

Languages

Spanish is the official language of the country and street signs and restaurant menus are written in the mother tongue. Even though the people linked to the tourist trade generally speak English, knowing some Spanish is a great advantage.

It is important to point out that "Dominicanese" (the local way of speaking Spanish, interspersed with Dominican elements) is the everyday life experience of the peasant's soul and wisdom, expressed with a rustic accent and with inland flavor. As in all countries, each region has its charm and accentuates its expressions in a peculiar way, identifying the speaker from the first words uttered in his conversation.

This unequalled form of expression has been a source of inspiration for renowned native and foreign writers. The time when this up-country language style began to be used in literary writings is not yet determined; but, we do know that a prize was awarded to a rustic poem written by Tirso de Molina between 1616 and 1618, during his stay at the Convent of Las Mercedes in the colonial zone of Santo Domingo.

In spite of Spanish influence, common terms derived from the Taino's melodious and sweet language remain in use and nearly all preserve their original meaning. For example: ají (pepper), barbacoa (barbeque), batea (small tub), bija (annatto fruit), bohío (hut), burén (flat griddle), canoa (canoe), Carey (tortoise-shell), casabe (cassava), coa (sharp wood rod), conuco (a plot of land for cultivation).