

FAO Travel Recommendations & Language Learning Resources

Middle East and North Africa compiled by Country

Last updated: February 20, 2013

BLUF: The purpose of this document is to provide travel recommendations and lessons learned on regional travel in the Middle East and North Africa based off personal experiences and thru the lens of FAO interests. This is not another attempt at Lonely Planet or similar guidebooks.

POINTS OF CONTACT: (1) Maj David Ickles: david.ickles@yahoo.com, (2) Capt Todd Moulder: tmoulder@hotmail.com, (3) Capt Andy Macak: macakca@gmail.com.

CONTENTS:

1. Dialect Learning Resources
2. Recommendations Common to All
3. Algeria
4. Bahrain
5. Cyprus
6. Egypt
7. Israel and West Bank
8. Jordan
9. Kingdom of Saudi Arabia
10. Kuwait
11. Lebanon
12. Morocco
13. Oman
14. Qatar
15. Tunisia
16. Turkey
17. United Arab Emirates

1. Dialect Learning Resources

Online Resources:

- a. ALL DIALECTS: www.wikipedia.com and www.wikitravel.org: maintain some basic phrases, grammar differences and common vocabulary at varying depths depending on the dialect. Additionally <http://jlu.wbtrain.com> maintains a course that breaks down in detail the various differences between Arabic dialects.
- b. EGYPTIAN: <http://arabic.desert-sky.net/index.html> (best free resource available), http://mylanguages.org/learn_egyptian.php, <http://www.youregypt.com/eguide/lang/>
- c. GULF: <http://www.gulfarabic.com>

Books:

- d. AUC Bookstore in Cairo: numerous resources available
- e. Lonely Planet Phrasebooks: Egyptian, Moroccan, Middle East (Egyptian Tunisian, Gulf, Levantine) (Transliterated)
- f. Rear language insert in Lonely Planet Guidebooks (Transliterated)

- g. *Taxi* by Khalid Al-Khamissi. Written in Egyptian dialect and also discusses many social issues from perspectives of Cairo's taxi drivers. (Arabic Script)
- h. *I Want to Marry* by Ghada Abdel Aal – Written in Egyptian dialect. (Arabic Script)
- i. *Kallimni 'Arabi Series with CD* by Samia Louis (Arabic Script in Egyptian Dialect)
- j. *A Dictionary of Egyptian Arabic* by El-Said Badawi and Martin Hinds (Arabic-English)
- k. *Lebanese Dialect with CD* by Henriette Haddad – Fadel. Commonly found in Arabic-French but English also available. (Arabic Script and Transliterated)
- l. *Eastern Arabic Dictionary and Phrasebook* by Hippocrene Books (Transliterated)
- m. *A Dictionary of Syrian Arabic* by Karl Stowasser and Moukhtar Ani (Transliterated)
- n. *Colloquial Arabic of the Gulf* by Clive Holes

2. Recommendations Common to All:

- a. Money: On arrival to new country, conduct ATM withdrawal. You will pay the foreign transaction fee (1.5%) and cash advance fee (if using GOVCC for official travel expenses), but will receive that day's foreign exchange rate without commission fees charged at money changing offices. Many countries accept major credit cards at a variety of places but even more developed countries sometimes accept only cash at gas stations. Recommend requesting maximum cash advance withdrawal limit available prior to commencing travel. The standard \$650 cash advance limit for FAOs on ICT is not sufficient to support continuous travel. Request up to \$1,500 if possible by budget Approving Official.
- b. Navigation: (1) Invest in car GPS (i.e. Garmin) and Garmin MENA maps or (2) Google Maps or similar application on smartphone with data plan. If you desire to buy a Garmin then there is a former Marine at Garmin that can provide discounts. POC: Ricky "Gunny" Evans – rick.evans@garmin.com.
- c. Country POCs: Change often. As a general guideline, submit APACS with intended dates and find current DAO POC to facilitate trip approval and support. DAO POC phone/email available in Foreign Clearance Guide. Your joint service FAO peer network or supervisor in the embassy can facilitate locating proper POCs for a respective country if you have difficulty tracking someone down. If there is an ICT FAO in your target country, he/she is your likely POC. Keeping this in mind, without searching before the trip, you will overlook many good 'out of the embassy' contacts like Marines assigned to the area or others who may offer a place to stay and/or site visit of places/organizations unique to their country. Inquire with inter-service FAOs, look online and ask your DAO supervisor for potential POCs.
- d. For current country situation: reference recent trip reports and ping embassy for pulse on what's going on.
- e. Security Cooperation Opportunities: Contact Theater Security Cooperation Officer at MARCENT FWD in Bahrain, Maj Josh Chartier as of Nov 2012. You may also

contact Marine Corps Security Cooperation Group to inquire on their projected regional trips and opportunities.

- f. VISAS: Plan Early. Some countries take two days. Other countries can take as long as two months. Different countries also have different requirements for travelers from different countries - contact your visa/travel office for the most current and accurate information for the country from which you are traveling. Recommend requesting second Diplomatic Passport before ICT departure. MARDET S1 can facilitate required request letter.
- g. Rental Cars: Traveling outside CONUS, rental car companies will likely not charge the standard "GARS" fee that is required for your GOVCC to provide insurance. Cover yourself with the additional vehicle insurance when renting a vehicle. If you plan to conduct any cross-border travel (i.e. from Bahrain across causeway to KSA and back), make sure this is pre-arranged with rental office as well and you have something in writing to facilitate the process. Although most rental companies claim that you must have an international driver license, they don't always check. Recommend obtaining one in CONUS prior to commencing ICT. AAA offers one for \$15.
- h. Communications:
 - i. Maintaining US number on cell phone: Sign up for free Google voice account, which will provide a free US phone number. Download free Talkatone app for smart phone. Once data plan established on smartphone, will be able to make calls/SMS for free (VOIP) back to US in 3G covered areas and/or WIFI. Magic Jack, Vonage, Skype Phone Number and other options exist as well and provide ability to use as a regular hardline phone alternative.
 - ii. VPN: Recommend strongvpn.com or similar to avoid certain Internet restrictions in the region. Service cost about \$80 for the year. Not 100% necessary, but depending on site and country residing/transiting it may come in handy. Depending on the country, you may have to adjust settings and portal used for full accessibility.
- i. Best places to sling your gringo Arabic: Taxi drivers are hit and miss. Outside of major metro areas people are generally easier to engage - same dynamic as in America where people in the rural areas are generally nicer, friendlier than the higher pace of life of living in the city. Best places have been finding single males at cafes or other social venues, local security guards or business vendors who do not know any English and don't mind someone to keep them company. Consider exploiting the annoying tourist vendors to your advantage. Speak to them only in Arabic, act as if you do not understand much English and tell them you are from some European country they know nothing about like Iceland. You will either get good Arabic practice if you want it or annoy them more by the language barrier and they will be more inclined to break contact and not annoy you. Strongly consider hiring a local

house keeper. They can offer unique insights into the culture and use of language around the house. Recommend Satellite TV to allow listening exposure/practice in every dialect and provides cultural insights.

3. Algeria

- a. Money: Only higher end hotels accept credit cards and there are very few ATMs that accept foreign cards. Otherwise, Algeria is exclusively a cash economy. Embassy provides free check cashing. \$1 = about 73,000-80,000 Dinar depending on exchange location. Embassy provides better rate. Money will go far on local economy if you avoid the higher end markets where you will find US comparable prices for restaurants and goods. Save exchange receipt for exchanging money on way out of the country – otherwise you will be stuck with any leftover currency that is difficult to exchange elsewhere. If you exchange at embassy, will need to re-exchange back at embassy. This is one country in particular where a higher cash advance limit is necessary.
- b. Communications: Local cell phone companies require special authorization from a higher echelon manager for Diplomatic Passport holders, which you must coordinate yourself. The embassy may maintain an extra pre-paid cell phone for TAD personnel. Due to limited RSO approved hotels, not all hotels maintained WIFI, but did have landline internet access available. Bring an Ethernet cord just in case.
- c. Travel: IMPORTANT: All travel outside Algiers must be coordinated well in advance. Minimum 5 days notification to RSO of intended itinerary. Furthermore, the Algerian Ministry of Foreign Affairs requires notification of all travel outside Algiers. Freedom to travel – but coordination must take place. TRANSPORTATION: Limited to the embassy motor pool and subway metro for local Algiers travel and daytrips outside the city. Very few approved drivers outside the capital. A guided tour in a location outside Algiers may be substituted if approved by RSO. Train from Algiers to Oran was approx. \$12 one-way or discount of \$20 round-trip.
- d. Lodging: Reservations are necessary and recommend requesting embassy reserve on your behalf to obtain under per diem rate for RSO approved hotels. The cheaper alternatives offered are more than suitable for FAO travel.
- e. Security: Buddy travel is highly recommended to afford more latitude for travel. The Casbah is off-limits without Algerian Police escort. Walking around Algiers and Oran without security – felt very safe and people were very friendly. Do not walk up to Fort Santa Cruz in Oran due to crime/thugs that target foreigners. All the locals advised us not to do this. Recommend driver for half the day (~2000D) to reach Fort Santa Cruz and/or locations outside the city of interest (i.e. Tlemson). Other option to Fort Santa Cruz is the hanging sky car system (50D each way) that runs from the city to the peak of the hilltop where you can walk down to the fort and bypass danger areas on way up. Picture taking of government/security buildings is prohibited and monitored.

4. Bahrain

- a. Money: Credit cards accepted almost everywhere except local souk type street vendors. Exchange rate is approx. \$1 = .377 Bahraini Dinar. ATMs readily available everywhere.
- b. Communications: Local sim cards are readily obtainable at the airport. 3G networks are reliable and widespread. WIFI common in hotels and cafes.
- c. Travel: Recommend Bahrain as part of initial trip in order to conduct face/face exchange with MARCENT FWD. This will provide opportunity to gain understanding of command focus, primary interests and establish relationships for future coordination and/or security cooperation opportunities later in ICT. NAVCENT also available for site visit. If limited time available, recommend MARCENT FWD over NAVCENT.
- d. Lodging: For official travel, must coordinate with Naval Support Activity Temporary Lodging Office. If space not available on post or if off-post reservations requested, they will coordinate reservation for you. On arrival and staying off-post, must obtain statement from lodging office stating lodging was not available or off-post lodging was approved IAW the Foreign Clearance Guide. PHONE: 439-3372 or EMAIL: m-ba-nsa-ngis@me.navy.mil.
- e. Security: Did not encounter any negative atmospherics or areas of concern in places traveled. Bahrainis were welcoming amongst those encountered. As of November 2012, substantial portion of island was highly discouraged to visit (many areas off-limits) due to ongoing political unrest.

5. Cyprus

- a. Money: Even though one could look at this country as two separate countries, they use the same currency throughout it. ATMs are everywhere. Costs of living is expensive in the south of Greek Cypriot side and cheaper in Turkish Cypriot side. Money can be exchanged at embassy, but may need badged employee to exchange for you.
- b. Communications: Internet is found everywhere in South. No S/A on the North.
- c. Travel: Travel in Cyprus is easy. You can travel in the entire country, but will need to ensure that your rental car insurance will cover cross-border driving. Some don't. Be advised that they drive on the left side of the road in south (right in north). This will be a factor for your driving if you have never driven English-style. It is strange because of your muscle memory is for normal driving and can cause some mental friction for the first couple of days. Recommend renting an automatic car as you will be dealing with the new way of driving and adding shifting with opposite hand only

makes it worse. Do pay attention and take things slow. GPS not needed as roads are well-marked and easy to navigate.

- d. FAO places to see/do: (1) Official Embassy briefs, (2) Turkish Cypriot coordination office. This is the small office where a few Americans work to gain S/A on what is happening in North. (3) UN mission. They offer tours of the green zone and briefs. These must be coordinated through DAO office. You also may be able to go on patrol with them while they check the integrity of the border. (4) British sovereign areas where British still control land and maintain military facilities. Close US working relationship.
- e. Lodging: There are plenty of good hotels throughout the country (south).
- f. Security: No danger experienced while traveling in Cyprus. Trip to the North coordinated thru DAO. You can potentially go North on a trip with Embassy / DAO.

6. Egypt

- a. Money: Credit cards accepted in modern retail stores and lodging. Souk type street vendors may accept credit but plan on cash. Exchange rate is approx. \$1 = 6.7 Egyptian Pounds. ATMs readily available everywhere. Check cashing is available for free at the US Embassy with a DOS Embassy Badge up to \$1,000/day for TAD personnel and \$3,000/day for PCS personnel. Otherwise daily living expenses are cheap and the exchange rate goes far.
- b. Communications: Cell phone: Recommend MobiNil cell company. Sim card will cost 10 LE, 50 LE (\$9) pre-paid card will last you almost a month and if you want data, 7 GB @ 3G speed will cost 100 LE.
- c. Travel:
 - i. Site Visit of Egyptian Tank Co-Production facility available with prior coordination. Recommend group travel to justify request and time invested on behalf of the embassy (DAO/OMC).
 - ii. For FAOs based in Cairo, DAO can facilitate participation in Egyptian military courses. A two-month Egyptian Dialect training course at the Ministry of Defense Language Institute (MODLI) was beneficial, providing language practice, foundation in the dialect and exposure to Egyptian military culture. Other historical courses are the Logistics Officer course, (UNK length) VIP Protection Course (4wks) and their Counter-Terrorism Course (5mo).
 - iii. Driving: Contrary to what appears to be mass chaos in the streets, there are driving laws even though it appears no one seems to adhere to them. Just note that you can be ticketed. What may appear as unsafe, Egyptian traffic manages to function and everyone eventually crawls to where they need to get. There are accidents often and several fatal seen on highway between Ain Sika and Ismailiyya. Night Driving: Extremely dangerous outside of

Cairo. Many cars drive with lights, but at least 25% do not use them. Also there are donkey carts with no lights, broken down vehicles with no warning devices, etc on the main highways between major cities. Egyptians drive with their lights off and turn them on only when they need them, such as passing another car or flashing them at oncoming traffic. For this reason, RSO restricts night driving to Cairo city limits.

- iv. Taxis: Cheap and plentiful. Depending on distance and time travelled, 5-10 LE (less than \$2) for 2-3 miles is a good rate and 25-30 LE for a trip from central Cairo to the outlying connected suburb areas depending on traffic. Recommend asking if the Taxi has an "Adat" (tool) meaning meter. Otherwise you will find yourself negotiating the rate. Some drivers will try to exploit foreigners for 100 LE vice the 10-20 LE the ride should cost. Sit in the front seat as the backseat is traditionally for tourists since we as Westerners typically sit in the back in the US. Typically only women and children sit in the back if riding alone.
- v. Metro: Cheap - 1 LE will get you a ticket to any stop in Cairo. Just don't get on the 'Ladies Only' train car.
- vi. Foot: Don't expect to find a cross walk. When you want to cross the street, just GO! The cars will adjust their speed based off you.
- vii. Travel to Luxor/Aswan: Overnight train is adequate, saves a night hotel and provides an 'Egyptian' middle class experience of transpo down the countryside/Nile. Duration: 12 hours, 2030-0830. Tickets are \$130 round-trip (Cairo-Aswan). You can also see the other trains passing through the station to observe the poor conditions of the trains for the lower strata of society. Between Luxor and Aswan, we organized for a private tour guide to see some of the temples in Kolombo and Edfu, which also provided opportunity to branch off and observe the economic disparity between the urban and metro areas. Cheaper option overall is taking Egypt National Railways (<https://enr.gov.eg/ticketing/public/gallery.jsf>) online or in person at the station. Offices are co-located with several metro stations. Flying to/from Aswan and Luxor is also an option.
- viii. Alexandria: Train available for 50 LE each way on Egypt National Railways. As of Feb 2013, train travel is off-limits by RSO due the high number of fatal accidents. Driving is approved method of travel to Alex.
- ix. Tours: American Star (americanstartravel.com) offers tours within Egypt at competitive rates. Costs include transportation, coordination for English-speaking tour guide, good pricing, and overall flexible to work with. Ibrahim has worked well based off past experience compared to other guides available.
- x. *Siwa Oasis*. Roads to/from Siwa along the coast were well maintained for any type of car. On arrival to Siwa, roads turn to improved-dirt roads off the main path. If taking the southern road from Siwa through Baharia Oasis to Cairo, locals recommended a 4x4 vehicle. 3G cell coverage was available the majority of the trip, except for scattered remote pockets between Mersa Matruh on the coast and Siwa – and in the outskirts of Siwa.
- xi. Highways to Ismailiyya, Suez, Port Said, and Fayoum are in good condition.

- d. Lodging: The Egyptian tourist industry is well developed - you can find a variety of accommodations based on your preferences. With tourism down tremendously, finding a vacancy is not a problem.
- e. Security: Egypt has a limited number of no-go areas, but for the most part as long as you keep the RSO informed he will work with you. Sinai is currently off-limits for all travel except to Sharm el-Sheik by plane. South of Aswan a Tourism Police escort is required and can be setup by calling 410 (information) or organizing a trip through a tourist agency. Also note that the better you speak Arabic, the more suspicious people will be of you. Get your practice in but consider using the 'tourist card' when appropriate to avoid suspicion and/or the annoying street vendor based on the situation.
 - i. Local Hospitals (in Cairo): (1) Kasr El-Aini Hospital - from US Embassy, proceed on the Corniche toward Maadi. Pass Four Seasons Hotel, look for large pink hospital on left. Enter Bldg from North. (2) As Salam Hospital - from Maadi proceed along Corniche toward Embassy. Pass large white Military Hospital on right just beyond overpass. Make right turn and Hospital on left.
 - ii. Tourist Police: There are tourist police, x-ray machines and metal detectors at every major commercial and government property (i.e. museums, tourist sites, some malls, etc). Treat them the same way you would in the US. If you have something that could be construed as a weapon on you, expect to be questioned and scrutinized. (Note: Lesson learned by observation, not experience) They take their job seriously - some more than others. Some museums and tourists sites do not allow cameras and will force you to leave it at the front desk.

7. Israel and West Bank

- a. Money: Credit cards accepted everywhere except local souk type street vendors. Exchange rate is approx. \$1 = 4 shekels and price parity is comparable to US markets. Israel has a reputation for being more expensive. You can spend \$15 for a hamburger in Tel Aviv at a nice restaurant, same as you would in the US, or find a cheaper \$4 alternative down the street for fast food. Did not notice the price disparity outside tourist centers except for gas and hotel costs. Discounted gas cards are available for purchase through US Embassy Tel Aviv and US Consulate General Jerusalem - 500 shekels for 1000 shekel card. Otherwise gas prices are approx double US prices. 17% VAT can be claimed on departure from country if you save your receipts. ATMs readily available everywhere but some operate only in Hebrew.
- b. Communications: Local sim cards are readily obtainable. 60 shekels for registration and initial pre-paid card and cellular data plan is 99 shekels for 5GB. All hotels provided WIFI but usually at an additional cost.

c. Travel:

- i. Do not skip out on briefs with the Consulate – it is one of two consulates in the world that operates autonomously from the primary mission/embassy. It is essentially the defacto embassy to the PNA and has existed since the 1850s.
- ii. IDF Briefing opportunity probably available with sufficient prior coordination.
- iii. Coordinate with USSC at Consulate in Jerusalem to piggyback on trips into West Bank – Ramallah, Hebron, Jericho. Otherwise travel into West Bank is limited to Bethlehem and Jericho with prior approval from RSO/FPD-I only.
- iv. Opportunities to use Arabic were plentiful. Jaffa area in south Tel Aviv, most places in Jerusalem (especially Old City and E. Jerusalem), West Bank, Akko, Nazareth, Cana, Tiberias, and Golan Heights..
- v. Consider visiting: Misgav Am in NE Golan Heights provides view overlooking Lebanese-Israeli Border. City of Metula in NE Golan provides access to drive up to Lebanese-Israeli border checkpoint and ability to observe wall separating the two countries. Tel Dan and Ban'ias are two primary sources of Jordan River in N. Golan and source of historical conflicts. Tel Dan has command post overlooking historical Syrian-Israeli Border. Valley of the Tears in NW Golan overlooks Syria.
- vi. Mount Hermon – must take ski lift in order to reach the peak. Military escort to OP looking East towards Syria is only available 1100 and 1300 each day.
- vii. Obtain Israeli National Parks Voucher at first national park site for about 150 shekels (covers all ~100 sites) vice each site individually (approx. 27/site).
- viii. TRAVEL BY AIR: Egyptian Air maintains direct flights under the auspices of “Air Sinai” several times per week. CAI-TLV: 0900-1010 and TLV-CAI: 1100-1210. Due to the political sensitivity of the flights, must book with cash only. Round trip with taxes waived traveling on Diplomatic Passport approx \$375 vice ~\$700 hopping through Jordan or Turkey. One-way ticket will run approx \$150. Provides an interesting experience searching for a flight at Cairo International Airport that does not maintain a visible check-in desk – you must ask an airport employee where to check-in.
- ix. SHEIKH HUSSEIN / ALLENBY BRIDGE: Provides exposure to scrutiny received by travelers Arab in appearance. Driving across with Diplomatic vehicle is the easiest method. But for FAO experience, get dropped off at Jordanian side of the border, go thru Jordanian customs, take bus (\$5) to Israel. Go thru Israeli customs. Take bus to Jerusalem (\$10) (no direct option to Tel Aviv). No ATM available after customs, only moneychanger.
- x. VISAS: If flying into Ben Gurion airport in Tel Aviv on an American tourist passport, you can simply ask the customs official not to stamp your book. You will be logged in electronically and no physical record will be stamped into your passport book. The 17L form in lieu of a visa typically provided on the land border crossings will not be provided either. On departure, customs will simply stamp your plane ticket in lieu of your passport and no

entry/departure fee will be assessed. For land border crossing and traveling on a tourist passport, simply ask for a 17L form to be stamped, vice your passport if desiring to travel on it to Israeli visa sensitive countries in the region. Otherwise, Diplomatic Visa required prior to travel. If land crossing on Tourist Passport, you may have to pay exit fee of about \$50. If you are on a Diplomatic Passport, you do not have to pay the exit fee. If you are on your Tourist Passport, it was advised during departure that you can show your Diplomatic Passport even though you are not traveling on it and the fee will be waived.

- d. Lodging: For official travel, required RSO/FPD-I approved hotels can be booked under per diem if booked through the embassy travel office. Otherwise no lodging restrictions for tourist travel except West Bank remains no go for spending the night. Tiberias provided good jump off point to tour Golan Heights.
- e. Security: Remain clear of Gaza Strip and surrounding missile threat radius. Road along Sinai border is no go. Did not encounter any negative atmospherics or areas of concern except by some Orthodox Jews who appeared closed off and disapproving of non-Jews in their country.

8. Jordan

- a. Money: Credit cards accepted almost everywhere except local souk type street vendors. Exchange rate is approx. \$1 = .71 Jordanian Dinar. Budget to spend more on this trip for daily living expenses than other Arab countries. ATMs readily available everywhere.
- b. Communications: Local sim cards are readily obtainable. 3G networks are reliable and widespread. All hotels provided WIFI but sometimes at an additional cost.
- c. Travel: Site visit at the Jordanian Marine Corps base was not difficult to setup with assistance from in-country FAO. The JIPTC (Jordanian International Police Training Center) provided a good opportunity to observe US Dept of State's continued Antiterrorism Assistance programs and Jordan's leadership efforts in training assistance to regional security forces. Rental car rates were higher than normal, about \$50/day for an economy/compact sized car.
- d. Lodging: For official travel, RSO/FPD-I approved hotels can be booked under per diem if booked through the embassy. Embassy may require you to have your reservation booked through them.
- e. Security: Did not encounter any negative atmospherics or areas of concern in places traveled. Jordanians were very welcoming.

9. Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

- a. Money: Credit cards accepted almost everywhere except local souk type street vendors. Exchange rate is approx. \$1 = 3.75 Saudi Riyal. ATMs readily available everywhere.
- b. Communications: Saudi ID required to obtain local sim card. Readily available – but necessary to have a sponsor help you obtain one. 3G networks are reliable and widespread. WIFI common in hotels and cafes.
- c. Travel: AIR: For internal air travel, book Saudi flights well in advance to secure best rate. Approx \$50-\$100 between major cities vice \$400 using another airline that will take you out of KSA and back into the KSA. Flights fill fast 2+ weeks out from intended travel. Customs on entry can take as long as 2 hours due to long lines, breaks for prayer and shift changes. VEHICLE: Traffic the worst in the region. Despite modern roads and traffic system, local drivers disregard most traffic regulations similar to Cairo. Difference is that whereas Cairo crawls, drivers fly in KSA – literally felt concerned for safety for first time. Taxis as of January 2013 not authorized. SITE VISITS: Embassy requests two days in Riyadh for embassy briefs and site visits with USMTM (US Military Training Mission), OPM-SANG (National Guard), and OPM-FSF (Facilities Security Forces). Opportunity exists to meet with ARAMCO in Dammam. Female FAOs must purchase an abiya prior to arriving to KSA as it is required immediately upon landing at the airport. A headscarf is not required for expat women, recommended to carry on person in case approached by the Religious Police. Females, regardless of nationality, are not permitted to drive.
- d. Lodging: Must be coordinated thru embassy provided list. Request embassy make bookings to secure best rate / under per diem rate. Staying with Marines at USMTM in Jeddah and Jubayl are options.
- e. Security: Did not encounter any negative atmospherics. However RSO highly discourages any travel south of Jeddah, Riyadh and Dammam. Religious police appeared not to cause problems with expats as long as they are abiding by local customs.

10. Kuwait

- a. Money: Credit cards accepted almost everywhere except local souk type street vendors. Exchange rate is approx. \$1 = .282 Kuwaiti Dinar. ATMs readily available everywhere.
- b. Communications: Local sim cards are readily obtainable at the airport. 3G networks are reliable and widespread. WIFI common in hotels and cafes.
- c. Travel: Three days was quick but sufficient to get a feel for Kuwait compared to other countries in the region. Worth at least making a stop through to gain an appreciation for its own unique personal issues compared to its neighbors and rest of region. Opportunity to conduct site visit of ARCENT if desired.

- d. Lodging: Check with RSO for approved list of hotels.
- e. Security: Did not encounter any negative atmospherics or areas of concern in places traveled. Kuwaitis were welcoming amongst those encountered.

11. Lebanon

- a. Money: Credit cards accepted almost everywhere except local souk type street vendors. Exchange rate is approx. \$1 = 1500 Lebanese Lira. ATMs readily available everywhere. US Dollars accepted everywhere as second officially recognized form of currency and available for withdrawal from ATMs.
- b. Communications: Local sim cards are available, but due to high cost of living more expensive than other countries in the region. A regular subscriber would pay \$100/mo for unlimited calling/text but only 500mb of data. 3G networks are reliable and widespread. WIFI common in public areas. On official travel, not necessary since movements outside embassy will be coordinated with embassy.
- c. Travel: All travel will be coordinated thru embassy when departing embassy compound. Budget for security detail. Contact DAO for current rates.
- d. Lodging: Restricted to embassy compound at rate of about \$135/night. WIFI available.
- e. Security: Observation traveling in a Leave capacity, which is difficult to get approved, did not encounter any negative atmospherics or areas of concern in places traveled. Lebanese were welcoming amongst those encountered. Albeit, historical threat areas avoided –Tripoli to the North where sectarian fighting has spilled over at times from Syria, and veering too far south where Hezbollah communities reside. Hezbollah flags, Iranian flags, banners of the Iranian president and Ayatollahs were prominently hung in Shi'a areas (S. Lebanon and Bakka Valley).

12. Morocco

- a. Money: Credit cards widely accepted in major cities, except local souk type street vendors. Exchange rate is approx. \$1 = 8.4 Moroccan Dirham. ATMs readily available in major cities, but limited in more rural areas if present at all. This is one country in particular where a higher cash advance limit is necessary. Gas stations were mostly cash. Hotels were inconsistent in the use of the their credit card machines.
- b. Communications: Local sim cards are readily obtainable at the airport. 3G networks are reliable but service drops at times outside major cities, particularly when your car breaks down in the northern mountain region. WIFI common in hotels and cafes.

- c. Travel: For air travel, recommend flying into Casablanca for best rate. Major freeways are well-maintained and require tolls between cities based on distance traveled. Major city roads are well maintained. But once off the beaten path, Morocco has THE worst roads in the region. Not abnormal to drive several hundred kilometers through potholes and dirt roads where it appeared an established road existed on a map. Be advised roads between Fes and Tangier are not maintained and in some cases are non-existent aside from major freeway running north from Rabat. Recommend 4x4.
- d. Lodging: Traditional 'Riads' and "Dars" (or Moroccan houses) are widely available, suitable and well under per diem. Hotels are over priced and not always on par with their international brands elsewhere in the region.
- e. Security: While no significant negative situations encountered, be advised that Fes is the largest 'old medina' (Old Arab City) in the region, if not the world. While a lone male traveler may feel safe enough walking the back alleyways, local vendors and unofficial guides target foreigners and can be very manipulative. Potential exists for them to lead you into an isolated unsafe situation. Locals advised of knife-point robberies in the past. The countryside region north of Fes is known for its drug production for Europe. Roads are poor and cell service limited if your car breaks down in this area. Morocco maintains a heavy military presence along the Algerian border and to the south with West Africa due to ongoing border disputes. Locals advised not smart for women to travel alone at night – people may suspect they are out for immoral reasons.

13. **Oman**

- a. Money: Credit cards accepted almost everywhere except local souk type street vendors. Exchange rate is approx. \$1 = .38 Omani Riyal. ATMs readily available everywhere.
- b. Communications: Local sim cards are readily obtainable at the airport. 3G networks are reliable and widespread. WIFI common in hotels and cafes.
- c. Travel: Overnight bus available from Muscat to Salalah for 7.5 OMR (\$20). Saves night lodging and provides middle class Omani travel experience. US Embassy Muscat travel office can assist with reservations as online information is limited. Recommend site visits of Thumrait Airbase, which is hour north of Salalah and Salalah Port to learn about CENTCOM logistics infrastructure.
- d. Lodging: Request embassy make reservations IOT obtain lodging under per diem. Budget options are also available.
- e. Security: Did not encounter any negative atmospherics or areas of concern in places traveled. Omanis were welcoming amongst those encountered.

14. **Qatar**

- a. Money: Credit cards accepted almost everywhere except local souk type street vendors. Exchange rate is approx. \$1 = 3.64 Qatari Rial. ATMs readily available everywhere.
- b. Communications: Local sim cards are readily obtainable at the airport. 3G networks are reliable and widespread. WIFI common in hotels and cafes.
- c. Travel: Recommend minimum two full ICT days (embassy briefs inclusive) to gain sufficient observation. Opportunity exists to meet with SOC-CENT FWD and AFCENT if desired. Site visit of Al-Jazeera was not possible, but Embassy PAO well informed to provide background on organization. Opportunities for camel races and falcon hunting are available. Would require extra day in Qatar. Go to falcon souk for information for a day trip.
- d. Lodging: Many options to choose from within per diem.
- e. Security: Did not encounter any negative atmospherics or areas of concern in places traveled. Qataris were welcoming amongst those encountered.

15. Tunisia (Non-permissive as of September 2012)

- a. Money: All hotels accepted credit cards but not all accepted non-Tunisian cards. While many places accepted credit/debit, cash was preferred and ATMs were easily accessible. \$1 = about 1.6 Dinar Tunisian depending on exchange location. Money will go far on local economy if you avoid the higher end markets where you will find US comparable prices for restaurants and goods. Ensure that if you do exchange money that you keep the receipt. The moneychangers will not exchange at airport if you do not have the initial receipt for exchange.
- b. Communications: Obtaining a local sim card is available hassle free in the airport. Wireless Internet is commonly available at most hotels.
- c. Travel: Roads and highways were generally in good condition. However some of the roads in the interior were not vehicle trafficable. It is best to remain on the larger freeways if you do not have 4x4 vehicle and the road conditions start to deteriorate. Fuel prices were on par with US prices. Kairouan was the highlight of the trip. Considered by some to be the fourth holiest city in Islam after Mecca, Medina, and Jerusalem – it provided a unique opportunity, especially during Ramadan, to speak with Muslims on the importance of the city in Islam. Sousse and Monastir are the hometowns of Tunisia's first two presidents and provide a glimpse of the economic disparity between the more affluent coastal cities and economic deprived interior. Recommend Bou Jaffa area of Sousse. On the route from Sousse/Kairouan to Tozeur, the route passes through Gafsa, important economic artery in central Tunisia. Sidi Bouzid is along the same route and is the town Mohamed Bouazizi set himself on fire marking the birthplace of the Arab Spring. Tozeur provides an opportunity for Sahara Desert appreciation and chance to get away from the tourist centric coastal cities.

Djerba is a good place to go to south. It is an island and you can get all-inclusive rates through Embassy. On the way back to north, Mareth Line is on the way. This military location is WWII defensive line (like Maginot Line in France) where Germans stood and then retreated as Brits fought through Africa.

- d. Lodging: JFTR authorizes only \$79 outside of Tunis, which does not go far in most cities. But suitable lodging options can be found.
- e. Security: Atmospherics were not as positive in some of the interior areas near Gafsa and Sidi Bouzid, but not threatening. Country not open for ICT travel as of Sept 2012.

16. Turkey

- a. Money: Credit cards accepted almost everywhere except local souk type street vendors and not all gas stations. Exchange rate is approx. \$1 = 1.76 Turkish Lira. ATMs readily available everywhere.
- b. Communications: Local sim cards are readily obtainable at the airport. 3G networks are reliable and widespread. WIFI common in hotels and cafes.
- c. Travel: CAR: A rental car provided flexibility to reach more rural areas between major population centers however gas was expensive. Regular gasoline was approx the equivalent of \$10.50 per gallon. Cheaper “Otogaz” at approx \$6 per gallon is available as an alternative petroleum based fuel, but not all vehicles are equipped to use it. Main highways were well maintained however veering off into certain small hamlets in the countryside were not maintained and not advisable for the standard government compact sized vehicle. BUS: The bus system in Turkey is outstanding, economical and efficient. The high prices of gas and the ease of bus travel make it a great option. Able to go wherever, whenever without waiting more than 2 hours. All the buses are greyhound type with A/C and most of the buses offer Internet. TRIP LENGTH: One week provided sufficient time to travel the Western region, but not nearly enough time to travel the entire country. Recommend minimum two weeks, and three weeks is preferable to completely explore Turkey.
- d. Lodging: No issues finding lodging within per diem (i.e. thru booking.com) – international chains or budget-minded options.
- e. Security: As of January 2013, travel to the Eastern regions was not advised by the US Embassy and RSO coordination requested. Did not encounter any negative atmospherics or areas of concern in places traveled. Lebanese were welcoming amongst those encountered.

17. United Arab Emirates (Locally referred to as “The Emirates” not UAE)

- f. Money: Credit cards accepted everywhere, same as in the USA. Exchange rate is approx. \$1 = 3.67 UAE Dirham. ATMs readily available everywhere.

- g. Communications: Local sim cards are readily obtainable at the airport. 3G networks are reliable and widespread. WIFI common in hotels and cafes.
- h. Travel: Flights are economical in/out of either Abu Dhabi or Dubai. Roads are modern and well maintained. Metro is extremely modern, clean and easy to use. Taxis are reasonably priced and drivers speak good English, Arabic or their native South Asian language. Recommend site visits with (1) Marine Corps Training Mission for the Presidential Guard in Abu Dhabi, (2) Iran Regional Presence Office at US Consulate Dubai, (3) Jebel Ali Port in Dubai.
- i. Lodging: UAE is a high cost of living country, but budget options are still available.
- j. Security: Did not encounter any negative atmospherics or areas of concern in places traveled. Felt extremely safe traveling throughout Abu Dhabi and Dubai. Be advised that UAE has laws and they do enforce them. Locals advised that there is a zero tolerance for drinking and driving (even a .01), despite that it has an active nightlife scene. Traffic cameras exist everywhere to enforce driving laws. An Army FAO who conducted travel a couple months prior shared he had about \$300 in traffic fines billed after he departed once the traffic camera fines were reported to the rental company.