR, the costs can be extremely high – perhaps in the thousands of US dollars for the week if one uses the device heavily for tasks like photo uploads and downloads or extensive web surfing. Charges for international voice, text messaging, and data plans vary by carrier and also by the amount of time (voice calls), number of text messages, and amount of data. Please note that AT&T and Verizon both have a “US\$10 daily” international plan that might be attractive for those planning only casual use while abroad. I am not certain whether Sprint has this “daily” plan at this time.

Please know that even though one has an international plan on one’s smartphone, connectivity might not be available on a given day in a given location in the Dominican Republic.

Good battery life practices while using these international voice and data plans include turning off all unnecessary apps that use data such as location services; “zeroing out” voice and data usage meters as one leaves the US so that accurate usage records can be maintained on the smartphone while in the DR; restricting the number and resolution sizes of photo uploads; and switching to “airplane mode” whenever the device is powered up but connectivity is not needed at the moment. Methods of doing these vary by smartphone manufacturer, so if in doubt consult an online manual for a specific type of equipment. *Updated April 3, 2019*