

Exchange Location: American University of Sharjah, United Arab Emirates
Major: International Studies
Dates: Spring 2016 January 31 to May 28

Preparation for Exchange:

Having been undecided between an exchange to Malaysia, Turkey, or the United Arab Emirates, I consider myself to quite lucky to have been able to visit the American University of Sharjah located in the United Arab Emirates. Prior to my departure, I thoroughly researched trip preparation guidelines through the host university's website as well as through various online trip advisory sources. This research was most definitely valuable information that allowed me to pack the necessary items needed for the cultural environment and climate of Sharjah. When packing, it is essential to include mainly light weight and loose clothing that will help in remaining cool in such a warm and humid climate. It is also crucial to remember that the cultural and legal norms of the United Arab Emirates require individuals to dress modestly, covering up to the shoulders and knees at all times. Coming from a Middle Eastern and Muslim background, complying with these cultural regulations was not as difficult for me as it was for other students coming from other regions around the globe. With this, it is quite useful to have a warmer set of clothing, such as a sweater, on hand if travelling to Sharjah during the winter months.

Upon arrival to either Dubai International Airport or Sharjah International for the orientation processes. During the week of orientation, exchange students were invited to talks hosted by the IXO Exchange Office advisors who provided information regarding Emirati culture, university rules and regulations, as well as

providing tips and advice on how to have the best study abroad experience. From my experience on an academic standpoint, while the lecture formats and schedules were quite similar to SFU, the university's grading system held a passing grade of 70%, making classes much more competitive and driving students to adopt much more rigorous studying techniques. Students should also keep in mind that a greater emphasis on respect towards persons in positions of authority is placed, both within the university and the country overall. Students should refrain from initiating or contributing to political conversations that may be directed at the country's political system and elite. This in fact, is considered a criminal offense and may negatively impact the student's exchange experience. Respect is a significant pillar of Emirati culture and law and should be upheld in all situations.

The yearlong high temperatures and humidity of the country often limit the potential for various extra curricular activities; however, this depends on an individual's environmental preference and pastime interests. Throughout the semester, volunteers and advisors at the exchange office will organize tours of the city as well as various entertaining trips and activities. The exchange group visited the majority of tourist spots in various Emirates in the Spring 2016 semester, as well as organizing a trip to the neighbouring Sultanate of Oman. Aside from these activities, students may visit the countless malls and indoor entertainment facilities, as well as many beaches and waterparks across the country. The weekend begins on Friday and ends on Saturday; this can be quite confusing at the beginning of the semester, but will ultimately become routine. Reflecting upon my experience, the malls in the UAE hold countless areas for entertainment including skating rinks, aquariums, amusement parks, and more. There are also numerous clubs and extra curricular opportunities within the university and on campus that exchange students are encouraged to take part in.

Reflection After Exchange:

Although I found my study abroad experience in the United Arab Emirates to have been quite pleasant, there are a few things that I would have appreciated knowing prior to my exchange. Students considering to study abroad in the American University of Sharjah should firstly keep in mind that although there are ATMs located across the campus, housing and accommodation payments are often paid in cash in the first few weeks upon arrival. Those who have withdrawal limits on their Debit or Credit cards should plan ahead, in order to have enough cash to make the required payments on time. Moreover, students should keep in mind that they might not necessarily be able to uphold their initial budget, as agBDCor,ds204) 16(an63(s243.902

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