

## Personal Impact: Ecuador with CFHI

Dr. Richard Maude contacted us in late 2007 with a view to re-establishing contact with Dra. Susana Alvear, CFHI's Medical Director in Quito, Ecuador. Now a Specialist Registrar in Infectious Diseases, Tropical Medicine and General Internal Medicine based in the UK, we took the opportunity to invite Dr. Maude to recall his experience eight years ago, and he kindly obliged.

In 2000, I spent nine weeks in Ecuador with CFHI on the community medicine programme that was, and still is, supervised by Dra. Susana Alvear. This program incorporated training in Spanish, extensive exposure to Ecuadorian culture and fantastic clinical experience in a variety of healthcare settings: a very in-depth and comprehensive introduction to medicine in Ecuador.

Every morning for three to four hours, there were one-on-one language classes at a local school with an amazing teacher, often followed by a trip to the market or a local shop to try out what had been learnt that morning. The language school also arranged a number of activities and excursions, including: a cultural show, cooking and dancing lessons, local movies, football matches, and trips to other parts of the country, such as to the coastal rainforest and the indigenous market town of Otavalo, with hiking among the surrounding volcanoes.

Most students, including myself, lived with a local family and were treated as an extra son or daughter. My local 'mother' was a fantastic cook and the numerous local culinary treats were often followed by lively family discussions around the dinner table. The combination of

daily language classes and total immersion in the local culture were responsible for my level of Spanish improving so drastically.

Back then, I was a final year medical student based in the UK. Many of the other students on the program were from the United States, and coming from different medical systems we learnt a lot from each other. Also, we got to know each other very well as we attended the same language school and took medicine tutorials together, giving even more opportunity for a full social calendar based around the many local restaurants, cafes and bars.

My medical experience with CFHI was made up of one to three-week spells attached to a number of different community medicine clinics in and around Quito, as well as a week spent with traditional healers in Otavalo and a week in the surgical ward of the Military Hospital in Quito. We were allowed a significant degree of responsibility and were even given our own clinic lists when we felt ready (closely supervised by an experienced local doctor, of course!). Clinical time was usually for four hours in the afternoons after language classes, with a tutorial once a week with Dra. Alvear. The aim was to be able to run a consultation entirely in Spanish by the



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end of the nine weeks. Towards the end I was encouraged and supported to do a research project, which I undertook in Quito and Otavalo comparing the attitudes of the local populations to western and indigenous healthcare practices.

At the end of my time with CFHI, I spent a further two weeks seeing a bit more of South America and the local CFHI team helped me arrange an overland trip across Peru and Bolivia to round off a most amazing experience.

My experience in Ecuador confirmed to me my ambition for a career in Tropical Infectious Diseases and International Health and reassured me that I am comfortable working in a foreign culture and language. It also taught me what is achievable with an elective period and provided me with a model against which to judge other such programs for my own students in the future.