

Studying abroad in Amman as an Arab-American

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Who is the intended audience(s) for your Perspective Piece?: “Heritage Students; Arabs; Muslims”

I came into the CET Jordan: Internship program with meaningful stakes and an identity heavily rooted in Jordan. I am an Iraqi-American, first-generation immigrant born in Irbid, Jordan. I have extended family members in Amman and As Sult. My family and I spent the first year of my life in Irbid and Amman. I feel a spiritual connection to Jordan, as it is my birthplace, a second home for my family, and merely hours away from my homeland of Iraq. Yet, I also have a very distinct Iraq-American identity that shows the second I open my mouth anywhere in Jordan. If you are also an Arab-American of a different dialect than Jordanian/Palestinian, you will feel this.

Being in Jordan is like being so close to home, with everyone around you reminding you of your cousins, your Khaltoos, your Amoos, your Jido. But also being in Jordan as an Arab-American of different origin means Jordanians can tell you are not from there. It has its perks. I felt like I could handle myself in social settings and with local staff better than other students because I had the same cultural background. I share the traditions and norms that Jordanians do. After all, we are all Arab. But I am also not Jordanian, so my dialect made me stick out as an Iraqi. Fortunately, Jordanians adore Iraq and are some of the kindest and most welcoming people. I have not met a single Jordanian who has not said something to me about how much Iraq is loved by Jordanians.

As an Arab-American, my experience also had some challenges. They are two pronged. One stemming from expectations of me as an Arab woman. I was expected to adhere to the same norms as other Arabs from Jordanians in general, and especially as a woman. It was not something outright, but it was something I felt because I was perceived as Iraqi by Jordanians and not as American—unless I asserted that identity, which is not something I would like to do because it is not an identity I am especially proud of.

The second challenge stemmed from fellow CET American students. If you are Arab American or even a person of color in this program, you will notice that it is very, very whitewashed, and that will pose issues of cultural insensitivity. I was annoyed and, at times, exceptionally offended and angry due to particular culturally insensitive behaviors from fellow CET students. These behaviors include, but are not limited to disrespecting/ignoring cultural standards in living spaces to full frontal, long-term cultural appropriation. As an Arab-American, you will face challenges in this program that are unique to you as an Arab. The others in this program do not have the stakes you have and may disrespect your culture and not

care about doing so. It is really disappointing, but it comes naturally in predominantly white spaces. It is up to you to choose how you want to confront that.

Overall, I have adored my time in Jordan in the CET: Internship Program. The on-site staff, teachers, and Jordanians all over have made me feel so welcome and have made my time worth every minute. With the exception of some fellow CET students, I have seen nothing but hospitality, graciousness, and love in my time in Jordan. Being Arab-American has made my time so much more worthwhile as I have had the privilege of connecting to my roots, culture, and mother tongue. I have never felt more proud of my Arab identity.