

Here's my Study Abroad Story

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Major: Philosophy, Politics and Economics (PPE)

Program: I participated in IES Abroad's program in Rabat, the capital city of Morocco. After a two week orientation in the city of Fez, we settled into Rabat for the remainder of the semester. I took courses in beginning Arabic, North African politics, Islam in Morocco, and gender in North Africa. All my classes were at the IES Center, which had several classrooms, wi-fi, and most importantly, air conditioning. The classes themselves were in English, but they were taught by English-speaking Moroccan professors. My program also arranged for us to go on several trips: a weekend in the Sahara desert, a weekend in the Middle Atlas mountains, and a trip to southern Spain to study Moorish culture.

Typical Day: On a typical day, I would wake up around 7:15, get dressed, and head downstairs for breakfast prepared by my host mother, Batoul. Usually breakfast consisted of bread with butter, honey, and apricot jam and either coffee or Moroccan mint tea. After breakfast, I would start the 25 minute walk through the medina and city to class at the IES Center. Usually, the merchants in the medina were just setting up shop and traffic was busy as people arrived downtown for work. After Arabic class in the morning, I would head over to my favorite cafe, Cafe Al-Atlal, which was about two blocks from the center. There, I would enjoy an almond croissant and an espresso while reading for class, catching up on email, or just relaxing with my friends. After breakfast, I would go back to the center to meet with friends and do something during the early afternoon, like surf, shop in the medina, or go to the grocery store. For lunch, I either ate the lunch my host mother packed for me or grabbed a panini or sandwich from one of the many restaurants. After more class in the later afternoon, I would return home for afternoon tea.



In the evening, I would exercise, start my homework, or visit the *hammam*--since showers weren't readily available, I found it easier to visit the *hammam* every few days rather than shower daily. Dinner would often be "tajine" (a Moroccan pseudo-stew...delicious!) or perhaps a spice noodle dish. After dinner, I would finish my homework and go over to a friend's house to relax on his rooftop and watch over the city.

Highlights: Visiting the Middle Atlas, which hasn't seen the economic development of the coastal regions, was a simultaneously trying but rewarding experience. The scenery and people were truly remarkable, so much so that I went back individually on multiple occasions. My favorite large city was Tangier -I loved its mix of European, African, and Arab culture and following the footsteps of expat writers. Finally, nothing, absolutely nothing can compare to staring out over the vast expanse of the Sahara from atop a 600 foot sand dune at night.

Challenges: If you are a serious neat freak, Morocco is not the place for you. Like most developing countries, it lacks the infrastructure and tidiness that one might be used to. If you love adventure, you will get your fill and then some. If you expect stores to be open when they say they will, taxis to take you where you want to go, and restaurants to have flush toilets, then Morocco will take some adjusting.

Advice? Challenge yourself! Wherever you study abroad, make sure it's somewhere that stimulates your sense of adventure. Get out of your comfort zone. Seriously, get out of it. You will come away from your study abroad experience many times better off if you do.

