

# Dominican Republic

**“Now we have a house with concrete walls, a high ceiling and tiled floors”**

When Jorge was 18 years old he left Las Placetas in the Northeast of the Dominican Republic and went to the United States. Three years later his wife followed with her first daughter and they had five more children abroad. Las Placetas receives the second highest percentage of remittances in the country. The majority of the migrants from this town have gone to the United States.

Jorge is one of 15 brothers and sisters and he left school after the third grade. “It was a backward place, our parents hurried us so that we could work in the vegetable plots, in agriculture.”

Jorge and his family settled in Connecticut, in an area with many Latin American migrants from Colombia, Puerto Rico, Ecuador, Brazil and Peru. There are also many Dominicans. His wife Altagracia take care of the children and also has started to sew in order to save on expenses on clothes and sheets. For some time she worked in a factory. They worked in Manhattan for a few years but later returned to Connecticut where they were able to purchase a house.

They raised their children the way they were raised. “We taught them the same values; we told them about how we were raised and how we value life, the importance of living honorably and seeking God. We told them to study because we were not able to.” One of his daughters received a university degree in accounting. At home the couple shares the household work. Altagracia was in an accident and Jorge helped her.

“In other words, he was not a typical guy that is never near the kitchen, we have always shared everything together,” said Altagracia.

The children also helped in the house, both boys and girls, with cleaning, sweeping, washing and folding clothes. The majority of the decisions were made by Jorge, but were always more or less agreed upon.

Today, Jorge is 60 years old and the couple has returned to the Dominican Republic to the countryside of Las Placetas. With the extra money that came from the sale of the house in Connecticut, they built a new house on a piece of land shared with the house that they bought for their parents.

“We built a house for our parents, a small house in bad shape where they lived until they died. It was poorly constructed; my brother did what he could. It was made with a bit of concrete and the rest with wood and corrugated tin. Now we have a house with concrete walls, a high ceiling and tiled floors.”

They always maintained their dream to return, because they say that life in the Dominican Republic is better for their health and more economical. Both have health problems, but only Altagracia receives a disability pension. In the countryside they plant bananas, coffee and vegetables for their own consumption. They have chickens so that they no longer have to buy eggs. Sometimes their children send money when their friends travel to the Dominican Republic or when they themselves visit.

They say that Las Placetas lacks electricity, a good highway, doctors and telephone lines. When their children come to visit they do not stay long. “For us, especially the girls have a hard time when they have to bathe without hot water or when they have to iron when there is no electricity,” Altagracia says.

However, the couple continues to be positive. “Now I see that I’m a bit better, we are forming a company here.” They are the ones building the road and they say some greenhouses will be built. This will generate a bit of work and they are also planning to build a dam in the river.



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**An estimated 1.5 million Dominicans are living abroad and in 2008 they sent home around US \$ 3 billion in remittances. The town of Las Placetas receives the second largest amount of remittances in the country. The migrants travel mainly to the United States. The region has many structural obstacles to development, such as scarce public services, and international migration is one of few options for social mobility.**

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