

# ProjectsAbroad

أهلا وسهلا بكم في المغرب

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## Volunteer Story: Samuel Jennings from UK



When I returned to England 2am on Tuesday morning, having 'found myself' or whatever it is British gap year students are expected to do, I had just spent five weeks living, working and travelling in Morocco.

The dreary line leading me on, one sleepy step at a time, through Stansted customs could not have been further from the life from which I had only just surfaced, centred around the breathless, bustling life of Rabat Medina. I felt I had been forced to come up for air far too early. At that moment, and even now, as I write this, I am of the firm opinion that I could quite happily have stayed in Rabat indefinitely. I can't say whether or not I have indeed 'found myself,' that's not really something I think can actually happen, and if it were then it would be down to others more impartial to decide, but I can truthfully say that Morocco has certainly left some lasting marks on me, which I have pared down to three main points: 1- I now roll my 'R's when I speak French, and inadvertently slip in bits of Arabic vocabulary. This is a disconcerting linguistic development for me, or rather, disconcerting for any Frenchman I come across in the future. 2- I have a considerably large collection of leather goods and camel hair rugs, and I only half regret settling on the price I paid for them (I figure that even if I did pay too much, the mint tea I was plied with when coaxing and cajoling the shopkeeper to lower the price more than made up for what was lost through my inexperienced haggling). 3- Back in England, I have continued my habit of walking confidently out into the middle of the road, full to the brim, perhaps, of a misguided confidence that weary English drivers will still be cautiously expecting this more casual pedestrianism and stop in time, just as their obliging Moroccan counterparts have been so accustomed to doing. I can also say that I have had the pleasure of meeting many like-minded individuals from all over the globe, not least from Morocco itself. Life in Rabat has

allowed me to sample (I hope) a truer, less commercialised side of Moroccan culture and, when I return, which I fully intend to do, (insha'Allah), I will be able to quickly surround myself with a network of friends that I dearly hope I will keep in close contact with in the coming years.



I discovered a generosity in Moroccans that I had not so readily anticipated, from the families of the volunteers, the guys at Projects Abroad themselves (Adil, Noureddine, Soufiane) and passers-by in the street, but also on a larger scale, through my placement. Working in Salé (Rabat's admittedly rougher, tougher, sister city across the Bouregreg), I came across a group of teachers whose working life revolved around the education of some of the most underprivileged children in the area, set in an enclosed, idyllic environment of cascading pink blossom, a newly refurbished truck-cum-library and three small, self-contained classrooms around two basketball courts that made up the Salé AMESIP school. As a fortunate, largely untroubled, student from England, I was charmed by the place. I cannot imagine how much Osama or Abdel or Fadwa, or any of the other children I met there and got to know, must have loved it, for it was a tranquil, undisturbed patch of ground, cut away from the somewhat grittier Salé, that could only offer them a brief respite from things beyond their control.





To conclude, I guess everyone has a different personal experience of a trip like this, and everyone goes about it in their own way, but I would advise anyone thinking of going, to throw themselves into the Moroccan way of life. Tea less than five times a day is downright antisocial. If you aren't stopped on the street by someone you know at least twice a day then that day is a dull one. Never say no to an invitation to eat couscous on Friday, even if you have had two or even three of such invites and are left a bloated wreck on the sofa by the end. Those were the rules I lived by, and I tried my best to observe them and follow them as closely as possible for those five short weeks. I can only finish by saying that I loved what I saw of Morocco, that I did not see enough of Morocco, and that I will be forced to return, hopefully before this year is out.



## Ramadan in Rabat

Ramadan will run from around the 29th of June to the 28th of July 2014. During this time Muslims fast from sunrise to sunset. This fasting also means refraining from liquids and cigarettes. The breakfast at sunset is called f'tour and usually consists of soup, dates, eggs, sweet pastry (called Chebbakia), mint tea and milk. Some families will eat again a few hours later.

Those that are fasting generally don't mind seeing non-Muslims eating, but it is better to be as discreet as possible when you are in the street and generally around people that you don't know.

Some volunteers try to challenge themselves and fast just like the other Moroccans, some find it very difficult, and others are okay with. So if you want to try, you should probably still drink water as it's very hot in July.

You will find that almost all coffee shops and restaurants are closed until after the f'tour is over – around seven-thirty in the evening. The streets are busier than usual in the evening and there's life in the streets until after mid-night.

Small grocer shops are generally closed until late morning or early afternoon. A lot of the larger shops open later than usual. Most ministries are open from ten in the morning until two in the afternoon.