

During the 2018 J-term, I studied abroad in St. Kitts and Nevis. It was a wonderful and educational experience on an absolutely breathtaking tropical island.

Specifically, I studied public health in both St. Kitts and Nevis with a primary focus on the prevention of HPV. We collaborated with local Non-Governmental Organizations, healthcare professionals, and teachers to design a protocol for the implementation of the HPV vaccine in middle schools. The St. Kitts and Nevis health care system is primarily community based, with an emphasis on public education and prevention. Students are typically vaccinated, during the school day, depending on their grade level. Our goal was to develop a strategy for introducing HPV vaccination into the regularly scheduled administration of vaccines, for students in the sixth grade. This process included touring the Joseph N France General Hospital in St. Kitts, visiting community health clinics, and observing lectures at the hospital. Our experiences allowed us to gain an understanding of the health care system, interact with the people of St. Kitts, and acquire knowledge essential for our work on HPV vaccination.

To gain more of an appreciation of the culture, we visited Caribelle Batik and received a lecture on the history and process of batik. In addition, we visited Brimstone Hill Fortress, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, zip lined through the rainforest, watched parades at Carnival and even spent time at the beach. We hiked Mt. Liamugia, a 3,793 ft. tall volcano, with tour guides, who educated us on the history of hiking, the volcano itself, and we learned about the tourism industry specific to their culture. One of my favorite experiences was visiting a children's home where we played tag, soccer, took selfies, and sang. It was a great experience to learn, embrace the culture, while having fun.

Most days included dining at the Sweet Lime restaurant. Dining was not the main focus of our trip; however, it provided me with an appreciation for the genuine, kind, and loving people of St. Kitts. For the first few days, I didn't eat much because I was maintaining a vegetarian diet. However, the owner of the restaurant was extremely caring and offered alternative options without me even asking. Every time we gathered to eat at Sweet Lime, the restaurant owner prepared a meal especially for my diet. Even though I was about 1,000 miles away, I was made to feel like I was right at home.

The second half of our class was spent in Nevis, with a primary focus on Disaster Preparedness in addition to developing an implementation strategy for the HPV vaccination. We were taught CPR, first aid, and disaster management. Specifically, we analyzed the effectiveness of their protocols to manage natural disasters in both St. Kitts and Nevis. We visited Nevis churches, schools, community health clinics, and the Alexandra hospital to learn more about their culture, healthcare, and school systems. We danced with students, gathered in praise during the church service, and worked with local statisticians to teach them essential statistical programming software (SPSS). Learning about the history, culture, and health care system of St. Kitts and Nevis allowed me to foster relationships, as well as develop a cultural understanding and deep appreciation of the island. I am grateful for the acquired knowledge and skills while traveling abroad. I was afforded a once in a lifetime opportunity to expand my global perspective of how healthcare systems work in other countries and make an impact in the improvement of health modalities implemented overseas. For this I am greatly appreciative of the opportunity.











