

Cara Bergamo  
San Jose, Costa Rica  
IHCAI-Intensive Medical Spanish Course  
June 1, 2009 to June 26, 2009

This past summer I went to San Jose, Costa Rica and participated in a Spanish language program through the International Health Central American Institute with 3 other Robert Wood Johnson Students. The program ran from 8:30am to 4:00pm, Monday through Friday, with the weekends off to travel. In the morning, I had a Spanish grammar course where I received an excellent foundation upon which to build my vocabulary and conversational Spanish. In the afternoon, I participated in a medical Spanish course, where I learned how to take a history and physical and was able to practice on two standardized patients. In addition, there were a few days set aside to learn about different tropical diseases, such as malaria and leishmaniasis, and a few courses on snake bites.

Along with the courses, we were provided the chance to go to the town of Tortuguera for 3 days, which is known for its turtle egg laying. Unfortunately, we went in an off month, but still saw other the other indigenous wildlife of Tortuguero. Another trip we took was to see a children's hospital in San Jose. Being able to see the way another country runs its health care system was truly amazing and definitely an eye-opener. I cannot speak to the care they are given, but the statistics we were told as part of the tour did not make it seem that their health care was lacking in any way.

In addition to the program, I lived with a Costa Rican family along with two other students from Robert Wood in a home on the outskirts of San Jose. My host mother and family were extremely welcoming and nice, especially considering my lack of language skills. The fresh fruit breakfast and assortment of dinners were delicious, and my mother never ceased to ask us if the food was okay. Also, she was a readily available source for our weekend excursions as well as any places in town we wanted to explore.

On the weekends, myself and 3 other medical students from Robert Wood Johnson traveled to a few wonderfully different and beautiful parts of Costa Rica. We went to the small beach town of Montezuma, the Cloud Forest in Monteverde and another beach town, Manuel Antonio. Through these trips we saw both the touristy aspect of Costa Rica as well as the amazing scenery and wildlife indigent to the country. From monkeys to deer you can pet to fluffy caterpillars, on the weekends we had an amazing time while learning a little more about the Costa Rican culture.

Overall, my time in Costa Rica was as amazing. The medical aspect was mostly limited to the medical Spanish course and the visit to the hospital, but the information gleaned from these sessions is extremely useful. I would highly recommend the IHCAI program to anyone interested in learning Spanish and immersing themselves in the Costa Rican culture.



This is the school.



This is our return from Tortugeuro.



This is my Costa Rican home.



This is our Costa Rican mother.



These are just some pictures of the places I traveled to on the weekends. (Monkey = Manual Antonio, Flower = Monteverde, Beach = Montezuma)