



Global Health Education Student Experiences

Sonia Abichandanj

Guatemala

Mayan Medical Aid in Guatemala

Summer 2012

"I spent four weeks between first and second year of medical school volunteering in rural clinics around Lake Atitlán, Guatemala. It was by far one of the best experiences of my life and I have lifelong friends. We spent our days in various clinics around the lake, one of which we even had to hike up 2 hours to reach and provided basic health care for the local Mayans.

"The residents of Lake Atitlán speak an ancient Mayan language called Kaqchikel. We were required to learn medical Spanish in order to speak to the translators and they then translated for the patients. Although this system could seem inefficient and frustrating, it was a unique experience that I would not have traded, and the patients were some of the most grateful and kind people I have ever met. Additionally, we are able to immerse ourselves in the Mayan culture while living in a three-story house with a beautiful view of the lake and it was only a short lancha (boat) ride to Panajachel where we bought our groceries and souvenirs.

"On the weekends, we were able to travel around Guatemala and explore the country's natural beauty. We swam in the natural hot springs, traversed caves, hiked up dormant volcanoes and visited the majestic city of Antigua. Overall, it was one of the best summers of my life and I would go back again if given the opportunity."