

## Expedition Fund Trip to Jordan Summer 2023

As part of my course at Queen Mary I was attempting, with great difficulty, to learn Arabic. As much as I enjoyed my classes and learned during them, without physically being in the environment of the language you are trying to learn it is exceptionally difficult to learn it well. So, I decided to spend my summer in Jordan studying Arabic.

After much research, I opted for Ahlan Jordan Arabic School in the country's capital, Amman. After a much-delayed flight (thanks Luton) I arrived late at night. Walking out of the airport I was greeted by the oppressive dry heat of Amman in Summer and the thunderous performance of traditional dancing, singing, and drumming from a band.

I couldn't have been more excited.

During the two months I spent studying in Jordan I was learning 5 hours of Arabic every day for 5 days a week. The classes were conducted entirely in Arabic. At times it felt like



*Street art in Amman*

I wanted to learn as much about the history and culture of Jordan as possible. During my stay, I visited museums and cultural sites in Amman such as The Jordan Museum where you can see the Dead Sea Scrolls. Especially interesting was a walking tour about street art and graffiti in the city, they have become popular forms of art and expression for younger residents of the city.

My time in Jordan would have been incomplete if I had not taken the opportunity to see some of the country's most memorable locations. The ancient Roman city of Jerash, known as the Pompei of the East, the Dead Sea where you can float on the salt-rich water, the relaxing red sea town of Aqaba



*Roman ruins in Jerash.*

I was drowning, submerged with words I couldn't understand and only briefly snatching a phrase I knew allowing me to catch my breath.

However, as uncomfortable as it was at times, my Arabic improved more in those two months than it had in the previous year.

Despite this intensive schedule, I did not miss a moment during the evenings and weekends.



*A Bedouin riding a camel in Wadi Rum.*

with crystal clear water, and of course the ancient remains of Petra. My personal favourite was Wadi Rum, the breathtaking desert where movies like Dune were filmed.

Taking advantage of my time in a region I had never been to before, I also took the opportunity to travel overland to the West Bank, part of the Occupied Palestinian Territories. I visited Jerusalem, Bethlehem, Ramallah, Birzeit, and Hebron. It is hard to describe this experience. The joy of visiting a street festival in Ramallah city centre or seeing the exaltation of Christians visiting the supposed birthplace of Jesus in Bethlehem contrasts greatly with the inescapable realities on the ground. You could go virtually nowhere in Bethlehem without seeing the great wall that separates it from Israel. Hebron is a city divided in two, with soldiers and military checkpoints throughout the city. Even the Tomb of the Patriarchs in Hebron, where Jacob, Abraham and other figures key to the Abrahamic religions are supposedly buried is divided in two. There is an entrance for Muslims and an entrance for Jews on different sides of the building with bulletproof glass is used to separate the two halves.



*Petra.*



*Tomb of the Patriarchs in Hebron.*

As a student of International Relations with dreams of becoming a journalist it was a thought-provoking and illuminating journey. As a human it was heartbreaking.

In total, it was three months away from the UK and I treasured every moment of it. There are too many memories to encapsulate in such a short piece but they will stay with me for a long time.

Perhaps the highlight of the trip was that while I was in Jordan I met a girl, who swept me off my feet. I since returned to Jordan at the end of November to see her

again and we have applied for a visa so she can visit me in the UK. I am not sure if another expedition fund trip has led to a relationship, but this one has!