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Thursday, February 24, 2011

Midshipmen Study Abroad in Qatar's Capital

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From the International Programs Office

Two Naval Academy midshipmen traveled to Doha,



Midshipmen 2nd Class Nicholas Metroka rides a camel in Doha, Qatar during his semester abroad last fall. Metroka and Midshipmen 2nd Class Joshua Wagner spent their fall semester studying with university students from around the world in Qatar's "Education City." Photo courtesy of the International Programs Office

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Qatar, during the fall semester to study with university students from around the world.

Midshipmen 2nd Class Nicholas Metroka and Joshua Wagner studied in an area called Education City, which included remote campuses of Texas A&M, Carnegie Mellon, Cornell, Georgetown and Virginia Commonwealth Universities.

Students involved in this program came from a variety of countries, including South Africa, Pakistan, India, Indonesia, Germany and Qatar.

“Studying in Qatar for the semester was an amazing experience that greatly added to our education,” said Metroka. “The opportunity to not only spend a semester in a foreign country, but also to study alongside people from all over the world and all different backgrounds, was very eye-opening and had a huge impact on our intercultural awareness.”

The midshipmen were able to experience more than just the educational program during their time in Qatar.

The midshipmen found that Qataris are actually a minority in Qatar, being heavily outnumbered by the expatriates that come to work in the country. These range from Americans and Europeans that come to work in the oil and business sectors to the Indians and Philippines that take care of most of the manual labor.

“Due to this population imbalance, Qatari culture is overshadowed by the cultures and traditions of all the immigrant workers that bring a part of their homeland with them,” said Wagner. “This is demonstrated by the fact that, although the official language of Qatar is Arabic, we rarely came across someone who did not speak English.”

National pride still runs deep, even for those who are not true citizens of Qatar. The midshipmen witnessed this pride in the enormous celebrations that took place when Qatar won the 2022 World Cup bid.

“Traffic was at a standstill in the streets as the whole country turned out that night and the next to celebrate,” said Metroka. “Qatari flags were being sold on every corner, and many cars were painted maroon and white to celebrate the occasion.”

The mids also experienced some spectator sports while in Qatar, including the 2010 Women's Tennis

Association championship and an exhibition football match in November between Brazil and Argentina. They visited the sports complexes and facilities built to hold the 2006 Asian Games and that currently hold the exhibition matches held in Qatar annually.

Qatar has hosted numerous other soccer teams in the past as well as some of the most famous tennis players in the world.

“With the bid for the 2022 World Cup, it will be amazing to see the transformation of the entire country, as ten new stadiums will be built for the tournament,” said Metroka.

While the majority of the landscape of Qatar and its surrounding countries may be a vast desert where life is scarce, Qatar is one of the fastest growing countries in the world.

“During our short time in Qatar, we were exposed to the construction necessary to develop the fast growing metropolis of Doha,” said Wagner. “From the dust that seems to collect on every stationary object, the early morning jackhammer wake up calls, and the ever present construction sites riddled with more cranes than can be counted on two hands, it is hard to look past the rapid construction in Doha.”

In the short time the mids were in Qatar, a hospital which will serve Cornell medical students as one of the largest hospitals in the Middle East, went from a mere steel frame to an elaborate building, nearing the end of its construction period.

“The world is waiting to see how prepared Qatar will be for the summer of 2022,” said Wagner. “Whatever the outcome of this event may be, one thing is certain. Qatar's infrastructure and culture will continue to develop rapidly in the coming years, as more immigrant workers continue to pour into the country, but their pride will always remain.”