



Fez Study Abroad Summer 2023

Jaylen Bell

First Day Arrival

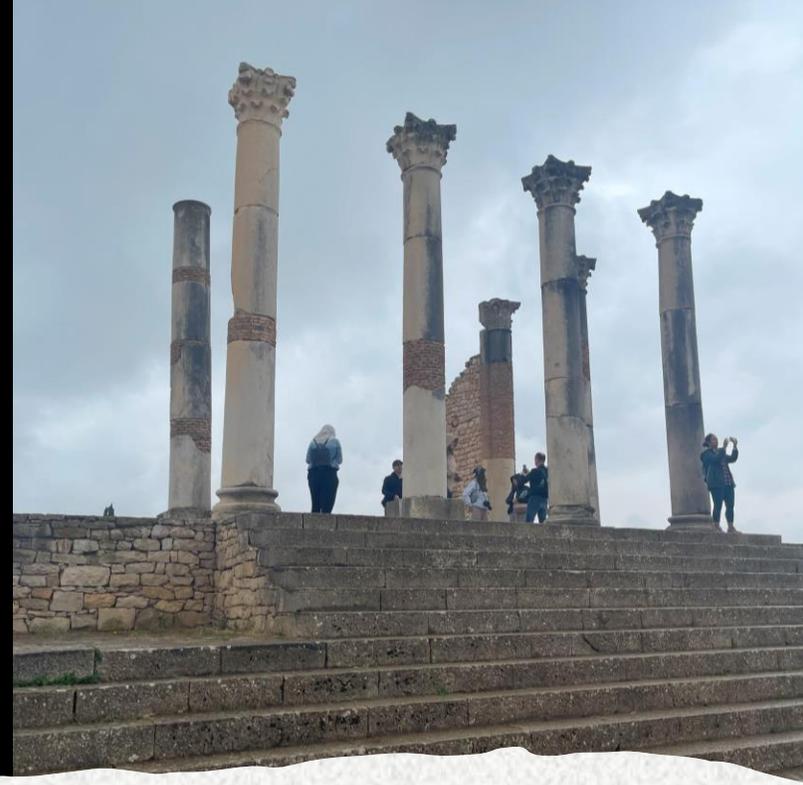
Meeting the Alif Academic Director Ahmed, The Excursion Coordinator Heather, and the Interns Mohammed and Meryem, along with all the UF students





Reflection 1

My experience of Morocco so far has been very good. The first day I arrived was very tiring because I had to take two flights with a layover in between and then ride the train from Casa Blanca to Fez which took four hours. Although the train ride was long, the views of the landscape and mountains were beautiful. Arriving in Fez that night was a great first night because I met up with the other UF students and two of the Moroccan interns from Alif, Mohammed, and Mariam, and they were warm and welcoming. The Fusha classes and studying are challenging because we are moving very quickly with difficult subjects like grammar, fronted predicate, subject, and lots of new vocabulary words. The professors Khadija and Najib are very helpful though, so they are helping me understand everything little by little. My favorite class though is Darija class because the professor Nawoul is very fun and energetic, and I am motivated to learn Darija to speak with the Moroccans. So far, my interactions with the Moroccans when going out has been very difficult due to my limitations with Darija and Fusha. My host family is great, and they make me feel very welcome, and the funny thing is that the best English speaker in the house is the ten-year-old granddaughter of my host mother, who can speak English, French, and Arabic! My favorite parts so far besides my host family have been the food and the little bit of soccer I have played with the local children in the streets. The streets, however, are very confusing, and it's easy to get lost, in fact, I only know how to go from my host family's house in the old medina to the taxi station and back. The local Moroccans have to me that it takes them a couple years while they are children to learn how to navigate the medina. The most surreal experience I have had so far is without a doubt when I went to the mosque with my Moroccan language exchange partner to pray on Friday. Although I am not a Muslim, he told me to just copy him and focus when I pray and the rest will happen naturally, and he was right, and I prayed for my family and was happy with the experience. I hope in the following weeks my Darija improves to the point I can have basic conversations with my host family and the Moroccan locals by the end of the trip, and that I can elevate my comprehension of Fusha dramatically too, inshallah.



وليلي/Volubilis

Reflection 2

Since the day I completed my second reflection, my time in Morocco has still been great. Although I am still very limited in what I can say, I am slowly but surely improving my darija in simple conversations. For example, I am gaining confidence when buying food at the shops and stores. I have also been taking the opportunity to practice speaking every morning when I take a taxi from the old medina to the ALIF American Center, and even though I speak in a strange mix of Fusha and darija, the taxi drivers are still very friendly and can understand me. Unfortunately, there will be no more darija classes, but I will still try to learn more darija with my host family, my exchange partner, and all the Moroccans I interact with. My classes and studying are still very long, and we get assigned a lot of homework every night, and sometimes it is tough to finish it all. In the classes, the lessons are still hard, and we learn many new vocabulary words every day. To help deal with all the new words and hard lessons though, I have been trying to make the effort to always engage and participate in class and to not worry about making mistakes even if I sound silly trying. I know this is important because if I am afraid to make mistakes and do not put all my effort into learning, I will not master the amazing, but difficult language of Arabic. Outside of the classroom, I had another surreal experience when I prayed in the Qarrawuine Mosque. Without a doubt, this was the biggest and most beautiful place of worship I have ever been inside, and I hope to one day visit the biggest mosque in Morocco in Casablanca inshallah.





My favorite snack: Sfenj

Only 20 cents!!!

Reflection 3

This week of my study abroad experience was my favorite thus far, mainly because of the trip to the Sahara desert. The trip was long and took roughly 10 hours including stops to eat and use the restroom, but there was plenty of scenery along the way to make the time go by faster. During the drive, the landscape was initially lush green forests, and we drove by a beautiful town named Ifran, which reminded of Switzerland, and within a couple miles of this town was a prestigious private university along with one of the King's palaces. As we reached the halfway point in the drive, the landscape transformed into more a savannah with less vegetation, but there were mountains alongside of us the whole way. As we finally reached the last couple hours of the drive, the landscape changed again into an arid desert, with a large stretch of it being volcanic black. The hotel we stayed at was nice, and we all swam together. While at the hotel, I once again experienced a funny moment when I went to talk with the girl who worked the reception desk, because she spoke to me in Darija at first assuming that I was Moroccan since I have a brown complexion. It would be funny and also mean a lot to me if one day I will be able to speak enough Darija to be able to convince the local Moroccans that I am one of them. Of course, the camel ride was really enjoyable, but Nathaniel's (Mashallah) camel scared all of us when the camel hilariously through a temper tantrum and made a really loud grunting noise since it did not want to kneel down for Nathaniel to ride him, so the Amazight guide had to force the camel down. Without a doubt, this was my favorite part of the trip so far, and I hope that the trip to Chefchaouen this weekend will be as fun.





Sahara Experience

Week 4 Reflection

Week four of my Morocco experience was arguably the best so far. My studies are still hard, but I am becoming more comfortable with my new teachers and gaining confidence. The weekend was what made this week so enjoyable though because we travelled to Chefchaouen and Akshour. The blue city was much smaller than I expected, especially when viewing the city from a higher point on the mountains that surround it. Nonetheless, the city was still beautiful, and the interesting cultural difference that I observed was that instead of the local Moroccans speaking to us foreigners in French, they would speak in Spanish. My favorite part of Chefchaouen was when we trekked up the mountain to view the whole city from the Spanish Mosque. Chefchaouen was great, but the best part of the weekend was the hike in Akshour. After hiking up the beautiful path surrounded by mountains and waterfalls, we reached the springs, and all swam together. Although the water was really cold, it helped everyone cope with the heat, which has been extremely high lately, with temperatures as high as 110 degrees! While most things have been going well lately, I did have one incident that was disappointing. While I was spending time with my host family at their house, I accidentally elbowed a piece of furniture holding several vases and sculptures, which caused the sculpture to fall and break. Of course, they refused and said it was no problem and that I do not have to replace it. To make it up to them, I insisted and promised to take my host mother to the souq on a day when I have free time and buy a new sculpture for her. Without understanding them most of the time, it feels like I am becoming a part of the family.





Chefchauen
and Akshoor

