

Soils 497U: A Journey through Jordan

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This past May after a semester of studying ancient agricultural practices and how they evolved over the years, my Soils 497U class set off on the adventure of a lifetime. We flew nearly twelve hours before landing in Amman, Jordan, where we spent the next few days. Over the next three weeks, I saw so many different types of environments and ways of living that it was hard to believe we were exploring a country only the size of Indiana. From the crowded cities of Amman, to the ancient abandoned cities of Gerasa and Umm Qais, to the vast desert of the Wadi Rum, to the wetlands of Azraq, we saw everything. I felt that I learned a great deal about the history of the Middle East and ancient agriculture while comparing it to modern practices. We learned by actually meeting with farmers and local business owners, as well as higher officials in the Ministry of Agriculture.



Me in Amman at the Citadel

While in Jordan, we studied ancient civilizations as one component of the class. We visited ancient Stone and Bronze Age cities, as well as areas conquered and developed by the Romans and later Christian Crusaders. We learned a great deal about Muslim and Christian history by visiting important



The Schreyer Scholars at a desert castle

sites for both religions. I felt I also learned a great deal about modern Muslims by interacting with various guides and seeing the Mosques everywhere. Our tour guide, Raed, was extremely helpful in answering all of our questions about anything in Jordan and seemed to

literally know everything! It was really cool to think that we were in one of the areas where agriculture first started and unbelievable to see how the landscape has changed. It seemed like many of the areas had once been lush farms but were now desert.



Me at the Vineyard

For the agricultural component of our class, we visited many modern farms and discussed their practices in depth. My favorite visit was to a Jordanian vineyard near the border of Syria. We met with the owner to discuss what types of sustainable practices he was using. For irrigation, he had created a large reservoir stocked with fish to add nitrogen content. He was completely organic and even

released native species to help deal with insect problems. We felt very welcomed there as they did everything they could to make us feel welcome. We also visited a large date farm which was really cool to see, especially with its intense security measures.

To study agriculture in Jordan's modern society, we visited with the Minister of Agriculture to discuss modern conservation efforts and Jordan's problems with water resources. It was a high honor to meet with such an important individual and listen to him answer our questions about Jordanian practices. Jordan faces similar issues to any country with a water shortage, but it has the additional problem of the

Dead Sea drying up due to using ninety percent of the water in the Jordan River for irrigation.

Traveling the entire country, we got to see many different aspects of the society, from the city of Amman to the tents of the Bedouins. We visited the tent of a Bedouin family to learn about how they herd goats. We also visited the home of a



The Bedouin family we visited

prominent family in Ajloun, where we had a traditional meal sitting on the floor.

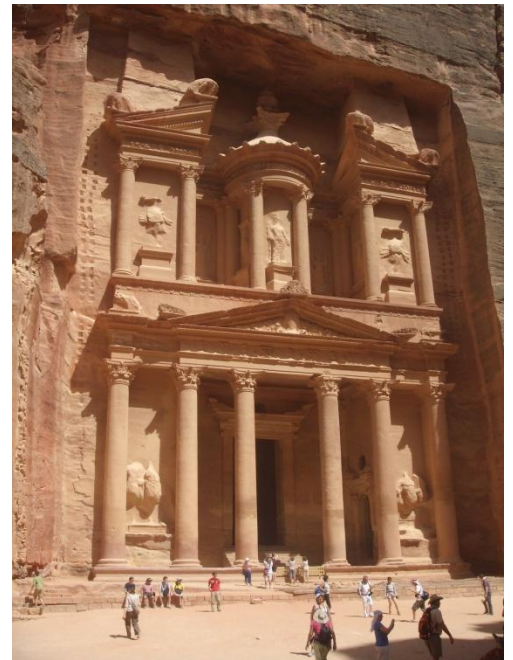


Me on a camel safari in the Wadi Rum

In order to further appreciate the environment of Jordan and support the ecotourism industry, we also went on several very fun hikes and visited the Dead Sea. The Dead Sea was so amazing and fun. We had a good time floating in the water and playing in the famous Dead Sea mud, as well as picking up salt crystals off the beach. We then went on

a hike through the Mujib River Canyon where we actually we were walking knee-deep in water through a narrow, very beautiful canyon. We actually repelled down a 66 foot waterfall partway through! It was really scary but fun. We also went on a seven-hour hike through a desert-like area. Another of the most amazing parts of the trip was our time in the Wadi Rum desert. It was so beautiful there and full of cool formations. We even got to go on a camel safari there! Another really cool part of the trip was our visit to Petra. It was so hot when we were there, but it was amazing to see the Treasury Building carved into the wall of the canyon. I made sure to watch *Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade* when I got home to see it in the movie.

Overall, this trip was one of the most amazing experiences of my life and I will certainly never forget it. This was the first time I ever flew overseas, and I never expected to go somewhere so unusual. I felt like this trip really opened up my eyes to the Middle East and helped me to understand how agriculture developed to the way it is today. I definitely want to go back someday.



Treasury Building at Petra