

Report

Type of Internship:

Medical – surgical

Personal data:

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Destination:

Country: Spain

City: Barcelona

Official Language: Catalan and Spanish

Vaccinations suggested: None

Healthcare profile of the region:

Spain in general and Barcelona (CatSalut) specifically have a solid reputation with regards to its public healthcare. The public net covers some 75% of the general Spanish population and enjoys the 6th highest rate of doctors per inhabitants in the world.

The hospital:

Location: The Hospital Clinic of Barcelona is easily accessible with the blue metro line L5, at the station of same name (Hospital Clinic). Numerous buses will also bring you to mere meters away from the main entrance.

For those who live further away and prefer walking, the Diagonal/Provença Station (Metro L2) is no further than a 10-minute walk from the back entrance of the Hospital Clinic.

General: Founded in 1906, this community hospital belongs to the Catalan Public Hospital Network (XHUP) and includes almost all medical and surgical specialties. It is also active in the areas of Patient Care, and Research and Education (University Clinic). The

century-old hospital has not stayed idle over time, and is comprised of top-grade facilities.

Personal:

Due to the chaos and lack of organization on the part of the IFMSA Barcelona, the hospital was not expecting me (or any other exchange student for that matter). That meant I did not work in my department of choice and had to content with a crowded General Surgery team.

The daily routine started at 7:30 with the rounds – first in the hepato-pancreatic station followed by the Hepatic ICU. Subsequently, a quick gathering with all doctors on duty ensued to decide on final details of the daily surgery, and discuss further development of patients. Since it is customary for Thursdays and Fridays to be surgery-free in the Hospital Clinic Barcelona during summer, meetings on these days were longer and always accompanied by the Transplantation Unit. The surgery hours were over around 1 to 3 pm, always with the possibility of us staying longer to shadow any doctor or do the paper work.

In the four weeks I stayed in the Hospital Clinic, my unit admitted four new patients and took care of some 15 other surgical subjects. As result of a slightly (logistically) overwhelmed General Surgery department, there was an excess of students, interns, and residents in every team and every operation room, and therefore a chronic lack of suitable tasks for this specific crew (the students and interns especially). Essentially all major surgeries were performed by the head of the department himself, Dr. Fontdevila, which left little to no possibility for us to assist in interesting cases. By the end my stay, I had observed what appeared to be a reward-system in which residents who stayed overtime seemed to be allowed to scrub in to watch closer and – in rare occasions – even be Second Surgeons (First Assistant) in minor operations.

Despite the planning gaffe (and I reiterate: largely if not entirely product of the IFMSA Barcelona's awful communication with the hospital) the working atmosphere was excellent. Each one of the doctors in the department showed some understanding, occasionally even proposing extra tasks for the students not to remain idle. Since the Hospital Clinic is a very scientifically engaged medical center, my unit made first-class source material available for research in order for us to prepare a detailed presentation on the anatomy and physiology of the Liver, Bile Duct, and Pancreas (the field of expertise of the department).

Overall, the working experience was somewhat disappointing for I was not allowed to do anything other than watch well-versed surgeons perform and shadow some of them in their clinic hours, with an eventual stitch or drainage removal. The crew was extremely amicable and understanding to the extent they could be, but rarely ever made an effort to translate anything to English, leaving colleagues who could not speak Spanish disoriented and at times plain bored. Moreover, the combination of language barrier and highly busy doctors made the learning experience (i.e.: posing questions and suggesting taking on more responsibility) a fairly tough task.

Accommodation and food

Provided:

The residence provided was at the campus of the Autonomous University of Barcelona, a large habitational campus in the outskirts of Barcelona, in a village called Bellaterra. The apartments were composed of two double rooms and a living room with a kitchen.

Though spacious, the quarters had no air conditioning and/or ventilating system, which proved to be a major inconvenience during the hot and humid Spanish summer. Furthermore, the train trip to the hospital took over 1 hour and two changes with the public transportation of choice (from the S2 train to the L3 metro line, and finally to the L5). Included in the campus' amenities were an over-priced local market, a nice snack bar where they broadcasted football games and often had large crowds of students, a much-needed swimming pool, a beach volleyball court and a synthetic grass soccer field, and an always-helpful Info-Point/secretariat.

No food was provided by the hospital, campus, or the exchange organization.

Acquired:

Since the campus was ways away from the city center and the train lines only worked until midnight, some of the exchange students decided to rent rooms near the heart of Barcelona over the weekend. AirBnB was often the preferred housing, though hostels were good substitutes. I paid no more than 25 euros the night for a room between Plaça Catalunya and Plaça Espanya, two of the main sites in the city.

In conclusion, finding a place to stay in the city should prove no problem thanks to the abundance of housing offers in Barcelona.

Financial:

In my own naivety, I highly underestimated how expensive Barcelona would be. Nonetheless, it is possible to live inexpensively if one is willing to cook daily and make use of supermarket products (as opposed to deliveries and restaurants). Compared to Austrian prices, the groceries are considerably cheaper, which contributed to my bewilderment when going out clubbing – alcohol and entrances are just as, if not more expensive than in Vienna. Favored night clubs often charged an entrance fee of over 15 euros (up to 30 after a certain time of the night) serving similarly overpriced beverages. On the other hand, “Cañas” at supermarkets could be found for as low a price as 30 cents.

All in all, after an intense month of exploring the city gastronomically and culturally, as well as the occasional partying on the weekends, the costs were barely affordable so that by the end of the month I had spent over one thousand euros.

Closing remarks:

To conclude, my internship in Barcelona was an interesting mismatch of broken expectations and positive surprises. At first, I felt very disappointed due to the complete lack of receptiveness and hospitality on the part of the Barcelona IFMSA, as well as the monotony of the over-crowded hospital. Nevertheless, things changed drastically when I decided that my experience in the country was rather one of enjoying a new, different culture. From then on, I focused on discovering new ways to socialize with fellow exchange and medical students rather than trying to be part of a purely professional exchange. And so I came to appreciate and relish the stay dearly, in unexpected ways – as aforementioned. It allowed me, for instance, to see how vivid and plural the Catalan culture is, especially during times of a Referendum for Independence of the province. Furthermore, it demonstrated how young doctors around the globe come to this world metropole with a certain loaded back-ground, filled with hopes and preconceived notions, that all clashed and finally brew something entirely new and interesting in unique friendships.

The experience opened my mind to new possibilities and I will be thus forever grateful to the organization and team who made this possible. If you came to this review expecting a recommendation, well here you have it: pack your things and go! But expect the unexpected.

Barcelona is waiting for you – or maybe not.



Festa Major de Gràcia: a local festival where the neighborhood of Gràcia decorates its streets in all fashions



Social Program (one of the only two in all four months): tour at Montjuic



National Food and Drink Party: one of the highlights of the exchange!