

I flew from Portland to Los Angeles, then to Miami and onto La Paz. I arrived in El Alto at the World's Highest Airport at 5:30 in the morning east coast time. Gonzalo Claure, the director at the language school Centro Boliviano Americano met me and six other interns and we took shared taxis down to La Paz. I arrived at my home stay in time for breakfast. The following day was orientation at CBA where I met all of the other interns. We took our Spanish test to see which class we should go into.



After having a huge Bolivian lunch at home, I returned to Spanish class at CBA. Right after Spanish class, all of the interns went to a medical lecture with Dr. Uribe about the status of the Bolivian healthcare system and health insurance.

I found out very quickly that my Spanish was a lot better than I had originally thought. It is really a matter of being immersed and having someone to talk to. After a few weeks, I felt like my Spanish had hit a roadblock but after pushing through it I felt that I understood more each day and became more fluent. The most important benefit of my internship in La Paz has been deciding what I want to do with my career. Before coming to Bolivia, I was on the fence about medical school. After experiencing the clinics and talking to the other interns, I learned that unless I was motivated to go to medical school I should not apply. What I learned instead is that I am very interested in child advocacy and primary healthcare for all. On a personal note, I learned that I am so much more independent than I thought. I was able to leave home and perform difficult tasks in a foreign country and I developed a lot of pride in my work and myself.



The biggest challenge that I faced in my internship was culture shock. I felt like I was falling apart in my third week and I really wanted to go home. I am so lucky to have had the support of not only my family and friends and my supervisors back in Oregon but the support of those in Bolivia. The director at the

language school Gonzalo came to my apartment, talked me back from the ledge, and really helped me to focus on the importance of staying in La Paz.

During my fourth week after working with Dr. Velasco at Hospital del Niño, I learned about the health disparities facing the lower middle class, especially in the area of dental hygiene. There is a huge lack of education in Bolivia about the importance of dental hygiene in young children. I decided that for the remainder of my time in La Paz I would do a survey of children under the age of five to determine



the status of their dental health. In doing this, I felt that I could draw attention to the health disparities facing many Bolivian children. Upon returning to the States, my hope is to publish a paper in some capacity.

When I first got to Bolivia, the poverty and the beauty blew me away. I had studied up on the country a lot but I was still fairly paranoid and distrusting of the people. The longer I was in the country the more I realized that my heart was really in Latin

America and I came to embrace the culture. I never thought I would make friends outside of the program but I did. I learned a lot from my Bolivian friends, about the Aymara culture and their daily lives. If I could have known anything about Bolivia before arriving, it would have been more about the Aymara and Quechua cultures as well as the political status of the country.

Once I started working on my dental health survey, my schedule became routine. I would wake up around 7:30 am, put on my scrubs, and have breakfast with my host mother and my roommate. Then I would walk to Hospital del Niño, which was about 15 minutes from my apartment. I worked Monday through Wednesday and Fridays with Dr. Jhonny Pérez, inspecting teeth and watching him work. I would work until 11:30 am and then head home for lunch. At this time, I did not have Spanish classes in the afternoons so my afternoons varied. A lot of the time, I would take my computer to a café and work on my survey. I



did a lot of research and read many papers on similar subjects. I made sure to email home and work on other things like essays for my graduate school. The evenings varied as well but a lot of the time I would go out to dinner or drinks with my Bolivian friends, this was a great way to practice my Spanish because most of them did not speak English.

My advice for future interns is this: do not be afraid to try anything and everything. This idea can be used for all aspects of your internship including food, travel, ideas, and all experiences. If I did not embrace this fact I would not have done work on my dental survey, I would not have ridden a bike down the Death Road and I surely would not have traveled alone. There is a fine line between being adventurous and being reckless and finding, that line is a great experience in itself.