

MARCH 2023
EDITION

WILDCAT CANTER

UNIVERSITY OF KENTUCKY AG EQUINE PROGRAMS NEWSLETTER



Mark your calendars for Saturday, April 1 at Coldstream Park, for the second annual UK Horsey Hustle 5K Fun Run and Walk. Registration starts at 9:30 a.m. and race time is at 10:30 a.m.

The 2023 Horseshoe Ball is April 21, and is co-hosted by UK Saddle Seat, UK Western Equestrian, UK Dressage, UK Polo and UK MANRRS. All profits from the Horseshoe Ball will support the five hosting clubs and teams.

Six UK students spent spring break in paradise, traveling to Puerto Rico for an equine domestic study away trip. The experience proved to be an adventure exploring the landscape, learning about the equine and agricultural industries.



HIGHLIGHTS



HORSEY HUSTLE 5K APRIL 1

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INAUGURAL HORSESHOE BALL

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EQUINE TROPICAL PARADISE – UK EQUINE STUDY AWAY TO PUERTO RICO

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UPCOMING EVENTS AND IMPORTANT DEADLINES

April 1 - UK Horsey Hustle 5K

April 18 - Spring ESMA Internship Showcase

April 26 - Last day of classes

April 29 - Land Rover Three Day Event "Caterday" tailgate, hosted by EQAAN

May 4 - ESMA Graduation Open House

Full event listings and details can be found [here](#).

WELCOME

We have our wings back!

Prior to the pandemic, Equine Programs and our greater College of Agriculture, Food and Environment had a healthy, thriving environment to foster Education Abroad opportunities. And then came COVID. EA programs (for the most part) shut down – both voluntarily and by mandate. While there were many moments of grace and innovation during the next few years of academic endeavors, Education Abroad courses were pretty much brought to a screeching halt.

Thankfully the time has arrived to begin traveling and exploring once again. It's time to experience regions outside of our immediate comfort zone. We have fully international options (e.g. Ireland/Northern Ireland this May; Germany and Netherlands next June); Study Away opportunities (e.g. the students who have recently returned from Puerto Rico – see recap on page xx in this issue); and recently proposed domestic opportunities here in the U.S. There are also semester abroad opportunities being revitalized.

Global citizenship, adaptability and intercultural competency are often listed as important skills for students to obtain during their academic careers. Immersing oneself in a Study Away opportunity can be a perfect way to acquire these skills.

If you are thinking of taking part in an Education Abroad opportunity during your time at UK, please be sure to contact your academic advisor and/or the [EA office](#). You won't regret it!



It's Time to Travel Again!
Presented by Equine Science and Management

What study abroad options are there?

- 1 International Destinations**
around the world through different trip styles such as direct, partner or exchange
- 2 Faculty Travel**
abroad with a faculty member and fellow classmates while taking a course during the year
- 3 Domestic**
Gain new experiences all while staying within the United States

Questions?
- Call (859) 257-2226
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MASTHEAD

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EQUINE TROPICAL PARADISE - UK EQUINE STUDY AWAY TO PUERTO RICO

By Erin DesNoyers

Spring break usually means catching up on sleep and getting a tan on a beach somewhere, right?

For six University of Kentucky students, spring break was spent in paradise, with maybe a bit less time to relax post midterm exams – not that they were complaining. Xiomara Arias, Abby Braese, Becca Chastain, Elsa Furlong, Olivia Morrison and Chloe Young traveled to the lush Caribbean island of Puerto Rico for a UK equine domestic study away trip with Camie Heleski, senior lecturer, and Erin DesNoyers, operations coordinator, both with UK Ag Equine Programs. This was the first of two equine study away trips planned for 2023 since before the COVID-19 pandemic.

The island experience proved to be an exciting adventure exploring the landscape, learning about the equine and agricultural industries in Puerto Rico and having some fun along the way.

The group arrived in Puerto Rico at varied times March 10 and 11 after some flight delays or cancellations. All in all, everyone landed safe and sound, ready to enjoy the warm weather and see what Puerto Rico had to offer. The first full day was spent sight-seeing in the Old San Juan Historical District



Overlooking Old San Juan Historical District. Photo courtesy Erin DesNoyers.

which stretches along the northern coast crowned by Castillo San Felipe del Morro and Castillo San Cristobal. These two citadels play a major role in Puerto Rican history with El Morro built first as a means to protect San Juan from attacks by sea and later San Cristobal to help protect from attacks by land. Both forts are impressive in size with beautiful architecture and views of the Atlantic to spot ships for miles.

Walking between the two citadels through the town of Old San Juan is another attraction which features a labyrinth of narrow cobble streets lined with brightly colored buildings. It was a Saturday and Old San Juan seemed to be bursting at the seams with lively street festivals, locals enjoying the nice weather flying kites on the sprawling citadel lawns and many tourists buzz-

Group at Carabali Rainforest Park. From left to right: Camie Heleski, Elsa Furlong, Abby Braese, Chloe Young, Olivia Morrison, Becca Chastain, Xiomara Arias, Erin DesNoyers.



ing around before leaving out on a cruise the following day. It appeared the only beings in the Old San Juan area who were not caught up in the hustle and bustle were the native gatos (cats) happily snoozing on the tops of cars.

The next day we set out for Carabali Rainforest Park in Luquillo. There we met up with veterinarian Jose Garcia Blanco and his wife Sharon who board several horses there. The park features nice riding stables and trails. The Blancos were kind enough to allow part of our group to ride their horses in addition to those provided by the park. These horses were gaited "Criollos" of Puerto Rico whose bloodlines could include Puerto Rican Paso Finos mixed with Columbian Pasos, other imported gaited breeds and non-gaited breeds. We set off for the trails with the Blancos and wranglers from Carabali to guide us on a three-hour ride through the rainforest and out to Luquillo Beach, known as one of the most beautiful beaches in Puerto Rico. The group had the chance to take pictures, ride along the beach and let the horses rest for a bit before making the trek back to the stables. Carabali Park has a restaurant on site where we had dinner trying local favorites like fried cheese with guava, tostones and mofongo.

Ecotourism is a draw for Puerto Rico given its interesting landscape, coral reefs, three bioluminescent bays (out of five total in the world) and even horses. Naturally we wanted to visit Vieques, a small island off the coast of Puerto Rico that is home to a population of feral and semi-feral horses. Semi-feral you might ask? Many of the horses on the island are part of a wild horse herd, but others have local owners who ride them and care for them while simultaneously allowing them to roam freely. The ferry schedule to Vieques wasn't exactly on our side the Monday we visited the island, but we were able to get tickets for later in the day. The additional time gave us the opportunity to enjoy Seven Seas Beach and grab lunch at a local spot by the ocean.

That evening, we boarded the ferry to take us to Vieques in hopes of observing the roaming horses. It did not take us long after disembarking the ferry to walk up a Vieques street and see a pony clearly being cared for by a local home and, moments later, a wild horse walking through this same neighborhood street like it was any other normal day. In venturing to the other side of the island, thanks to a very kind taxi driver, we found an open area with horses going about their evening at sunset. Some mares had foals in tow among other horses of varying ages. Later, we visited the town square to see more of the local sites and happened upon two horses casually drinking water from the square fountain.

Horses and people coexist on this small piece of paradise in the Caribbean, which has led to an increase in tourism. The island has been battered by hurricanes, but its people and horses have endured. While it is a neat experience to see horses blending into everyday life on this island, it does make you stop and think about the various issues relating to equine welfare and natural resources needed for survival. There are a couple of groups evaluating the conditions for these feral horses on Vieques to help provide water and nutrition as the horse population grows and resources become scarce.

After a long, but exciting evening of ferry rides and driving back to our abode, sleep was desperately needed to be able to wake up the next morning before dawn to visit Yauco. Yauco is well-known for its coffee farms. In our rental SUVs we drove up peaks and along a very narrow ridge of Yauco to reach Don Joaquin Alicea and his family coffee farm. To put this drive into perspective, there were areas where you had to execute three point turns to get up the mountain and absolutely no straightaways. Karen Bengoa, an extension agent with the University of Puerto Rico and our fearless leader, kindly guided us to the farm where she and Alicea taught us the entire process of cultivat-



Group at Café La Ursula coffee farm in Yauco. Top left to right: Camie Heleski, Olivia Morrison, Chloe Young, Becca Chastain, Abby Braese. Bottom left to right: Karen Bengoa, Xiomara Arias, Elsa Furlong, Don Joaquin Alicea's granddaughter, and Alicea. Photo courtesy Erin DesNoyers.



Becca Chastain all smiles interacting with the horses at Potrero Los Llanos. Photo courtesy Erin DesNoyers.

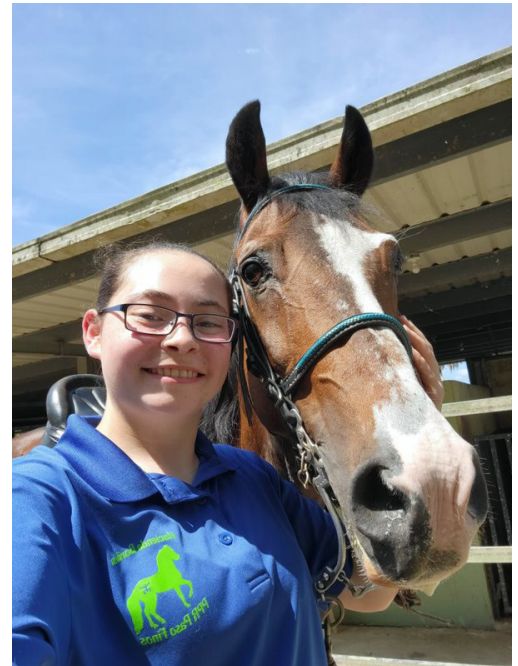
ing coffee from plant to roasted bean. It was fascinating to see the entire process, from the raw coffee bean to its hull removed, dried and roasted. Alicea processes and roasts his own coffee on site which has won multiple awards. We also learned best management practices for cultivating coffee plants, genetic differences between certain plant varieties and natural diseases and predators. Coffee is important for the agricultural industry in Puerto Rico and it was a memorable morning learning more about a bean that has such significance in our daily lives and in history. We are thankful to Alicea and his family for inviting us into their home and for providing us an amazing experience.

After making the arduous journey back down from the peaks of Yauco, bags of freshly roasted coffee in hand, our group headed to Coamo for a tour at Potrero Los Llanos. We met up with Eduardo Maldonado, vice president of Potrero Los Llanos, who is passionate about the Thoroughbred industry and was excited to teach us about their operation. Potrero Los Llanos is specific to Thoroughbred breeding. With approximately 10 stallions and twice as many broodmares, this operation is considered larger in scope. We were privileged to see their attractive stallions with impressive racing careers and several mares with foals – two of which had just been born days prior. This facility has found management practices that work well for their horses and property. Mares and yearlings have ample access to big pastures to graze, roam and socialize. Quality hay can be difficult to come by in Puerto Rico; therefore, Potrero Los Llanos grows their own hay, which is spread out in pastures during dry seasons to help keep up grazing and foraging habits. This farm has certainly found ways to manage Thoroughbreds in a hot and dry climate and they believe in letting their horses be horses.

Following two days packed with tours, long drives and late evenings, everyone was happy when Wednesday rolled around with a low-key schedule. We found ourselves settling into what the locals call “island time” and boarded a boat with Captain David. Hoping to see some marine life, we anchored off the coast of Parguera to spend the day snorkeling. While we did not get to see manatees or sea turtles, we did see live coral and lots of fish living in the mangroves nearby. I think it is safe to say the group was in need of some rejuvenation, and thanks to Captain David, that is just what the group found.

Special shout out: if you’re planning a tour of Puerto Rico, look up Vertical AdventourPR for your Puerto Rico excursions.

We ended our day of relaxation (and learning about ecotourism of course) in Ponce, a quaint town with rich history. Ponce features a lively plaza with historical monuments, a very old and interesting firehouse and a beautiful cathedral. Ponce was once a major port for the southern region of Puerto Rico and has long been a larger city on the island. Maybe it was the architecture or the towering presence of bronzed historical figures that helped you to connect to Ponce’s deep roots and heritage, but also reminders of modern day through coffee shops with the latest latte flavors and cute shopping boutiques. This coastal town is still recovering after the recent hurricanes; therefore, larger museums and attractions are still mostly closed, with a few just starting to reopen. If you plan a visit to Puerto Rico, don’t discount this quaint southern area.



Xiomara Arias posing with one of the horses she rode at Hacienda San Francisco de Asis. (Photo courtesy of Xiomara Arias)

Feeling rested and much more alive after a full night's sleep, we set out early Thursday morning ready to see two Puerto Rican Paso Fino farms. Hacienda San Francisco de Asis was our first stop. This family-run Paso Fino farm offers breeding, boarding, riding lessons and training opportunities. Rafael de Angel and his wife, Nicole Aviles, gave us a great overview of the Puerto Rican Paso Fino breed, showcasing their versatility across disciplines and natural abilities from foals to stallions and everything in between. They were nice enough to even let our students ride if they wanted. Xiomara Arias, an Agricultural and Medical Biotechnology student and Paso Fino equestrienne, hopped on a few of the horses to showcase what the Paso Fino can do.

Paso Finos have a unique lateral gait which many find comfortable for a myriad of equestrian disciplines. The Paso Fino gait and the sound of their footfall was routinely noted as "music to the ears" as if the breed marches across the ground to their own unique beat. They are shorter in height, but built to handle changes in terrain and can cover distances at slow to medium paces. Paso Fino type horses are widely used on the island even still for transportation. Fun fact: It is legal to ride horses on the street in Puerto Rico, something we saw throughout our time on the island. We learned that the Puerto Rico Paso Fino is held in high regard and Puerto Ricans are proud of their native breed and its heritage. Hacienda San Francisco de Asis is one of several farms working to continue this breed and highlight its many positive attributes to the equine industry.



Group at Hacienda RBC with Raul Bras, his wife and colleagues.



Students practicing their balance and technique at the Vocational Equestrian School of Puerto Rico at Hipódromo Camarero. (Photo courtesy of Dr. Camie Heleski)

To further our Paso Fino educational journey, we spent the afternoon at Hacienda RBC owned by Raul Bras, another Puerto Rican Paso Fino breeding and training facility. We were welcomed by Paso Fino stakeholders and enthusiasts eager to show us their stallions and competition horses. In addition to a farm tour and a presentation about the breed, several high-level Paso Fino equestrians put on demonstrations to help us understand the attributes of this breed.

All in all, these farms rolled out the red carpet to host our students and teach us about what the Paso Fino means to Puerto Rico, the breed history and its many talents. These farms were incredibly hospitable to our group, truly displaying the kindness and passion you find in the Puerto Rican culture.

Vocational Equestrian School of Puerto Rico. Here, many come to learn equine and equestrian skills to become a professional jockey. We met with the school director who took us on a backside tour to see the school training barn where students exercise and have classroom times. There we watched sever-

On our final day, we visited Hipódromo Camarero, the Thoroughbred race course just outside of San Juan. During the early morning, but still hours after others started their work on the track, we began with a visit to the

al students complete morning workouts. We learned that students come from Puerto Rico and other countries to study at this vocational school. The two-year program sees students working their way up to riding professionally at Hipódromo Camarero. These students not only learn how to ride, but also learn equine anatomy, race track logistics and how to work and communicate with horse owners and trainers.

After getting a sneak peek of the backside and the jockey school, we met back up with veterinarian Jose Garcia Blanco to see him in action at the trackside veterinary clinic. Blanco and a team of veterinarians and veterinary technicians work to provide medical care to the equine athletes at Hipódromo Camarero. Our group was excited to see a live endoscopy and floating procedures for two horses that morning. Some students were equally excited to cuddle with the multiple gatos that call the outdoor clinic their home.

Before attending the afternoon races, this left us just enough time to pack in a quick 45 minute hike in El Yunque National Forest. Just a short drive from Hipódromo Camarero, we drove back up the peaks of this national rainforest to find an easy hiking trail to view one of the rivers where hikers can play on the rocks and even swim in the calm pools beneath the rapids. We were grateful to El Yunque for their beautiful visitor's center, which also provided an excellent place for everyone to change to attend the afternoon races. We spent the rest of the day at the track enjoying Puerto Rico's Thoroughbred racing and maybe doing a little betting here and there. Seeing the race track and getting an inside glimpse of the Thoroughbred industry in Puerto Rico was a neat experience from start to finish.

We packed so many fun adventures into one week, our group proved just how much you can see in a short amount of time.

"In a matter of days, we were able to explore different cultural roles of equines in Puerto Rico. Through the trip we were lucky enough to get to ride and observe horses, as well as tour some of the major Thoroughbred and Paso Fino farms present on the island. Further, this course did not lack in exposing us to different agricultural industries and ecotourism practices vital to Puerto Rico's economy, this includes coffee farming and marine tourism (snorkeling),"said Chloe Young, Equine Science and Management sophomore.

This domestic equine study away opened eyes to so much rich culture and direct experience within equine, agriculture and tourism industries. Puerto Rico will have a special place in our memories with lots of laughs, smiles, enlightenment, cultural awareness, beauty, adrenaline, friendship, heritage and so much more. To all who helped with planning and hosting this amazing group of students, thank you! We could not have had such an enriching experience without you. Puerto Rico is an island of great adventure and beauty with laid-back vibes and super kind people. Until next time, safe travels everyone!





 University of
Kentucky
Ag Equine Programs
College of Agriculture, Food and Environment

APRIL 1
COLDSTREAM PARK
10:30 A.M.



**REGISTER
HERE**



YOU ARE CORDIALLY INVITED TO THE HORSESHOE BALL; TICKETS ON SALE NOW

By Emily Brown



Horseshoe Ball

April 21 Tickets \$45

Music by DJ KnockOut

Held at an all-inclusive Bayou Bluegrass venue
Over \$1000 in door prizes from Lexington's best-loved businesses

Every ticket is an entry. More door prizes to be announced. Some prizes 21+ only.
All profits support our hosting UK Ag Equine clubs and teams.

Logos for sponsors and partners: Fennell's, Horse Country, Mirror Twin Brewing Co., Revive Sauna Studio, Talon Winery, UK Dressage, Wildcat Polo, UK Saddle Seat Team, UK Western Equestrian Team, University of Kentucky Ag Equine Programs, BHG (Bluegrass Hospitality Group), Freshies.

The 2023 Horseshoe Ball is a formal event planned for Friday, April 21, in celebration of UK's ag and equine clubs and teams, as well as equine students. ALL Equine students are encouraged to attend.

The Horseshoe Ball is co-hosted by UK Saddle Seat, UK Western Equestrian, UK Dressage, UK Polo and UK MANRRS. All profits from the Horseshoe Ball will support the five hosting clubs and teams.

The planning committee has collected more than \$1,000 in door prizes from favorite Lexington businesses, including Bluegrass Hospitality Group, Talon Winery and Revive Sauna and Salon. Every ticket is an entry. Some prizes 21+. More prizes to be announced. The event will be held at a Bayou Bluegrass venue and feature DJ Knockout, official sound of UK Athletics and The RedMile.

Attire is long dresses, suits, and ties. It is **HIGHLY ENCOURAGED** to purchase tickets sooner rather than later as planners expect the event to sell out. The link to tickets can be found at <https://www.eventbrite.com/e/537813363247>. The password to ticket sales is: UKAGEQUINE2023.

For more information, visit @horseshoe-balluky on Instagram.

Internship Spotlight

BLAKLEY RELEFORD

Barn Management Intern, Kentucky Equine Adoption Center

Equine senior, Blakley Releford, recently completed an internship as a barn management intern for Kentucky Equine Adoption Center.

Since 2008, Kentucky Equine Adoption Center has made it their mission to accept any breed of horse and provide humane treatment and shelter while seeking adoptive forever homes. To date, this organization has rescued and rehomed more than 1,000 horses.

When asked what the daily responsibilities were, Releford said, “I would assist with training, riding, and the daily care of the horses. I also was able to speak with employees about their need for sharing the horse’s stories. I was able to create social media content, photograph horses and talk about their daily activities for the website and social media.”

Releford said her most meaningful takeaway from her internship was the amazing horses she worked with. “My biggest accomplishment was simply getting to meet so many incredible horses with such inspiring stories. We get horses surrendered to us for all kinds of different reasons from neglect, hoarding, the passing of owners, aggressive behavior, medical issues, off-the-track Thoroughbreds and more. It was very rewarding to get to meet all these horses and see how much they have gone through and how resilient they are,” she said.

Releford said she wants future students to take every opportunity. “You never know where it will take you and who you will meet along the way,” she said.

| Brooklyn Shirah, a senior Equine Science and Management Major, is the Communications and Student Relations Intern with UK Ag Equine Programs.



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Destinations
around the world
through different trip
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2 Faculty
Travel abroad
with a faculty
member and fellow
classmates while
taking a course
during the year

3 Domestic
Gain new
experiences all
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Tailgate Spot **S282** @
The Kentucky Horse Park

Hosted by:
 **EQAAN**
EQUINE ALUMNI AFFILIATE NETWORK

see our social media pages for
more details and a tailgate map



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