

Amazon Indigenous Health, Ecuador – Child Family Health International

I decided to go to Ecuador for the summer following my first year of medical school because I felt it would be one of the last opportunities I would have to travel. The program I chose consisted of a week in Quito, the capital of Ecuador where I had Spanish classes from 8am to 5pm everyday. This first week acclimated me to the new environment, the high altitude of the mountainous region, and got me accustomed to speaking Spanish all the time. I stayed with a host family in Quito who were very accommodating and helped me practice Spanish outside of the classroom. This first week also oriented me to the program and gave me the opportunity to explore the capital.

For the next 3 weeks I traveled to a rural Amazonian town called Puyo, as my program was focused on the traditional health practices of indigenous Amazon communities. These three weeks comprised of a mix of rotations through the Western style clinics in the rural towns, along with visits to the indigenous communities of the Amazon area. I had the opportunity to see how the Ecuadorian government runs their health care system. Most of the rural clinics are run by recent graduates who are required by the government to spend their first year as a doctor in a rural clinic. This is their way of making sure the rural towns have access to some kind of health care. These doctors were only a couple years ahead of us in their education and it was really interesting to learn about their style of medical education. I also had two excursions into the jungle to stay with 2 different indigenous Amazon communities and learn about their way of life and medicine. One community was a Shuar tribe that lived 4 hours away from any road to modern civilization. There we stayed in their huts and learned about the various plants and herbs they use to treat everything from heartburn to cancer even. The vast and comprehensive medicine they practice is incredible given the bare means in which these people live.

Tarik Hashem

hashemto@umdnj.edu

