**Reporter:** Paul Morillon

**Contact at destination:**Dr Serge Ferracci (Emergency Department) / Dr Bruno Hoen (Infectious Diseases) / Marie-Line de la Reberdiere (Elective Administrator)

**Year of visit**: 2016 (April to June)

**Country:** Guadeloupe

**Institution:**CHU Pointe-à-Pitre

**Departments:**Emergency Department / Department of Infectious Diseases

**Work / Study undertaken:**

I spent six weeks in Guadeloupe – three in each department.

The infectious diseases department was a good opportunity to see care of the patient in a longer-term setting, although some of the patients were quite ill. The island had many cases of Zika when I was there, and there is Dengue and Chikungunya, although I did not see much at the hospital, as these patients are often asked to stay at home so as not to spread these diseases further. Other rare diseases were present, particularly certain complications of HIV infection.

I was able to clerk patients and examine them, and students have the opportunity to present patients at the weekly MDT meetings. Students sometimes have the opportunity to perform procedures such as LPs, although I did not have this chance when I was there.

The Emergency Department was more active and there was thus more to do as a student. The day began at 0800 with an MDT and then students would spend the day with an Intern. Typically, I would be clerking patients and presenting them to the intern or senior doctor. There was also the opportunity to spend time in the resus which, although it only had three beds, would see its fair share of trauma from RTCs and stabbings, which are unfortunately all too common on the island. I was able to be involved with these resus calls and could help with tasks from suturing to examination.

**Description of the destination:**

Guadeloupe is a beautiful country. Located in the Caribbean, there is a clear melange of French and Caribbean cultures. With a population of around 400,000 it is not a large country, but certainly larger than some of the nearby islands. It very much has the feel of a tropical island, with hot and sunny weather, mountainous terrain and an incredibly diverse range of wildlife, including iguanas (always highly entertaining) pelicans and an array of sea-life.

**Were the local people friendly?**

The locals were certainly a friendly bunch. We were lucky in that our hostess introduced us to lots of her family, meaning we got to know lots of people whilst we were there. The staff (albeit most of them visiting from mainland France) at the hospital were always friendly and very welcoming.

**Did you feel safe and if not why not?**

Yes, I generally felt very safe. Having a car definitely helped, as did being male as some of the ladies did receive some unwanted attention. In general, however, the island is one of the safer ones in the Caribbean.

**What did you do in your spare time? Is there anything that you would particularly recommend others to do?**

Six weeks was a good amount of time to spend on the island as there was much to do there. The volcano is certainly one unmissable attraction; it takes two hours to climb from the starting point and if you are lucky, there is an incredibly view from the top. Alas, I was not lucky, but it is definitely worth the climb anyway. The beaches in Guadeloupe are brilliant too, many of which are better than others. My favourite ones were around Deshaies, but there are also good ones in the Gosier region (where most tourists stay) and elsewhere. Watersports are easy to get involved in, even if a little expensive – there is excellent scuba diving off the west coast and often good surfing on some parts of the island.

There are a variety of beautiful islands just off the Guadeloupe mainland to visit, and if you’re feeling more adventurous, Guadeloupe has exceptionally good links to other Caribbean islands including St Lucia, Martinique and Dominica, all accessible by boat or plane. If you choose the former option, be warned – it is cheaper, but not for those who get sea-sick!

**What time of the year were you there? What was the climate like?**

April to June. The climate is tropical – many days it would rain, but rarely for more than 30 minutes overall. It was usually quite humid, with highs of 33 and lows of 23 degrees. Most days it was sunny, but there was almost always a few clouds in the sky.

**What was your accommodation like?**

We were very lucky in that we stayed with a friend of a friend of a friend (of a friend) and she was incredible. Her place was very pleasant and she was exceptionally kind, cooking for us at least once per day by the end of our stay! We were based to the east of the Gosier region (where most tourists stay) which is a good place to be.

**Was it provided?**

No. The hospital does rarely have accommodation, but it was not available for us.

**If not who arranged it?**

My friend of a friend of a friend (of a friend). There is lots of Airbnb / apartment availability however.

**How much did it cost?**

Approx £400

**Did you enjoy your visit?**

Very much so – it was certainly some of the best weeks of medical school. We found a good balance between spending time in the hospital and enjoying the country. I would highly recommend this is an elective destination if you want to improve your French.

**Did you find the visit useful medically? – in what way?**

Absolutely – good exposure to some rarer diseases, excellent opportunities to practise clerking and many of the doctors took time to teach us.

**Has it improved your French?** .

Immensely. The main reason for choosing to spend my elective in Guadeloupe was to improve my French, and this certainly happened. I had studied A2 French, and had kept it up a little throughout medical school, but these 6 weeks really helped improve my confidence. Many of the locals speak Creole, but most of them speak French too, and it was rarely the case that we could not see patients due to them not speaking French. All the doctors spoke French and were thankfully reluctant to speak English which was certainly a good thing as we felt fully immersed. I would say the experience is almost just as good as being in France for your French.

My medical French improved enormously. I would, however, very much recommend attending an Anglo-French Medical Soc medical French weekend, which was really beneficial.

**How has it increased your knowledge of French culture?**

Although Guadeloupe is very different to mainland France, there are many similarities due to it being an overseas territory of France. They have all the Géant / Casino / Super U supermarkets as in France, and their pain-au-chocolats and baguettes are second to none!

**If you went back would you do anything differently?**

Probably not stand on a sea urchin – I would not recommend that.

**How did you get there?**

Eurostar to Paris, and fly from Paris – almost always the cheapest route.

**What was the approximate total cost?**

£1800 (and my dignity, when mispronouncing various French words)

**Is there any other information that you think may be useful?**

A car is absolutely essential for the island – I would go as far to say that if you do not have one or have someone who can give you lifts there, it’s not a great place to be. Everyone drives (beware of rogue traffic jams, almost always occurring for absolutely not reason whatsoever) and the public transport is about as good as an iguana is intelligent (not very, in case you are wondering). Car hire, however, is incredibly cheap.

The country uses euros, meaning it’s a little more expensive than most Caribbean islands, but not too much so – you can definitely get by on a student budget.