

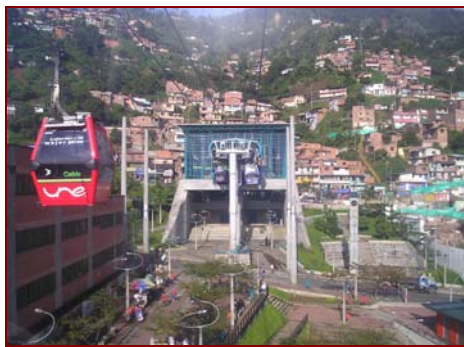
The last free summer before 2<sup>nd</sup> year represented an opportunity to leave academics and see another culture. Immersing in a different culture would give me the chance to gain a new perspective about the world, and by going outside my comfort zone, I wanted to learn more about myself and my cultural values and biases.

The program I chose is a collaboration between RWJMS and Universidad CES in Medellín, Colombia to set up a student and faculty medical school exchange program. The goals of the programs include understanding a different health care system both by participating in hospital rotations as well as lectures, learning about Colombia's public health problems and comparing them to the US and gaining medical Spanish proficiency both through lecture and clinical participation. The program has a very large cultural immersion component that includes home stays with CES students and a week of faculty-facilitated tours of Medellín and towns beyond.

During the first 4 weeks, our schedule would include classes (Infectious diseases, Ob/Gyn, Emergencies & Disasters) in the morning followed by a hospital rotation (Pediatrics, Family Health, Ob/Gyn, Internal Medicine) in the afternoon, and for the first 2 weeks, we also had medical Spanish classes in the evening. At times, I felt overwhelmingly busy, but always in the company of interesting people and places.



On Ob/Gyn floor of Medellín's General Hospital



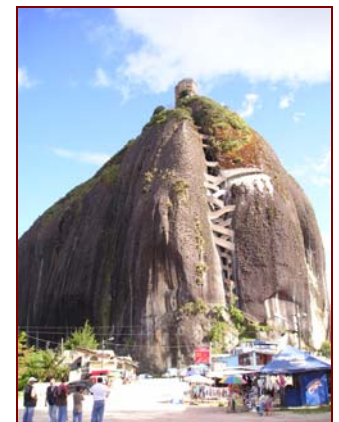
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Medellín is the 2<sup>nd</sup> largest city (2.5 million people!) in Colombia. It is located in a state called Antioquia in the Aburrá valley 5,000 ft above sea level. The climate is always spring-like with an average temp of 72°F making the city lush and green all year round. Medellín is an industrial, modern city known for its universities, commerce, science, nightlife, flower production, and festivals. The people of Medellín, known as *Paisas*, are passionate and friendly people who love their city and are proud to welcome visitors. Medellín overcame years of oppression and violence and in the past 15 years the city experienced a boom in population growth, textile industry, new housing, and consumer businesses. El Metro de Medellín, a symbol of pride, is a massive public transportation service that joins poor and rich districts giving everyone access to the economically vital parts of Medellín. The city is also the

home of Fernando Botero, world-famous Flower Festival, Botanical Garden, and Christmas Lights. During last week in Colombia, we had had the chance to further explore Medellín and its towns. We visited towns such as Guatapé with its mysterious Piedra del Peñol, a massive rock of 200 meters in altitude and the colonial capital of Colombia, Santa Fe de Antioquia, which has a completely suspended bridge over the river Cauca called el Puente de Occidente.

Thinking about my experience in Medellín now, it is the people that I remember most. Everyone that I had an encounter with was genuinely interested in my experience in his/her country. The faculty and administration at Universidad CES designed an innovative program and saw that we had a full experience every step of the way. The medical students at CES gave up their study time to show us their beloved city. I was always asked: Am I enjoying my stay and will I come back to Medellín for a second visit? How can I not? I fell in love with Medellín, its people, the kids at la Clinica de Santa Ana, the mountains, and the fast, lyrical Spanish of *Paisas*.

Before I left, my host student, Claudia and her Mom, told me that their house will be my home the next time I visit Medellín. I definitely have plans to go back for a rotation during my fourth year of school to continue with my medical education and the friendships that I began that summer.



Guatapé: Piedra del Peñol, a massive rock of 200 m in altitude