

Studying Abroad With MS



After settling in with the reality of living with MS, I jumped ship and moved to the Caribbean for three years. This wasn't some grand design of needing a change of pace or even a bucket list item. No, I moved 2,000 miles away to go to school. And it was hard, but it was so, so worth it.

Most people who study abroad go for a few months—usually a year at most—and they generally go somewhere on par with their usual style of living. Not me. No, I decided that I was going to move to a country where the most-heard advice from current students was “bring peanut butter” or “the cargo ship comes in on Thursdays” or “contact solution is super expensive.”

I'm sure my neurologist thought I was insane. I know my parents did. I probably did, too. It was what I wanted to do, though, so we all put our heads together to think of ways to make it happen.

I was on injectable medication for my MS and the insurance company only wanted to give me a thirty-day supply at a time. So, the fight with the insurance company began. No, they couldn't ship that to me at school—it would sit in customs for lord knew how long. No, 90 days was not enough—I would only be home at Christmas and a few weeks in the summer. We must have thought of so many different ways to fight the vacation override that finally one of us got sick and tired of it and let the poor insurance rep have an earful.

But, I got my six-months-at-a-time override.

Traveling with six months worth of injections was an absolute, nerve-racking disaster. Most of the TSA agents, to their credit, didn't even flinch when my bag full of school supplies and needles went through the machine. My roommates, whom I met for the first time in the middle of our kitchen one night, were perfectly fine with giving up a small section of the fridge for my meds. I had a small sharps box that I dropped off at the school clinic at the end of the semester and they just kind of shrugged it off.

I formed a family with my classmates. We were all stuck on the rock together, and it was sink or swim together. I built relationships that will stay strong for a lifetime—and that started with being open and honest about my MS and the challenges that came along with it. With them picking me back up during relapses, and my team rooting me on from home, I studied and made the best out of island life. There were days where I definitely overdid it in hiking or diving and paid dearly the next day, but I wouldn't trade my experiences for a million perfect days in a row.