

Medical Student Enrichment Program

University of Alabama at Birmingham School of Medicine

Clinical Elective: Baní, Dominican Republic – INTEC: Instituto Tecnológico de Santo Domingo

Dates of Training: June 2, 2024 – June 30, 2024

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Going into the Dominican Republic trip, hearing about being in a hot, humid country for an entire month sounds intimidating, especially since you've only got one year of medical school under your belt. Luckily for me, I had seven other people to share that experience with and lots of local Dominican host students willing to help me with anything and everything. We got to the Dominican on June 2nd and we were greeted by some of our host students and supervisors. They even made us a welcome sign, brought local chocolate, and gave us INTEC gear. As soon as we got to our rural home for the first three weeks, they surprised us with a homecooked meal! We would be doing a lot of cooking with the INTEC students and a lot of communal meals, which I loved since I got to know both the UAB and the INTEC students really well. There was already a lot planned for us, and that same night we went to a mango festival in Baní. I love mangoes and hearing that our rural town was well-known for mangoes in the Dominican Republic was amazing. At the festival, there were so many booths and there was one main tent where we could try over 12 different varieties of mangoes, which sounds crazy because it is!



After a long eventful first day, we got to go into our rural health clinic which we were in for three weeks. They call the rural health clinics in the Dominican Republic UNAPs which stands for Unidades de Atención Primaria. The UNAP I was assigned to was called Quija Quieta, which translates to quiet jaw in English and refers to the town's history with sugar cane agriculture and the sounds, or lack of thereof, of the associated machinery. Since we were still in Baní, there were lots of mango trees surrounding our UNAP and we were lucky since our UNAP had lots of different mango trees in the back patio area. Whenever we had breaks between patients, we would grab mangoes off the trees and eat them (after washing them off of course).

During my time in the UNAPs, I helped take manual blood pressure readings, take pulse oximetry readings, and gather information on their chief complaint and any relevant history. We worked in the clinics from 8 AM to noon. The majority of patients that came into the clinic had hypertension, diabetes, and sickle cell anemia so they would come in for a check-up or just for a medication refill. We would have the occasional infectious disease, emergency, and pregnancy cases that we would assist the main clinic doctors with. We were sent into the UNAP with a Butterfly Ultrasound probe and were able to scan lots of pregnant individuals and show them their child for the first time! It was so special to be able to give someone that experience and share that moment with them! I learned about the different systems of healthcare, their infrastructure, and importance in the Dominican Republic.



In our off time from the clinics, we were able to hang out together in our housing compound. On the weekends, we either took trips or stayed with one of our host students in their family home in Santo Domingo which is the capital of the Dominican Republic. One of our first trips was to Isla Saona. It's a beautiful island about 2–3-hour drive from Santo Domingo. I've never seen water so clear or felt sand so soft! It's definitely a picture-perfect beach area. I remembered that I was applying sunscreen super often to avoid burning since the UV index is between 10-12 (crazy) in the Dominican! The trip was fun since the drive there and back was very much filled with laughter, good music, and good company, while the trip itself had amazing food, fun activities, and beautiful views!

Other weekends, we'd try some of our host students' favorite food spots, hang out at their houses, meet their families and friends, and explore more of what Santo Domingo had to offer. One of my favorite areas in Santo Domingo we went to is called "La Zona Colonial" nicknamed "La Zona" and translates to the colonial zone in English. It has lots of restaurants that serve traditional Dominican food like Mangú and Mofongo (very yummy). There are also lots of coffee shops, markets, and even a chocolate making museum! It has a central plaza where you can go inside the first church established in the Americas, there's also a nautical museum, and even the house of Christopher Columbus' son. There are lots of cute stores and places to grab souvenirs for your friends and family in La Zona, which I took advantage of!





Our last week in the Dominican Republic, all the UAB students moved into an Airbnb in Santo Domingo. During this last week, we were able to join our host students in their pediatric rotation in the Hospital Infantil Dr. Robert Reid Cabral. This hospital was the first pediatric hospital in the Dominican Republic, now it serves as the public pediatric hospital that treats rare and unique medical conditions. We were rotating between three areas within pediatrics: recent births, emergencies, and triage. In recent births, we talked about cases with congenital abnormalities like Patau Syndrome, Syphilis, and Spina Bifida. In the emergency room, we helped attend to patients with sickle cell crises, pericarditis with cardiac tamponade, and Mobius syndrome. In triage, I helped take vitals for a pediatric patient that came in with a brain tumor resulting in them having a Pediatric Glasgow Coma Scale score of five.

Our last week was also full of adventure and creating lasting memories since we had more time to experience what our host students and Santo Domingo had to offer. Early in the week, we explored the local Chinatown and got to try lots of great East Asian and Southeast Asian food at the Chinatown street food market! We also got to visit the botanical gardens which were in the middle of the city. We enjoyed grabbing some food and bringing it inside to picnic before we explored the different areas of the garden. We even got on the trolley which takes you to the most serene Japanese garden on the farthest end of the gardens. We were able to get a tour on the trolley which was in English and in Spanish.



Our last few days, we went to dinner with the UAB Dean of International Medical Education and the INTEC students in which we were able to have one last big group meal. It was a great way for us to celebrate our time in the Dominican Republic. The second to last day, we were able to go support our student hosts and their dissertation presentations that are required from them to graduate. It was bittersweet for them as all our INTEC students are in their fifth year, which is the last year of medical school in the Dominican Republic, and their dissertations were associated with research they conducted in their UNAPs.

On our very last day, we visited Los Tres Ojos national park, which is a natural sinkhole with underground caves and water after grabbing some brunch at a local café in La Zona. After that, I went to the movies with my student hosts to see Inside Out 2 with Spanish subtitles. Our last night, all the UAB students went to a fancy restaurant called Central and ate the best last meal anyone could. At the Airbnb, we were all frantically packing and reminiscing on our month since it definitely flies by faster than you think!

