



Dartmouth-AUKuwait Internship Program
Intern Newsletter – Fall 2018
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Embracing the Unexpected in Kuwait

I was nervous and excited when I accepted the Dartmouth-AUK internship with a large emphasis on nervous. Although previous interns had told me that Kuwait was great, many of my American friends and family members were skeptical at best. “Why on Earth would anyone want to go to Kuwait?” was a question I got more than once. I think it is important to spend time in places that I don’t know a lot about and that Americans rarely visit. Kuwait certainly fit both of my requirements. I am very thankful that I listened to the past interns’ advice rather than that of my friends and family. I had an incredible experience in Kuwait and I am grateful for my time there.

Before going to Kuwait, I spent ten weeks studying abroad with my Dartmouth classmates in Morocco. I had been told that the two experiences would be different, which made sense — European countries are all unique, as are US states, so why would every country in the MENA region look the same? However, I was not sure how they would differ. The first contrast I experienced was people’s outgoing generosity. My seatmate on the flight to Kuwait kindly offered me some of her chocolate before the plane took off. I found this magnanimity to be constant during my stay at Kuwait, as people offered me unique snacks, took me to their favorite places, and made sure I had a great time. Although Morocco had great hospitality, it came at a cost, with each person expecting a tip for helping you or showing you something. In Kuwait, people were nice just for the sake of being nice. The landscape in Kuwait was also very different from anything I’ve ever experienced. At first, I struggled a lot with the lack of trees and stifling heat. However, after I braved the traffic that I needed to cross to get to the Gulf, I discovered a whole new area of Kuwait where I could exercise, enjoy fresher air, and people watch. I was pleased to find that cat-calling and general street harassment were much less common in Kuwait than they were in Morocco, and I felt very safe.

Although Morocco has more traditional tourist attractions than Kuwait, we still found a lot of interesting and unique things to do in our free time. During our first weekend, we visited a museum called the Mirror House, where an Italian-born, Kuwait-raised woman created collages of mirrors that cover the walls of every room in her house. A few weeks later, one of our good friends took us to visit the gold souk (market), where thousands upon thousands of pounds of gold jewelry are packed into small shops. She taught us that owning gold is considered to be a form of insurance in Kuwait, because a woman can sell her gold if she gets a divorce or if something happens to her family. During our second to last week, we went to see a Kuwaiti music performance at the opera house in Kuwait City. The music was unique and the performance was enthralling. Unlike European classical music, Kuwaiti classical music includes drums and singing, which for me made the music much more engaging. With the help of the



Me and Ally (my fellow Dartmouth intern) attending a 5K race hosted by the US Embassy

internet and advice from friends and co-workers, we explored more of Kuwait than many locals have. My only regret was missing the desert camping and camel racing seasons, but I guess that gives me a reason to go back!

I was surprised at how frankly some people spoke with me about their experiences in Kuwait. I only met a few Kuwaiti nationals, so most of the opinions I was exposed to came from people with other nationalities who have lived in Kuwait for their whole lives. Meeting people

from so many different places led to eye-opening conversations that squashed stereotypes that I had about their home countries. One of my friends was a Syrian national whose family has lived in Kuwait for a few generations. She is thoughtful, smart, and she wants to broaden her horizons by studying abroad. Unfortunately, the travel ban against Syrians prevents her from going almost anywhere outside of the Middle East. Conversations with her reminded me of the importance of not stereotyping and not believing everything you see in the media. Other students opened up about the struggle to be taken seriously when pursuing a non-engineering or finance major. Although some students in the US face the same problem, many students at AUK were pressured by their parents into a major they did not love because their parents are worried that a liberal arts major is not useful. It was admirable to see how AUK tries to change the culture around pursuing majors that are not occupation-oriented, but it certainly seems to be an uphill battle. I loved having the opportunity to get to know a lot of students through my placement in the Tutoring Center and participation in campus activities.

I also learned a lot about Kuwait through my placement in Public Relations and Marketing. One of my tasks was to scan the English language newspapers each day, and it was interesting to see how national and international news was portrayed. All of the news about the Amir (the leader of Kuwait) was positive, but there was negative press about ministers who held very high positions. The newspapers also reminded me what a small country Kuwait is, since they were more similar to my local paper (*The Valley News*) than to the *New York Times*. They included information about local groups and activities and a shocking amount of detail about the public university's student government elections. The bulk of the paper was world news and business, which made me realize how much Americans focus on US news rather than world news.

Although the Intensive English Program was much more focused on the US than Kuwait, I still had a very valuable experience. I can now empathize with teachers because I got to see how challenging it is to explain things in a variety of ways, as well as how hard it can be to grade without making mistakes. I loved the amount of intense focus that working in the classroom required and the satisfaction of



Me and a friend, Gehan, celebrating my birthday.

seeing an ‘aha moment’ on a student’s face. I looked forward to going to the classes, because I knew that there would always be a new challenge or surprise.

Although I had an amazing time in Kuwait, I would be lying if I said it was not without struggle or discomfort. My main issue was my white skin, which led me to be noticed and remembered by pretty much everyone. Although only a few people commented, it still made me feel uncomfortable. Despite that, I am very thankful that I had the experience as I can now get a slightly better understanding of what minorities go through in the United States — even if no one makes a comment that is obviously about your race, you can still feel uncomfortable.

During my last few weeks in Kuwait, I started to realize how sad I was about leaving. I made some great friends and found spaces where I felt comfortable being myself. I had invested a lot of time and energy into helping students improve in the Intensive English program and the Tutoring Center, and I was sad that I would not be able to see the AUK students finish the term. When I left Morocco, I was only excited, because I missed so many things from home and because I did not fully engage with the local community. When the time came to leave Kuwait, I was really upset. I didn’t get the chance to say good-bye to my friends and co-workers in person because of school cancellations due to flooding. Luckily, I know that I will be able to stay in touch with many of them through social media, and I am hopeful that I’ll be able to see them again!