

Kelcey Grogan

SOILS 497 U

## Jordan Journal

Spending three weeks in Jordan was the longest amount of time I have spent abroad so far. I enjoyed being immersed in another country and culture. It not only gave me the chance to see the sites, but it also gave me the opportunity to learn about the people, the landscape, and their way of life. Those three weeks were jam packed. We were constantly on the go, but it really ensured that we saw as much of the country as possible.



*Our group in the Jordanian Minister of Agriculture's Office after meeting with the Minister, who left before the photo was taken.*

It is hard for me to pick one memory or activity that really stands out. There are so many great experiences: repelling through the waterfall, 14 kilometer hike to Dana Nature Reserve, my dress fitting in Amman, our camel ride through the desert, off-roading with Basam, Mahmoud, and Amir. Some of my favorite memories were our conversations with the Jordanian people. I loved eating lunch and talking with the family in Orjan. Or, getting insights into a young woman's life through Suhair. I believe that often in modern American culture we can misunderstand or misrepresent their culture and beliefs. Suhair really helped me to understand that it is founded in respect. I appreciated how much they value family, and remain close with their immediate and extended family.



*Our group with our delightful & insightful tour guide Suhair, who is the first person standing on the left.*

I also enjoyed whenever we stayed at the sites operated by the Royal Society for the Conservation of Nature. Their mission “Helping People . . . Helping Nature” is doing a lot to help both the environment and the communities in Jordan. For each nature reserve they set up, they try to ensure that the communities are provided for by establishing programs that give the women and men opportunities to earn money and learn valuable skills. As a Community, Environment, and Development major, I appreciated that they made sure to incorporate members of the local community into their operations.



*Local women working in the jewelry shop at one of the RSCN sites.*

One of my favorite memories from the trip was our fourteen kilometer hike from the Wadi Feynan Eco Lodge to the Dana Nature Reserve. It was long, hot, and strenuous, but it was a great feeling of accomplishment when we finally reached the top. The desert scenery

was beautiful. I would often stop just to take in the surrounding beauty of the mountains. The landscapes in Jordan are so varied; it is difficult to capture their beauty in photographs. A picture could not fully capture the varied colors and textures of the high mountains and desert plains.



*Our fourteen kilometer hike through the desert.*

Our guide for this hike was from the local Bedouin community. He was a great leader on the hike; the heat barely bothered him. Because he was from the area, he was able to inform us about the local culture as well as the local plants and animals. After we had been hiking for about two hours, we stopped in his family's tent where we were treated to a cup of tea. His family was welcoming and hospitable. Sitting in their tent, surrounded by their goats and the wilderness, I truly realized for the first time how difficult

their way of life is. As nomads, they travel with the seasons. They lack access to adequate nutrition, housing, and healthcare facilities. Their limited source of income comes from their goats. Each day is a struggle. Their lives stood in sharp contrast to the ostentatious wealth often on display in Amman.



*A typical Bedouin tent, that house both people and animals in the same room.*

I am so thankful that I had the opportunity to travel to Jordan. It was a rare opportunity to experience the Middle East. Before our trip, I knew little about Jordan. Now, I have come to appreciate the varied landscapes across the country. It was enjoyable to learn the rich history and see the ancient ruins. Most of all, I relished the chance to gain a better understanding of the complexities and tradition of the Muslim and Middle-Eastern cultures.