



FLOATING DOCTORS

Welcome to the Jungle!
Culture, Health & Ecology Immersion
In Panama

with Dr. Benjamin La Brot
President of Floating Doctors



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1.0 For Whom Is This Immersion?



Riding our giant dugout canoe across the sea to bring health care and service to remote indigenous villages in the jungle is a fairly novel experience for almost all our volunteers, and that is just one example of the many ways an immersion trip like this can be such a powerful growth experience at any age. If we had a dollar for every time we heard a volunteer say “Well, that’s the first time I’ve ever done that!” we would never need to fundraise! It is our intention that this trip motivates people to think globally and to have service always be a part of their lives in the future. Our team is very effective at helping provide context and support to ensure that people can step out their own comfort zones at their own pace. It is of critical importance

to us that people’s first time engaging in international travel and service work be a safe and positive experience at any age or experience level.

This trip is ideal for first-time or veteran visitors to developing rural regions, and provides an unprecedented access to an elusive indigenous population and remote jungle environment, as well as the chance to bring health care and education to help these forgotten villages. Although Floating Doctors accepts volunteers of all ages and skill levels, this immersion trip is particularly designed for:

- Junior High/High School Students & Parents
- Undergraduate Students
- Service Clubs Trips
- Corporate Community Service Trip

Participants with an interest in international humanitarian work, global health challenges, careers in health care, jungle ecology, as well as indigenous and Panamanian culture and history in a breathtakingly beautiful region will definitely thrive and enjoy this trip. However, this is a chance not just to learn about international medicine or a different culture, or how to tie up a dugout canoe at the dock, or swimming in tropical water—this is really an opportunity to learn about ourselves, to grow, and to come away changed by what we have seen and accomplished.

“The highest reward for a person’s work is not what they *get* for it—but what they *become* because of it”

My dad is a veteran medical mission doctor, who has worked in many challenging regions over the years—northern Cambodia, Sierra Leon, Mother Theresa’s Home for the Dying, Haiti, etc. He slept in a lot of hammocks, sat under cover during many tropical downpours, got very muddy, but he would always return from missions with his eyes shining, and looking as though he had seen things and learned something the rest of us can never know...something that was only his; a secret that only a few other people who were there would ever know or understand. When people ask him why he likes going on missions, he knows that it is hard to put into words. He simply shrugs and says ‘It’s the least expensive way to have a life-changing experience.’ And tells them they should go try it.

I watched my dad come back with shining eyes for many years, and finally I got the chance to embark on what became my career in international humanitarian medical care. Sometimes it’s the hardest thing I’ve ever done, sometimes it’s easy and we are allowed to be the instruments by which patients lives are changed forever, but it is *always* an adventure. I look forward hopefully to sharing the adventure with you.

Fair Winds,



Dr. Benjamin LaBrot
President of Floating Doctors



2.0 Immersion Trip Overview

This trip offers a rare opportunity to gain first-hand experience in the delivery of remote rural health care, and an inside look at the culture and ecology of the underserved remote regions around Bocas del Toro, Panama. Participants travel to Panama and stay at the Floating Doctors headquarters on Isla San Cristobal. The group will engage in a variety of immersion activities including visiting a jungle conservation area, touring a traditional indigenous chocolate farm, volunteering at a charitable nursing home, snorkeling a coral reef, and deploying with the Floating Doctors medical team to two remote village clinics.

Participants will first travel to Panama City and enjoy the opportunity to explore the Panama Canal, Frank Gehry *Biomuseo*, the charming 'Old Town' area and other options in the city. After arriving in Bocas del Toro and attending New Volunteer



Orientation and a lecture in Cultural Competency, the group will receive training and orientation the following Monday morning, spending the afternoon working in the government convalescent home that Floating Doctors supports. Tuesday through Friday everyone will engage in immersion activities and clinical deployments with the Floating Doctors.



During clinical days, students will be placed at multiple stations including ultrasound, doctor/provider stations, intake stations, administration stations, or sent to accompany house calls or emergency responses. Depending on language ability and age-appropriateness of the consult content, participants may scribe or translate in clinic, assist providers in consults, ultrasounds, house calls or procedures, or may staff the pharmacy station, administration station, or clinic intake stations to check vitals, take basic histories and conduct health screening for anemia, diabetes or other conditions. Floating Doctors staff will offer explanations and context for everything we encounter. Participants will also engage the children in the village school and help teach dental hygiene, handwashing, or other health promotion activities.



During other field excursions, the trip leaders will provide an ongoing commentary for everything we encounter. Our knowledge of the history, culture, ecology, and health challenges in Panama is extensive, and our staff and volunteers are always enthusiastic teachers who enjoy sharing their own excitement and discovery of everything this region has to offer. Our unique relationship with the Ngabe-Bugle people, and our presence over such a large remote region offer an unprecedented chance to travel safely to a developing region and interact with an elusive population.



The course provides participants with a unique, mentored clinical and cultural exposure. Our goal for this immersion is that it will be transformative for participants. This experience will not only encourage global thinking, international cultural and travel competence and a deeper understanding and appreciation of other cultures and environments, but also reinforces the value of service not only for others but for ourselves. When we travel and experience new things, it changes us—but when we combine real service to others with our travel, it adds a new dimension to our trip. We find that we do not take a journey; the journey takes us instead. These are trips that are not just fun, or entertaining, or a great learning experience—these are the experiences that stay with us forever, that help make us who we are, and that no one will ever be able to take away from us.



3.0 Itinerary & Timeline Options

3.1 Itinerary

Day 1 (Friday): Fly to Panama City

- Arrive and check into hotel
- We recommend resting on Friday—it's a busy week ahead!

Day 2 (Saturday): Explore Panama City

- See **"3.4: Panama City Activities"**

Day 3 (Sunday): Arrival in Bocas del Toro

- Free until afternoon flight to Bocas (See **"3.4: Panama City Activities"**)
- Arrive at Albrook Airport in time for afternoon flight to Bocas del Toro
- 6:00 PM: Travel with F.D. staff from Bocas town to our base on Isla San Cristobal
- 6:30 – 7:30 PM: Dinner
- 7:30 – 8:30 PM: "Cultural Competency" training lecture by Dr. Ben La Brot

Day 4 (Monday): Training

- 7:30 – 8:30 AM: Breakfast
- 9:00 AM – 12:00 PM: Volunteer Orientation & Training
- 12:00 – 1:00 PM: Lunch
- 1:00 – 3:00 PM Volunteer Orientation & Training
- 3:00 PM – 6:30 PM: Trip to town to get snacks; free time at F.D. Base
- 6:30 PM: Dinner

Day 5 (Tuesday) & Day 4 (Wednesday): Clinics & Cacao Tour

- 6:30 – 7:30 AM: Breakfast
- 8:00 AM: Depart by boat for clinic deployment
- 9:00 AM: Arrive at clinic destination & unload boat
- 10:00 AM – 5:00 PM: Clinic is underway
 - see **"3.2: Immersion Activities"**
 - Visit Oreba Chocolate Farm for tour of traditional indigenous chocolate farm
- 5:00 PM – 6:00 PM: Travel back to base
- 6:30 PM: Dinner

Day 6 (Thursday): Nursing Home Service & Free Time

- 7:30 – 8:30 AM: Breakfast
- 9:00 AM – 12:00 PM: Visit 'Casa Asilo' nursing home
- 12:00 PM – 1:30 PM: Lunch in Bocas
- 1:30 PM – 5:30 PM: Free Time to Enjoy Bocas Del Toro or do independent leisure activities like shopping, SCUBA diving, sailing, ATV riding, or horseback riding.



Restored Colonial Casco Viejo



Dinner at F.D. base



Town of Bocas del Toro



Traditional Chocolatier

- 6:30 PM: Dinner
- 7:30 PM: Option to participate in weekly F.D. case discussions

Day 7 (Friday): Guided Jungle Walk & Coral Snorkeling

- 7:30 – 8:30 AM: Breakfast
- 9:00 AM – 1:00 PM: Dolphin Bay Preserve guided jungle ecology tour
- 1:00 – 2:00 PM: Lunch
- 2:00 – 5:00 PM: Snorkeling at Cayo Coral reef
- 6:30 – 8:00 PM: Dinner

Day 8 (Saturday): DEPARTURE DAY



Sloth visitor to our base

3.2 Immersion Activities

We strongly encourage immersion trip groups to engage in a donation drive for key items like toothpaste and toothbrushes, children’s Tylenol, soccer balls, antibiotic cream, or other items that seem simple but have the potential to change a life in places they may otherwise unavailable. The immersion trip group can bring donations with them, or if large amounts have been collected they can be shipped ahead to Panama in one of the Floating Doctors’ containers and stored until the trip. We suggest that groups also make a poster about something they can present as a gift to the students in the village schools—it can be about your own culture, or about dental health, or the importance of handwashing or covering your mouth when you sneeze, or a variety of other ideas. On site, we particularly enjoy when participants help with our toothbrush distributions, teaching the kids how to brush properly; or practicing handwashing—simple things that can be life-saving. Other activities include art projects, or playing soccer or volleyball (one of the Ngabe kids’ favorite sports).



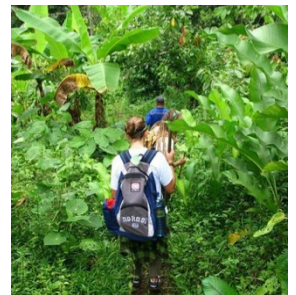
3.3 Excursions

Cacao Tour:



The Oreba Chocolate Tour is attended for a few hours during one of the two Floating Doctors clinic deployments, which takes place in the Ngabe village of Rio Oeste where a traditional chocolate farm tour has been developed by the community. The tour highlights cacao cultivation and traditional chocolate preparation methods, and many of our patients work in this village industry. Just as some of the world's best coffee comes from Boquete across the mountains, people are starting to discover that some of the world's best chocolate comes from Bocas del Toro.

In the Oreba Chocolate tour, visitors are guided on a hike through the shaded cacao plantation, weaving in and out of jungle and cacao trees. Because the tour takes place within the protected shade-grown farms of the villagers, there are often many jungle animals to see along the way. Being able to spot poison dart frogs, sloths, and toucans is not uncommon. Local farmers in the community describe and show the entire process of organic shade-grown cacao, including growing, harvesting, fermenting, drying and ultimately roasting and making chocolate.



The tour is completely run and managed by the indigenous Ngabe farmers in the community. A highlight of the tour is the chocolate demonstration where local Ngabe women in traditional dress teach each visitor how to make chocolate the way they have been doing it for centuries. This all takes place under a traditional thatched roof, and concludes with a traditional Ngabe meal.

There will be chocolate and cacao products to purchase at the end of the tour. Available to buy is Dark chocolate, nibs, roasted cacao, or the 100% pure chocolate used for baking and making hot chocolate. 100% of proceeds go the community and portions of the proceeds go directly towards education and health care for the community. This is not only an example of traditional cacao farming surviving and thriving in the modern world, but also of a very effective community development intervention—this program, which was set up by the community with the help of a local Peace Corps worker, incentivizes the preservation of cultural traditions, sustainable farming technique, and wildlife preservation, making this tour one of our favorite projects anywhere.



Casa Asilo

The 'Asilo' is a government-run nursing home that the Floating Doctors support with medical care and companionship for the residents. Contrary to the experience in most US nursing homes, the majority of our medical role there is not pharmaceutical or highly technical—we find that simple human kindness and attention have a powerful therapeutic value, and the Asilo is our living laboratory to teach that to our volunteers and participants.

There are about 30 residents in the Asilo with a variety of conditions. We spend time with the residents, help them with personal hygiene (like brushing their hair, clipping or painting their nails, etc), take them for walks, do art projects with them or simply sit and talk to them. It is a wonderful place to be reminded that we still have value when we become old, and that even the vast gulfs of decades of experience can be transcended, and connections made that enrich both young and old.



Dolphin Bay Preserve



The Dolphin Bay Preserve is a 100-acre jungle property we help manage as a conservation area for one of our partner organizations. It is located on a peninsula extending from the Panamanian mainland at the edge of Dolphin Bay, a locally famous breeding ground for bottlenose dolphins. The preserve spans six habitat zones: primary lowland rainforest, secondary forest, freshwater ponds, mangroves, coral reefs and seagrass beds.

We maintain a cleanly swept trail network through the different habitat zones, plant more fruiting and flowering trees to support more

wildlife, and protect the property from poaching. With such a variety of habitats, this property contains enormous biodiversity. Among the many organisms, the forest contains a variety of culturally significant plants that play important roles in local medicinal practices.



Dolphin Bay also hosts one of the densest known populations of Pumillo dart frogs in the world, and hosts ongoing research into their evolution and behavior. Some of Panama's 1400 species of orchids can be found on tree branches in the old-growth jungle, and a variety of crustaceans, oysters, anemones and other invertebrates thrive in the mangrove roots along the shoreline. The mantled-howler monkeys are hard to miss alongside the toucans, parrots, woodpeckers and many other birds that make their homes in the jungle canopy.

Our tour begins with an open boat trip through the mangrove maze to reach the preserve. Participants are then taken on a guided waling tour for about two hours through the preserve, with the guide pointing out various animals and plants and explaining the complex relationships of the jungle organisms, including an area that had suffered clear-cutting many years ago and is now recovering.



This is definitely the best opportunity to walk safely on a clear path through thriving, wild jungle and get a sense of how this amazing ecosystem functions.



Cayo Coral Snorkeling

The coral reefs emerging around Cayo Coral are among the most beautiful in the Bocas del Toro archipelago. Their particularly calm, clear waters, sheltered from the caprices of the open sea, have led to the development of fine, colorful coral, attracting varied underwater life. After lunch at the Dolphin Bay Preserve, we travel by boat to Cayo Coral, where participants can jump in and snorkel over this safe, calm area's beautiful coral structures.



The depth of the water all over the reef is a comfortable 8-12 feet deep. In the central part of the spot, small reefs, covered in turquoise, golden yellow or carmine red sponges provide a particularly colorful decor. Cone-shaped groups of coral cling to the walls, and are the favorite shelter of brittle stars, which have colonized the area. Small groups of sergeant major fish seem to mount the guard, without noticing the wrasses and grunt swimming around the reef.

If you move a little further away, the underwater landscape is transformed into a field of soft coral and sea fans swaying in the waves. Parrotfish and four-eye butterflyfish slip into this coral "forest", which has a host of surprises in store if you stick around a little. In the sandy parts, try to spot the yellowhead jawfish, which quickly withdraw into their burrows at the first sign of danger.



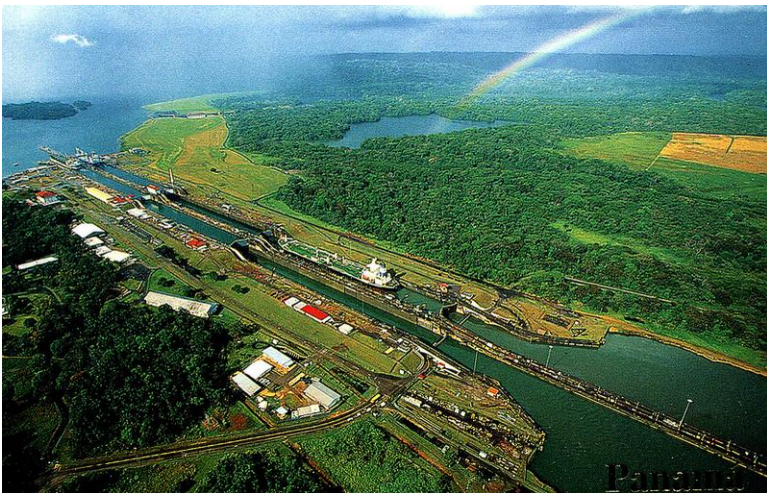
After snorkeling, we pass by 'Sloth Island,' a small mangrove island that very often has sloths hanging out in the mangroves near the water's edge—one of the most reliable places for sloth-spotting we have seen, and all while seated comfortably in our boat.



3.4 Panama City Activities

Participants arrange their own activities in Panama City depending on the group preference. The best option is to engage a taxi driver for the day to take the group from destination to destination, and wait for you while you sightsee. Panama City taxi drivers are considered very reliable and are very accommodating for these kinds of trips and many of them speak excellent English; the cost of a taxi for the day is generally \$75 - \$120. Here is a list of activities we recommend. Although there is not enough time to do them all, you can discuss your preferences and we will be happy to help you construct a Panama City itinerary that you can communicate to your taxi driver.

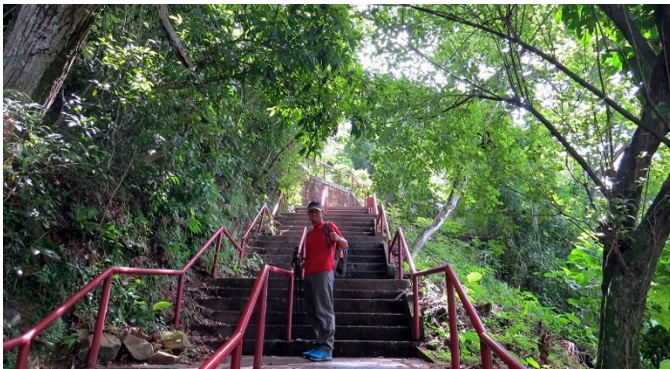
1. **Panama Canal:** The Panama Canal and Canal Museum are a must-see for any visitor to Panama. It would be like going to Egypt and not seeing a pyramid. The Museum at Miraflores Lock, the last lock on the Pacific side of the canal is about 15-20 minutes from the city center by taxi. Ships go through all day long and the Museum has a viewing area from which you can watch ships being locked up or down the canal. The Museum takes about 2-3 hours to explore, and has exhibits not just about the epic story of the building of the canal, but the ecology and cultural heritage of the canal zone as well as the role of the canal in Panamanian society and culture.



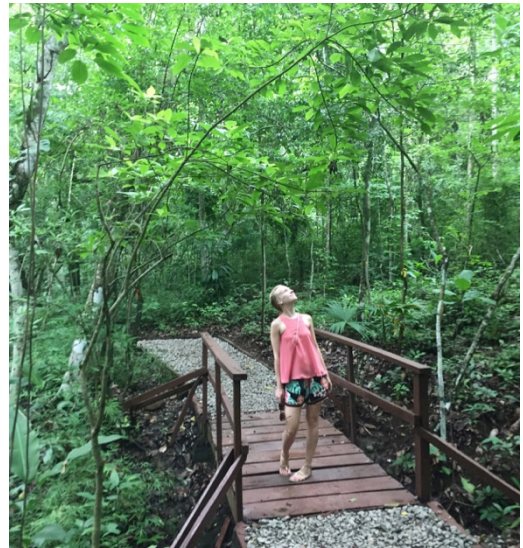
2. **Casco Viejo:** A stroll through Casco Viejo, the 340+ year-old Spanish colonial sector built in 1671 is a must-do. Casco Viejo showcases Panama's Spanish Colonial and Canal-Era history. A vibrant, colorful neighborhood, it's recently undergone a renaissance-restored hotels and restaurants in handsomely restored buildings lie side by side with crumbling old buildings. Casco Viejo is a promontory-enjoy sea breezes and sweeping ocean and Panama City bay views. It's also Panama City's hottest nightlife sector. Enjoy a great selection of restaurants and nightlife spots some with 360 views bay and city views.



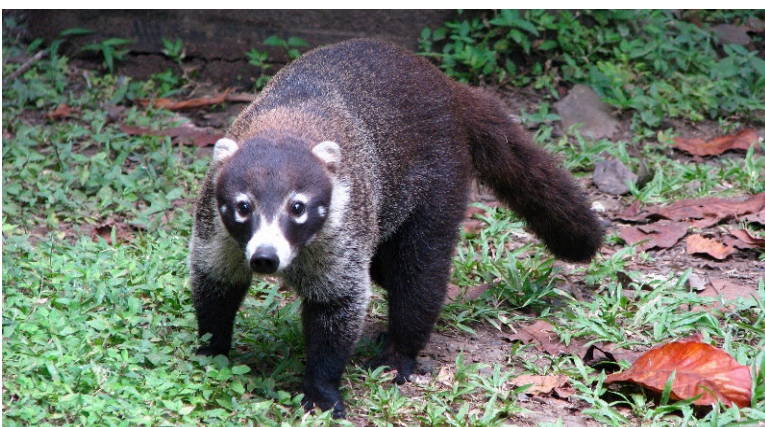
3. **Cero Ancon:** There's no better way to see Panama's past, present and future live than to take a hike or drive up Ancon Hill towering over Panama City, where you'll have a bird-eye's view of Casco Viejo, modern Panama City and the Panama Canal. The paved path is through rainforest-you'll likely spot some wildlife like sloths and birds. Take this hike in the morning to avoid the scorching midday sun and afternoon tropical showers. It takes about 1.5 hours back and forth. You can take a taxi to the entrance and ask the driver to come back for you in a couple of hours, or you can have the driver take you straight to the top if you just want to check out the view.



4. Parque Metropolitano: Panama City has the only [Rainforest](#) in the world within the city limits of a metropolis. The park is just a 20 minute drive from anywhere in the city. The hike to the summit is an easy 45 minutes walk with a lot to see. Animals can be shy and are most likely to be seen very early in the morning or around dusk. Enjoy panoramic rainforest and city views. While it is safe and easy to walk around without a guide, tour operators often offer guided nature tours of the park—if possible go with a nature guide who will point out sloths, exotic birds and explain about life in a tropical rain forest.



5. **Summit Botanical Gardens:** The Parque Municipal Summit (Summit Municipal Park) is a 620-acre botanical garden and zoo, located on the outskirts of Panama City about 20 minutes out of town on the road to Gamboa. The park was created in 1923 by the former company of the Panama Canal to test the adaptation of plants' species from different parts of the world to the tropical climate of Panama. It was through this experimental farm that teak was introduced to the American continent. In the 1960s a small zoo was started within the Botanical Garden. The zoo has increased gradually, and today is home to about 300 animals. One of the attractions of the zoo is the harpy eagle; the national bird of Panama. The botanical garden includes a representation of plant species from tropical and subtropical countries around the world as well as native species of Panama. Many of them have beneficial uses for humans as food, medicines, construction materials, or ornamental use. Animals at the zoo include squirrels, alligators, owls, coyote, gray herons, gulls, parrots, jaguars, ocelots, margays, monkeys, agouti, pumas, doves, foxes, lizards, and harpy eagles.



- 6. Mercado de Mariscos (Seafood Market):** The Mercado de Mariscos is the city fish market, open for business to local restaurants and the public every day except the 3rd Monday of each month when it is closed completely for thorough cleaning. It's the best place to buy fresh fish in Panama City - everything from tuna to snapper to lobster to octopus - or ceviche to go from one of the many vendors. It's bustling with energy like a true open market and there is a very good casual restaurant upstairs. This can be an interesting 15-min to 1-hour visit, especially in the morning while it is still cool and everything has freshly come in with the fleet. It is just on the edge of Casco Viejo, and is an easy quick stop on your way to or from Casco.



7. **Biomuseo (Biodiversity Museum):** During your visit to Panama City, don't miss the “Biodiversity Museum: Panama Bridge of Life”, known colloquially as the "Biomuseo." This one-of-a-kind museum, designed by architect Frank Gehry, presents the natural beauty of Panama and the diversity of life on the planet. The museum is located in the scenic Amador Causeway. The Biomuseo's permanent exhibition is titled Panama: Bridge of Life. Eight galleries and eight "devices of wonder" tell of the origin of the Panamanian isthmus and its gigantic impact on the planet's biodiversity. These galleries were conceived by to tell a story: how the emergence of the Isthmus of Panama changed the history of our planet. The entrance fee is \$22 for adults and \$11 for kids and about 2.5-3.5 hours is plenty of time.



4.0 Getting the Most Out Of Your Trip

4.2 Cultural Competency



Floating Doctors' unique relationship with the Ngabe will allow you to interact with this population in a way that would be impossible otherwise. Initially, the different cultures encountered on this trip may seem very foreign and strange, but it is never long until the differences become lost in all the ways we are the same. This is an opportunity to reach out across vast gulfs of experience, culture, geography, socioeconomic status, education, and other factors and make real connections based on our shared humanity that transcend all of those differences.

People everywhere like to laugh, love their children, want the best for their families, have compassion, and care about their community. The "Cultural Competency" lecture on day one is an excellent and engaging preparation for finding the connections between you and our patients, and concludes with a visit by our best example of the universal nature of so much of humanity: little Max, our rescue kinkajou (yes, that's a real animal). His story shows how there are some aspects of humanity that are universal!

4.3 Spanish Language Practice

Our immersion and learning activities do not require Spanish, and we will provide translators as needed. However, any Spanish language skill greatly increases your ability to engage our patients. Whatever Spanish skills you have, you will certainly have the opportunity to leave with improvement in understanding and speaking. Whether you are a native speaker or can't quite get past 'Hola,' this is an excellent chance to practice and learn. Our patients are very patient with poor Spanish skills and quite frankly sometimes find our pronunciation and word choice highly entertaining. Ask Dr. Ben about how for months he was using the Ngabe dialect word for "home-brewed moonshine" when he meant to say "tapeworm." Asking someone if they suffered from "home-brewed moonshine" elicited quizzical looks, then understanding before patients answered with a smirk "only in the morning." This confused Dr. Ben for some time and provided considerable entertainment for the patients until someone took pity on him and corrected him.

4.4 Medical Work Experience

For participants who are interested in health care, this trip offers a fascinating work experience opportunity. Our staff and volunteers on site often come from as many as five or more nationalities, and are enthusiastic teachers and mentors. We see many interesting cases, and because our patients understand that we often have students, they are very open to allowing our participants to observe consults, procedures, or pre-natal ultrasounds. Participants in our immersion program may assist our dental station, pharmacy, patient intake or consulting stations. For participants whose accompanying parents are doctors, the experience of working together is an added bonus that many doctors and



their children have enjoyed in our program. Participants will gain invaluable experience as well as learning the contextual approach to solutions that are practical to the surrounding resource limitations. Younger participants' comfort zones are carefully respected and they are encouraged to observe, ask questions and engage in activities that they find interesting, while ensuring that they are excluded from age-inappropriate situations or cases that are better suited for adult participants.

4.5 Ongoing Service Work

When we mentioned that trips like this could be transforming for people, one of our greatest hopes is that participants' will not only gain a wider experience of other cultures, but also that they will be encouraged to continue to think of others in the global community and to act on those intentions.

4.6 'Reflections' Blog

There is a lot to take in during this immersion trip, and to help process everything we recommend all participants write a reflective essay about 1-2 pages long. We find that this helps focus on some of the key experiences each person may have, and encourages self-insight. We suggest that participants focus on their expectations or preconceived ideas prior to coming, their experience on site, and any details about how they feel the experience may or may not have changed them. Some helpful items to consider are:

- **What was something that pushed you out of your comfort zone, and what was that like?**
- **What was the most difficult thing you encountered (physically, emotionally, clinically, or however)?**
- **What was the saddest thing you encountered?**
- **What was the funniest thing you encountered?**
- **What was your favorite experience?**
- **Is there a particular patient who stands out in your mind? Why?**



5.0 Costs & Logistics

****Please see the 'Volunteer Handbook' and 'FAQs' sheet for more detail, but here is a short summary.**

5.1 Accommodation & Meals



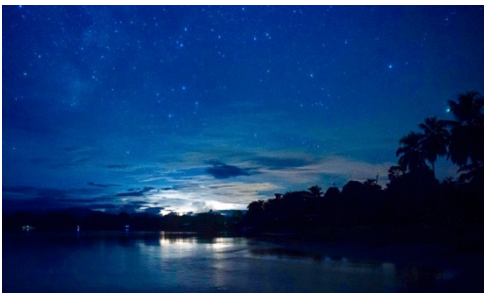
Participants will stay at the Floating Doctors base on Isla San Cristobal, a 10-minute boat ride from the town of Bocas del Toro on Isla Colon. Our headquarters is located on a mangrove island not far from town, relying on solar power, rain catchment and filtration, and biotreatment of waste. Participants will stay in our 9-room dormitory and deploy from there to trip activities. Our leadership and facilities staff work very hard to keep our volunteers comfortable and well-fed, but please remember that these are accommodations built with much struggle against an unforgiving

environment—far more comfortable than camping, but not the Ritz!

We ask that participants be adaptable and enjoy the adventure of living off the grid and the sight of glowing bioluminescence at night, or the flocks of parrots returning home overhead at the end of the day. The mangroves and the jungle are beautiful, especially at night, and swimming or snorkeling off the dock is a great way to cool off at the end of a day out in the field.



Three meals per day will be provided. There is access to Wi-Fi and other basic amenities. All program-related transportation and as well as regular scheduled water shuttle service twice daily between Bocas town on Isla Colon and the Floating Doctors headquarters.



5.2 Travel

To arrive in Panama City, you will fly to Tocumen Airport (airport code: PTY). Although prices vary seasonally, tickets generally cost between \$400 and \$700 round-trip for direct flights to Panama City. It is a \$30 tax ride from Tocumen to the City Center (taxis are reliable and safe).

Traveling to explore Panama City is easily done with a licensed taxi driver your hotel can organize for you. Taxis hired for the day, or part of a day, generally charge \$10-\$15/hour for private chauffer services and they will wait for you while you are in a museum, walking around, or eating.

To fly from Panama City to Bocas del Toro (airport code: BOC), you will fly on Air Panama, currently the only airline flying from Panama City to Bocas del Toro (50 minute flight). Air Panama flies from Albrook Airport (airport code: PAC); flights generally cost \$115 one-way. There are generally only two flights per day, and you will most likely be booking the later afternoon flight on the Sunday of your itinerary, to arrive in Bocas del Toro in time to take the Floating Doctors' launch from Bocas town to our base on Isla San Cristobal .If your plane is late, the boat will wait for you.

Once at base, all program-related travel is provided by Floating Doctors, generally in one of our '*panga*' motorboats or our giant dugout canoe ('*cayuco*').

5.3 Costs

The cost for this immersion trip is \$1150 per person. This includes:

- 6 nights accommodation at the Floating Doctors headquarters
- All meals from Sunday night to Friday night
- Airport pick-up and drop-off in Bocas del Toro
- Travel costs and admission for Chocolate Farm Tour
- Travel costs and marine park fee for Snorkeling Tour
- Travel costs & Dolphin Bay Preserve admission for jungle walk
- Travel costs for clinical deployments

Not included:

- Travel to and from Panama, and between Panama City and Bocas del Toro
- Lodging and activities and meals in Panama City

5.4 How to Register

Please email our Director of Operations, Karine Tchakerian at karine@floatingdoctors.com to coordinate your group visiting our Panama program.



6.0 Appendix:

6.1 Lecture Topic Summary

1. Cultural Competency

Review of common but often-unexpected cultural issues that arise during consults across wide religious, ethnic, geographic, language, and socio-economic gulfs. Learn skills to communicate more effectively with patients, utilize translators, and reduce medical error related to miscommunication. Participants should gain confidence when approaching consults in unfamiliar cultural settings and using cultural competency skills to improve clinical outcomes.



6.2 Vaccination Requirements

To participate in this course, students will need vaccination coverage for Panama. For up to date information on your requirements, please see the Center for Disease Control's website at: <http://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel/destinations/panama.htm>

Typically, the following vaccines (which many people have had during childhood) are required to be current:

- Chicken pox
- Polio
- MMR (Measles/Mumps/Rubella)
- DPT (Diphtheria/Pertussis/Tetanus)

The following vaccines are usually recommended by the CDC for Panama:

- Hepatitis A
- Hepatitis B (Floating Doctors strongly recommends that the series be started prior to arrival)
- Typhoid
- Yellow Fever
- Rabies

Lastly, there is malaria in Panama. Fortunately, Bocas is not a high-risk region (in five years, we have not seen or heard of a single case in our area) and therefore malaria prophylaxis is not required. Most volunteers choose not to take Malaria prophylaxis here. However, Chikungunya, Dengue, and other mosquito-borne diseases may be present intermittently and self-protection against mosquitos is recommended (long sleeves, bug nets, repellent, fans, etc)

To allow ample time for your vaccinations to take effect, and to begin a round of anti-malarial medication (if you so choose), plan to see health care provider at least six to eight weeks prior to departure. Participants are advised to visit their health care provider, even in the event that inoculation cannot be obtained within four weeks of departure, as vaccines and medication can still be administered.

6.3 What to Take

Following is a list of suggested items to pack. Due to shared living space, packing lightly is encouraged. Please limit yourself to no more than two small duffel bags or one travel backpack for clothing and personal items, and one small daypack (school backpack) for clinic days. Please confirm with the Floating Doctors Volunteer Coordinator (volunteerinfo@floatingdoctors.com) to verify if there are any changes or special requirements for your trip.

Clothing (pack clothing that can, and probably will get dirty)

- hot weather clothing (T-shirts, tanks, shorts, lightweight jeans/cargo pants, undergarments, pajamas)
- swimsuit (for swimming and bathing on multi-day clinics)
- lightweight, full-coverage clothing for sun/bug protection
- hat
- sunglasses (no designer glasses)
- sandals that are easy to wash
- sturdy shoes good for hiking
- rain poncho/jacket
- watch with a second hand (for clinics)
- scrubs for clinics (not required)

Important Documents

- Valid passport (be sure you have AT LEAST 6 months before expiration as many countries do not allow entry of passports with less than 6 months of validity)
- Travel Insurance
- Immunization Record
- Color photocopies of personal documents: Passport, Driver's License, Bank Cards, Prescriptions
- Money: Panama uses US dollars therefore money is easily withdrawn from banks in downtown Bocas
- You will be responsible for the following costs:
 - Airfare/transportation to/from Bocas del Toro
 - Daily meals when not on multi-day clinics and if staying off-base
 - *Meals on base are provided Monday-Friday, with no meal service all Saturday and only dinner provided on Sunday.
 - Non clinic-related transportation or travel between F.D. base and town outside of regular shuttle times
 - Travel Insurance
 - Laundry (hand-laundry equipment available, coin laundry or drop-off/pick up laundry services in Bocas Town (\$-3-\$5 per load to wash and dry).
 - Extracurricular activities
 - Phone Service (Pay-as-you-go phone available throughout Panama)
- Pertinent course information: readings, notebook for journal entries, etc.

Toiletries (if need be, can be purchased in Bocas)

- Bug Spray (with DEET)
- Calamine Lotion to Soothe Itchy Bug Bites
- Sunscreen
- Shampoo/conditioner
- Soap
- Deodorant
- Brush/hair ties
- Shaving gear
- Prescribed medications
- Towel
- Aloe Vera/after sun lotion

Clinic Items

- any personal medical equipment you might prefer to use (stethoscope, penlight, otoscope)
- water bottle (water in Bocas is drinkable)
- small daypack
- Waterproof bag (not required but useful on boats during heavy rains)

Multi-day Clinic Gear

- hammock & bug net (may be sold separately; we recommend a hammock with integrated bug net)
- two pieces of rope 15 feet long (suitable for tying each end of your hammock and supporting your body weight)
- sleeping sack, sheet or very light blanket
- Travel towel

DO NOT Bring

- hard suitcases or trunks
- weapons of any kind (pocket knives, field tools are ok)
- illegal or recreational drugs
- valuable jewelry
- unnecessary credit cards

6.4 Health and Safety Issues Abroad

Health Insurance

International Medical Insurance Coverage is mandatory before departure. If you have medical insurance, you should check your policy to see if it includes medical coverage during international travel and the scope of coverage, especially emergency medical evacuation.

Safety in Panama

Students will be required to register their trip with the State Department/American Institute in Panama before departure. Students should refer to the information below when preparing for their trip. Students are also encouraged to review the State Department's Consular Information Sheet on Panama, available here: <http://travel.state.gov/content/passports/english/country/panama.html>.

Travel Safety Tips, excerpted from the State Department website: (http://travel.state.gov/travel/tips/safety/safety_1747.html)

What to Take

****PLEASE review the Floating Doctors' list of 'Things to Bring' and other informational resources before your trip! There are some very specific items you may need, especially if you are deployed overnight to the communities. If you have registered with Floating Doctors already but have not received the Volunteer information documents, please contact volunteerinfo@floatingdoctors.com to follow up.**

Safety begins when you pack. To help avoid becoming a target, do not dress in a way that could mark you as an affluent tourist. Expensive-looking jewelry, for instance, can draw the wrong attention.

Always try to travel light. You can move more quickly and will be more likely to have a free hand. You will also be less tired and less likely to set your luggage down, leaving it unattended.

Carry the minimum number of valuables, and plan places to conceal them. Your passport, cash and credit cards are most secure when locked in a hotel safe. When you have to carry them on your person, you may wish to put them each in a different place rather than all in one wallet or pouch. Avoid handbags, fanny packs and outside pockets that are easy targets for thieves. Inside pockets and a sturdy shoulder bag with the strap worn across your chest are somewhat safer. One of the safest places to carry valuables is in a pouch or money belt worn under your clothing.

If you wear glasses, pack an extra pair. Pack them and any medicines you need in your carry-on luggage. To avoid problems when passing through customs, keep medicines in their original, labeled containers. Bring copies of your prescriptions and the generic names for the drugs. If a medication is unusual or contains narcotics, carry a letter from your doctor attesting to your need to take the drug. If you have any doubt about the legality of carrying a certain drug into a country, consult the embassy or consulate of that country before you travel.

Bring travelers' checks and/or one or two major credit cards instead of cash. ATM cards generally work at the local bank in Bocas del Toro but additional fees from your bank may apply. Credit cards are also accepted at many vendors. Pack an extra set of passport photos along with a photocopy of your passport's information page to make replacement of your passport easier in the event it is lost or stolen.

Put your name, address and telephone numbers inside and outside of each piece of luggage. Use covered luggage tags to avoid casual observation of your identity or nationality. If possible, lock your luggage.

What to Leave Behind

Don't bring anything you would hate to lose. Leave at home:

- Valuable or expensive-looking jewelry
- Irreplaceable family objects
- All unnecessary credit cards
- Your Social Security card, library card, and similar items you may routinely carry in your wallet.

Leave a copy of your itinerary with family or friends at home in case they need to contact you in an emergency. Make two photocopies of your passport identification page, airline tickets, driver's license and the credit cards that you plan to bring with you. Leave one photocopy of this data with family or friends at home; pack the other in a place separate from where you carry the originals.

Leave a copy of the serial numbers of your travelers' checks with a friend or relative at home. Carry your copy with you in a separate place and, as you cash the checks, cross them off the list.

What to Learn About Before You Go

Local Laws and Customs

When you leave the United States, you are subject to the laws of the country you are visiting. Therefore, before you go, learn as much as you can about the local laws and customs of the places you plan to visit. In addition, keep track of what is being reported in the media about recent developments in those countries.

Things to Arrange Before You Go

Register your travel

It is a good idea to register your travel--think of it as checking in--with the State Department so that you may be contacted if need be, whether because of a family emergency in the U.S., or because of a crisis in the area in which you are traveling. Travel registration is a free service provided by the State Department, and is easily accomplished online at <https://travelregistration.state.gov>. (In accordance with the Privacy Act, the Department of State may not release information on your welfare or whereabouts to inquirers without your express written authorization.)

Credit

Make a note of the credit limit on each credit card that you bring, and avoid charging over that limit while traveling. Americans have been arrested for innocently exceeding their credit limit. Ask your credit card company how to report the loss of your card from abroad. 1-800 numbers do not work from abroad, but your company should have a number that you can call while you are overseas.

Insurance

Find out if your personal property insurance covers you for loss or theft abroad. Also, check on whether your health insurance covers you abroad. Medicare and Medicaid do not provide payment for medical care outside the United States. Even if your health insurance will reimburse you for medical care that you pay for abroad, health insurance usually does not pay for medical evacuation from a remote area or from a country where medical facilities are inadequate. Consider purchasing a policy designed for travelers, and covering short-term health and emergency assistance, as well as medical evacuation in the event of an accident or serious illness.

Precautions to Take While Traveling

Safety on the Street

Use the same common sense traveling overseas that you would at home. Be especially cautious in (or avoid) areas where you may be more easily victimized. These include crowded subways, train stations, elevators, tourist sites, market places, festivals and crime-ridden neighborhoods.

- Don't use short cuts, narrow alleys or poorly lit streets.
- Try not to travel alone at night.
- Avoid public demonstrations and other civil disturbances.
- Keep a low profile and avoid loud conversations or arguments.
- Do not discuss travel plans or other personal matters with strangers.
- Avoid scam artists by being wary of strangers who approach you and offer to be your guide or sell you something at bargain prices.
- Beware of pickpockets. They often have an accomplice who will:
 - Jostle you,
 - ask you for directions or the time,
 - point to something spilled on your clothing,
 - or distract you by creating a disturbance.
- Beware of groups of vagrant children who could create a distraction to pick your pocket.

- Wear the shoulder strap of your bag across your chest and walk with the bag away from the curb to avoid drive-by purse-snatchers.
- Try to seem purposeful when you move about. Even if you are lost, act as if you know where you are going. Try to ask for directions only from individuals in authority.
- Know how to use a pay telephone and have the proper change or token on hand.
- Learn a few phrases in the local language or have them handy in written form so that you can signal your need for police or medical help.
- Make a note of emergency telephone numbers you may need: police, fire, your hotel, and the nearest U.S. embassy or consulate.
- If you are confronted, don't fight back -- give up your valuables.

Safety in Your Hotel

- Keep your hotel door locked at all times. Meet visitors in the lobby.
- Do not leave money and other valuables in your hotel room while you are out. Use the hotel safe.
- If you are out late at night, let someone know when you expect to return.
- If you are alone, do not get on an elevator if there is a suspicious-looking person inside.
- Read the fire safety instructions in your hotel room. Know how to report a fire, and be sure you know where the nearest fire exits and alternate exits are located. (Count the doors between your room and the nearest exit; this could be a lifesaver if you have to crawl through a smoke-filled corridor.)

Safety on Public Transportation

If a country has a pattern of tourists being targeted by criminals on public transport, that information is mentioned in each country's US Travel Page in the section about crime.

Taxis

Only take taxis clearly identified with official markings. Beware of unmarked cabs.

Trains

Well-organized, systematic robbery of passengers on trains along popular tourist routes is a problem. It is more common at night and especially on overnight trains.

If you see your way being blocked by a stranger and another person is very close to you from behind, move away. This can happen in the corridor of the train or on the platform or station.

Do not accept food or drink from strangers. Criminals have been known to drug food or drink offered to passengers. Criminals may also spray sleeping gas in train compartments. Where possible, lock your compartment. If it cannot be locked securely, take turns sleeping in shifts with your traveling companions. If that is not possible, stay awake. If you must sleep unprotected, tie down your luggage and secure your valuables to the extent possible.

Do not be afraid to alert authorities if you feel threatened in any way. Extra police are often assigned to ride trains on routes where crime is a serious problem.

Buses

The same type of criminal activity found on trains can be found on public buses on popular tourist routes. For example, tourists have been drugged and robbed while sleeping on buses or in bus stations. In some countries, whole busloads of passengers have been held up and robbed by gangs of bandits.

How to Handle Money Safely:

- To avoid carrying large amounts of cash, change your travelers' checks only as you need currency. Countersign travelers' checks only in front of the person who will cash them.
- Do not flash large amounts of money when paying a bill. Make sure your credit card is returned to you after each transaction.
- Deal only with authorized agents when you exchange money, buy airline tickets or purchase souvenirs. Do not change money on the black market.

If your possessions are lost or stolen, report the loss immediately to the local police. Keep a copy of the police report for insurance claims and as an explanation of what happened.

After reporting missing items to the police, report the loss or theft of:

- Travelers' checks to the nearest agent of the issuing company
- Credit cards to the issuing company
- Airline tickets to the airline or travel agent
- Passport to the nearest U.S. embassy or consulate

How to Avoid Legal Difficulties

When you are in a foreign country, you are subject to its laws and are under its jurisdiction. You can be arrested overseas for actions that may be either legal or considered minor infractions in the United States. Familiarize yourself with legal expectations in the countries you will visit. The US Travel Page for Panama includes information on unusual patterns of arrests in particular countries, as appropriate.

Drug Violations

More than one-third of U.S. citizens incarcerated abroad are held on drug charges. Some countries do not distinguish between possession and trafficking, and many have mandatory sentences – even for possession of a small amount of marijuana or cocaine. A number of Americans have been arrested for possessing prescription drugs, particularly tranquilizers and amphetamines, that they purchased legally elsewhere. Other U.S. citizens have been arrested for purchasing prescription drugs abroad in quantities that local authorities suspected were for commercial use. If in doubt about foreign drug laws, ask local authorities or the nearest U.S. embassy or consulate.

Possession of Firearms

The places where U.S. citizens most often experience difficulties for illegal possession of firearms are nearby – Mexico, Canada and the Caribbean. Sentences for possession of firearms in Mexico can be up to 30 years. In general, firearms, even those legally registered in the U.S., cannot be brought into a country unless a permit is obtained in advance from the embassy or a consulate of that country and the firearm is registered with foreign authorities on arrival. (NOTE: There are also strict rules about bringing firearms or ammunition into the U.S; check with [U.S. Customs](#) before your trip.

Photography

In many countries you can be detained for photographing security-related institutions, such as police and military installations, government buildings, border areas and transportation facilities. If you are in doubt, ask permission before taking photographs.