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Since the beginning of my studies at Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität in Munich in Germany I knew that I wanted to complete a semester abroad and I envisioned a "preferably exotic" country (from my point of view ☺). Looking through the list of LMU's many partner universities, I came through the SultanQaboos-University (SQU) in Muscat, which recently entered into a cooperation with the Institute of Political Science at LMU. I had been interested in the Arab world and the Middle East for some time and half a year on the Arabian Peninsula in a country between Saudi Arabia, Yemen and Iran promised to be an exciting adventure. Therefore, I finally took a flight to Oman on September 8 2018. I reached Muscat at well over 40 degrees Celsius early in the morning where two friendly men from SQU welcomed me and brought me to my accommodation, which was a house for international students a few kilometers from the campus. The SQU campus is beautiful with plenty of nice buildings, green areas and places to relax. In my first week, I was a bit confused with the administration process and the new campus but I got many help by some of the Omani students who cared for us international students. The SQU staff was also welcoming and always eager to help when I had any questions or issues. Experiencing the complete gender separation on SQU campus was something completely new for me. Especially at the beginning I mistakenly took the wrong pathways and elevators but after a while I got used to it and nobody ever blamed me for my mistakes.

Having quickly made contact with other exchange students and Omanis, I spend my free time with my friends exploring Muscat and the surrounding area. I quickly realized that Oman is an incredibly diverse and beautiful country. There are completely empty beaches and picturesque bays. Several times, I was snorkelling in crystal clear water and saw colourful fishes as well as also turtles and even dolphins. I also bathed in wadis in the middle of the dry landscape. Moreover, there are mountains in Oman for hiking and of course the huge sandy desert. As you can reach the Emirates by car in just a few hours, Dubai was also part on our program.

A defining impression that I have taken from my stay in Oman is the general friendliness, helpfulness and typical Arab hospitality, which Omanis still maintain to the minutiae detail. For example, I once was stuck with my car on the edge of the desert where I had no phone reception. After a couple of minutes, two Bedouins approached us and without speaking a word of English or even asking for money, they helped me to get some air out of the tires and get my car back on the road. Never before has it been so easy for me to get in touch with the locals and make friends so quickly. And never before have I been invited that much to go out for a meal, eat or even spend the night with the family. One friend even invited me to her traditional Omani wedding.

As many European do not even know, Oman is a stable and peaceful country that acts as a mediator between the denominationally divided Arab states and the Arab-Israeli conflict. I even experienced this tolerance in the country since in Oman, as in almost no other country in the world, Sunnis, Shiites and Ibadites pray together. In Muscat, you can find many different churches and temples of various religions. Talking to Omanis, I always noticed their curiosity and openness towards my culture and me. In January 2019, I returned to Germany with a lot of great experiences, many new friends and at least some elementary knowledge in Arabic. My semester abroad in Oman has certainly provided me with a greater understanding of the culture of the Gulf region and the Muslim world, and has given me a lot to think about topics such as the role of religion, gender understanding and the relationship between East and West.

