

AMBergh Arabic Language Experience

Amman, Jordan

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During the summer of 2014 I spent one month in Amman, Jordan studying Modern Standard Arabic. I received the building bridges scholarship through the great generosity of Ambergh Education and KEFOUND. I hoped this experience would be a great one but I never imagined what an impact these weeks would have on my life outlook. My month in Amman was a whirlwind adventure that truly changed my life. It is very difficult to sum up such a rich and diverse experience in one essay but I will do my best to both share my experience and show what a great opportunity this program was.

Firstly, the rate at which my Arabic improved in just one month was incredible. I came to Amman with a beginner's knowledge of Arabic and was mostly able to introduce myself and briefly describe my life. After one month studying at the institute in Amman, I was able to speak freely with cab drivers who only spoke Arabic to maneuver around the city, carry on normal conversation with a "conversation partner" in Arabic and read Arabic passages with ease. My lessons were really useful and my teacher did a wonderful job incorporating games, activities, and in-depth discussions in Arabic. I was very satisfied with how much I learned and improved.

While in Jordan I learned so much about the Jordanian/Shammi culture, food and people through the time I spent with my host family, outings with my teacher and classmates as well as the great hospitality of the people of Jordan. I had the opportunity to experience much of the country's deep history as I traveled around Jordan with my classmates and friends. I climbed through the ancient city of Petra, saw some of the world's oldest mosaics in Madaba and gazed down from atop Mt. Nebo where Prophet Moses did hundreds of years ago. I experienced the surreal sensation of floating effortlessly in the Dead Sea, walked through the ancient Roman ruins of Jerash and fell asleep in the desert under the stars of Wadi Rum.

The friendships I made and the people I met while in Jordan truly enlarged my outlook on the world. Through this program I had the opportunity to meet people from countries around the world such as Australia, Canada, France, Germany, The Netherlands, Sweden, and The United Kingdom. The students studying with me were of different ages, professions, and had a variety of reasons for learning Arabic. As a half-American half-Egyptian Muslim from the United States, it was especially nice for me to meet other people from mixed backgrounds and cultures. As cliché as it may sound, I truly found that we all had more things in common than differences. Despite our different nationalities, ethnicities or upbringing we could all find a common ground to stand on. We could share aspects about our cultures that the others had never heard of, introduce each other to new ideas and foods and share different views of life. Although I have traveled in the past, I learned so much during my time in Amman about the lives of others around the world. There are some things you will never learn or understand until you speak to someone in person, until you meet a living example from that country.

As a mixed-culture Muslim American, I also felt like a dual-ambassador in Jordan. For one, I was an example of a Muslim American to many Arabs who had never met someone like me before. I know I dispelled many misconceptions that Muslims in the Middle East may have about Muslims in the West. On the other hand I was able to share my religion and knowledge with my classmates and friends in the Arabic program as questions about Islam and middle-eastern culture would arise. In addition, I enjoyed learning about their religious or general life views and was able to see that once again we had so many things in common despite our different faiths or views on spirituality. Jordan was the perfect setting for this meeting of faiths as it has been home to Muslims, Christians and Jews living harmoniously for centuries.

All in all, I feel so blessed to have had the opportunity to spend this month in Jordan. My Arabic speaking, reading and understanding really improved which full-filled both personal and religious goals of mine. Not only did I learn more about the Arabic and Jordanian culture but I learned more about the lives of people from other countries I may never have experienced or met otherwise. I made many friendships which I hope will be life-long during my stay in Amman and this experience is one I will remember forever. I have a new thirst for travel and adventure and hope to continue building bridges between cultures, religions and regions throughout my life with the different people I meet. Thank you again to Ambergh for such an amazing experience!