



Dartmouth-AUKuwait Internship Program

Internship Newsletter - Spring 2017

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A year ago, I would have never imagined traveling to the Arabian Gulf on my own. I had been studying Arabic since my freshman year at Dartmouth, and looked to use my off term to help expand my understanding of the language and of Arab culture. When my Arabic professor recommended the American University of Kuwait Internship Program, I could not pass up the opportunity. After months of anticipation, I boarded a plane in Los Angeles with a direct flight to Qatar. As I sat down in the middle of the plane, I took my last look out the window to the rolling hills of California. I woke up to the pilot announcing our descent into Doha, Qatar. I looked out the window to see a vast desert and towering glistening buildings. After landing, I quickly ran through my second round of customs and leapt onto my plane heading to Kuwait. As the plane touched down, I was immediately immersed into the diverse nature of Kuwait. Never in my life had I seen people from so many different cultures co-existing! After finally retrieving my luggage and meeting Tadd, I walked outside the building and was hit with warm evening air and the bright lights of the city.

Living in Kuwait:

I was set up in a lovely eighth floor apartment in Salmiya. The apartment was about a million times better than any dorm at Dartmouth. Because an exchange student was living in the apartment usually set aside for interns, I was living in a building about a 10-minute drive from

AUK. Luckily the building I was living in was also a faculty apartment, so I was able to catch rides with Rachel, a teacher from the English Intensive program, and Faten from Human Recourses.



During my first weekend, I explored the streets around my apartment. I discovered a small grocery store nearby, and I became a regular

customer at the local fruit and vegetable stores. During mornings when I could not be bothered to cook breakfast, I would take a quick walk to a French bakery on the other side of my building. I also learned to take advantage of the relatively cheap taxi system in Kuwait. I traveled to several

places throughout my stay, such as The Avenues, Kuwait's largest and most luxurious mall! Although I was nervous at first to take taxis, Kuwait's layout made it easy to give directions and taxis were easy to call from the streets.

I would describe Kuwait as an incredibly industrialized and modern country. Just about every American restaurant chain (Fatburger, McDonald's, PF Chang's, Dunkin Donuts to name a few) and probably every coffee chain in the world can be found in Kuwait. However, there are also plenty of local business that offer authentic food from a multitude of countries such as Egypt, Lebanon, India, and Thailand. To say that food and coffee are a huge part of the Kuwaiti lifestyle would be an understatement.

English is widely spoken throughout Kuwait. This made practicing Arabic easier for me. I never had to stress about not being able to communicate with someone if my Arabic, which was Modern Standard and not a local dialect, was not clear enough. To practice my Arabic reading skills, I would often times walk to a local café, which was of course a popular American chain, and read the newspapers provided with my vanilla latte.



The Avenues Mall

Working at AUK:

AUK is nestled amongst the bustling roads of Salmyia. The University is smaller and more urban than Dartmouth. There are from 2,500-3,000 students enrolled at AUK and many people will tell you the atmosphere resembles something close to a high school. Because of its small size, the entire University felt like a tight knit community where people were willing to lend a helping hand and welcome me into the school.



American University of Kuwait

At AUK, I worked in three different departments: Center for Continuing Education, Center for Gulf Studies, and the Intensive English Department.

The Center for Continuing Education was my primary placement, meaning I spent most of my work week there. I worked on several projects ranging from a business research project to helping update English courses. I was surprised to learn about the differences between professional development in Kuwait and in the US. While most people in the US rely on schools to teach them the necessary skills to flourish in the professional world, Kuwaitis are increasingly demanding supplementary professional courses from training centers. I loved the team at the Center and felt like I became a part of the family they had created there. I became close to the Center's student worker, Mona and her sister Amal. They took me out shopping after the university day was over and showed me which one of the hundreds of shops in Salmiya were the best. I even attended a small 21st birthday celebration for Amal at the University. Although the celebration was only a small gathering there was an incredible surplus of food and desserts!

I also worked at the Center for Gulf Studies as an office intern. I was lucky enough to get my own office and was often times blessed with free Caribou Coffee. I worked on creating and updating research guides for scholars interested in the region. I also compiled information on previous events and had the opportunity to watch interesting lectures on a multitude of subjects regarding the Arab world.

My final placement was as a teaching assistant with the Intensive English Program. I sat in with three different classes throughout the week and helped students improve their English in any way I could. My first class of the week was a reading course. One of my favorite moments was acting as a judge for the students' teaching program. During this activity, the students taught a lower level English intensive class an essential reading skill they had previously learned. I loved the energy that Ms. Alison brought to that class and admired the relationship she had with the students. I also worked with Mr. David's presentation and grammar classes. I was able to help students with research for their final persuasive presentations, and with grammar exercises. I really enjoyed being able to interact with people my age and asking each other an infinite number of questions about Kuwait and the US.

Culture:

My greatest experiences in Kuwait were exploring the country and its culture. I was fortunate to meet Salma and Nathalie, AUK students who will be visiting Dartmouth during the summer. They showed me around the area and taught me about what life was like for a college student in Kuwait.



I went with Salma and her wonderful family to Souq Mubarakia, Kuwait's largest traditional market. Salma and I walked around the shops and haggled for jewelry with some of the merchants. We later went to eat at an Arab restaurant called Al Shamam, and I got my first taste of what an authentic Arab meal was like. All the food was laid out on the table for everyone to help themselves. I tried everything and anything, and I was always asked to eat more! I do not think I will ever eat better tasting hummus or falafel!

Salma also accompanied me to The Scientific Center. Inside the building were pearl fishing boats and an aquarium. I did not know much about Kuwait's history before visiting the country, and seeing the pearl diving boats that men would take out for the summer months really brought pre-oil Kuwait to life.

On one particularly hot weekend, I joined Nathalie and her friend, Deema, at a private beach called Al Shaab Club. Being from Southern California, I was ecstatic to finally have a beach day. Even though the temperature was over 100 degrees Fahrenheit, the beach was filled with families and groups of young adults. We then ventured over to a Wendy's, since burgers are Kuwait's favorite thing to eat. This Wendy's is nicer than any Wendy's I have ever seen in the

US. Nathalie also introduced me to Arabic ice cream, which is thicker and has more stretch than regular soft serve ice cream for relatively the same price!

On my last day in Kuwait, I visited the Kuwait Towers. The Towers were incredibly tall and shone a bright blue that could be seen even from the shores of Salmiya. On this day, their lights portrayed the Union Jack to stand in solidarity with Manchester, UK, after the May 22, 2017, terrorist attack at the Manchester Arena after a pop concert. It felt like a nice goodbye to my home for the past two months to visit Kuwait's quintessential landmark.



The Kuwait Towers

Conclusion:

I was nervous to leave the US for a country I was not familiar with, but now after my journey has come to an end, I could not be happier with my decision to take an off term to Kuwait. I had studied the region extensively at Dartmouth, yet no lecture could ever have provided me with the knowledge I gained while living in Kuwait. I was exposed first hand to Arab and Muslim culture and fell in love with it. From the food, to the languages, and the very apparent Arab hospitality, Kuwait was a hub of multi culturalism. I spoke to many people throughout my internship, some who had lived there all their life, others who had traveled there to work, and actual native Kuwaitis. The stories that they shared with me really opened my eyes to how large this world really is. I was inspired by the bravery of those who had moved to Kuwait on their own or lived through the Gulf War. I was also moved by how proud of their culture, religion, and diverse nation life-long residents of Kuwait were. Living on my own in Kuwait was definitely a challenge, being accustomed to a Hanover life, but I learned a lot about

myself through trial and error. After living in Kuwait, I have the confidence to fulfil my new-found wanderlust. On my last day of work, many of my coworkers asked me if I enjoyed my time in their country. Of course, I responded “yes!” and we began to reminisce about our past two months together. I plan to come back to the area and hopefully to Kuwait after my graduation from Dartmouth. My time in this country has changed me as person and a scholar, and I hope to share these experiences with my friends and family for the rest of my life.