



Al Ain may be rather quiet, but Dubai is just down the road — the author in front of some recent architecture.

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Between Desert Tribes and Deluxe Hotels: Studying Arabic in the UAE

By Leila Al Khatib, Marburg, Germany

The moment I stepped out of the airport in Abu Dhabi, a breeze of damp air welcomed me in the country that would become my new place of study for the following two semesters. As had been agreed between my university in Marburg/Germany and the United Arab Emirates University (UAEU), an intensive Arabic language course was scheduled for me in the first semester, which was to be followed by me taking regular courses and attending lectures at the university in the second semester.

During the first weeks after my arrival in Al Ain, the *Garden City* of the United Arab Emirates, I was busy dealing with the unknown and exciting surroundings I came upon. My Arabic course, consisting of only two students including myself, claimed my entire attention and dedication from the very beginning. Once more I discovered that the Arabic language - especially the vocabulary - is like an ocean that seems to be incredibly deep. Nevertheless, I profited to a great extent from my patient and competent teacher, who managed to provide the daily four hours of tuition with the necessary variation and learning effect.



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Palm trees and attention to architectural detail enrich student life at UAEU. © Leila Al Khatib

As a city, Al Ain has to be described as an accessible and quiet place. Due to its location close to the Omani border, trips to the surrounding areas are recommended and worthwhile, since they offer a change of scenery, which can be convenient against the backdrop of the routine that students are exposed to sometimes at the hostels. Now and then, I feel exhausted having to cope with the habits and characteristics of the foreign society, for example facing the situation of the expatriates working in all kinds of fields and making up 80 % of the country's population . But recalling my long-term aims, I then focus again on gaining experience that I can learn so much from for my personal and academic future, following the American author Mark Twain, who once said: "Travel is fatal to prejudice, bigotry, and narrow-mindedness." We should all foster this fatality!

Leila Al Khatib majors in Middle Eastern Studies at Philipps-Universität Marburg and is currently spending a year at UAE University in Al Ain.

Full Cultural Immersion at UAE University

By Fidel Bartholdy, Marburg, Germany

As an Oriental studies major at Phillips-Universität in Marburg/Germany, I have been studying at United Arab Emirates University (UAEU) in Al Ain for one semester. Since my studies here consist of an intensive Arabic course, my main goal in this semester has been the improvement of my Arabic language skills, having already studied the language for four semesters in Germany. Each day in class at UAEU brings up a new challenge, whether it is the creative writing of a letter, the translation of a newspaper article or a dictation. My teacher is very motivated and supports the development of new skills with the right mix of severity and amicable patience so that after only three months, there is already significant progress. Regarding the university administration, I felt welcomed from the very beginning when a personal driver picked me up from the airport in Dubai and gave me the first instructions and tips for life in the UAE.

Also, my stay at a student hostel turned out to be uncomplicated and easy. The social network at the hostel is strong, and I was integrated in the community from the first moment, so it was no problem for me that I was, except for one other German, the only Western student at my hostel. I got to know strict rules and learnt how to behave in a society where certain values and a certain behavior are expected. Especially this experience of being thrown into a different world with different ideas and values offered me lessons in intercultural understanding and also confronted me with limits of understanding. The immersion into a completely new cultural life widened my horizon to a great extent, while I became even more aware of my own cultural roots and my personal values. The intercultural experience was and continues to be the most challenging part of my time at UAE University, which has been enriching in many ways and of which I would not want to miss a single day. My DAAD scholarship not only provided a sizable part of the required financial budget, but the DAAD staff in Abu Dhabi have also offered support in the organization of my university enrolment. *Felix Bartholdy majors in Middle Eastern Studies at Phillips-Universität Marburg. He spent the fall of 2011 at UAE University in Al Ain.*



The author — fully immersed © Fidel Bartholdy