

Madeleine's experience on the 2022 Faculty-led Program Abroad to Ecuador

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Madeleine is a first-year **Veterinary Technician** student who took part in a Faculty-led Program Abroad (FLPA) in Summer 2022 at **Universidad de Especialidades Espiritu Santo** in Guayaquil, Ecuador.

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It wasn't a hard decision for Maddie to make when she thought about participating on a study abroad program.

"...I was sitting on the bus going home from class and a notification popped up on my phone in bold: *"New Vet Tech student opportunity to travel to Ecuador in May 2022"*. I instantly opened my phone to see what it was all about."

After reading the details about the unique opportunity, she was quick to seize the moment in hopes of being one of the few students to participate in the program.

"I applied for the trip that night not thinking I would be waiting almost 8 months for this trip to be a real and tangible thing. I didn't know applying that night would change my life and my outlook as much as it did."

The Faculty-led Program Abroad to Ecuador was one of the first study abroad programs to take flight after the easing of travel restrictions due to COVID-19. It was a momentous milestone made possible by the support of faculty at Seneca and at **Universidad de Especialidades Espiritu Santo**.

For many students applying for the opportunity, it was a chance to gain invaluable hands-on learning in their field and learn in a new and unfamiliar environment.

"After just finishing my first year of technician school and 2.5 years of COVID-19, I could not wait to get on that plane" she recalled.

Led by a member of Seneca Faculty, the group brought what was taught in their classrooms into the field and along the way, adapted to new cultures and communities.

"I decided to apply to this opportunity because I wanted the immersive experience of cross-cultural learning and an opportunity to have hands-on experience in the veterinary field to understand the differences between medicine in Canada vs. another place of the world"

During the program, students assisted wildlife conservation projects, worked with the various conservation animals and learned about the role that wildlife hospitals have in their communities. They also assisted animal care attendants, technicians, and veterinarians at Fundación Almanimal which is a non-profit organization dedicated to helping vulnerable urban animals.

"This incredible non-profit organization opened their doors to allow all of us to help with the routine administration of flea and tick medication and nail trims as well as baths for the dogs that probably have never had so much love from so many people, ever. Their founder said that, without our efforts, the vaccination of 4 cats would have taken 2 hours and in the 4 hours we were there we managed to give medication to all the cats and all the dogs that we were permitted to be around."



Maddie had the honor of assisting a veterinarian with the draping of a one-winged falcon.

Being in one of the most bio diverse places on Earth, students on the program visited various animal habitats, trekked through rain forests and explored beautiful mangroves - all of which were memorable moments for Maddie.

For Maddie, there was one memory in particular that stood above the rest. This was her unforgettable experience swimming with an endangered species of sea turtles. At the start of one of the group's excursions, it was unclear if the group was going to come across the turtles. "I was told by the tour guides that the chances were not high, but it might happen". But as their excursion continued, the perfect opportunity presented itself and the group was able

to come across Green Sea Turtles in their natural habitat.

"The ocean became a little saltier that day with the number of tears that were shed -
What a magical moment!"



Maddie floating alongside a Green Sea Turtle.

After her time in Ecuador had come to an end, Maddie reflected on her experience from start to finish. From receiving that email notification on her way home to coming back from an unforgettable time abroad, all while making lifelong friends along the way.

"The connections and memories I will hold with me FOREVER."



A snapshot of Faculty-lead, Kirsti Clarida (right), with several of the students who participated on the program.

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