

Zaragoza, Spain

The summer global health rotation for medical students in Zaragoza, Spain was a great experience. Zaragoza is a beautiful, sunny and friendly city with water fountains at many plazas and parks. I stayed with a native Spanish family, living about 25 minutes from the city center, Plaza España. Zaragoza's efficient and reliable bus system has many routes spanning all over the city and to surrounding neighborhoods and villages. Zaragoza has lots of new buildings constructed using recyclable materials specifically for the International Water Expo in 2008. Plans are to take them down though because there is no use for most of the buildings anymore.

The first two weeks in Spain, I shadowed Dr. Fernando Orozco, a family physician, at the Centro de Salud en Valdefierro (Valdefierro health center). The health center was located in another neighborhood about 25 minutes outside the city center. I would take 2 buses to get to the clinic each morning and afternoon, but it was good because that way I learned the bus routes and key landmarks in the city. Dr. Orozco was very helpful, thoughtful and considerate, always allowing me to examine patients right alongside him and the resident. This was such a great clinical experience as well, because I learned how to use an otoscope to look in a patient's ear, practiced how to palpate for abdominal pain, how to figure out if an infection is viral or bacterial by looking at the back of their throat with a penlight and tongue depressor. I was fortunate enough to accompany Dr. Orozco on several house visits to patients' homes in Valdefierro (the neighborhood near the health center).

At Hospital Clinico, I worked with Dr. De Escalante, a physician in the department of internal medicine, and Dr. Montoya, a resident from Peru. The morning began with reviewing and discussing patients' charts followed by rounds. This was a good experience, because even though it was challenging to understand everything the doctors and patients were saying in Spanish, I was more readily able to pick up on the personal interactions between the doctor and patient.

Some other highlights of my trip included exploring Zaragoza and northern Spain. Zaragoza has a great blend of modern and traditional architecture with many cultural, historical and contemporary places to visit including the Aljafería Palace, the Corte Ingles, Plaza de Pilar, Medieval Fair and the many beautiful parks and cathedrals. Beneath the city, there are ancient Roman ruins – only some of which has been uncovered. My Spanish parents took me on a day trip to the Pyrenees along the Spain-France border. We visited Confranc, a border town in Spain, and saw the tower the Spanish used to spy against the French many years ago. In another city, Jaca, we visited a castle and one of the oldest cathedrals in all of Spain. Later in the afternoon, we made our way (by car along very curvy mountain roads) to el Castillo de Loarre (Loarre Castle) – an enormous, ancient castle from the 11th century.

