

ProjectsAbroad



Projects Abroad Morocco July 2013 official Newsletter

Content

- Ramadan & Eid
- Two week special | care & community
- Volunteer story : Matthew Burwood – Two week special



Ramadan

A Month of Fasting

Ramadan, the Islamic month of fasting, involves abstaining from food, drink, sexual relations, smoking and other vices from dawn to sunset. Muslims start fasting once they hit puberty, while people suffering from chronic diseases like diabetes aren't allowed to fast. Ramadan's conclusion is marked by Eid Al-Fitr, one of the two major Islamic holidays (the 2nd one is Eid- Al-Adha in which sheep are sacrificed as an act of obedience to God)

Although the focus of Ramadan is spiritual – making extra prayers, giving charity and other acts of worship are recommended – Moroccan culture places a surprising emphasis on food during this holy month. Iftar, the meal at which Muslims break their fast, is highly anticipated and even children who aren't fasting look forward to the spread of food each evening.

This year, Ramadan concurred with the hottest period in Morocco: mid July to mid August, which made it very challenging for Muslims even though they've been doing it every year, but the most surprising thing is that so many volunteers from Projects Abroad fasted –sometimes couldn't deprive themselves from water, but didn't have a bite at all.

The Iftar Table

At a Moroccan iftar, dates, milk, juices, and sweets typically provide the sugar surge needed after a day of going without food. Harira, a hearty lentil and tomato soup, satisfies hunger and restores energy. Hard-boiled eggs, meat- or seafood-filled pastries (briouats), fried fish, and pancakes might also be served.

Large batches of sweets such as sellou and chebekia are traditionally prepared in advance for use throughout the month, as are cookies and other pastries. These, and other specialties found in the list of Ramadan Recipes can be made all year round, but they are especially popular during this holy month.



Eid Al-Fitr

Eid al-Fitr falls on the first day of Shawwal, the month which follows Ramadan in the Islamic calendar. It is a time to give in charity to those in need, and celebrate with family and friends the completion of a month of blessings and joy. In Morocco most people would wear their best or totally brand new clothes mostly traditional white Djellabas.

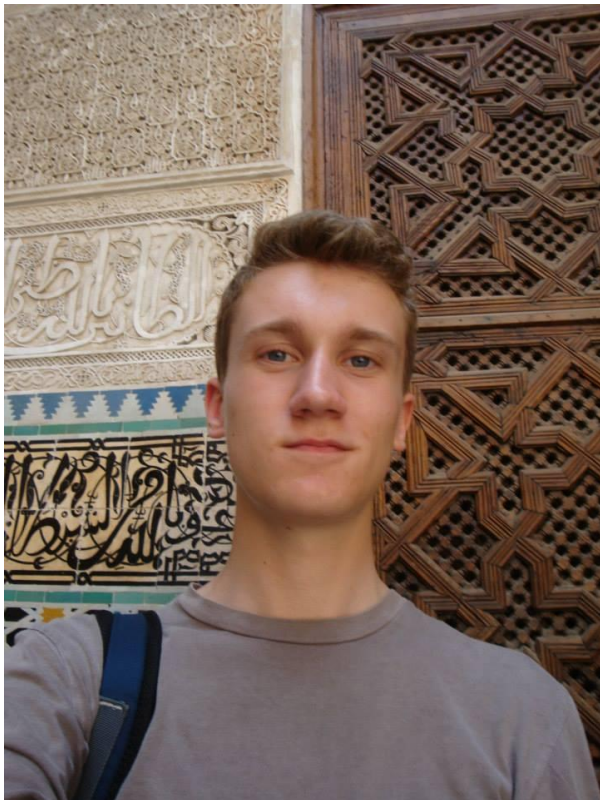
Before the day of Eid, during the last few days of Ramadan, each Muslim family gives a determined amount as a donation to the poor. This donation is of actual food -- rice, barley, dates, rice, etc. -- to ensure that the needy can have a holiday meal and participate in the celebration. This donation is known as sadaqah al-fitr (charity of fast-breaking).

On the day of Eid, Muslims gather early in the morning in outdoor locations or mosques to perform the Eid prayer. This consists of a sermon followed by a short congregational prayer.

After the Eid prayer, Muslims usually scatter to visit various family and friends, give gifts (especially to children), and make phone calls to distant relatives to give well-wishes for the holiday. These activities traditionally continue for three days. In most Muslim countries, the entire 3-day period is an official government/school holiday.

Moroccan families prepare for the Eid by making various kinds of cookies special to the occasion, served along with mint tea in the morning. Totally deserved after a long month without any daylight meals!

Volunteer story : Matthew Burwood – Two week special



2 Week Special with Projects Abroad in Rabat, Morocco

Having never previously worked with or even heard of Projects Abroad, my travel companion Abdul and I left the airport at Rabat with open minds as to how the next two weeks of learning Arabic and volunteering would pan out. We were met with enthusiasm and relaxed conversation, and quickly realised that both the staff and the volunteers were fascinating people, and would be a pleasure to work with.

After a relaxing first Sunday of walking around the ancient Roman ruins at Chellah and getting to know the other volunteers, we began our joint programme of lessons with work at our placement, Amali des Oeuvres Sociales. As intermediate level Arabic students, we were unsure what form the lessons might take, and whether we would be able to work at our particular level of difficulty. We need never have been unsure! As soon as the Morocco staff realised that the Arabic level varied among us, they enlisted another teacher to ensure that we received the most helpful tuition possible. Our teacher magically knew exactly the right difficulty level at which to teach us, and our language skills progressed in leaps and bounds.

The volunteering side of the programme involved much teamwork, planning and of course physical exercise, because we were helping to build a cafeteria area – a future relaxing environment for the local children of Salé. Digging in the Moroccan summer could be sweaty work at times, but this was no barrier to our efforts due to sufficient time to rest and the swapping of roles. Later on in the programme we had the opportunity to freshen up the appearance of the walls outside the placement by designing and painting some lively murals. This was good fun for everyone involved, including the local children who we tasked with covering an area of the wall in colourful hand prints.

Beside the main programme, the Projects Abroad team in Morocco made sure that every opportunity to meet up and socialise in the evenings was taken. Some evenings we travelled to the modern parts of Rabat for a coffee and a snack; other times we just walked around the Medina to soak up the atmosphere and spend our Dirhams, or took part in activities at some of the host families' houses. For example, one lively night was designated as "Dancing and Henna Night". It definitely didn't disappoint!

The weekend was a chance to see some of Morocco outside Rabat. On Saturday we took a day trip to Fes, an ancient city full of intriguing sights, sounds and smells. One smell we are unlikely to forget would be that of the Fes tannery, where visitors are handed sprigs of mint to mask the stench. We also visited some Berber rug shops and a traditional Berber pharmacy, and then a beautiful old madrasa (a school dedicated to the study of the Qur'an). On Sunday we visited the Exotic Gardens at Salé, the neighbouring city, for some more interesting sights and some more silly photos. On the return journey, the Moroccan staff were open minded as always to the suggestion of a visit to McDonalds, where we got an important chance to sample the local fries. It seems that there is a limit to how far you can deprive volunteers of Western cuisine!

There are so many more things that could be mentioned here – the pottery session, the cookery (and eating) session, the tour of Rabat, or even the overall experience of living with welcoming host families and seeing Moroccan and Islamic culture close up. Hopefully it is already clear that the 2 Week Special in Morocco is a unique way to discover this vibrant country, its many sights, and its wonderful people.

Two week special | care & community

In pictures



Colleen in the pottery session



Caterina and
Kirsty teaching
some dance
moves to the
kids at Amesip
placement



Hannah
drawing
with kids



The last day at work in Amali



The entrance to the old Médina in Fes