

Pass It On: Coping & Learning

Written by Anonymous Contributor CET Jordan: Intensive Language | Spring 2018

Today I took my last walk to-and-from campus, took my last Arabic test of the semester, and said goodbye to the best professor I've ever had. Leaving Jordan is bittersweet. I will miss being surrounded by my classmates who love Arabic as much as I do, but I am ready to go home. I'm going to be open about my personal experience because I think prospective students have the right to know what they're getting themselves into. And by being honest, I hope that you can be honest with yourself about how you might cope with living in a different environment.

I like to think I know myself pretty well, so I didn't set expectations that I'd be happy-go-lucky the entire semester, but there are some aspects of Jordan and the program that can be difficult to prepare for. In other words, you just have to deal sometimes. I hope that I can help in some way with the "deal with it" process.

Some students come to Jordan expecting certain accommodations that simply aren't available. For example, Jordan is a water-scarce country and because of that, the tap water is not potable. While this might be a minor inconvenience, each apartment has drinkable water jugs for your hydration needs. On the subject of water, it is important to be mindful of how much water you use in the shower. And if you want a warm shower, you'll have to wait about 30-45 minutes for the water heater to work its magic. Lastly, dryers are not available in the apartments so be prepared to air dry your clothes—the Jordanian sun will do just the trick. All of these things are totally manageable if you are adaptable and err on the side of low-maintenance.

CET Jordan is known for being an academically-intensive program, especially the Intensive Language track, so if you want a laid-back study abroad experience, go to Europe. But if you are dedicated to learning Arabic, this is the program to do. With that comes sacrifices, though. That is, don't expect to do much traveling throughout the semester. Not only do most of the bordering countries have travel warnings put out by the U.S. State Department, but you simply won't have time. You are allowed one personal day the entire semester—yes, you read that right. This program is no joke, so if you're prone to being late and slacking off, you have a wide awakening ahead of you. The staff takes teaching Arabic incredibly seriously, and they expect that level of dedication in return—which brings me to the language pledge.

Yes, the language pledge is hard. No, you will not suffer the whole semester because of it. You'll

learn a lot of Arabic in a short period of time if you use it daily, crazy right? While the reason behind the pledge is pretty straightforward and is only there to help you, I understand it's hard to imagine only speaking Arabic for a semester. (The language pledge for the Internship program is more relaxed, but your Arabic suffers for it). It's especially hard to form friendships with other students when you don't have a wide range of vocabulary, but it gets easier over time and you can bond over your collective struggle. Sometimes the struggle isn't a collective one though.

Studying abroad in Jordan can be lonely at times, especially for students with mental illnesses.

Culture shock and mental illness are not a fun pair, which can make it hard to succeed academically. As expected, my depression worsened when I came to Jordan, so I sought for help before things got out of control. The CET staff tries their best to provide support within the limitations of Jordan's mental health services. GeoBlue, CET students' insurance plan, only fully covers two psychiatrists in Amman. I went to both of these psychiatrists, and did not have success with either of them. My roommate had a similar experience, and later decided to leave the program early for mental health reasons. While CET is up-front about the lack of mental health resources available in Jordan, students with mental illnesses should not miss out on learning Arabic in Jordan if that's what they really want. It is best to equip yourself with the things that will help you get through rough patches prior to coming, whether that's medication or other forms of coping. With that, I'll share some of the coping mechanisms that I found helpful during my time.

1. Be open with your loved ones back home about how you're feeling, but don't close off from the people physically present. An occasional Skype or FaceTime can be just what you need, or it can leave you missing home more. It's important to strike a balance between being present with the people around you going through a similar experience, and communicating with the people back home who know you best.
2. Explore parts of the city you haven't ventured to before—Amman is huge. I particularly think it can be helpful to visit more Western-influenced areas, especially if you're missing home. Places like Weibdeh and Rainbow Street generally embrace Westerners and Western culture more.
3. Take a break from studies and do low-stress activities. Re-watch episodes of your favorite TV show (check to see if your school offers a VPN so you can watch US Netflix and Hulu!). Play some cards with friends at a nearby café. Make yourself some comfort food. Discover new music on Spotify.
4. Allow yourself to process culture shock or whatever struggle you are facing. If you need to cry, let it flow! Go through the emotions you need to. Don't make yourself feel bad for not being happy and grateful 24/7.

I sincerely hope my experience can help prospective students make an informed decision about studying abroad with CET Jordan, and if it's for you, I hope you can revisit this coping mechanism list (if needed) and give it a shot. Insha'Allah you will make the best decision for you!