

## The Reward of Connection: A Hawaiian Preceptorship

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As a requirement for the Doctor of Naturopathic Medicine (ND) program at Bastyr University, students must do 132 total preceptor hours with multiple physicians, including naturopathic physicians, allopathic physicians, and osteopathic physicians. Many students preceptor with a doctor near them for convenience. I'm sure I will preceptor in the Seattle area later in the ND program, but this past summer I was looking for an adventure. Why not explore a new area while gaining experience as a future ND, right?

An advantage to attending national conferences and conventions with NDs is the opportunity to network and make connections for potential preceptorships. In April last year, I had the honor of meeting Dr. Michael Traub, ND, DHANP, FABNO in Washington, D.C. while lobbying with the American Association of Naturopathic Physicians (AANP). Dr. Traub, a past president of the AANP, practices on the island of Hawai'i in Kailua-Kona, performing a variety of modalities including adjunctive naturopathic oncology care, platelet-rich plasma (PRP) injections, and bioidentical hormone therapy. His passion and sincerity resonated with me.

A month later, I was considering places I could preceptor during the summer before the start of fall quarter. Dr. Traub came to my mind first, so I e-mailed him to ask about preceptoring in August for two weeks. My prior experience working as a medical assistant before medical school definitely came in handy—because of this, he was willing to let me preceptor with him.

And that was it. That was the confirmation to myself to travel to Hawai'i in August to preceptor with Dr. Traub in Kailua-Kona. I had never been to Hawai'i and I had not even been on a trip that far completely alone or to an island unknown to myself. I looked at my bank account and it showed approximately \$500—typical—the life of a medical student waiting for next quarter's loan refund check. How was I supposed to travel to Hawai'i and basically live there for two weeks on just \$500? I was having second thoughts that this was a crazy idea—foolish and irresponsible.

But I went and I'm very glad that I did.

I booked my roundtrip flight using miles I had saved through Delta Airlines. Two weeks. \$500. The Big Island. At this point, it was a for sure thing and my plane tickets were proof.

When I arrived at the airport in Kailua-Kona, I hopped into a taxi and started the 15-minute ride into town. I checked into a hostel downtown and booked two weeks for only \$320 or less than \$23 per day. I didn't have a car to get around but thankfully, Dr. Traub's office was a short walking distance. During the work week, I was in the office each morning at 8 A.M. and left at 6 P.M. Time off, however, included Thursdays, Saturdays, and Sundays—this made me happy because I was also able to sight-see around the island as well.

Staying at a hostel in Hawai'i felt like being in a foreign country. There were usually around eight visitors, including myself, each night. None of them stayed more than three nights, and so

after several days, I felt like it was my home. It essentially was—I had groceries, I went to work in the morning, and I was starting to become a close friend to the guy who worked at the front desk who, ironically, had just moved there after being homeless in Seattle's University District for the past few months.

I was fortunate that there was always someone staying at the hostel with a car rental, and on my days off I was invited to explore the island during the day. Two days, in particular, stood out to me during my Hawai'i trip. One day, I went to the Mauna Kea Observatory, one of the world's largest observatories, at nighttime near Hilo with a visitor named Gabilan. It was absolutely incredible to see from such a high elevation. As I laid on the cold ground I could see every constellation give light to the dark sky. I felt as if I was in outer space. Through the telescope, I could even see Saturn and its rings.

The second day that stood out was the day I went with two other hostel visitors from Montana to Volcano National Park. We hiked around the trails during the day and then finally got to the site of the active volcanic eruption around 6 P.M. At this point, we also had just found out that it would be a 4.5-mile hike to the lava and a 4.5-mile hike back to the car. Although the sun was already starting to set, we decided to do the hike because it was a main reason for driving to the National Park in the first place.

Four and a half miles of total darkness later, we made it to the end of the road. There was cooled lava covering the road, and we couldn't go any further because it was so dark and the heat from the lava was starting to get uncomfortable. And then, the rain started to pour. That made for a miserable 4.5-mile hike back to the car with no sign of other visitors in the park—just darkness and soaking rain. Despite all this, it was truly a beautiful moment.

It was the connections I made with fellow travelers. It was the connections I made with the Earth during hikes and adventures. And it is the connections I hope to make someday with patients as their conduit for healing. It was Dr. John Bastyr who said to not hesitate to touch your patient during the office visit, and I thank Dr. Traub for reminding me of this connection during my preceptorship with him.

Mahalo,  
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