

Victor Hillergren      NCC Abroad in Puerto Rico

Volunteering with disaster-relief and recovery efforts in Puerto Rico this summer was an experience like no other. I'd never done anything like this and was hesitant to jump into it at first given it'd been a little while since I'd traveled abroad. I couldn't imagine where I'd be had I not done it. What was supposed to be a 3-week trip for me turned into almost 3 months. The only reason I'd come home at the time I did was to take care of things here, otherwise I would have continued the work there, which I intend to do upon returning in the near future.

Two years ago this month Hurricanes Irma and Maria made landfall on Puerto Rico, leaving thousands without electricity, running water, access to other basic resources and transportation to hospitals and grocery stores. People spent months in the dark, barely surviving under tarps and in other unpleasant situations. The amount of stories we'd heard in our time there could fill a library. As part of the wealthiest nation in the world, it's a shame these people are still dealing with the trauma and aftermath of such a natural disaster.

Fortunately, there are organizations such as All Hands and Hearts, and SUNY's New York Stands with Puerto Rico initiative that have been gathering students and kind-hearted people from all over the state and the world to volunteer with recovery efforts. It was incredible to not only meet amazing people from all over the state as we went down to Puerto Rico as a group, but to be part of this disaster-

Puerto Rico has to offer from the beaches and colonial cities that surround the coast to all of the mountains and vast greenery in between.

There is so much underappreciated history in Puerto Rico still relevant to this day, still making history to this day. We were there when tens or hundreds of thousands of people took to the streets in protest of removing their governor from office for mishandling FEMA aid and recovery funds. In meeting so many people from all over the world, it seems like the world all met here in this one location to form the global society we have today. The Caribbean in general has had such a pivotal role in history, connecting Europe and Africa to the Americas, and expanding from there over the past few hundred centuries to give us the world we have today. That energy, the magic from everything connecting and meeting still thrives and lives on today. You can feel it upon stepping foot in Puerto R