

What was your first day at the internship site like?

My first week consisted of Spanish classes all day, which I would highly recommend. I feel like I reviewed 4 years of Spanish in four days, which set me up with a much better base to start into my internship sites. I rotated to a different site every week. As an intern for 10 weeks, my first site was volunteering with a primary school. In honesty in first day, my ability to communicate was overestimated and I was left alone with an entire classroom of students for the entire morning which was very stressful. I consider myself good with preschoolers but the language barrier made for a very difficult experience, but each day during that week I learned more and more exponentially. I was also able to work with my Spanish school teachers in the afternoon for learning helpful phrases when working with children.

How would you assess the initial adequacy of your language ability, and how did it develop?

I had studied Spanish for all four years of high school and tested into 300 level in university my freshman year. I hadn't taken classes for about two years when I arrived in Ecuador. I thought I was going to be at a higher level than I really was. My foundation level Spanish was very helpful like pronunciation, basic words and understanding of the structure but I quickly learned how much I did not know. Implementing what you know from textbooks or taking time to write sentences out, is not the case when you are speaking in a native country. I was able and currently still understand more than I can say, which is common when learning new languages.

My Spanish improved more than I can really quantify, since there are so many levels and directions of fluency. By the end of the internship, I felt confident enough to travel through South America alone for a month. By no means would I call myself fluent or be confident in translating, but I am also amazed what 3 months did to my proficiency. There is a component of how much you put into learning that you will get out of it. I put myself in situations where I would have to speak and truly listen instead of relying on pointing, or hand gestures.

What were the most important benefits of your internship - personally and professionally?

I've learned that living for an extended period of time in a culture completely different than your own forces you to face your biases, your privileges, pinpoint where your culture, your personal habits, and your lack of knowledge fall short. If you need a humility check, traveling will gladly give that to you and even if you don't need it. Traveling in general makes you a better person across professional and personal realms with just more enrichment and knowledge. Personally, I've grown in ways I probably don't fully understand yet. I am more a considerate, patient, open-minded, and passionate person because of this internship. Professionally, I have a much better understanding of the daily interactions, nuisances and ethics to be a medical professional that I would never have gained here in the United States.

What were the biggest challenges during your internship?

The largest challenge for me was the frustration of not being able to communicate to the best of my ability. There were so many times I wanted to say something very distinct and eloquent in English but it would come out very elementary or not at all. With time, it only becomes better but there are moments where I felt stupid or blunt in my words. On an internship level, there were some overall systemic or cultural norms that sometimes I didn't agree with, but that didn't weight on me too much. On a personal level, activities that I missed doing for myself was the liberties I was used to, like the freedom of driving, doing chores at my leisure or cooking for myself.

What steps did you take to make sure that you became an asset to the organization?

As a general statement, the more Spanish you know the better. I would review relevant and useful vocab for each clinic or volunteer site based on their specific focuses. Since I rotated organizations every week, I had a shortened strategy of being a patient and open minded learner with also enough charisma and eagerness to gain opportunities out of my time. Even when my Spanish wouldn't suffice, my personality and attitudes helped me a lot.

What guidance and supervision by your mentor on site did you receive? What guidance did you have from your academic faculty at home?

I lived with the CFHI Program Coordinator, Rosita. The most up to date information, planning and details would come from her directly which was very helpful. Her daughter Pricilla also lives at the house, and her English is flawless and she is so much fun to have around. I always felt like I could go to either of them for any issues I had. I loved living with Rosita. She takes care of so many program details and chores that would be overwhelming if I was trying to manage by myself. The CFHI Medical Director, Dr. Alvear, we met with once a week for one hour. She always had welcoming demeanor and was open to any discussions that we wanted to have. Any of my mentors in Ecuador were willing to do anything for us if we needed it.

The at-home support was essential to my success for this internship. My IE3 Program Advisor, Jamie was flexible, understanding and helpful during all the requirements I had to complete before, during and after. Jamie also has first-hand experience in the countries I visited and her insight was extremely helpful. My professor Julie was also cooperative, accommodating, and considerate during all the hurdles, like limited internet during my online course requirements. With excess communication and the flexibility of my at-home support made me successful and at ease during my internship.

How did your impression of the country you were in change during the course of your internship?

Instead of being constantly afraid, with time I came to the comfort that not all people are out to get you, scam you or rob you in Ecuador. You must keep your guard up the entire time as a foreigner, but not having the preconceived judgment made a positive difference in how I felt during my stay in Ecuador. I reached a point during my 7th week where I actually felt like I belonged, comfortable and was contributing to Ecuador and Quito. The better my Spanish improved, the better I was able to interact and gain more enrichment from my experience.

What do you wish you had known before you arrived?

Aside from all the advice that is listed in the other question, I wish I could tell my past self that everything would go smoothly and it would be an adventure of a lifetime. That I would gain enough confidence to travel around South American alone, just from the experience of this trip. How I would reignite passions and spark new ones, and how it might have changed the course of my career direction and life priorities.

Give an overview of your daily routine.

Each week looks very different but that is the nature of my program. There's been volunteer places I didn't need to arrive until 9:00am and other clinics where I needed to be there by 7:00am. My commutes have ranged from 2 minutes to 45 minutes. An average schedule looks like the following:

6:30am – Wake up, get ready, pack stuff for the day

7:00am – Eat breakfast

7:15am – Leaving the house, walk to the bus stop, transfer bus twice

7:45am – Arrive at clinic

12:00pm – Leave clinic, grab the return bus and a quick bite to eat (quickest hour of the day)

1:00pm – Spanish classes start
4:00pm – Spanish classes end, some days napping, some days sightseeing!
7:00pm - Dinner at Rosita's house "Sobremesas" Table talk
9:00pm – Homework/Get caught up or go out on the town!
12:00am – Attempt to sleep by

Please give tips for future interns who will be living in the same city/country (ie. transportation, money, entertainment, culture, housing arrangements.)

Before I left, I put about \$80.00 in a single envelope for each of the 10 weeks I would be here. Filled with bills smaller than twenties, I am very happy with my decision to do this. Having a bunch of \$1.00 bills and a whole bag of quarters has been awesome for me and would highly recommend this to future interns. During the week, I do a fine job of sticking to my budget. During the week, I can get lunch for \$2.50 and I strive to do that, but I can also spend about \$6.00 depending on the place. The ATM's here give out 20's and sometimes 10's but I can barely break a 10.00 bill at lunch, so I have to actively seek out times to break my larger bills. This sometimes leaves me in a pinch even when I have sufficient amount of money, but the service worker doesn't have change. Imagine paying with 100.00 bills at lunch places back in the States. During the week, I just spend money on lunch and transportation. ATM's that have worked for me have been Banco Guayaquil and Banco Pinchincia.

However, I have needed more money for each of the weekends for traveling, gifts and activities. For example when we went to Banos, the greyhound bus ride was \$4.00 one way, hostel was 28.00 for all the nights, adventuring was \$30.00, and food/entertainment around \$40.00. This may sound reasonable in comparison to the states but spending at least \$100.00 for each weekend adds up over 10 weeks. I was not explicit about weekend travels in my budget so I find myself surprised how much I spent, however I regret nothing!

City metro buses cost \$0.25. Taxis cost \$2.00-\$4.00 with a 15 minute range. Occasionally, the meter is cheaper, but other times if you negotiate a price beforehand saves you money. The more people you can pack into a taxi, the cheaper it gets.

To go the volunteer sites, I have either walked or taken a taxi. To go to the clinics, I have been taking the metro bus system. The bus system is very busy and utilized, which means the buses are frequent and cheap. Each clinic is in a different location but at the beginning of each week, someone escorts me on the bus to my clinic to show me the specific route. As Quito is long and narrow, the bus lines run North to South along the main roads. If I am running short on time I can just grab a taxi to and from anywhere. Taxi's deliver door to door which can be perfect, but a taxi costs almost 400% more than taking the bus system, so you have to do time-benefit analysis for each circumstance. The taxis are abundant and usually make themselves known to foreigners on the street by honking or flashing their lights. We definitely utilize our free time after 4pm on Thursdays, we have the entire weekend to explore Ecuador. It's amazing the plenty of options even within a 3 hour range of Quito in any direction. The travel buses are a great choice from the two main terminals in Quito and usually are less than \$5.00 one way. The diversity of climates in Ecuador is incredible, ranging from the jungle, to the highlands, to the coast. We try to balance a more extreme travel weekend followed by a more tranquil day trip weekend.

We did the following trips, all of which I recommend:

- In Banos (3 hours South from Quito), a quaint city with a great nightlife is known for their outdoor sports. We went got massages, relaxed and salsa danced as best we could.

- In Mindo (2.5 hours Northwest from Quito), known for the bird watching and protected wildlife, we visited the cloud forest and relaxed in hammocks at our tranquil hostel. There are beautiful birds and native species, and it's incredible to just watch them moving around in their natural habitat.
- During the holiday of Carnaval (celebration of Lent beginning), we had a 5 day weekend where we took the opportunity to go the coast. To travel to the coast, is either an 8-11 hour bus ride or a 45 minute plane ride, which we utilized both. The specific town we visited was called Montanita, which is known internationally for its incredible surfing waves and a bit for its wild nightlife. Due to the holiday and the festivities, it was an incredible weekend I will never forget. I feel very lucky we had the time to travel there and if there is a chance to go the coast I would recommend it, but during a normal weekend would be a lot of travel time for little time of enjoyment.
- We visited Otavalo (1.5 hours North of Quito), where the renowned artisanal market is located. The other intern and I visited primarily for the alternative medicine clinic to learn and experience the traditional Ecuadorian medicine. The market was wonderful and where I did the majority of the shopping for gifts. The more you buy from a single vendor, you can get a better price and bargain with. Bring a suitcase half full and leave with it barely zipped!