

TeamMED Philippines

Help shape history... This is the first TeamMED trip to the Philippines! We are partnering with Ateneo Centre for Health Evidence, Action and Leadership (A-HEALS) and associated organisations to improve health literacy and outcomes in poverty-stricken communities of Northern Samar.

Samar is an island in the Eastern Visayas region of the Philippines, hardly visited by tourists and amongst the poorest in the country. Its economy is still recovering from the heavy impact of Typhoon Nona in December 2015. Shared faith, music and singing are central to the strong sense of community here, and to their resilience as a people.

In addition to carrying out clinical and preventative initiatives during the two and a half week program, we stress the importance of forging lasting relationships with the medical staff, students, volunteers and local community members. The most valuable things we have to offer are a familiar face and ongoing support.



Program outline

There are three main components of the two and a half week program.

- 1. Clinical experience in a Rural Health Unit (RHU)*
- 2. Community-based experience based in Doña Lucia*
- 3. Conducting research with A-HEALS*
- 4. Donating supplies to Northern Samar Provincial Hospital (NSPH)*
- 5. Partnering with Ateneo School of Medicine and Public Health (ASMPH)*

1. Clinical experience in a Rural Health Unit (RHU)

The first week of the trip is intended to give you a taste of the professional health system before more community-focused activities in the second week. Aside from the main hospital in Catarman, there are also several district hospitals and many government-run rural health clinics throughout Northern Samar.

- The team will be split up into groups of 2-4 to have an immersive placement in different RHUs in Northern Samar.*
- Your group will learn from these inspiring local doctors by observing them at work, which may include accompanying them on community visits to remotely-located patients.*
- In the RHU, you will also have the opportunity to help:*
 - Talk to patients*
 - Take vital signs / observations*
 - Redress wounds*
 - Give injections*
 - Take blood samples*
- Your group will be able to rent accommodation close to your RHU.*



If you have any questions, get in touch! Email: cpxue1@student.monash.edu

2. Community-based experience in Doña Lucia

For the second week and a half, the team will be based at Sophie's Farm in the province of Mondragon. The nearest barangay is Dona Lucia. This portion of the program is more focused on health promotion and community engagement.

Health promotion

As upper respiratory tract infections and pneumonia are major health issues in this region, we hope to run a health promotion campaign to minimise the burden of communicable respiratory diseases. This will engage local families in Doña Lucia, particularly those of the pre-school-aged children attending the Sacred Heart Learning Centre (SLHC), and college-aged students from the University of Eastern Philippines (UEP).

Our key messages:

- Hand hygiene
 - HOW: use of soap and water, hand rub technique, nail maintenance, thorough drying
 - WHEN: after coughing, sneezing, toileting, petting animals; before preparing food, eating
- Dental hygiene – we can supply toothbrushes
- Preventing the spread of illness
 - Coughing / sneezing into a tissue or handkerchief
 - Disposing of tissues properly
 - Washing your hands

Community engagement

- The whole team will stay in a dorm at Sophie's Farm in Mondragon. Delicious food is provided!
- You will get to know the Filipino SHIFT volunteers and farm staff, and help with the laundry and early morning harvests.
- You will be assigned a foster family in Doña Lucia, and may have the opportunity to stay in their home for one or two nights – the rest of the time you will be at the farm. You can spend an entire day with them to understand their lifestyle and how it affects their health. This could include activities like fishing at 4am!
- It is an honour for them to host a guest, and an honour for us to be welcomed into their family. Of course, we will organise to leave a token of appreciation!



3. Conducting research with A-HEALS

Throughout the two and a half weeks, we will be helping A-HEALS to gather much needed data. The information we collect will not only provide a framework to your RHU and community-based experiences, but also help A-HEALS design ongoing public health initiatives. Our involvement might include assessing whether a certain area has access to clean water, how locals use the health services in their area etc.

4. Donating supplies to Northern Samar Provincial Hospital (NSPH)

We hope to raise funds to deliver some basic medical equipment to the hospital in Catarman, including pulse oximeters, glucometers and blood pressure cuffs. SHIFT has also asked for first aid kits and basic medications for each of their three different ministries. This is a great opportunity for team members to be resourceful and get creative with fundraising initiatives!



NSPH, Catarman

5. Partnering with Ateneo School of Medicine and Public Health (ASMPH)

We may also be partnering with medical students from the Ateneo School of Medicine and Public Health (ASMPH) in these endeavours! A form of interschool exchange, this will allow both sides to learn about a different medical education system, gain an insight into another national health system and share their respective experiences. It would also help to be partnered with somebody who can speak Tagalog! These plans are yet to be formalised, depending on the ASMPH calendar.

Travel arrangements

There is only one flight to Catarman and back, leaving Manila at 5:15am, only 4 days a week! Therefore, two of our flights will need to be with Philippine Airlines. We plan to travel from January 6th to 24th 2018, though this may be adjusted according to team members' availability.

Last I checked it was around \$1,300 for the whole trip (if travelling with separate airlines from MEL – MNL then MNL – CRM). Living expenses including rent, food and amenities are **very** reasonable there.



On the plane from Manila to Catarman (left); in a motorised tricycle through Catarman (right)

Transport around Northern Samar will entail motorised tricycles and jeepneys! Finer details will be organised according to which RHUs you are visiting.

If you have any questions, get in touch! Email: cpxue1@student.monash.edu

Accommodation

Accommodation for the first week will be organised by the team once arrangements are formalised with the different RHUs.

Sophie's Farm belongs to the Sacred Heart Institute for Transformative Education (SHIFT) Foundation. It is a simple farm where a few religious sisters and several SHIFT volunteers live for most of the year, taking care of many cats, a couple of dogs, some ducks, a variety of different vegetable and fruit crops and plenty of palm trees. Our lodging will be in their modest cottages, and meals will be shared with the SHIFT volunteers. The cost of board and food at Sophie's Farm will total approx. \$288AUD per person for a 10 night stay.



Sophie's Farm before and after Typhoon Nona

Your safety

While we fully support stepping outside of your comfort zone to experience global health from a different perspective, the safety of the team is our priority! A high degree of caution is advised for Australian travellers in the Eastern Visayas region of the Philippines. Some recommendations:

- Download the SmartTraveller app or subscribe to email notifications to keep up to date with warnings relevant to the Philippines.
- Purchase travel insurance – medical students are eligible for free travel insurance with Avant.
- Ensure that your passport is valid for at least 6 months from your planned date of return to Australia.
- Consult your doctor about your immunisation status before you travel.

If any dangers arise that would warn against travelling to this region in January 2018, we will have to cancel the trip. Please visit: <http://smartraveller.gov.au/Countries/asia/south-east/Pages/philippines.aspx>

Cultural considerations

Approximately 80% of the Philippines are Roman Catholic. It is a strong part of their identity and significantly informs their daily lives. You are not expected to participate in any religious ceremonies or activities against your wishes, only to be respectful of their practices and understand the role that religion plays in their community.

Many of the local people are not accustomed to seeing foreigners. They will all be curious, though some will be shy and others very enthusiastic to get to know you. Take the time to introduce yourself and talk to them – do not underestimate the impact of your interactions with them, however short!

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