

A Middle Eastern Adventure- Tyler Rice
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It was the first time I ever held a passport in my hand, the first time I've ever seen the ocean from the air, and the first time I ever stepped foot in a country where I was a minority and the most spoken language was English. There were many firsts on my international learning experience this past summer in the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan. After landing in the Queen Alia Airport, Amman, Jordan I came to the realization that the experience was going to provide eye-opening experiences like I had never seen.

After what seemed like a long, harrowing taxi ride to the Red Rose Hotel we settled into what would be our home for the next three weeks. Quickly the emphasis of the class, soils, was brought to the forefront of minds because of the sudden dust clouds that would rise from the desert-like landscape and the streets of Amman.

Our group was made up of eight undergraduate students and our professor Kathryn Butler. The class that preceded our international adventure in the Middle East was dubbed "Soils, Civilizations, and Societies", also SOILS 497U. The focus of our class was on the way that

mankind has affected and shaped the soils that we find around the globe today. Discussion in the class also drew out the way that soil perceivably shaped the rise, fall, and vitality of civilizations.

Jordan is a country that has been cultivated, conquered, and culturally constructed by many different peoples coming from every direction. It is central and strategically located in religious, social, and resource-driven circles. Our group was able to see the many effects that societies throughout the ages had on this region. We traveled through the North-West and the Jordan Valley, part of the North-East desert, through the Central Region of Jordan, and South to the Arabian Desert.

We were able to visit several different agricultural production sites. These included: an organic vineyard, a date farm and processing center, a vegetable farm, several olive and fig groves, and a sewage waste treatment facility/alfalfa hay farm. Whenever in rural areas we witnessed from a distance sustainable ag systems, irrigation techniques, a state-run dairy farm and processing plant, hundreds of hectares of dryland wheat, and small goat herders. One especially enlightening times was a meeting we were able to have with the Minister of Agriculture. We soon learned that water was a precious resource to all who lived in the region. Several times we stayed in tent campgrounds or lodges which were provided by the Royal Society of the Conservation of Nature. These sites highlighted the rich ecological and cultural uniqueness that the country had to offer.



Aaron and I in discussion at the Ministry of Agriculture

Monica and I taking a moment to laugh while determining soil characteristics in between vine rows.



I was not only interested in the agricultural and environmental aspects of the course but also the history most associated with the Judeo-Christian heritage. All throughout our group's journey throughout the Holy land I took special interest in sites such as Mount Nebo, Bethany, Gilead, Gadara, the Golan Heights and Lake Galilee, as well as others.



Trying out my musical abilities in a foreign land.

Of course recreation was part of the experience. We had the opportunity to float in the Dead Sea, take several hikes and off-road drives through the majestic wadis (valleys), take in the sites at Petra, and ride a camel. It is especially interesting to note that our diet the entire three weeks was much different than it would be in the Western world. We ate a lot of chicken, unleavened bread, hummus, cucumbers, tomatoes, figs, dates, olives, watermelon, cheese, yogurt, and some lamb.



Our entire group takes advantage of a photo opportunity while on a hike through agricultural village Adjlun.

Overall this trip will always bring to mind the endless opportunity that Penn-State is able to provide for their students, especially in the College of Agriculture. I enjoyed it thoroughly and took note of something new every day. When our guide, Raed, told us “Yalla” (let’s go) at the end of the day we were generally not disappointed.