





wellbeing of the community that surrounds the coral reef. This was summarised quite well by one of the members of the organisation who said (paraphrased) “The people of Andavadoaka aren’t just connected to the ocean ecosystem; they are PART of the ecosystem. If our job is to conserve and maintain the health and wellbeing of the ecosystem, that includes all parts of the ecosystem, including the humans.”

One of the aspects of the health governance meetings that interested me was the similarity that they had to the guidelines that we use in the NHS; how they discussed sets of pathways that should be followed upon the presentation of an ill patient. Whilst the guidelines in Velondriake factored in the limited medical resources of the area, they still followed a straight forward step-by-step process that was easy to understand by the staff in the area. Paediatrics is what I am most interested in specialising in in the long run, so it was also interesting to see the paediatric conditions that were most prevalent in this region, and how they were not in fact so different to those in England, with the biggest worries being fever, meningitis and diarrhoea. The difference however, was in the treatments available for them.

Finally, whilst it is unrelated to medicine, the many other activities that we became involved in during our stay were unforgettable and incredibly rewarding too, including but certainly not limited to, learning to dive and making actual contributions (no matter how small) to the world of marine biological research, teaching English, improving my own French (which had been suffering since moving from Belgium to the UK for university), and, particularly difficult and challenging for me, learning to swim properly.

Before this trip, I had always been an incredibly poor swimmer, and had a phobia of the open ocean. A large part of this trip was facing this fear, throwing myself in the (literal) deep end and forcing myself to learn to swim properly. I am proud to say that by the end of the trip, I did learn, and in fact I did something that I knew I wanted to be able to do as soon as I arrived on coco beach; on my second last day



The Mozambique Channel from coco beach, with Andava Rock in the distance. This image admittedly makes the distance to the rock seem further than it actually is, which is exactly why this is the picture that I will show people when I tell them about my glorious feat

on-site, I swam out to Andava Rock. Standing on that rock five weeks after hardly being able to complete a 400 metre freestyle swim, I felt like I had, at the risk of sounding incredibly over-dramatic, conquered the entire ocean. Then I swam back.