

My name is **Madeline Griffin** and I am a medical student at the University of Texas Medical Branch. I participated in the **CFHI Reproductive Health Program in Quito**, Ecuador for 4 weeks in May of 2011.

Week 1: May 1-7

For the first week of my program I spent all day in Spanish class. In addition, one of the rules of my homestay was that we only speak Spanish at the dinner table. So much Spanish! By the end of every day my head ached from concentrating so much on conversation. It was amazing practice though and very rewarding when I realized that I was finally understanding and participating in full Spanish conversations at the dinner table!

### **The view from my window at my host family's house**



On Thursday we took a fieldtrip to the Santa Maria Supermercado and learned all the Spanish names for the various fruits and veggies. There was fruit I had never seen before and all of the familiar fruit was gigantic! Bananas were as long as my torso and incredibly delicious. We all picked out a fruit and then brought them back to the Amazing Andes Language School to share.

### **Fruit bowl with lichi, tomate de arbol, and maracuja among others**

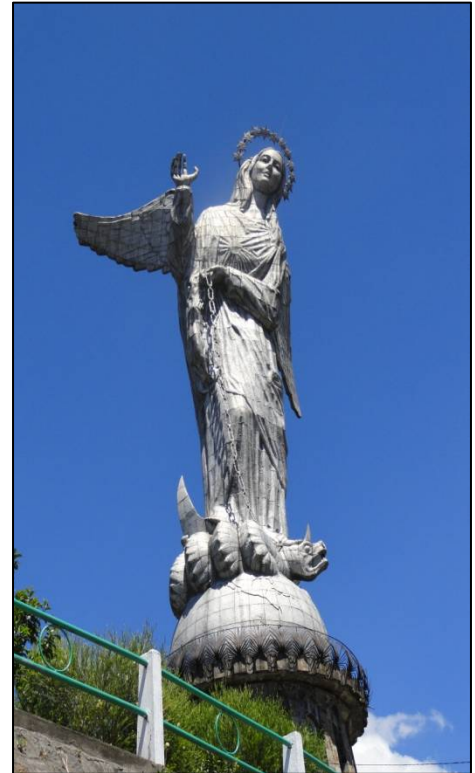


On Friday we were given a personal tour of Old Town Quito and then drove 4 hours south to the town of Los Banos. Old Town was incredibly beautiful; most of the original colonial buildings still line the narrow streets that wind up and down the hills of central Quito. I read in one of my tour books that during the Quito smallpox epidemic of 1756 the government ordered that all buildings be painted with white limestone, which was believed to be a disinfectant. It was

not until the late 1980's that Old Town was restored to its original array of dusky oranges, pinks and yellows. We stopped at El Panecillo, a statue of the winged Virgin, for some panoramic views of Quito, and then continued to Iglesia de San Francisco. This enormous cathedral was the first church built in Quito in 1535 just following the arrival of the Spanish.



**Old Town Quito**



**El Panecillo**



We started off our Saturday morning in Los Banos with a delicious stack of pancakes at the restaurant on the roof of our hostel. I was also able to take a panoramic shot of the town from our perch while enjoying breakfast.

**Panoramic of Los Banos**



Next we headed to a local tour shop to rent bikes for the afternoon. We biked the road between Los Banos and the town of Puyo stopping several times to enjoy the scenery. Our outing ended with a hike down to a waterfall called Pailon del Diablo, translated as Python of the Devil. We were able to hike behind this giant cascade of water and got completely drenched!



**Pailon del Diablo**

Week 2: May 8-14

My second week in Quito marked the beginning of my clinical rotations. I was first placed in Maternidad Isidro Ayora with Dr. Carrera, a pediatrician in the Clinica de Adolescentes. Maternidad is a giant public hospital dedicated to the care of pregnant women and their babies.



**Maternidad Isidro Ayora Hospital**

I learned from an information session with our Medical Director, Dr. Susana Alvear, that teen pregnancy is on the rise in Ecuador. Still, it was unnerving to witness first-hand the problem in person. My mornings with Dr. Carrera consisted of rounds through the post-delivery rooms filled with girls between the ages of 13 and 20 who had recently given birth. We checked their charts, talked to the girls about their babies and general health, and (my favorite part) performed well-baby exams on all of the newborns. I listened to the tiny heartbeats, felt for the separated fontanelles of the babies' skulls and helped collect blood samples for testing babies with jaundice or other issues. The most disheartening part of this clinic was seeing the prevalence of HIV/AIDS among these young women. One morning we performed an exam on a 16 year-old mother who had not realized she was HIV+ until she arrived at the hospital to deliver her first child.

After clinic in the afternoons I took the opportunity to explore Quito and experience the local culture. I ate shrimp ceviche (yum!), a traditional Ecuadorian dish, and wandered the Mariscal district of New Town Quito. In Plaza Foch, ground zero of Mariscal, I found some American burgers and fries for the days that I felt homesick and even discovered a bookstore that sold fiction books in English! One afternoon I practiced my Spanish at the local Cinemark with "Agua Para Elefantes."

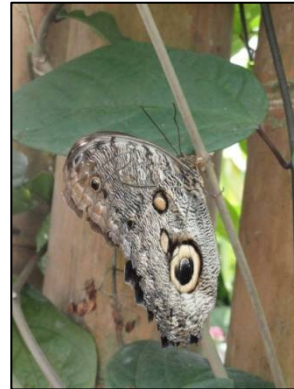
### **La Liga Soccer Game**



On Wednesday night I attended a La Liga soccer game between Guayaquil and Quito. So much fun! Of course I made the rookie mistake of sitting on the Guayaquil side but everybody was having too much fun to notice. Confetti, drums, and sparklers were all on display as fans cheered passionately the entire game. Sadly, Quito lost the game 1-0 but it was still an amazing time!

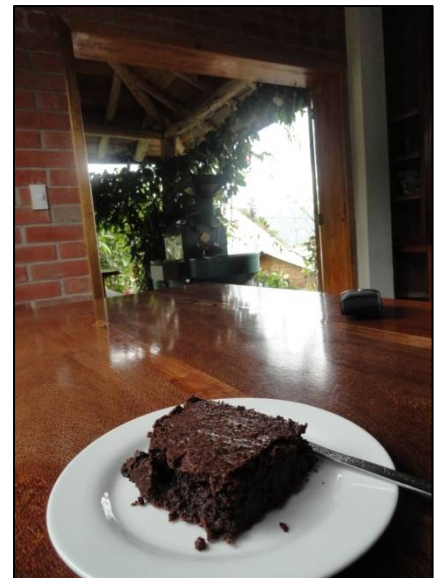
On Saturday four other girls in my program and I packed our bags and headed to Mindo for the day. Mindo is a small town less than 2 hours north of Quito surrounded by the Bellavista Cloud Forest Reserve. Called a cloud forest for its near-constant mist, this was one of the most beautiful landscapes that I experienced in Ecuador. First stop for the day was a butterfly farm called The Mariposario. Here we learned about the stages of a butterfly's life and watched as they emerged from

cocoons and stretched their wings to wick off amniotic fluid before flying off in search of food. The diverse array of butterfly species was truly breath-taking.



Next, we hiked up to the Mindo zip-line canopy tour base. For only \$10 we were able to zip-line 13 cables across deep ravines through a forest lush with orchids, bromeliads and flowers. This was one of my favorite activities of the entire trip!

### Mindo Zip-line Canopy Tour



Finally, to end a nearly perfect day we went to the EL Quetzal Chocolate Factory. After a tour we settled down to enjoy a delicious brownie before our bus ride home.

Week 3: May 15-21

On my second week of rotations I was scheduled at Hospital Militar, a private hospital for the Armed Service and Police. The differences between this and the public sector's Maternidad were quite

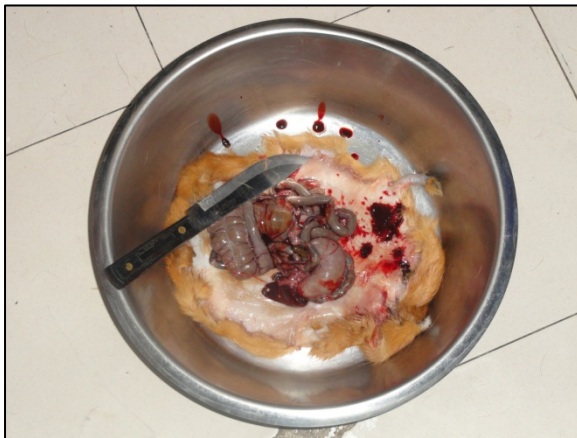


stark. Resources for the private hospital were far superior to that of Maternidad. For this rotation I shadowed a surgeon in several surgeries.



On Wednesday afternoon I took a bus 16 miles north of Quito to la Mitad del Mundo, literally translated as “the middle of the world” but better known as the equator. After a quick lunch we spent the day taking photos straddling the two hemispheres and posing with the gigantic commemorative statue.

## The Equator



On Friday morning we took a bus to Otavalo, a town 2 hours north of Quito made world-famous for its giant market. We spent the morning in a traditional medicine clinic for the indigenous population called Jambi Huasi. I was able to follow one of the medicine women at the clinic for a *diagnostico mediante el cuy* in which a guinea pig or cuy is used as a diagnostic tool. The entire therapy is performed in Quichua as the healer rubs a guinea pig on the patient and then guts it to examine its anatomy. This was the most unique clinic in which I rotated in Ecuador and I enjoyed learning about traditional alternative therapies.



After the clinic we took a cab to Cuicocha Lake, a beautiful crater lake formed 3,000 years ago when a volcano collapsed during an eruption. It was named Cuicocha or Guinea Pig Lake by the Incans when it was discovered because one of the islands in the middle resembles the shape of a guinea pig.



On Saturday we went to the Otavalo market to shop and people-watch. The sights ranged from artisan stalls with tapestries, ceramics and sweaters to fresh produce to animals (including llamas)! Both tourists and locals alike shop all day every Saturday in this mecca of handmade goods. I loved the traditional cultural clothing of the Otavaleños on full display at the market. The men wear their hair in long braids while the women wear white blouses, wool skirts and golden beads wrapped tightly around their necks. Gorgeous!

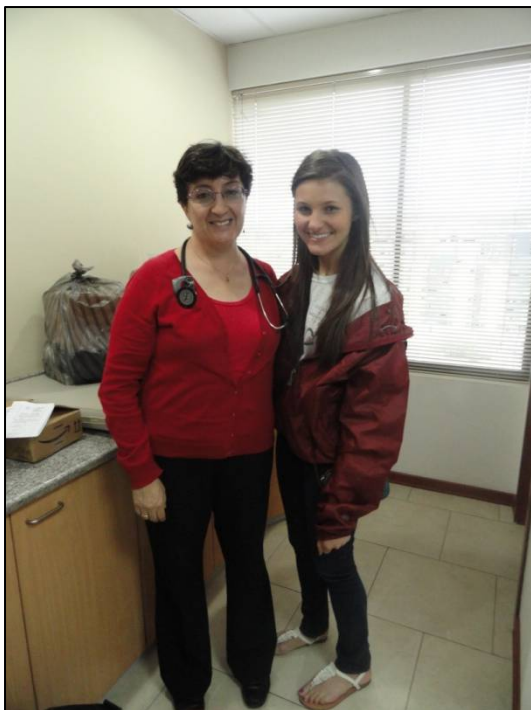


Week 4: May 22-27

On Monday I started my final rotation in the labor and delivery section, sala de partos, of Maternidad Hospital. As soon as I finished changing into my scrubs a woman in labor rolled by on a gurney on her way to the delivery room. Dr. Marquez told me to follow and only minutes later I witnessed my first vaginal delivery! This was quite an exciting way to start the week. Next, I watched a surgery to remove a hydatidiform mole from a woman's uterus. This is when a non-viable egg implants in the uterus and converts a normal pregnancy to a pathological process. To end the day I followed Dr. Marquez as he checked on women in labor and waited in hopes of seeing a cesarean section, but none were needed that day.

On Tuesday I got to see my first cesarean section! I was a bit disturbed to discover that women are kept awake during the entire procedure. After a small incision and 20 minutes of the surgeon wrestling with what turned out to be a rather large baby boy, he was safely delivered and handed to his mother. This was very different from the vaginal births, and I was so happy that I was able to observe one.

On Friday, the last day of my CFHI program, I packed and reflected on my experience in Ecuador. I feel so fortunate to have had the opportunity to witness first-hand the health care system in another country, especially in such an underserved community. I was most affected by my first rotation in the Pediatric Clinic in which I witnessed the astounding high rates of teenage pregnancy and HIV/AIDS cases among the youth of Ecuador. This experience has reinforced my desire to travel and work in underserved communities in both the United States and internationally as a physician. I will never take for granted the abundant resources of North America after seeing doctors draw blood from patients without wearing gloves and labor and delivery rooms that are so overcrowded with patients that the families of the pregnant women are not allowed in to witness the birth of their children and grandchildren. This has truly been a life-altering experience for me. I would highly recommend it to anyone interested in international health care.



My family visited Ecuador after the conclusion of my program and brought medical supplies for the local rural clinics. This is a picture of my sister with Dr. Susana Alvear, our fantastic CFHI medical director in Quito.