

Exchange Report

General Surgery

Sulaymaniyah, Kurdistan

August 2019

I travelled to Kurdistan, Iraq from Heathrow airport, London on the 1st August, with a long stopover in Doha, Qatar, and arrived in Sulaymaniyah international airport on 2nd August. I stayed for a little over four weeks and flew back home on 31st August. I had been in contact with a few Contact Persons before arriving and a couple of them met me at the airport. After a little confusion in finding them; I was waiting in the terminal building not knowing that they were waiting at the transfer bus stop in the car park a short way away. They drove me to my accommodation: a dormitory room within the teaching hospital compound (not the hospital I'd been assigned to as the dormitories there were being refurbished). They showed me my room and the small kitchen, living room and washing facilities available. The rooms were obviously well lived in and not in pristine condition. I was the only exchange student in Sulaymaniyah during August, and was the only one living in my dormitory room. I only ended up living in the dormitories for a few days before, moving in with a host and her family. I thoroughly enjoyed staying with a local family. I got to experience life in a Kurdish home, I tried so much home-cooked Kurdish food and I've seen just how close-knit families there are. I met my hosts parents, siblings, aunts and cousins, all during the short four weeks there.

On the first day of my internship, one of my Contact Persons picked me and drove me to my assigned hospital - Shar Hospital, to find my tutor. After finding his office we were informed he was away for another two weeks. I didn't end up meeting my tutor at all during the four weeks. Instead I joined the 6th year medical students in their surgery module. I got to see so many cases, and far more interesting ones than I'd seen back in Czech Republic or U.K. I attended all their lectures, seminars and visited all sorts of different clinics around the city. I was able to watch very interesting surgeries in the operating room, both in Shar Hospital and in the surgical teaching hospital. This was great for me, having only just finished 4th year, I felt I learnt a lot more being taught alongside them by their teachers and it was also far more enjoyable being with other students.

The LEOs and Contact Persons planned so many activities and events for the social program, on most days I had them messaging me about the evening or weekend activities. They took me on tours around the city, out for dinners to try the Kurdish cuisine, up to local viewpoints to watch the sunsets. My favourite trips being a visit to the capital city of the region, Erbil, and hiking in the nearby mountains. Despite it being 40-degree heat, we were in the beautiful countryside and hiked down to a river where we spent a few hours swimming. Having trips out of the city to see the local countryside was a particular highlight for me.

I hadn't really known what to expect from my exchange so I went into it with an open mind, ready to meet new people and discover a new city and culture. I was astounded by the kindness and warm welcome I've received by everyone, and was invited over for lunches, then dinners, and then to stay the night by multiple people met. I have thoroughly enjoyed my time in Kurdistan; the people, the places, the food, and the rich culture here have all been amazing. Everyone I've met has been so friendly and inviting, and has made me feel so welcomed there.