

## **Andean Global Studies—Medical Spanish Program—Quito, Ecuador**

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This July, I traveled to Quito, Ecuador to study medical Spanish through an immersion experience and clinical rotation. Quito is the expansive capital city of Ecuador located high in the Andes Mountains of South America. The colonial Old City was a picturesque tourist attraction with the Governmental Palace and many Spanish-influenced churches. My school, hospital, and homestay were located in the bustling, crowded northern section of the city.

Living with a host family provided an invaluable opportunity to practice Spanish and learn about the Ecuadorian people. We ate and conversed together almost nightly, and sometimes I helped cook empanadas or corn humedas.

The program was three weeks long, and consisted of one-on-one Spanish language lessons every day, and two weeks of rotations in one of the area hospitals. I did my rotations at Hospital Baca Ortiz, the public regional pediatric hospital. Each morning, I attended classes with students from Universidad Central del Ecuador on their Pediatric rotation. After, I went on rounds in the “Lactantes” ward with my preceptor, and then assisted her during her outpatient consultation hours. The hospital was always crowded and chaotic, as hundreds of families waited for their free medical care. As a teaching hospital, the level of expertise was high, but I did notice differences in quality of care. Most notably, I noticed that less emphasis was placed on sanitation and sterilization; the sinks often lacked soap or paper towels. Some crucial medications were unavailable, but I was impressed that they were already using electronic medical records. The doctor-patient relationship was also less patient centered. In the external consultation, patient visits were brief and focused. The doctor had me call in the next patient even before we completed the first visit. Patient privacy was not a priority.

Each afternoon, I had 4 hours of one-on-one Spanish instruction at the language school. The teachers and staff at the school were incredibly friendly and helpful. They offered optional activities like cooking classes and salsa dance lessons, and organized trips to nearby attractions such as the Papallacta hot springs and the equator.

On weekends, we had time off to travel and sightsee. I used the time to explore each of the three geographic regions within Ecuador: the coast, the mountains, and the jungle. On the coast, we relaxed and partied at the Atacames beach in the Esmeraldas region. In the mountains of Mindo, we hiked and zip-lined through the “cloud forest” canopies. In the jungle of Baños and Puyo, we went white-water rafting and spotted cascading waterfalls and exotic wildlife.

Unfortunately, while I was in Quito, we experienced issues with safety. There were several armed and unarmed robberies of AGS students. One student from RWJMS was robbed at gunpoint near the school. I would advise any student to take certain

precautions such as traveling in large groups, especially after dark (around 6pm year round), keeping valuables concealed, and staying alert.

During my time in Ecuador, I learned so much about the culture, the politics, the health care system, and the people. Most importantly, I learned a great deal of Spanish, which will help me to more effectively treat patients here in the U.S. I am deeply grateful for this experience, and I look forward to practicing abroad again in the future.





