Questions to Consider in Choosing an International Elective Site

1) Ethical Questions to Consider
   a. What are my motivations? Why do you hope to do this work? What are your objectives (both personal and structural) in short and long-term?
   b. What are the benefits (and who will receive them)? What are the costs (and who will bear them)? In the context of limited resources, is your elective justified?
   c. Will my work undermine a disparity or contribute to it? What will be my impact on patients? Other healthcare providers?
   d. When we don’t have the answers for communities in need, how will I respond?
   e. Is your work sustainable, and if not, will this leave a negative impact?

2) Personal attributes essential for international work
   - Flexibility, humility, sense of humor
     • Are you adventurous, adaptable, and self-confident but with knowledge of limits?
     • Have you considered your tolerance for:
       • Travel uncertainties/risks/costs
       • Uncomfortable living conditions
       • Theft risk
       • Challenging cultural expectations
       • Disease/injury exposure
       • Frustrations about inability to help

3) Identify what broad scope of global health opportunities interest you.
   a. Clinical vs. research vs. education vs. public health vs. advocacy
   b. Rural vs. urban
   c. Inpatient vs. outpatient
   d. Public hospital vs. private
   e. Individual vs. group project
   f. New vs. established program
   g. Costs of rotation
   h. Are you looking to establish a career in global health?
   i. Are you looking to build sustainability in a project?
   j. How much supervision is required?
   k. What do you hope to bring back to your community from this experience and who will you share it with?

4) Identify length of rotation and when you will go.

5) - Is there a country or locale you would like to be in?
   - Are there special language requirements?
   - Is travel distance from the U.S. an issue?
   - How stable and safe is the location
6) -Are there any special needs or requirements (i.e. electricity if doing benchtop research)?
   -Do you need to consider travel for spouse/children?
   -Do you have any specific health needs (i.e. DM1 and need for refrigeration)?

7) Organization-specific questions
   a) What is the organization’s long-term goal? Who determined that goal?
   b) How has the organization come to be in this community? What conditions make it
      necessary for them to exist in the first place?
   c) Who has volunteered there in the past? Evaluation of their experience?
   d) How does the international community perceive this organization?
      https://www.guidestar.org/search
   e) What is the expected role of the student in the experience? (i.e. shadowing vs. direct
      patient care, caring for children and/or adults, work hours, etc.)
      -Responsibilities should be clarified with site director prior to arrival
   f) Who is organizing the experience?
   g) How long have they been involved in the community/location?
   h) Is this a profit or non-profit? Religious or government affiliation?
   i) What type of preparation, in-country support, and post-exposure debriefing is
      provided?
   j) Will there be a preceptor on-site for the entire elective? Will there be access to
      interpreters?
   k) If students are paying a fee, is the use of fees transparent and are there appropriate
      fiduciary practices by the organization?
   l) How are student activities linked with long-term reciprocal gains for the community?
   m) What cultural, economic, or political barriers might affect your elective?
   n) What are the clinical resources for the site? (lab, radiology, pharmacy, ICU,
      specialists, etc.)
   o) What are the common diagnoses and medical problems at the site?
   p) What are the logistics for the site? (dress code, accommodations, internet,
      transportation, food, water, safety)?

Seven Sins of Humanitarian Medicine
Sin 1: Leaving a mess behind
Sin 2: Failing to match technology to local needs and abilities
Sin 3: Failing of NGOs to cooperate and help each other
Sin 4: Failing to have a follow-up plan
Sin 5: Allowing politics, training, or other distracting goals to trump service, while representing
the mission as “service”
Sin 6: Going where we are not wanted or needed and/or being poor guests
Sin 7: Doing the right thing for the wrong reason
References:
APPD Global Health Content.

Arya A. Preparing for International Health Experiences: A Practical Guide.