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Middle Eastern Memories

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After traveling 32 hours across three continents, I arrived in Jordan. I traveled to the Arabian Peninsula in mid-May last year to partake in Columbia University's Summer Ecosystems Experience for Undergraduates (SEE-U) Program where I spent five weeks studying water management, sustainable dry-land agriculture, and conservation biology. It was not only the field of study that attracted me to the program, but also the adventure of traveling to a country so far from home. Over the course of the program, we traveled to a number of Jordanian cities, including Amman, Ajloun, Jerash, Dana, Petra, Aqaba, and Madaba, where I formed a number of unforgettable memories. For example, I snorkeled amongst lionfish, clownfish, and other colorful sea life in the Red Sea; floated in the Dead Sea, where the current pulled my body across the warm, oily water; rode a camel in Petra fearing that its wobbly, pencil-like legs would break under my weight; explored ancient Roman ruins in Jerash and Amman; and haggled in the souks, surrounded by a myriad of beautiful fabrics, jewelry, and handicrafts. While these are only a number of memories I cherish, I am most nostalgic for the cultural experiences I had while in the Middle Eastern nation. I miss the smell of crisp, rounded falafels as they sizzled in metallic vats on street corners in Madaba—their fumes wafting through the air, choking the street vendors who fashioned them. I miss the trancelike sounds associated with the Islamic calls to prayer—the pious chanting bounced off the walls of grand ravines, causing them to echo throughout Amman, Ajloun, and Dana. I miss the faint sound of goats being herded in the rural Bedouin villages in which we stayed—the sounds of *baaaahs* and bells growing louder in the evenings. I miss the sea of red dunes that blanketed Wadi Rum. Lastly, I miss the minarets, which glowed green each night against the backdrop of a million stars. Studying abroad in Jordan through the SEE-U Program not only allowed me to study a discipline that I am passionate about, but also to experience another region of the world I would have not visited otherwise. Although I spent only five weeks in Jordan, I long to return to that otherworldly land.

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