

Daily Log: International Surgical Week – Mexico City (19–24 April 2026)
By Bokalli Francois, ISS Travel Scholar 2026

Pre-Congress (18–19 April 2026): Arrival and Cultural Experience

I arrived in Mexico City on 18 April, which allowed me time to explore some of the city's iconic landmarks before the congress began. I visited the Basilica of Our Lady of Guadalupe and the Teotihuacán pyramids, experiences that enriched my cultural understanding and appreciation of Mexico's heritage. This early arrival helped me acclimatize and prepare mentally for the week ahead.

On 19 April, the first official engagement was the Travel Scholars' Reception. This event marked the beginning of meaningful professional and personal connections. I had the opportunity to meet Dr. Sule Burger from the ISW Council, fellow scholars (Jenni, Lucky, Laval, and Joel), and several faculty members. We quickly formed strong bonds, often attending sessions together throughout the week. I am particularly grateful to Dr. Mike Sarr, whose openness, mentorship, and guidance were invaluable from the outset. The reception fostered a welcoming and collaborative environment that set a positive tone for the congress.

Day 1 (20 April 2026): Early Career Development and Opening Ceremony

The congress officially began with the Early Career Workshop, which provided invaluable insights into academic surgery. Sessions led by Dr. Sherry Wren, editor-in-chief, and Dr. Adam Gyedu were particularly impactful. Their guidance on scientific writing and publishing highlighted areas for improvement in my own work and equipped me with strategies to target high-impact journals.

The opening ceremony was a vibrant and gracious display of Mexican hospitality, during which we received our certificates. The remainder of the day featured diverse scientific sessions delivered by renowned surgeons. A standout lecture was by Dr. John Hunter on laparoscopic repair of paraesophageal hernias. Given the high recurrence rates observed in similar cases in Kenya, this session offered practical insights into improving surgical outcomes. Additional highlights included Dr. Fischera's session on colorectal surgery in inflammatory bowel disease and Dr. Jamie Murphy's discussion on colorectal anastomosis, both of which were highly educational.

In the evening, we were invited to "Mexico Night," an exquisite cultural event featuring traditional cuisine, music, and dance. This relaxed setting provided an excellent opportunity for informal networking, strengthening early connections with fellow scholars and faculty. The relationships built during this evening proved invaluable and facilitated more open and productive interactions throughout the rest of the week.

Day 2 (21 April 2026): Global Surgery and Multidisciplinary Learning

The day began with the Writers' Summit, continuing the focus on academic development. A pleasant surprise was meeting fellow Kenyans, Drs. Zipporah Gathuya and Jana MacLeod, whose encouragement and willingness to mentor were deeply motivating.

Two sessions stood out. The global surgery session on trauma, chaired by Dr. Christopher Dodgion, was particularly inspiring. His work on improving trauma care in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs) resonated strongly with my interests, and his openness to collaboration presents potential future opportunities. The thyroid multidisciplinary team (MDT) session, led by Drs. Harari, Untch, Rosen, and Doherty, provided valuable perspectives on

managing thyroid pathologies. While many approaches were familiar, the discussions highlighted ways to optimize patient care even in resource-limited settings.

Day 3 (22 April 2026): Presentation and Professional Recognition

This was a significant day in my professional journey, as I presented during the Digestive Surgery Free Paper Session. My presentation focused on a challenging case of Mirizzi syndrome managed in a low-resource setting. The engagement from the audience was encouraging, and the feedback from the session chair, Dr. Hirotoshi Kikuchi, was particularly insightful, offering practical suggestions for improving surgical decision-making in similar scenarios.

Later, I attended the General Assembly of the International Society of Surgery (ISS). As the only travel scholar present, I was honored to be recognized for my engagement in global surgery initiatives. This acknowledgment was deeply motivating and reinforced my commitment to continued growth and contribution to the field.

The day concluded with a networking session between scholars and faculty. Following advice from Dr. Sarr, I actively engaged with faculty members, recognizing the importance of these interactions for future opportunities. I had meaningful exchanges with several leaders, including Dr. Kelly McQueen and Mr. Andrew Hill, whose prior experience working in Kenya made the discussions particularly relevant.

Day 4 (23 April 2026): Continued Learning and Clinical Application

The final full day of sessions carried a reflective and somewhat nostalgic tone. A highlight was the breast surgery MDT session led by Dr. Ines Buccimazza and panelists Drs. Johannes Tausch, Boileau, and Galvan Cruz. The discussion provided practical insights into managing complex cases, particularly hormone-negative and multifocal breast cancers. These lessons are directly applicable to my clinical practice and will contribute to improving patient care.

Day 5 (24 April 2026): Closing Reflections and Departure

The final day was an opportunity to consolidate the week's experiences, reflect on key lessons, and strengthen connections made during the congress. I departed Mexico City with a renewed sense of purpose, equipped with new knowledge, skills, and professional relationships.

Impact of the Travel Scholarship

The travel scholarship was instrumental in making my participation possible. It not only alleviated financial constraints but also provided access to a global network of surgeons, educators, and researchers. Through this opportunity, I gained exposure to cutting-edge surgical practices, strengthened my academic writing skills, and received mentorship from internationally recognized experts.

Equally important were the relationships formed with fellow scholars and faculty, which are likely to evolve into long-term collaborations. The encouragement and recognition I received have significantly boosted my confidence and motivation. Ultimately, this experience will translate into improved patient care, enhanced academic productivity, and a stronger commitment to advancing global surgery initiatives in my local context.