



Dartmouth-AUKuwait Internship Program

Intern Newsletter – Fall 2019

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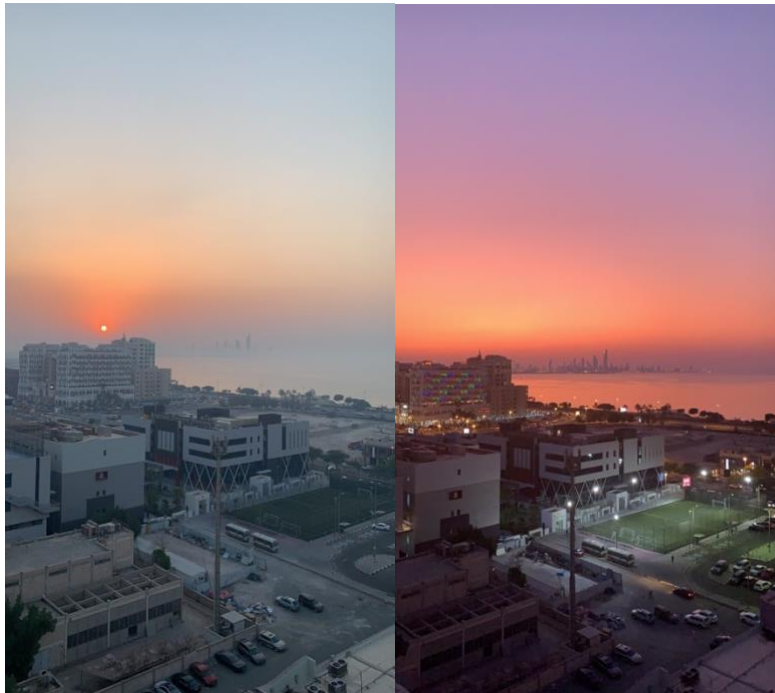


Kuwait: A Muslim-American’s Perspective

I was excited to go to Kuwait because I knew that the internship was going to help me grow significantly. I was nervous because I didn’t know how I would adjust to living in a Muslim-majority country. Although I am Muslim, I grew up in America, and the last time I was in a Muslim country was more than ten years ago with my family.

Arriving in Kuwait was a culture-shock, even for me. From what I learned beforehand, Kuwait is very westernized, so I didn’t expect to see so many people wearing abayas and dishdashas, traditional clothing found in the Middle East. In terms of weather, it wasn’t as bad as I thought it was going to be. At the beginning of the internship, the weather was hot and humid, but the heat wasn’t an issue since I didn’t need to stay outside for very long and every building was air-conditioned. Towards the end of the internship, the weather was phenomenal, and I always wanted to be outside!

I shared an apartment provided by AUK with two other Dartmouth students. In terms of location, it was perfect. It was a two-minute walk from AUK and a five-minute walk from a mall and grocery store (not that I ever needed to go because you can order groceries online and have it delivered right to your door in Kuwait!). The view from this apartment was absolutely breathtaking. You can see the ocean and the rest of the city from the balcony, and one of my favorite things to do is to stand outside and watch the sunset.



The view from my apartment.

school at AUK were more than willing to teach me and answer my questions. Additionally, I guest-lectured in a few psychology and college readiness courses, assisted professors with their research, and created learning material for a

course on Islamic economics. During my internship, I never felt like “the intern.” I felt like a valued staff member and my feedback was always appreciated.

Although knowing Arabic is certainly not a requirement or a necessity for this internship, I wanted to take advantage of the fact that I was in the Middle East to learn Arabic. I love learning languages. Knowing Romanian, Spanish, and Urdu, I’ve witnessed countless times how shared language has the ability to both connect and comfort people. I already knew from my childhood Islamic school classes how to read Arabic. I just couldn’t speak it. After explaining my knowledge of the Arabic language to a few people at AUK, not only was I able to audit an advanced Arabic course, but students at AUK (and my roommates from Dartmouth) were also more than happy to teach me. As of right now, I am less than fluent, but I can hold a basic conversation and hope to continue to improve my Arabic.

The American University of Kuwait reached out to me and the other Dartmouth students



A group photo with my team, The Tempest

this semester to join with AUK students in the NASA Spaces Apps Challenge and I decided to participate. Space Apps is where teams engage with NASA’s free and open data to address real-world problems on Earth and in space. On opening night, I walked around looking for a team that needed another participant, and I ended up joining “The Tempest.” We decided to take on the “Build a Planet” challenge, and our team created a virtual reality game that allows

winning second place in the competition! My main task for the team was to make sure that the physics and other scientific details behind the program were correct. I had a fantastic time, learned many new things, and was inspired by the talent and creativity I witnessed. The winning team built an app to predict and identify wildfires with 84% accuracy. A few teams also created games while some built robots for their respective challenges.

users to build their own scientifically accurate solar system; it ended up

All of my teammates were complete strangers to me before the competition, but over the weekend, I got close to these talented individuals; the competition was probably one of the main highlights of my time in Kuwait.

Being a minority and growing up as a Muslim in America isn’t easy at times. Sometimes I’m required to explain myself to people or to speak on behalf of a group of people, and it can be



A group photo of the top two winning teams at AUK

a challenge. I am mixed-race, and so my physical features coupled with a common female Muslim name like “Maryam” made many believe that I was a local. I’ve never felt like I belonged to a community more in my life, and people repeatedly told me that I am just like one of them. I finally got to experience what it is like to be the majority and not the minority anymore, and I didn’t know how profound the feeling would be until I got to Kuwait. To me, Kuwaiti culture is the perfect mixture between the culture I experienced at home and what I experienced outside my house in America.

I loved my time in Kuwait. From smelling countless of oil perfumes at Souk Al-Mubarakiya to watching the sunrise at Al-Shaheed Park, there was never a dull moment. The food was always great, and coffee culture is big here, which was great to me— being an avid lover of coffee. The best part about Kuwait is the people. The people here are so friendly and outgoing, and they were always excited to talk to me and the other Dartmouth students; I shared coffee or a meal with somebody new almost every week. The locals here, from the professors to students at AUK, were constantly going out of their way to make sure that I and the other Dartmouth students were doing okay and reminding us that we could reach out to them whenever needed. I made lifelong friends, and I will forever cherish the memories I made in Kuwait. I know for a fact that I will be back.



Buying perfume from the local souk