

Nursing Times

Globe-trotting and developing professionally as a nurse

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Spending two weeks at summer school in Chile gave student editor, Sabrina, far more opportunities and experiences than she could have hoped for if she hadn't branched out

As the plane fast approaches the dusty runway, I become increasingly aware of the tension building in my shoulders, my fingers and my eyelids. Safe to say, this is probably one of the few moments in my life where you will ever see me sitting perfectly straight, resembling the posture of a character from a Jane Austen novel.

What commonly happens when I'm an aircraft passenger, is that for the first and final 10 minutes of the journey I believe that the plane is going to explode and that we are all going to die. I realise of course that this is an irrational fear, and fortunately it has never got to the extent where it has prevented me from setting foot in a metal box that flies. Give me the ready meal plane food and a glass of wine, and we're all good to go, I promise.

I will always remember the moment I peered out of that tiny little cabin window as we landed.

For miles and miles, all I could see was what effectively looked like a scene from a science-fiction movie. The landscape was so arid, so bare and so rufescent; with clouds of coppery dust particles dancing in the southern hemisphere winds. This did not look like the familiar planet Earth I know and love - I had officially landed on Mars.

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This time last year, I received an acceptance letter to attend the fully-funded [Universitas 21 Health Sciences Summer School 2016](#). Advertised as a two-week course exploring how preventative interventions early in life can help fight chronic disease in subsequent development, this was an opportunity to learn alongside students from all over the world, from a variety of professions such as public health, medicine, nursing and dentistry.

Oh, and did I forget to mention this would all be set in the capital city of one of South America's most beautiful countries, Chile? Well, now I have.

So as you can probably gather, this appears to be quite the 'professional development goldmine' for a student nurse; particularly in terms of offering students the chance for multidisciplinary learning and cross-cultural knowledge exchange, all within the context of a Chilean health and education system.

Yes, there was class work, and yes there was a group presentation at the host university, but these were perfectly interspersed with clinical observations, practical sessions and cultural activities.

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I will never forget visiting a local maternity ward, speaking to mothers (who had only just given birth in the last 24 hours!), to find out more about their attitudes towards breastfeeding; or sitting on a gym mat learning how to deliver infant massage to a sinister-looking plastic doll. Nor will I forget horse riding with course mates around the Andes foothills as we feared for our lives along the rocky cliff edges.

We were faced with experiences that went far beyond the realms of our degree curriculums, and I couldn't be more grateful for those memories and those debates.

See, if we're going to get really emotional, going from a group of international strangers to an international family is something you will never quite understand until you are a part of one yourself.

"The whole beauty of the school was having that ability to develop your own ideas"

While we may not have shared the exact same values or the exact same practices, the whole beauty of the school was having that ability to listen, to share, to debate, to adapt and to develop your own ideas on how you want to become a future healthcare professional.

Now I can proudly call all of these people friends, both in the personal and professional sense; exploring Chile not only through its health research and practice, but through its warm community and outstanding geography.

One thing for sure, if you decide to apply for a summer school, you will not only leave with a list of professional skills and knowledge as long as your arm, you will leave with a whole new family.

So the next time you receive an email from your university, where will your next professional development venture take you?