

# Here's my Study Abroad Story

**Ari Davis**

## **SIT Jordan: Modernization and Social Change Amman, Jordan**

**Major:** International Relations

**Program:** Studying abroad in the SIT Jordan: Modernization and Social Change program was a life changing experience that helped me to become more aware and understanding of the Middle East and the world as a whole. I built meaningful connections with locals and my host family that will stay with me for years to come.

The SIT program is awesome not only because it connects you with loving host families, but also because it helps immerse you in the culture in every way possible. SIT sponsors trips all over Jordan: to the Dead Sea, the ancient city of Petra (think Indiana Jones & the Last Crusade), Wadi Rum, and a rural homestay with the Bedouin. Additionally, we took a trip to Cairo, Egypt, which was especially interesting to see post-revolution.

The thing that really sets the SIT program apart is the ISP (Independent Study Project). For one month students research a topic of their interest and write a 30+ page paper on it. This period gives you independence like no other program does. It allows you to pursue something that interests you, whether it is cultural or political. The SIT program sets you up with the resources (connections, translators, funding) to help make your project a reality. They'll work to connect you with whomever you want to meet: Ministers in government, religious leaders, professionals, CEOs, NGO heads; the opportunities are endless.

**Typical Day:** During the school week I developed a routine that was actually somewhat similar to the one I have in the States. On a typical day I woke up, ate some humus and bread, walked to school (30 min walk). I had 2 hours of Arabic class, and then an hour lunch break where I would usually walk to the local circle and eat Shawarma.



Then I had two hours of a lecture/discussion that generally consisted of a Jordanian professor or professional talking about politics or culture. In the evening I would generally work out, eat dinner with the family, and then either spend the night in with the family or go out to local coffee shop and play cards with friends. On the weekends I usually traveled around the area or explored Amman with friends.

**Highlights:** The rural homestay with the Bedouin was a wild experience simply because it was so different from anything I have ever known. In the five days I was there I went rabbit hunting, slept under the stars near Petra, herded sheep, drank so much tea and ate Mansef (goat, rice and a yogurt-like sauce) with my hands.

Another highlight was going on camping adventures with a couple of friends. We did a two-day canyon hike (there was no trail) so we bush whacked and waded along a stream. It was probably the coolest hike I have ever done - no people for two days, hot springs, waterfalls and oases surrounded by steep canyon walls.

On another hiking trip we met a Sheppard who graciously invited us to eat dinner with him and sleep in his house.



**Challenges:** The hardest part of my experience in Jordan was in the second and third weeks after I had moved into my host family's apartment but still felt awkward and out of place. It was frustrating because I felt like I had no place to go and relax after classes. It took me a few weeks to fully adjust to the cultural differences and to feel comfortable and at ease in my new home. In the end though I adjusted to living with my new family and felt at home in their house. The connections I made with my family actually ended up being one of the highlights of my time in Jordan.

**Advice:** Go out and explore Amman, and Jordan as a whole. Go on trips without all the other SIT students and always say "yes" if a local invites you to do something. If you put yourself out there, locals will befriend you, show you around, maybe make you dinner and let you sleep at their home. Simply by getting out there I was invited into locals' homes for tea and dinner, to coffee shops and restaurants. I even got invited to an engagement and a graduation party by locals who I met while walking through the streets of Amman.