

## My Mobility

Students from Ca' Foscari Recount their Learning Experiences Abroad

# Grandma, I'm going to Morocco!

Marta Veronese

LM Lingue, Economie e Istituzioni dell'Asia e dell'Africa Mediterranea

Destination: EGE Rabat University, Morocco

Marta Veronese grapples with the powerful emotions unleashed in Morocco by Eid al-Adha, the Muslim feast of sacrifice.

Everyone knows Morocco. Couscous, Tajine, Spices, Joint.. but can you imagine how it's real life there? I couldn't. Well, I thought I could but I ensure you that I was wrong; well that's what happens when you decide to reject destinations like Barcelona, Paris, Amsterdam and you prefer going overseas and truly immerse yourself in the culture you had been studying for years.

My first day in Morocco can perfectly resume my life there.

I arrived in Rabat at midnight and directly went to the apartment I had seen when I still was in Italy on the internet and whose owner I had negotiated with (yes, if you go to Morocco, never forget to negotiate! You can buy a Berber carpet for 50€ instead of 350€). The apartment was awful, it smelt so badly and it was so full of mold I couldn't breathe; moreover I was kicked out of the house because I refused to rent it. So I found myself in the middle of the night in the capital of Morocco with two suitcases and had no idea of what I was going to do. Fortunately Morocco has two sides, people who want to fool you and the other 90% who looks forward to help you; Luckily in this 90% there was my Moroccan friend Anas who picked me up and brought me in a pub to drink something (yes know.. first thing I did in Morocco? Drank a Belgian beer, so typical). Not only Anas helped me finding a house but also hosted me for 4 days in his beautiful villa and prepared me tea, which became my favorite: it's nothing else but green tea with mint and an enormous amount of sugar.

On the following weekend occurred the biggest festivity in the Muslim world, *'īd al-kabīr*, so I decided to take my first journey: Marrakesh and Essaouira. Marrakesh, called the red city of Morocco because of the predominance of this color in most of the buildings, is an amazing chaos where if you stop and stare into space just for one second, in an heartbeat you find yourself surrounded by Moroccans trying to sell you the best tajine pot in town or twenty 'handmade' Fatima's hands which

are identical to the ones of every other peddler in Morocco. If you turn on the other side you can also find other people willing to show you how to reach your hotel whose location they exactly know, even before you tell them its name. Eventually you end up following a random makeshift guide, while full of souvenirs bought for half price.

Then I moved to Essaouira, a wonderful little town by the ocean which I could never forget. On Friday I woke up and went out for breakfast with no idea of what I was going to go through. Streets were completely empty, shops were closed, houses were gated, there was no living soul outside, I could just hear the sound of the wind crashing the trees. There was blood everywhere, pieces of bones, horns... it seemed like the beginning of a horror movie. All of a sudden I heard children screaming and I saw them running towards me with a bucket, in which there were the entrails of an animal that they were collecting from the street.

Epiphany! During *ʿīd al-kabīr* Muslims are used to sacrifice a mutton to Allah. They slit it without causing it death, then let it walk while it's still alive so it can lose the excess blood and finally they kill it; afterwards they skin it and prepare it to be cooked while kids collect the entrails; every process takes place in the street, as it is a collective festivity. This is what I mean when I talk about going into a culture, discover every side of it, its customs and traditions, even the most horrifying from the western point of view. That night I was invited by a local family who shared with me their holy meal. That mutton was delicious, cooked with plumbs and almonds.

The last experience I want to talk about is the most powerful memory I have about Morocco. I was with a big group of people from my university in Rabat, with whom I rent a coach and left for the south. It was the longest journey ever: 17 hours driving, with the driver who was reckless, like every other Moroccan driver. We danced, we played cards, 'never have I ever', 'would you rather', we kissed, we cried and finally we arrived.

We arrived in the exact middle of nowhere. The coach stopped, we got off and in front of us, the desert. There was nothing around us, only tons of sand and just beyond, nestled deep in the rolling dunes, a tiny rickety tent which was our place to sleep. Actually that night we stayed outside, the sky was astonishing, full of sparkling stars; Try to imagine the situation: close your eyes, total silence, the wind is blowing and moving the sand that crashes your skin, the sky is bright and immense. A human being, surrounded by nature. I still remember the peaceful feeling I felt that night.

The following morning we woke up at 5, we climbed the highest dune nearby and contemplated the sunrise. The sun was extremely bright and big, reflecting its light on the sand. In North Africa in the early morning Bedouin shepherds bring their flock to the well, walking for hours and hours just to water them; we were so lucky to witness this beautiful moment, when we saw a group of wild dromedary camels. They were

twenty or thirty, of different colors and sizes running toward the well and behind them, the shepherd with a stick and a kefiyah in his head. I was breathless looking at wild nature.

Morocco changed me; sometimes it was really hard, but I believe that tough experiences challenge you and eventually make you grow.

