4th Year Elective in Malaysia

Where I went: I spent about 5 weeks at a large government district hospital in the town of Sibu in Sarawak, Malaysia, on the island of Borneo. Malaysia is divided into two main parts: "peninsular" Malaysia is where the capital, Kuala Lumpur, is located and is much more developed than the "Borneo" half of Malaysia. The state of Sarawak, in the Borneo half, is still mostly rainforest with most transportation being boats up and down rivers. The town of Sibu has about 200,000 people and is near the mouth of the Rajang river, the largest river in Sarawak. So the hospital there gets patients from the town and also many referrals from remote regions upriver.

What I did: My elective was officially called "pediatric infectious disease", but I basically just did a peds rotation in a place where the diseases are much different. Since the state health department does not let visiting medical students have much responsibility, I usually just went on rounds with the attending and the residents. My preceptor, Dr. Ooi, was the attending for the general peds ward, and is an excellent teacher. The residents were also very friendly and helpful, and let me help during procedures on the ward. A sampling of the diseases we saw during rounds: dengue fever, hand/foot/mouth disease, Japanese encephalitis, scabies, as well as the usual asthma and bronchiolitis. I also attended peds clinics and peds cardiology clinic every week with the other peds attending. I basically could make my own schedule and was able to go observe any ward or clinic that I found interesting.

I also helped Dr. Ooi on his research in pediatric CNS infections. It basically involved chart review to see the epidemiology and possible seasonality of different diseases like JE, hand/foot/mouth, and meningitis. I did a lot of computer data entry, but it was helpful to Dr. Ooi and passed the time in the afternoons (which can be slow). I also spent quality time in the hospital library which has constant high speed internet, and read up on diseases I saw on the wards.

Accommodation and food: I stayed in the quarters next to the hospital where most of the interns stay. It is a nice building where I had a small living room, bedroom, and bathroom to myself along with a fridge and phone. There were ceiling fans to keep down the heat, but not aircon. You'll definitely need some mosquito coils too. The shower has no hot water, but it's hot enough already outside that cool showers are always welcome after a long, sticky day. The cost was perfect at 10 ringgit/day (less than US $3). For food I usually ate 3 meals a day at the hospital canteen (cafeteria) which is a separate building and is run by several Chinese brothers. The food is very good and there's a lot of variety. I usually had roti canai (a North Indian pancake type thing with curry) or dimsum for breakfast, and rice or noodles for lunch/dinner. The chef, Henry, is super nice and made me "special" dishes after I had tried everything else on the menu. And you'll usually never pay more than 4 ringgit for a good meal (about a dollar).

Stuff to do: Sibu is a rather dead town with not a whole lot to offer for entertainment. In the evenings I usually played sports with hospital staff. There are volleyball, basketball, and tennis courts right there. The bus to town comes several times an hour to the hospital front and costs about 30 cents. There are some cool markets downtown selling
everything from jungle produce to music videos. There are plenty of interesting cafes and restaurants to try. The state of Sarawak is full of cool eco-tourism type things to do, so I took a few days at the end to travel around.

**Language:** The national language is Bahasa Melayu (Malay), although many languages are spoken. Most educated people know decent English. There’s a large Chinese population so Mandarin is very common. Also, the largest tribe in the area, the Iban, speak their own language. In the hospital all the staff know some English but most of the patients do not.

**Contacts and travel info:**
My preceptor, an attending pediatrician with an interest in peds neuro:
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Jalan Ulu Oya 16 A/5
96000 Sibu
Sarawak, Malaysia

Another peds attending, Dr. Wong See Chang, was also very helpful in setting up accommodation. Dr. Ooi would have his email.

You also need to get permission from the State Health Dept: currently it is Galidas Galau
Email: Galidas <sma.hq@sarawak.health.gov.my>
Address:
State Director of Health, State Health Department
Tun Abang Haji Openg Road
93590 Kuching
Sarawak, Malaysia

Tourist stuff in Sibu: talk to Frankie Ting at Sazhong Trading and Travel on Jalan Central. He can hook you up with stuff upriver or around Sibu. I also found the Rough Guide book on Malaysia, Singapore, and Brunei to be worth its weight in gold.

**Any questions:**
Email me: Elizabeth.stuebing@case.edu
Hi April,

Here are some pictures from my trip. Hope that helps.

Beth

view.JPG

residents.JPG