

## Placement

We spent four weeks volunteering in the north of Peru, in a health post in the Cordillera Blanca mountains, and in the town of Acopampa, in the northern province of Carhuaz.

The health post is run by the small charity Light Education Development, located in the village of Quisuar. It is staffed by a single nurse, and we were also accompanied by a friendly guide/translator, called Juan. Here we ran clinics for the local people, who visited from the surrounding villages. We could take histories, perform physical examinations, and prescribe from the post's small medication store (to which we contributed some donated medicines). The local people speak Quechua, and so we had to translate throughout each consultation. Each day we would see up to 25 patients, although the number of patients who visited the post would vary greatly, and they would arrive anytime between 7am and 10pm.

The ailments we witnessed most often were common conditions, such as UTIs, URTIs and GORD, as well as chronic conditions such as osteoarthritis. There was a distinct lack of public health knowledge, meaning our primary role was often educating patients on concepts such as curative vs symptomatic treatment, eating healthily, and drinking adequate quantities of water.

Alongside our general consultations, we also provided basic vision assessments and free reading or distance glasses for those who needed them.

In Acopampa we performed basic vision assessments on all the pupils at a local school, as well as some parents and teachers. Here we also provided free glasses, that had been donated to the charity.



# Rural Medicine in the Cordillera Blanca Mountains, Peru

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## Peru

Peru is a high-middle income country, located on the west coast of South America. It has a population of 33.72 million, and the capital is Lima.

Healthcare in Peru is provided by a mix of government and private organisations, with an insurance-based model. A majority of citizens receive some form of government coverage. However, there are many barriers to accessing healthcare, especially for those in poverty and those who live rurally. We witnessed this during our time in Quisuar, where the villagers who visited us would have otherwise had to travel a long distance to reach the nearest government-run health post, and even further for any specialist care. There are also difficulties for Quechua-speaking communities, as consultations are generally conducted in Spanish.



## Organisation

In order to organise our elective, we got in touch with Light Education Development through the contact form on their website, which can be found here:

<https://lighteducationdevelopment.org>

We were then contacted by Val, the charity's founder, who was our supervisor.



## Pros

- Exposure to health practice radically different to that found in the UK
- Good immersion into the lifestyle and culture of local people
- People were always friendly, welcoming, and immensely grateful
- Program established based on a thorough understanding of local needs and issues
- Health post based in a strikingly beautiful mountainous region of Peru, well off the tourist track
- Opportunity to take on a lot of personal responsibility vs a more conventional placement
- Opportunity to travel in Peru, see Machu Picchu, and lots of other amazing sights
- Cost of living is very cheap compared to the UK

## Cons

- Language barrier if you don't have pre-existing Spanish knowledge
- Only basic amenities at the post, which could be challenging for those not prepared for a pared-back lifestyle akin to camping
- Could be lonely without a group
- Have to go through around a week of adjustment to altitude to avoid altitude sickness, as the post is located at around 3000m elevation

## Tips

- Learn some Spanish!
- Take a four-season sleeping bag, comfy mat, and a water-filter
- Speak to someone who has been before about practicalities (I have a packing list I can pass on)
- Follow all the advice of the local guide
- If you're interested in trekking, let your guide know