Qatar Study Abroad

Studying abroad in Qatar Spring semester was one of the best decisions I made throughout college. Qatar is a new center for the modern oil and gas industry, so as a petroleum engineering student, I was able to better my understanding of the industry and learn about the foreign fields. Going to school with the local students was beneficial, because we were able to learn from each other both about the coursework and our home countries. The students in my classes had an entirely different experience in the A&M petroleum engineering program, and they were interested to know about ours. The students were friendly and welcoming to us, and the small classes were a good environment for learning. I felt closer to my professors and utilized their vast knowledge of the international industry many times.

Outside of school, we got the chance to do things we could never do in College Station like go dune bashing in the desert, ride on a dhow cruise and eat the local food at the Souq Waqif. Many of the events and trips were planned by study abroad coordinators, but we were more or less free to do as we pleased in our spare time. The professors generally understood when we went to travel or had family in town; they understood that we were studying abroad and supported us when we wanted to experience the culture. We were able to take weekend trips to other countries we would probably never go to from the US. Working in the tutoring center, OASIS helped us to meet the other students and earn some spending money on the side.

Homesickness, though, was a natural reaction to the vastly different culture in Qatar. Living in the dorms again with no easy form of transportation at times got frustrating. In many ways, it was difficult to feel at home and comfortable in a place where everything is so different. We did not have the freedoms we were used to, and the language barrier didn’t help either. The eleven of us who were studying abroad helped each other and formed a community of support, because we were all going
through the same thing at one time or another. Being away from home for four months would be hard on anyone, regardless of the place.

The experience was unforgettable, and I would highly recommend it to anyone willing to go with an open mind. I met wonderful people, both study abroad students and locals, and I got to see parts of the world I never thought I would. Four months, in my opinion is the perfect amount of time to feel immersed and truly learn the culture without being away from home for too long. I feel very lucky to have gotten this opportunity to learn so much about my industry and the Middle East at such a young age.
Qatar

My name is Brady Lain and I spent the spring 2013 semester in Doha, Qatar studying abroad at Texas A&M Qatar. This past semester was filled with many unexpected surprises, both good and bad, but overall, I had an amazing experience.

Qatar is one of the most distinct places that I have ever been. From the traditional, Middle-Eastern Souq Waqif to the decadence and opulence of the Pearl, Qatar has a noticeable ambience. It is a place full of Middle Eastern culture, but the culture is not one that is overt, not one that forces itself upon you whenever you enter the country. Many of the ex-patriots who have been in the country for many years have never even been to a Qatari’s house. The separation between foreigners and citizens is one of the biggest differences that I noticed about the Middle East in general. The culture is one where it can be hard to make friends with a Qatari, but once you make a friend, he will be a friend for life.

Since Qatar is predominantly Islamic, it was hard for me to adjust to the Sharia law that was in effect. Because I am a Christian, I was faced with many difficulties that I have never had to deal with in my life. I have never had to censor the words that I say in order to be politically correct. It was just hard for me to live in a country where you can be thrown into prison for 5 years for sharing what you believe is true. That being said, I would not have been anywhere else. The benefits of living in another culture far outweighed any hardships or struggles that I had to deal with. In fact, besides not having Mexican food, Qatar was a very easy place for me to live. The pace of life is slower, the nation as a whole is extremely hospitable, and I even made some lifelong friends. It was also really amazing to be able to travel all over the world while I was there. From Oman to Turkey to Thailand to South Korea, I had some opportunities to travel that would have been impossible from College Station, Texas. One last great thing about the study abroad trip was that I was able to become really close with all of the other study
abroad kids from College Station. Because we were such a small group, we all really got to know each other and grow closer as friends.

The academics in Qatar were pretty similar to my experiences in College Station. Overall, the classes might have been a little bit easier in Qatar, but not enough to be extremely noticeable. The professors were really knowledgeable and for the most part were really good teachers. I took 18 credit hours when I was there and it wasn't too big of a load for me. I did have a little more free time because I wasn't involved with as many extra-curricular activities, so that was nice, but I filled that extra time with cultural activities and traveling instead. The class choices are a little bit more limited since there aren't as many students in each major, but I liked that because it allowed me to have the same classes as all of the other Petroleum Engineering juniors and get to know everyone.

Overall, my Qatar study abroad experience was an unforgettable experience and one that I will always cherish. From all of the late nights getting schawarma delivered to the dorms to all of the times just sitting around the campfire in the desert, there were a lot of great things that I did and a lot of amazing people that I met who impacted and changed me forever. I cannot wait until I am able to return someday and visit the country which holds such fond memories.
Aggie Engineers Taking On The World

Studying abroad in Qatar has easily been the best experience of my life. There are not enough ways to express how valuable the opportunity was, nor to explain how much of an impact it had on me. For starters, the chance to be able to meet new people was unbelievable. Meeting so many different people from all over the world, not just Qatar, is truly special, and doing so at the age of a college student makes it even better. I was introduced to people from places I had not ever heard of, only to have them become very close friends. It’s easy to have the perception that people from the Middle East are different, and too different to befriend. However this was not the case in Qatar. The locals, as we liked to call them, the Qatari people, were some of the sweetest, most down to earth people I have ever met. They were very open to differences, always asking about America and about my own ethnic background as well. They were warm, friendly, and thoughtful. Being a woman, I thought I might not make many male friends since it is not common in the Qatari culture to befriend the opposite sex. However, I did become friends with my classmates, men and women. The women in my class were beyond caring, and were always making sure the study abroad kids were having a good experience in Qatar. The other students that were not Qatari, were from a broad spectrum of places. These people became good friends of ours too, always extending invitations to all sorts of events. I had the opportunity to embrace the culture to the fullest, and learn so much about the Middle East. This, I would not have gotten the experience to do anywhere else, or through any other program. That’s the beauty of being college students. We are all the same, regardless of where in the world we are. It was amazing to come to that realization.

School was of course challenging, as it would be on main campus. We had about 26 people in our classes, which was a very comfortable amount. It was very hands on, and it allowed for a lot of time for questions and examples with a professor. The professors knew you by name, and were always willing to help. They were easily understood, and very knowledgeable. We were able to develop a friendship with our professors, and I am still in contact with them for advice in my internship. They were always making sure the study abroad students were doing well, and that we were not getting homesick. It was very kind of them to always be aware of our wellbeing.

We also had the opportunity to work during our time in Qatar. We worked at The Oasis, a tutoring center inside Texas A&M at Qatar. We were tutoring younger students on basic subjects we had already mastered such as calculus, physics or foundations of engineering. We got to meet a lot of wonderful students, co-workers that were also students just like us, and the great staff. The staff even threw us a going away party at the end of the semester, and we were so grateful for their hospitality. It was also nice to have spending money while being there, and especially nice for traveling purposes.

Another perk of studying abroad was the location. The Middle East is an absolutely beautiful place, waiting to be discovered. Doha is such a new and upcoming city, its future is so bright and there is so much to see and to do. I had the opportunity to travel to neighboring shining city, Dubai, and it was as amazing as it sounds. Its proximity made it plausible to do in a weekend. I had the opportunity to stay the night at The Atlantis Hotel, an incredible hotel that is located only in Dubai and the Caribbean. Aside from the wondrous Middle East, Qatar is conveniently located close to close by Asia and Europe. Our
group decided to take a week long spring break trip to the beautiful country of Thailand, spending half the time in Bangkok, and the beautiful beaches of Phuket. It was an unforgettable week, and none of us had ever imagined we would get the chance to travel to Asia, especially to Thailand. Traveling to these places gave me a sense of how big the world is. It allowed me to experience another culture, completely different from the Middle Eastern one I had been living in.

What really made this experience worthwhile for me was a combination of it all, along with the people that were by my side along the way. Our particular group did not travel with any expectations of the Middle East. Obviously we had heard people's opinions and perceptions, but we did not allow them to influence us. This allowed for us to enter the experience with a clean slate, saving us from any disappointments. In fact, Qatar only amazed us. Furthermore, our group became a very tight-knit group of friends. We were all eager to be experiencing new things, and relied heavily on each other for support. We had a lot of fun together, made new friends together, and created memories together that will last for a lifetime. From studying together, working together at the Oasis, taking Dhow Cruises on the Arabian Gulf, to exploring the streets of Bangkok, we have done it all together, and had the time of our lives doing it. We were all different people, of different backgrounds, customs and ideas, but being abroad we pushed our differences aside and came together on the fact that we were all Aggie Engineers taking on the world.
Study Abroad Experience

When I got on the plane to fly to Qatar, I had no idea what to expect. I stepped onto the 14-hour flight not knowing what I was getting myself into. I was half expecting everyone to drive Ferrari's and Lamborghini's and for the weather to be the surface of the sun the whole semester. But much to my relief, the weather was perfect and everyone only drove Porsche Cayenne's.

My expectations were more than filled within the first couple of weeks of my stay. I had originally thought I was going to be using a clunker phone for communication; I had no clue what I was going to eat for food; I was unsure whether the locals would be friendly or not; and I thought I was going to live in a dump. I was able to unlock my iPhone and get a data plan for cheap, the food is fantastic, and the people here are some of the nicest people in the world. I did however live in a dump.

There were many surprises throughout my study abroad experience. Every weekend here seemed to somehow be new and exciting. From spending hours at the Souq Waqif people watching, to nights at the Jazz club, to day trips to the desert, Doha offered so much. There were also opportunities to travel. I was able to go to Thailand for spring break, and took weekend trips to Oman to explore the mountain ranges and Dubai to experience the "Las Vegas" of the Middle East. The opportunities that this study abroad presents are unreal.

I have learned a plethora of new things while studying abroad. I have gained a tremendous amount of knowledge and respect for the Islamic culture, I have learned that Arabs are some of the friendliest around, and that everyone in college goes through similar experiences around the world.

The best part about this study abroad trip is making connections with people across the world, traveling to new places, and learning about different cultures all while studying at the same university I've been studying at for the past 3 years. Qatar is centrally located on the other side of the world so that you can travel almost anywhere in the world. Places that my friends have gone include South Africa, India, Turkey, Greece, Japan, Malaysia, and Thailand.

The difficult parts of living in Doha are transportation and fully understanding the culture. Living in college station, I was glued to my car – I drove everywhere. Here, I have to rely on taxis to get anywhere, which can be a real hassle at times. It is also still difficult to realize that guys and girls rarely mix. In fact, Muslim weddings are women only and men only.

From this study abroad experience, I would definitely consider living abroad as an expat in the future, and that parts of the middle east are completely different that how it is portrayed on the news.

I am going to recommend this program to everyone I know. It has been such a great experience - so great that I cannot understand why more people do not apply. The program will only improve. In fact, the future study abroad kids will get to live in one of the nicest dorms in the world; dorms that we thought we going to live in.
Robert Cole Carruthers

Study Abroad in Qatar

Before I came to Qatar I knew little about the region and the country itself. The only information I had to guide me was what the news covered on the Middle East and the orientation that Mrs. Rosenkranz gave to all study abroad students before we left. Neither of which were very accurate to my actual experience.

Before I arrived in Doha, I was expecting to find a country teeming with Ferrari driving, thobed out, arrogant Middle Easterners that thought the World revolved around Qatar. I tend to associate wealth with arrogance, as is all too often the case in the United States. This however is not true at all. For starters they all drive Porsche Cayennes because the roads in Qatar will bottom out a Ferrari on the highway. In all seriousness though, the people of Qatar are very far from arrogant and are surprising grounded considering the overall wealth of the country. Another preemption I had before journeying to Qatar was the fear that nobody was going to speak English. This is also, not true because Qatar is filled with people of varying backgrounds and English is the only language that they can all speak, well at least kind of speak.

Academics in Qatar are not the same as on main campus. The style of learning and teaching is a lot more laid back. With a class of only twenty students it is a lot easier for a professor to work with the students on due dates and test days. The labs are run by the professors, which is very convenient. This was actually very nice because he made the exam so he can focus on the parts we will be tested over.

My favorite part of the entire trip was meeting so many different people and all of the crazy places we got to go because we were on the other side of the World. Meeting new people here was really easy because everyone in the school knows who the study abroad kids are and most of them want to at least introduce themselves to you. They all know who the study abroad students are because the school is really small and it is really easy to spot a new face. As for travelling, Doha is only a forty-five minute plane ride from Dubai and Abu Dhabi. For spring break we went to Thailand. Thailand is a twenty-four hour plane ride away from the U.S. so I figured that I would probably never go there again just for vacation.

At the beginning of my trip it was difficult to adjust to the laid back lifestyle of Qatar. This sounds like a good thing, but in some cases it is really annoying. Five minutes early does not exist, neither does five minutes late. If you want to meet a group I would suggest planning to meet thirty minutes before because no one will actually be there on time. Also Qatar has no Dr. Pepper. This is just travesty!

Overall this semester has been one of my favorites of my entire college experience. The people I have met, the places I have been, and experiences I have had cannot be compared to anything else I have experienced in my life! I would recommend a semester studying abroad to all college students. You have eight semesters in your college career why not spend one of the abroad?
Stephen Loughren, Qatar Study Abroad Assignment

Ever since I learned about this great study abroad program back during my senior year of high school, I have dreamed of studying abroad in Qatar. The Middle East has always been an intriguing area to me, one of seemingly endless natural beauty, vast cultural differences and a completely new way of life. As our departure date approached, it started to occur to me that I would be in a vastly different world in just a few days. I really had no expectations of the trip whatsoever until I talked to friends and family that were concerned with the media's interpretation of the Middle East. Everyone in America believes that the Middle East is a breeding ground for Christian hating suicide bombers. I was not one of those believers, but after countless comments, a small seed of worry started to spread. As it turns out, the media is completely wrong on all of those accounts, but that is something I will talk about later. Other than that small seed, I had virtually no expectations whatsoever. I knew I wanted to travel, meet new people and experience everything this side of the world had to offer. As in turns out, that perspective exponentially increased my enjoyment of this trip.

That being said, all of my non-existent expectations were fulfilled. I made the most out of our time here by not saying “no” to any invitation to go out and do something. If our local friends in our class invited us out to dinner, I was the first person to say yes. Want to go sand bashing this weekend? Yes! Want to explore a Mosque? Sure! Play volleyball at the pearl? Oh yeah! Another student even invited us to play for the rugby team even though we have never played before, and we ended up starting three games! All in all, there are so many opportunities to have great experiences and the students here are extremely open and hospitable to the study abroad students. They all have immense national pride, and want to teach you about their culture and way of life, if you are willing to listen. Go out and do things, because my motto is “you can sleep when you get back to the States”.

The main thing that surprised me is how small this World actually is. Short of a few small differences, everything here was eerily similar to home. Students complain about homework, strict parents, being stressed and tired, weather and teachers in Qatar just like in College Station. Students still misbehave and talk during class and procrastinate studying for tests. Something that was very pleasantly surprising is that the students in Qatar take being an Aggie very seriously. Even the residents of Qatar were astonishingly hospitable, to the point of inviting a group of us to dinner and activities (with prizes) in the desert, twice! This has taught me to not be so culturally ignorant like most of the people in the world. Every expectation I have had about the Middle East has been shattered. Everything from their views of America, Christianity, treatment of women, and so on, have been completely changed. I believe this is for the better because it seems that the Middle East as a whole is attempting to separate itself from the misbehaving religious extremists that have tainted the view of the Middle East for the entire rest of the world.

The best part of this semester for me was all the new experiences. I only knew two of the eleven other study abroad students and I feel that actually played to my advantage. Almost no one knew each other so we were all forced to meet each other and hang out as a group. We were really lucky not to let ourselves separate into smaller cliques. In fact, our great group dynamic actually increased the enjoyment of this entire experience exponentially. Other new experiences that made this trip great include all the traveling we did, new food we tasted and things we tried. We traveled to Thailand as entire group for Spring Break which was amazing. Also, three of us took a trip to Oman for the weekend. Camping and hiking in the Omani mountains will be memories that I will cherish forever. It just makes so much sense to travel while over here because it saves copious amounts of time and money compared to traveling from the states.

In such a modern, technologically advanced society as Qatar, there were very few difficulties and limitations. The few I can justify are simply things we have to live with being in a different culture mixed with protecting the liabilities of the governmental institution of Texas A&M. The only legitimate complaint was ease of transportation, as we are not allowed to drive. Although cabs are reasonably
priced compared to United States standards, they are not reliable and the cost piles up over the course of the semester. Another difficulty was the void of the normal staples in our College Station life. The food here is very unhealthy, consisting mostly of carbs and sugary drinks. The gyms are very small and are packed with the very few people that make living a healthy lifestyle a priority. Vegetables and protein are very expensive and sometimes hard to find and expire quickly. This little disappointment was overcome by the gratuitous amounts of delicious food from all around the world. Any food from any country can be located here in the great city of Doha.

There are many, many ways that I have benefitted from this study abroad experience, and I'm sure I will use these skills in the future. Being more culturally accepting is the main thing that I will use in the future. The petroleum industry is vast, virtually spreading to every continent. As a petroleum engineer, I plan on traveling to many parts of the world and need to be accepting and respectful of the host culture that I am guest of. Learning to meet new people from all over the world was not only a valuable lesson; it also was an amazing experience. Needless to say, I would suggest this program to every engineer at Texas A&M. Guys and girls included, as it seemed like the two girls that were in our group were included in almost everything and enjoyed their time here as much as I did. Getting abroad experience is invaluable not only in terms of academic/career advancement, but also on a personal enrichment level.

I am so glad that I had the opportunity to experience Qatar and the entire Middle East on this amazing study abroad trip. I have learned so much both academically and culturally. All of the countries have amazing natural beauty and the people are very warm, welcoming and hospitable. I have met many lifelong friends from both TAMUQ and main campus that I would have never met otherwise. All in all, I would strongly suggest this to every engineer at Texas A&M as it was full of memories that will last forever. Also, I would like to thank Maiken, Dr. Maggard, Dawna and Texas A&M for this amazing opportunity.
My TamuQ experience

Going into college you get a lot of advice of what decisions you should make for the next four years of your life. The best advice I got was to take advantage of all the opportunities your school has to offer. Studying abroad in Qatar through the engineering program is by far the best decision I have made in my life, it has opened many doors and broaden my view of engineering in a global scale. Most importantly, I got to travel the world with ten strangers that became family.

Living in Qatar for a semester has really cleared a lot of stereotypes I had about the Arab world. I was surprised how much I had in common with the students I went to school with. Everyone was very welcoming and wanted to show us around to see what their culture had to offer. We met a group of Muslims that took us to the desert and had a whole show waiting for us, it was probably one of the nicest things a stranger has done for me. One of my favorite activities was to go to the corniege and drink karak while watching the skyline Doha has to offer. The food was delicious, we all became big fans of shawarma, plus they deliver anywhere. It was tough having to eat turkey bacon though and having no Wal-Mart around. Not being such a good chef this became a bit of a struggle as I didn’t know many recipes. My favorite experience was traveling, Thailand and U.A.E were great places to see. If I had the money I would of probably traveled more like some of my peers.

Overall, this was the best decision I have made in my life. I am so grateful I was chosen to the program and got to meet such great people. Qatar has so many opportunities and such a great vision. I can’t wait to visit the country in a few years.