

# VOICE



AUK® STUDENT MAGAZINE



# Around the World with AUK



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# Once Upon A Story



# Tell Us Your Story

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“Tell us your story” was a competition for the AUK student community, where members would write a short story or prepare an artwork under the subject “Life without words.” The competition was announced by email and the Student Affairs Instagram account during the first week of October. Once all submissions were taken, a panel of judges consisting of staff members looked through the stories/artwork to decide on the top 3 of each type, which would then be seen by the final panel of judges.

The objective of this competition was to encourage the AUK student body to be part of an event, and to showcase and recognize unseen talents hidden within the community. We were looking for the hidden gems that have not been able to take part in events, Award Nights, and other competitions held in AUK, the silent ones that do not have a medium to express their true artistry.



# Winners

## Story

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### First Place :

#### Jouri Al Ajmi

Three months ago, tragic events kept escalating in the beloved Afghanistan. Then, on the 16th of August, a shocking video captures the moment of 3 desperate Afghans trying to flee from the Taliban while clinging to the aircraft's wheels, where they end up falling off the plane to meet their demise.

This footage has aroused a strong feeling of indignation in me. I felt ashamed that I had nothing to offer for the people of Afghanistan but to use my voice on social media by sharing posts about what was happening in their country.

The image of these poor three men kept haunting me for months...

Strangely enough, and on the flip of a dime, I became these three desperate men in one soul and two hands. Now, I'm writing how my life seemed like before my demise.

This is not meant to disrespect the victims in any way, shape, or form. I have written this short story with the utmost respect to each victim. May they rest in heaven.

– Jouri Al Ajmi

Salam. You can call me Jahan, Bakhtiar, or Ghazi. If you have seen how desperate I was, how helpless I felt while clinging to the aircraft's wheels owned by my occupier, you will understand that each and every name talks about me.

When I was born, I became Jahan (world). A Jahan of the military, soldiers, tanks, weapons, terrorism, screams of pain, the silence of the mourner, the blood of the innocent smeared on the walls of their homes, books ripped off under the dead children's desks, and shattered hopes. This is me (Jahan). I am also called Afghanistan, and the Jahan of Afghanistan is not where I wish to be. I was so desperate to see the other part of this big Jahan, not the Jahan I was doomed to become.

My mom always told me to appreciate myself, and for a while, I started to believe in her words. Then, I learned how to embrace myself until I started to say it out loud confidently. I am Jahan of Afghanistan, and Afghanistan is Jahan!

I am the home of Rubab, Dambura and Zerbaghali! The laughter of women when the Doyra starts playing are as overwhelming as their screams when honor murdered. What about the fascinating smell of Aushak and the irresistible taste of Palaw? By the way, my beloved mom made me Landi Palaw right before I met God. So now, the Landi Palaw lives inside of me, eternally!

Have you heard of the term melting pot? Well, I am the epitome of a melting pot. Here you have Pashtuns, Uzbeks, Tajiks, Balochis, Hazara, Arabs, Nuristanis, and many others mentioned in my national anthem. Listening to it while reading my words will take you to another dimension, trust me!

I am beautiful, just like the sunsets of Kabul and the starry nights of Bamyan. The Persian soul of Balkh and Herat lives within me, just like how Rustam lived within the sheets of the "Shahnameh", despite the smell of his blood on the hands of Shaghad! My language is Rumi's poetry. I am praised for my language, seeing it's mystical richness and divine unity of spirits.

My mom hears me affirming these words to myself, then tells me with a big smile stretching her face, "āffarin azizam!" (Bravo my dear).

Poor mom realizes that Kabul looks depressed when the sun sets, doesn't she? The Rubab is broken. The Dambura players have fled the stage, and music is no longer the pleasure of life. The Aushak is left uneaten by the woman who was slaughtered by her sick-headed father. He sacrificed his daughter right after he surrendered to the deeply rooted beliefs. Which beliefs? The ones that say women are men's property and trust me, these beliefs are all over my Jahan! Every day, you hear of a Hazara family digging the grave of their loved ones, usually murdered by another human of my Jahan. My language is no longer praised, it's now looked down upon because it's the language of the long-bearded, turban-headed terrorists! People of other Jahans are afraid when they hear me speak. But, looking at the brighter side, I'm glad at least they still romanticize the poems of Rumi. No doubt he's the man of Balkh before Konya stole him from us.

At least, I was Bakhtiar (lucky) for once before I died. I had the opportunity of leaving this Jahan sooner than expected. This is my chance to become the Jahan I once aspired to be!

"What a great day to become a Bakhtiar and to start a new chapter!" I told myself, while desperately clinging to my dream, flying to the Jahan I once desired to become. Not only am I able to fly and explore this wide Jahan, but also, I can be a Ghazi (Fighter) while doing so! I fought for my dream to seek a better life, and I did! I just flew to Heaven! This is unbelievable!

I ask God now, does this explain why you left me suffering in my Jahan for so long? To reward me with the best gift for being the Ghazi I am?

I used to despise myself (Jahan). I used to desperately wish to seek my desired life in the other wide Jahan. But in the time being, I despise nothing, and I desire nothing but to stay here forever. In this Jahan, Heaven!

rubab: A traditional instrument

dambura: A traditional instrument

zerbaghali: A traditional instrument

doyra: A traditional instrument

aushak: A traditional dish

palaw: A traditional dish

land palaw: A traditional dish

"Shahnameh": An epic poem by Ferdowsi (a famous Persian Poet)

Rustam: A legendary hero in the Persian Mythology

Shaghad: The murderer of Rustam, his half-brother in the Shahnameh

Rumi: A famous Sufi scholar known as "Mawlana" who was born in Balk, Afghanistan to later move to Konya, Turkey



## Second Place:

Awatef Al Sendi

### "Life Without Words"

The world speaks without using words. Not anyone can understand; only those who pay close attention and gaze vacantly into the distance with a wide imagination can. If you look close enough, you can realize that the world is speaking to you through its changes and occurrences. As if when life gets heavy on you, the water that gathered in the clouds gets heavy as well and cries to show you that it cares. Or when thunder occurs after lightning as if it's screaming for you to take the right path when needed. A rainbow after that to show you that life is still light. Not only the brightness and luminosity I am talking about but the joy and happiness after each struggle. As if the world's circle is based on your emotions. As if, you are the center of the world. Because you are the center of the world. You matter.

As much as words are important, you don't need them to express your emotions. It is similar to how the sun shows it cares by warming the world for us. Or how the moon makes the earth a more livable planet by moderating our home planet's wobble on its axis, leading to a relatively stable climate. But you need to understand them instead of judging. Like how people hate volcanoes while all it did was reduce the amount of heat energy absorbed by the atmosphere.

Every so often, we pass on little details in life and don't pay attention to what they are trying to say silently. Such as a type of flower you come across; maybe its meaning is trying to tell you something, but you don't care enough to take the time to understand it. Or possibly a dog's bark or a cat's purr is trying to say more than its voice allows them to.

Most of the time, a single touch, a physical contact, a hug can mean so much more than words can ever share. A pat on the arm can assure you that you are not alone; someone is there. After all, it's our first form of communication - a single touch, a caress, a hug. It's the only way to make a baby smile after a long cry. It's prime more than speech, more than words could ever tell. You can always find the truth, find all the mysteries words can hide in someone's hand, in someone's eyes, or smile.

Or perhaps when the deaf and the non-verbal find a way to your heart with a simple facial expression that sums up their emotions. With no words or signs needed to be used. Unutterable words aren't the only way to approach someone's heart, someone's soul. Similarly to when the stars make a clear line for you to follow, but you don't. Simply because you don't believe and not because it didn't speak. After all, just like George Santayana once said: "The earth has music for those who listen." You have to open up, to listen to the unspeakable words.

Yet again, life without words isn't always easy. Every so often, you need to use your words to express yourself, such as simply saying: "I care about you, I see you, I love you."



# Artwork

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First Place:

Mariam A Zaghloul

Find Your Light

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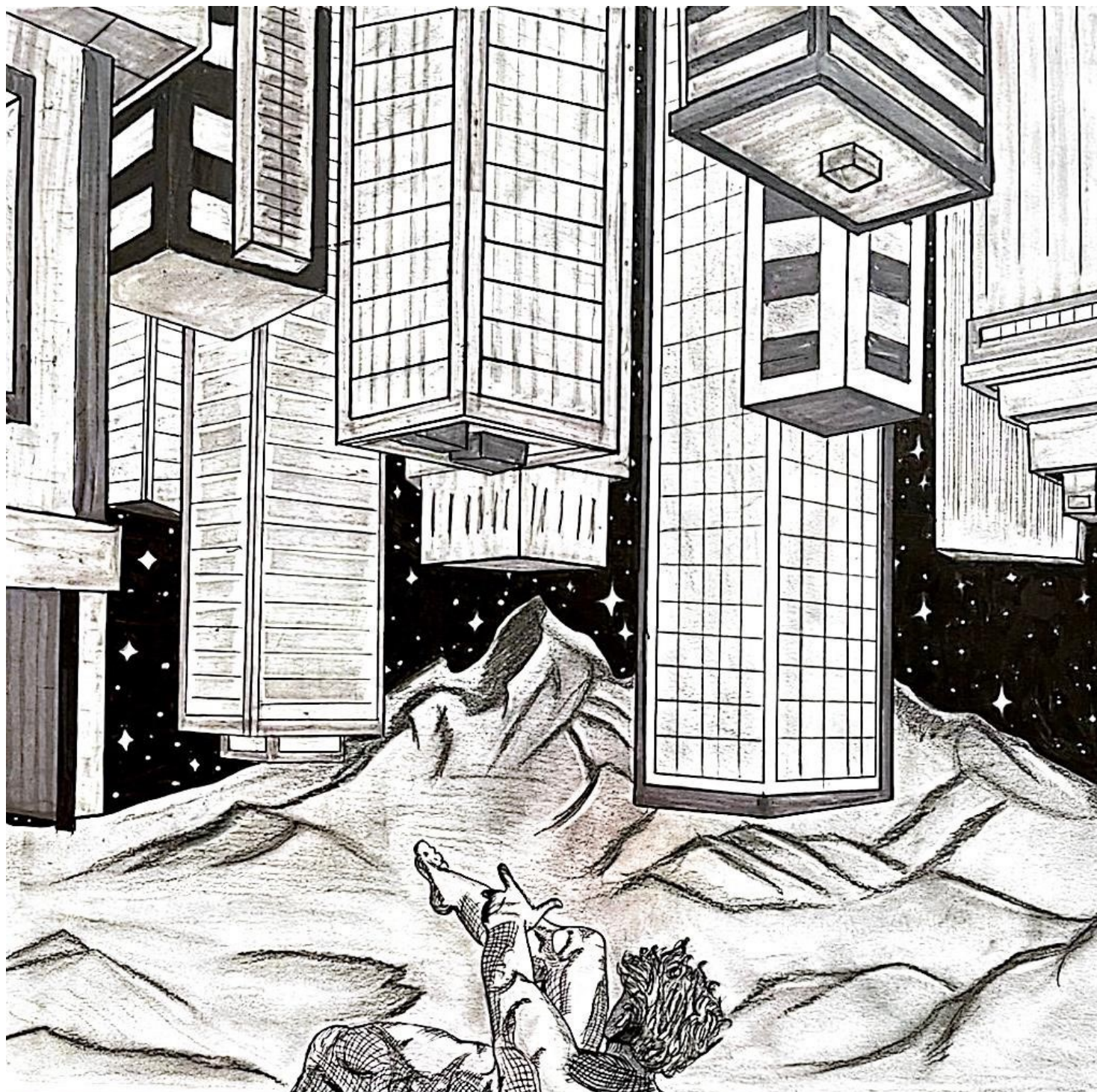


# Second Place:

Amanda El Naggari

Three Stages of Dread





# Third Place:

Shahad Al Sarraf

The Despair of Rejection





# A Sit Down With Dr. Craig Loomis

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By: Bader A Hassain

It's no surprise that Dr. Loomis is arguably the best flash fiction writer in the Gulf region. His style of writing compared to that of many writers, including James Baldwin and Douglas Adams. Most students remember him for his strict style, which seems to be filled with a tight choice of diction, and sentence variations that resembles a drumbeat. He seems to apply this standard to some of his works. One example is a collection of short stories called The Salmiya Collection. However, I believe it is his latest book, this Is a Chair that really cements the style. Following a fellow named Dr. Martin, the story paints itself in little images. Everyday life in the Gulf with certain words he

picked up from many students, professors, and family members of students. I couldn't stop laughing as I turned the pages. Like each imagery had this little nectar of life that was familiar to me. I recall the first time stepping into his office after finishing the book. Determined, I had figured out the book by who the characters were and how the protagonist felt. It was like you were speaking to Dr. Craig —entering his mind. But he surprised me with one line "Its Fiction." Yet when he said that I still couldn't believe it because of how true his lines spoke out through Martin. Or maybe it was because I had analyzed Dr. Loomis in most of my classes for being this professor with saint-like patience.

Dr. Craig Loomis was born in 1949 in a small town called Placerville, with a population of ten thousand or so. You can well imagine he lived a crazy life, having met people like Ginsberg, and my favorite is watching The Doors perform live with a drunk Jim Morrison throwing objects at the crowd. He also was a hospital technician working in the OB-GYN ward. Working in this ward, I believe, was the turning point of how he saw life. He mentioned one incident, where he had to watch twin infants die and record the time of death. At this point in life, he was shifting gears with his education; having switched majors five times in several fields. One of those fields was Oriental Studies, which landed him in Japan in which he lived for quite some time. But he thought it wasn't for him and eventually switched to English, which was a relief. I recall how he would often stress the fact to take our time at university and not choose any major that seems "easy."

How he landed in Kuwait unfortunately was not as exciting as the paragraph above. Dr. Loomis, upon completing his PhD had landed a job opportunity at a university just starting up, which was around the early 2000s. Obviously, there wouldn't be much of a culture shock to him, but he needed to understand the culture he was part of. How students forged papers, how wasta worked, or even what sah meant. During this time, he would discover Bazaar magazine which, if you know, was a free publication at your local Starbucks. Dr. Loomis found out they did not have a place for short stories, and he proposed that he'd show them his works, hoping to get published. Often, he would give them thirty short stories and hope that at least one would be put in the next issue.

Taking his creative writing class was an experience. I learned that to write is to enlighten, I also learned that creative writing has no rules. Yes, you can put clauses and adverbs in one sentence and make it work. That is why this article itself is purposely vague in some parts. The biggest myth of it all is the use of pretentious language which can work expressively, but it can also show how much of a sycophant you may be. While I personally did not excel at creative writing as much as I anticipated, I did watch my peers get shocked at the way stories are told. Dr. Craig Loomis is looking to publish another collection of short stories dealing with his hometown. Possibly even a novel later. Who knows, do you?





# Unknown Serenity

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By: Shana Bijumon

It may sound unusual, but I fell in love watching these gelatinous blobs tossing around by the current, knowing they were alive but not understanding why.

There is no brain, no bones, no blood, and no heart in them. They are not fish nor vertebrates, despite their name.

Their simplicity, however, has a certain appeal. Watching them glide through the water gave me a sense of calmness, serenity at its best.

I stood there, not wanting to move, watching them float.

It was a sense of peace that I had felt but never understood.

~It is an unknown serenity

# The Art of Storytelling: *Qesati*

By: Nuha Al-Sahli

Storytelling is the art of sharing individual experiences, beliefs, ideas, and life-lessons through narration. This fundamental part of being human allows us to share experiences and create emotional connections that make us see each other and the world differently. Qesati is a storytelling initiative based in Kuwait, founded by Fatemah Alhabib, that is meant to bring people together through the art of sharing stories with the purpose of inspiration. VOICE has conducted an interview with the founder of Qesati to share with you this immersive experience and shed light on such a vital initiative.

Mass Communications graduate and current writer at Alshaya Group, Fatemah Alhabib, was born and raised in the UAE, and upon coming to Kuwait, realized the importance of a space where voices can be heard.

"I was exposed to people from different countries, backgrounds, and cultures, all my life. So, when I came to Kuwait, I felt like there was more of a niche here and I was not used to this kind of environment. I love learning about different people through traveling. I feel as if it is a way to understand myself more, to meet new people and to explore things that are beyond what I usually experience daily. And this is one of the reasons why I find storytelling to be important because we are all sharing different cultures and experiences."



Fatemah Alhabib, Founder  
of *Qesati*.



Qesati logo @qesa.ti on  
Instagram



## "What is the role Qesati plays in sharing culture and experience?"

*"Storytelling is a form of inspiration, and I genuinely believe that people are one of the biggest forms of inspiration. I have had a lot of people from diverse cultures and backgrounds as guests or as attendees. That is something that brings people together and allows them to share their own unique experience and allows people to be exposed to other cultures."*

## "What is the purpose of a space like Qesati, especially in Kuwait?"

*"So, when I first started Qesati, the purpose was not to only target people in Kuwait, but also everyone around the world. We managed to do that when we were doing some virtual sessions, I have had guests join from various places around the world to share their experience. As for the importance of Qesati, it allows people to expand beyond cliques. Many people, especially in Kuwait, stay in their own circles and safe groups without being aware of what is happening outside these bubbles. So, by listening to people and their stories, they become much more aware of things such as social issues happening in their environment that they were not aware of before. They can understand that society is not perfect, and there is always room for improvement. For example, one of our guest speakers was a Kuwaiti girl who was an orphan, and many people in the session were astonished that even though they lived in Kuwait their entire life, they had no idea how difficult the situation was for an orphan. It is through learning and listening to others that you are able to do better in society."*

## "How does storytelling specifically, help tackle such issues?"

*"It is because storytelling is a natural part of being human, that it is so accessible to everyone. No person's background goes against storytelling. Every person from every culture knows storytelling because we are natural storytellers. We all come home and talk about our day, or share funny stories that happened at school, these are all forms of storytelling. Many people come into the session feeling intimidated and not sure how the process works, but once they realize storytelling is more about conversing with one another rather than reading aloud from a book, the conversation flows more smoothly."*

## "When did Qesati start? And what difficulties did you face in the beginning?"

*"So, Qesati started in 2020, specifically September 3rd. But prior to being launched officially on Instagram, we carried out three different sessions on the side just to test out if the sessions were going to be successful. We had small groups of friends come together and share their stories regarding a specific topic and through that topic, we shared our stories, and everything just organically started to build from there onwards. It started off with just a group of friends coming together to share their stories, moving up to bringing in guests and then moving on to bigger guests and to bigger circles. I think one of the difficulties we faced was getting people to be involved in the session. Because people did not know what to say or how to start the conversation, as a moderator myself, it was a bit difficult to moderate and try to find the right questions to ask in the sessions, for people to feel motivated to share their stories. So, it took a while for Qesati to get a kickstart, but I do not think that we ever faced a session that was completely terrible. The conversation always feels natural, and people were always very receptive towards the stories because again, storytelling is very natural. I think another struggle that I have had was finding a space to carry out these sessions, especially because when we started, it was during the pandemic, and a lot of places had restrictions towards how many people they want to accommodate and I am hoping in the future, there can be a space just for Qesati"*

## "How do you decide whether a session was successful?"

*"I think when the session made room for a lot of conversation and helped people resonate with the speaker and with one another I conclude that it was a successful session. The goal is to have attendees say 'oh, I've been through something similar to that' and start sharing their experiences with no judgment. It is a supportive environment, and every successful session will have the speaker and the attendees feel at home and feel inspired. I can really feel the sessions being successful because we have had around 6 people in the first session, and 30 people in the last one, so I know the purpose of Qesati is being met. I feel wonderful whenever the session ends and before people leave, they come and tell me that they feel much lighter, and they feel understood and heard. The purpose is to feel like you are not alone. I have had people from marginalized communities, different racial backgrounds, nationalities, and age groups come to the session, and they all feel safe and at ease to share their stories and that is what Qesati is all about"*

*"Every Qesati session has its own special charm. We have had sessions that were very emotional, sessions that were funny and sessions that were informative and educational. That is the charm of Qesati and my goal for the future is to grow this space and help more people feel comfortable to share their stories and feel inspired."*





*Qesati session titled "Freedom of Creativity" with ABAIH! Channel*



*Qesati session- Yoga and Meditation Kashta.*



**Winter**

**Fiesta**

# "Cold" Hands and "Hot" Chocolate

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By: Shana Bijumon



# Comfest 2021: My Insights of Comfest after Two Year Isolation

By: Bader A Hassain

I recall when Com Fest 2020 was canceled. it was just around the corner after what was supposed to be the National Liberation Day –until Covid hit. Now, people had the chance to experience a huge social gathering again with Com Fest 2021, and guess who attended as a VOICE reporter?

It was a regular Friday afternoon, dressed in my polo long sleeves, accompanied with suspenders. I met up with my friends at the now gone Coffee Masters. Upon entering, I see Kushal, an AUK Finance student, who frankly looks like something straight out of the seventies. He was dressed up in his traditional Pakistani attire, but considered himself to be engaging in cosplay as a samurai of sorts. He tried finding a prop sword to use, but couldn't find a bakala that sells one. Kushal insisted on being the star of the show. I didn't bother saying no, he was original in his costume.

When we entered the place, it was crowded, which slightly concerned me since most people were not wearing masks. After entering, I moved aimlessly, wondering where I was on the map. So, that is what I did; wander in circles, hoping there is something new in each loop. By then, I was taking pictures of all the different cosplayers. Some were variations of well-known animes I couldn't put my finger on but recognized due to their massive popularity. Others did cosplay on comic books that I have indulged in myself over the quarantine, therefore I knew their niche.

I really liked the convention because people did not take each other seriously, and there was a certain nonchalant tone to the cosplayers when they would answer questions. Also, seeing the crowd develop from what it used to be - a handful of closeted anime lovers to an entire community of thousands was just incredible. There were even those that catered towards trading card games like Pokemon and Yugioh. Additionally, ComFest had a line of celebrities attending, one of whom was Troy Baker, who most of you would know from the video game The Last of Us. He played some of his music live on the small stage of the event.

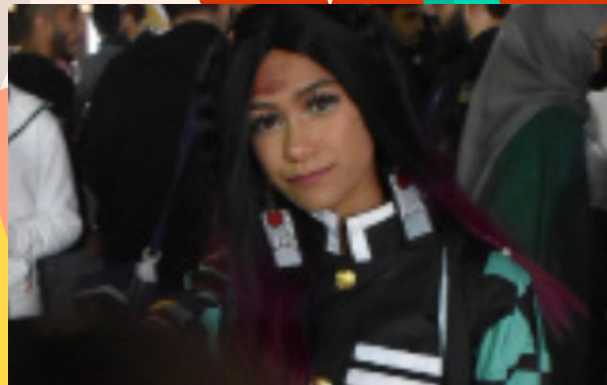
Another notable part of the convention comprised the artist's corner, and an AUK freshman held one booth. Her name was Jenna, a talented individual who had sold her paintings and t-shirts that, of course, catered towards the people attending ComFest. Moreover, she made wallets with hand-painted anime characters. If I were to ever hear she is failing her classes because of her work, expect an 800-word rant about the Graphic Design department not recognizing talent!

The convention also had restaurants like Meme's Curry show up. The restaurant opened around 2014 and now has become an empire for its delicious katsu. It surprised me when I saw that the owner had made another restaurant called Yosai's Fries, which was inspired by the Meme's fries dish. All the owner's restaurants were named after his sons and daughters, which was heartwarming. I remember seeing his first restaurant held at a convention a few years ago, and it was their first start up booth. To see the restaurant flourish today excites me for their future endeavors.

While it was a great convention nonetheless, I was not too fond of some aspects regarding the convention. There was some disorganization in terms of entry and exit. If you were to exit, you needed to get stamped to return; imagine having thousands entering and exiting, and only two were responsible for stamping. Actually, some of my friends admit to sneaking in. Most of these conventions have the same problem of purchasing a space for their hosting, only to exceed their expectations and have thousands come in, and I believe with that comes a certain lack of communication. I think it was insensitive to reserve a venue that small, especially considering the new variant had already been present in the country. They should keep in mind the safety of their customers; otherwise, what is the point of having to run a convention post-pandemic?

Despite the anxiety of being in a crowded mess like ComFest, it did improve in terms of content, which is great, to say the least. Being able to meet many wonderful characters was a breath of fresh air after a year and a half of isolation.





# Connecting Bridges

By: Lea Calingasan

**B**aladkum, meaning “your country” in Arabic, is a multilingual community with a goal to make everyone feel like Kuwait is their home-away-from-home. It is “built by the community for the community” with hopes of nurturing the feeling of belonging and integrating the sense of hospitality within Kuwait’s community. They aim to celebrate diversity and bring all walks of life together by delivering accessible information, updating local communities, providing mental health resources, and more through community events, workshops and blog posts. Their goal is to inform with ease, hence providing posts and translations in six languages – English, Arabic, Hindi, Filipino, Malayalam, and Bengali. Since launching Baladkum in July 2021, they have already hosted multiple online workshops, self-defense classes, yoga sessions, and their first Cultural Fiesta in December of 2021.

Baladkum is a product of the BUILD Ideathon 2020 hosted by en.v – a Kuwait-based, women-led team with the goal to unite society. As one of the top three finalists, Baladkum was funded and supported. They operate Baladkum.com and regularly post on Instagram, Twitter, Facebook, and LinkedIn to reach more people.

Baladkum was initiated and founded by Fatemah Ashkanani – a fellow Wolfpack! Ashkanani is a proud Filipina-Kuwaiti and a prouder mom of four cats. Aside from being mixed-race, she lived in the United Kingdom for six years, allowing her to gain a more globalized worldview. Being exposed to multiple communities helped her better understand diversity in society and the importance of social identity and the sense of belonging. Her friends describe her as a supportive, genuine, and dedicated person – some of the great qualities a leader must possess!

Fatemah Ashkanani is a Communications and Media student at AUK. When we asked about her major, she stated, “The various aspects of my degree spoke to me. I feel like this major will give me the right tool that I need to be where I want to be. It’s fun and exciting.” She has plans on pursuing a master’s degree after graduating. She enjoys running Baladkum and cannot wait to see what the future holds for her and her team.

To understand more about *Baladkum*, we asked Fatemah the following:

Why did you choose to focus on diversity and inclusion rather than other issues?

*“BUILD Ideathon’s theme was Reimagining Our Future Together. The challenge was to find innovative ways to help the most marginalized communities in Kuwait. Baladkum was one of the many ideas to come out of that challenge. Other than that, the pandemic has spotlighted the various experiences of the different communities that exist within Kuwait, so our goal impassions us to help where we can by offering the tools that we provide.”*

How do you manage your team given the pandemic and distance between members?

*“One of the perks of having Baladkum operated mostly online is meeting virtually and compromising for each other’s time zones. We often conduct our meetings at night, so everyone gets to join. Although most of our members reside outside Kuwait, they either lived within the GCC or were familiar with Kuwait’s culture. We still understand one another despite the differences in race, religion, etc.”*

Where do you see *Baladkum* a year from now?

*“Our goal for 2022 is to expand more languages in our blogs and posts, collaborate with different organizations, and have more nationalities presenting their countries in our next Cultural Fiestas.”*

Complete the statement: I want the readers, followers, or audience of *Baladkum* to learn...

*“That there’s such beauty and joy in being different and amongst people of diverse backgrounds. From trying out new food to learning how to say hello in a new language, being around different people keeps you curious and creative, which are traits, we should continue to strive for.”*

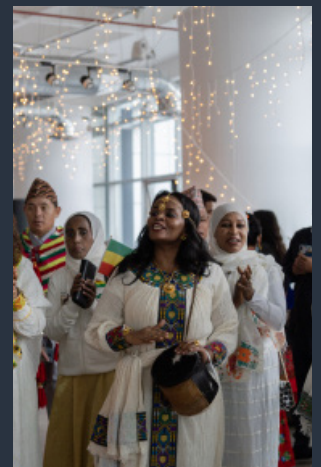
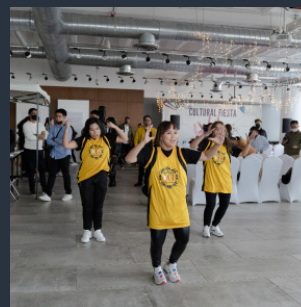
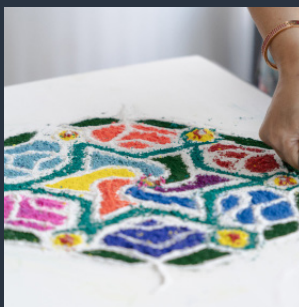
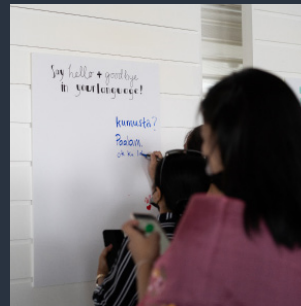
# Sneak Peek:

## Baladkum's Cultural Fiesta 2021

On December 17, 2021, Baladkum held their first Cultural Fiesta in the Promenade Cultural Center – Hawally. The Cultural Fiesta was held in celebration of International Migrant Workers Day. This occasion honors the dedication and emphasizes the non-discrimination and patriotism of overseas workers worldwide. Furthermore, it paved the way for attendees to unwind and learn more about the culture of one another.

Audiences coming from countries like the Philippines, India, Pakistan, Nepal, Ethiopia, and others enjoyed various performances from Nepalese, Ethiopian, and Indian cultural dance groups. Many have tried Rangoli – an Indian art form and experienced the Ethiopian coffee ceremony. Everyone gathered for lunch later that day and devoured different Filipino, Indian, and Ethiopian dishes.

The storytelling activity left a boost of serotonin for everyone to end the day. With simple questions like, “What is your most joyful moment and why,” and “What is your favorite meal,” people grew more compassionate and cared for one another. That is the goal and message of Cultural Fiesta – no matter who you are and where you are from, there will always be a unique story you hold that is worth sharing.







# IOM

## Film Festival: A Small Review

By: Bader A Hassain

**T**he International Organization for Migration hosted a film festival event at the AUK, in which they

planned to show an educational film that highlighted migrant issues around the globe. The event was scheduled to start only minutes after I was assigned to write about it! I was extremely flustered, but I rushed to prepare and made it exactly in time, right before the guests set foot on stage. I made sure to grab the camera from my car in order to properly document this very exciting event. Having to attend an event at campus after the pandemic felt extremely rewarding. It was like the university was finally springing back to life, and I felt glad to see it happen.

I arrived at the theatre at two o'clock sharp and readied the camera. A woman walked up to me and gave me a three-page handout. She then explained, "fill this part now, then the second page after the film finishes, then sign a contract for us to use your voice or any pictures of your face or body." I sat in the front row. I started filling the form out. It asked simple questions about migration and my view of it, and whether migrants would be good neighbors. As a reporter, I filled it out from a neutral standpoint.

Professor William Andersen, the host of this event, alongside an IT Technician, were up on stage checking if the link was working and the audio quality was good enough for students online to be able to hear and see the event. Once everything had checked out, the presentation began, in which Prof. Andersen brought up Ferhat Atik, the Director who introduced Dr. Vamik Volkan who appears in the movie.

When the presenters and the IT staff were done with their preparations, the movie was finally on the big screen. The film aired the credits at the beginning, which I thought was extremely unusual, and confusing.

panel discussion. Hey, at least there was one positive thing out of this, the theatre was good enough for displaying theatre productions.

Regardless, it was a pleasure seeing the names of the people who worked hard on the movie displayed on the screen, so to show my appreciation, I made sure to document this moment with my camera.

Next in the film was an introduction to Dr. Vamik Volkan, establishing his credibility in the field of psychiatry and his many endeavors in the field of migration. He explains the dangers of asylum-seeking in the sense of a shellshocked individual seeking asylum. Depression, anxiety, and grief all play a role. Losing your home, your family, and such. Dr. Volkan then talked about his travels to the U.S.A., explaining how he was a different person than that of Cyprus, which made me reflect on my own behavior while traveling, and how I'm more open to conversations than usual. When the film wasn't focused on the presenter, it would switch to videos of homeless people in the streets. These powerful scenes really highlighted what he was saying about trauma, and migration. Sadly, when I glanced at the audience, many of them were on their phones. It broke my heart that some would completely ignore the movie's powerful message to check their social media feeds. The movie was ten minutes away from finishing; I turned the page to the one that instructed me to fill it in after the film, as I had all my answers mentally written already.

Once the film finished, a panel of professors from different sectors, Graphic Design, SBSA, IR, and Psychology, gave brief presentations. All of them talked about their experiences with migration and emphasized more on the negative aspects of it. I thought that their experiences with this issue were fascinating. It's crazy that such an issue is this pervasive in our society.



# Indigeneity and Erasure in North Africa: Exploring *Amazigh* Culture

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By: Nuha Alsahli

If you have never heard of Imazighen, you may be under the impression that the inhabitants of North Africa are of Arab descent but, any descendant of North Africa's pre-Arab population is known as an Amazigh, plural Imazighen. Imazighen are an ethnic group indigenous to North Africa and can be found in Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Libya, Mali, Niger, and Mauritania in a variety of settlements. The Arabs invaded North Africa in the seventh century, bringing with them not only a new religion but also a language and traditions that were foreign to the original Imazighen tribes of the Sahara and Mediterranean region. The Arab conquest in North Africa has had long lasting effects on the Islamization and Arabization of the region, causing what is known as integration. In general, according to genetic evidence, it is fair to say that most Arabs from the Northwest region of Africa are of Amazigh descent and have grown up Arabized.



Amazigh flag picture : World Amazigh Congress. (1998). Amazigh Flag [Photograph].  
[https://commons.m.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Berber\\_flag.svg](https://commons.m.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Berber_flag.svg).

Imazighen is a word from the indigenous Tamazight language that translates to “free people.” The more frequent– although false –term for Imazighen among outsiders is Berber, which Imazighen largely reject due to its harmful connotations. It has much to do with the word ‘barbarian.’ Amazigh languages are a phylum of Afro-Asiatic languages that includes several closely related languages. Imazighen are pushing for the unification of closely related languages into a single standard, Tamazight, a commonly used general name for all Amazigh languages. Among the scattered Imazighen communities, there are over 300 local dialects. Imazighen are mostly Sunni Muslims, yet they still follow many traditional customs. Cultural beliefs tend to predominate in rural regions since Imazighen outnumber Arabs there. The Amazigh people converted to Islam gradually over generations, and the religion did not become prominent until the sixteenth century. The Atlas Mountains that run through Morocco, Algeria, and Tunisia, had been inhabited by Imazighen Jews. However, between 1950 and 1960, a significant amount of them immigrated to occupied regions of Palestine.

Imazighen are known for their artistic abilities, ranging from pottery to weaving, jewelry to henna art, and, especially, their stunning designs. Many artists consider their work as a spiritual process in which they could incorporate “blessings” into their work. My personal favorite aspect of Amazigh culture is face tattoos. For beauty, health, and protection, women tattooed their faces, feet, arms, and other body parts. Moreover, tattoos were used to tell tribal stories, connect women to their land, and indicate familial relationships, among other things. Northwest African women with tattoos today were born in a time when tattoos were highly encouraged and celebrated, but unfortunately, the practice has pretty much disappeared. However, it is still interesting to learn how these tattoos helped distinguish members from distinct groups and tribes and were symbols meant to unify groups, deeply rooted in their history. Despite the meaning behind each symbol, facial tattoos were also a fashion trend, and many interviewed Northwest African women stated that back then, these tattoos were “the same as make-up.”



-Amazigh woman with siyala tattoo picture: Jean and Franc shor- National Geographic-  
ic. (2006). Amazigh woman with siyala tattoo [Photograph]. <https://www.google.com/amp/s/iseo58.com/post/188462297325/berber-woman-of-ait-haddidu-tribe-wears-her-wealth/amp>.



yennayer celebrations picture: AFP. (2018). Yennayer celebrations in Algeria [Photograph]. <https://www.google.com/amp/s/www.dailysabah.com/africa/2018/01/12/berbers-mark-new-year-in-algeria-welcoming-2968/amp>







# Graduation of 2021

By: Bader A Hassain

As the end of the semester approached, many students like me have been wondering why the grassy area was covered over. Rumors spread of it being a new building, which obviously doesn't make sense since the new G Building was so recently built. After a long wait, we finally found out that the university was actually building a new stage to hold the graduation ceremony. Unlike 2020, the change in pandemic regulations has given graduates of 2021 the opportunity to celebrate their graduation on campus which would be held on Wednesday the 1st of December and Thursday the 2nd of December.

It was a two-night event. I recall preparing my camera at the now-closed cafe near the university with my suit and tie, resembling Peter Parker. I entered campus at 8 pm sharp and found that the university looked completely different. It was empty and full of signs with the phrase "Congratulations Class of 2021" on them. It was surreal to think that I would probably be celebrating an event like this one someday.

The University's plan was to celebrate the graduates from The College of Arts & Sciences and The College of Business & Economics on Wednesday, and then the graduates from The College of Engineering & Applied Sciences on Thursday. When I went to Wednesday's event, I was able to recognize most of the professors on stage and had a lot of fun talking and mingling with them and admiring their colorful gowns—all of which had different representations of their own universities. I then went to Thursday night's graduation, but I couldn't recognize any of the professors on stage as I didn't have time to mingle with them before the event.

The stage filled up completely by the time I got there; the violinist had already played the standard pop songs. One song that stood out for me was the theme tune of the Godfather trilogy. The violinist then walked to the front of the stage towards the crowd and effortlessly improvised. What really impressed me was how she maintained her composure when the crowd took pictures of her—flashes on!

I sat at an empty bench until the musical performance stopped, then I went back to the stage. While heading there, pairs of graduates formed a line with the leaders of each line holding up large flags of the college they represented, which intrigued me to take photos as I'd never noticed these images before.

Keynote speaker, Founder and Chairwoman of the Board of Trustees of AUK, Shaikha Dana Nasser Sabah Al-Ahmed Al-Sabah gave her speech, which comprised of a nostalgic overview of how the University developed over the years—from campus being a kindergarten to the established university that it is today. She also talked about how the pandemic had affected us as a whole community, and the passing of our previous Sheikh, Sabah al-Ahmad (God rest his soul). It was a fascinating and moving speech that made us reflect on all the traumatic events of last year.

Once her speech ended, one line of graduates after another slowly went to the podium, while the graduation ceremony music played in a continuous loop for the next hour and a half. Graduates sat and waited to get their degrees. The ceremony ended with shots of confetti flying into the air. They then finally played a fresh set of music that I hadn't heard before, probably because it was Arabic. But it still added to the ambiance of a graduation at the American University of Kuwait.

Students and parents started gathering at Gate Three, all taking pictures. I saw many of the families hugging and kissing their sons and daughters, some of whom teared up realizing that they finally graduated after years of hard work.

When the event was finally over, I walked towards Gate Three in my Peter Parker outfit to meet up with all the members of the Student Council. While we walked around, throwing jokes at each other, I felt a strong sense of community and belonging. Knowing that Student Life had my back filled my heart with joy, and comfort. This event was truly a memorable one.







# Around the World in a Semester

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# New Year's Eve Around the World

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By: Nuha Al-Sahli

Does anyone else feel as if the year 2020 is not over yet? It is hard to believe that 2020 was two years ago, and we have successfully made it through 730 days since then. No one can deny that those two years came with challenges and countless changes in our personal, social, and academic lives, but each year signifies a new beginning and a new chance. As we enter 2022, we are all busy achieving our resolutions and hoping that this year will present us with greater opportunities and more delightful memories with our loved ones. We started our new 365-day journey with New Year's Eve celebrations, fireworks, and in the company of friends and family. Let us take a look at the most famous New Year's Eve celebrations and traditions around the world.

The eyes of the world turn towards Times Square New York every December 31st. The dazzling lights and celebrations in Times Square have made it into a global tradition that the entire world anticipates. The most famous aspect of this celebration is the "ball drop," where a large ball descends a flagpole and rests at exactly midnight, signaling the start of the New Year. This huge event is covered internationally and is preceded by live entertainment such as parades and performances by musicians for the crowd that is estimated to consist of one million people. What makes Times Square so special at this time of the year is the huge gathering, the Rockin' Eve performances, the blizzard of confetti, and party favors that create a lively atmosphere that starts the new year with dazzling festivities.





The second host to some of the best New Year parties is Dubai, UAE. Dazzling performances, firework displays, and fantastic food are considered some of the best places to be on New Year's Eve. The showstopping centerpiece is, without a doubt, Burj Khalifa, with stunning fireworks, lights, and lasers flashing across the sky. In last year's New Year's Eve, Burj Khalifa shared celebrations from around the world and invited global audiences to share their celebrations through a partnership with Zoom, live streams on YouTube, and other social media platforms under the theme of "togetherness." The dazzling Dubai fountain shows right across from extravagant restaurants make this an unforgettable experience.

Celebrations vary from one country to another, and the same is true for traditions. In Spain, the most famous New Year's tradition is the one of the twelve grapes. According to tradition, you must eat them one by one at midnight on December 31st, in rhythm with the striking of the clock. You will have a prosperous and lucky year if you finish all the grapes in time. Whether you believe in magic or not, you should try the experience; it is a lot of fun. On New Year's Eve, grapes are the most anticipated event. The sound of the clock is transmitted on television across Spain. On this day, family and friends traditionally gather for a great dinner before eating the twelve grapes. People in many towns and villages gather in a big location with a large clock to eat grapes and share the last minutes of the previous year.

To ward off evil spirits, Danes welcome the New Year by tossing old plates and glasses against the doors of family and friends. They also "leap" into January by standing on chairs and jumping off them together at midnight. People in Finland forecast the coming year by pouring molten tin into a water container and analyzing the shape the metal acquires after it hardens. A heart or ring denotes a wedding, a ship denotes travel, and a pig denotes a plentiful food supply. If you would like to try some of those traditions, you better have a big appetite for the next one, because Estonia's New Year's Eve custom will leave you full.

People there are accustomed to eating at least seven, nine, or twelve meals throughout the day on December 31st. It is a lot more than the traditional three meals a day, but it is said that if you eat seven, nine, or twelve meals on New Year's Eve, you will have the strength of seven, nine or, twelve men the next year. Eating extravagant dinners and indulging in delicious food also celebrates the upcoming year's abundance of food.

Ethiopia is one of the few countries on Earth that recognizes the thirteenth month. Surprisingly, they celebrate the New Year with massive celebrations on September 11th. The festival is known as Enkutatash, which means "gift of jewels," and it celebrates the days when the Queen of Sheba embarked on a trip and was rewarded with diamonds upon her return. Small presents are given to children today, and adults celebrate with friends and relatives. Luckily, the weather in Brazil is wonderful throughout the year, as people enjoy spending New Year's Eve in the sea. It is considered lucky if you can jump over seven different waves while making seven different wishes. They also enjoy fireworks on the beaches of Rio de Janeiro while eating lentils, which represent fortune. White is the most favored color to wear since it is said to bring good fortune and serenity. They burn life-sized dolls with face masks that represent unpleasant occurrences from the previous year, similar to Aos Viejos.

Every country's New Year's Eve customs are different, and each country has its own style of celebrating. The New Year traditions are created to promote good luck, fortune, happiness, and generally a better future. Whether you have traveled for the New Year or celebrated at home with friends and family, you will undoubtedly feel nostalgic and hopeful for the coming year. These emotions are global and experienced by everybody on this important occasion, along with resolutions that we may or may not keep.

# Dear Santa, My Wish for Christmas

By: Zinab K Hassan



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# Around the World at AUK

By: Nuha Al-Sahli

Everyday hurdles are a custom experience for college students everywhere, and each day presents a new issue we must tackle. Every college student knows a thing or two regarding issues such as time management or failing to network. However, international students have reported additional obstacles that were foreign to local students. AUK is home to many nationalities and celebrates this diversity via events such as an international week. While an international week is a great opportunity for international students to display and celebrate the beauty of their home countries, a platform where their opinions and concerns can be voiced is needed. This article presented international students with this platform where they can share their experiences with one another and with Kuwaiti students.

While being asked about how integrated they feel with local students, many international students pointed out the existence of cliques. Ahmed, a Graphic Design student from Egypt, talked about this matter, saying, "It is a bit hard connecting with local students who are already members of their own friend group. At first, I thought maybe it was because they already had a group, they were comfortable with, but once I saw that this group consisted of Kuwaiti students, I realized it might have something to do with nationality. This is not to say there is something wrong with that, it is perfectly normal to gravitate towards people who share the same culture as you, but it may have made it difficult to feel connected." Lilo, half Moroccan SBSA and IR student had a similar take; "When it comes to events, Student Life accepts everyone and hosts many international based events. However, amongst local students, there are definitely nationality segregated cliques on campus in which their members discourage difference. I have noticed some of them talk down on people whose culture they are unfamiliar with or do not understand."

Keeping this interesting take on cliques in mind, I have asked international students about what reasons do they think are behind these cliques. Sara, an SBSA student from Lebanon, shared her own experience with cliques; "I do believe there are cliques on campus, and I cannot rule out the chance that they could be nationality-based, but I think it has more to do with common interests. For example, there are many cliques where the members are of the same major. I think it is mainly about such things where you all have the same interest or culture. I do not think they are purposefully excluding people based on nationality, but it is just because they connect with one another more and they have similar experiences because they are from the same country." On a similar note, Adam, a Graphic Design student from the Philippines, believes that students at AUK are more integrated and that the existence of cliques does not affect his university experience, saying "I think the biggest obstacle to being an international student is the cultural differences. People in the Philippines are less conservative and tend to be warmer than people in Kuwait. I also miss Filipino food as there is a stark difference in cuisine, and I am more used to the sweet and savory palate. I highly suggest you try Adobo- my favorite Filipino dish. As for academic issues, I would not say there is a significant difference between Kuwaiti students and international students. The only academic issue I have faced is hearing people in class speak Arabic and feeling out of the loop."

There are mixed feelings amongst international students about the existence of cliques on campus and whether they are nationality-based. The uniqueness of the international student experience varies from student to student, and while each experience is different, they are all valid. One thing all international students had in common was their appreciation of the events hosted by Student Life.

Mel, a Graphic Design student from Syria and Palestine, spoke about these events saying, "There are many events that shed light on different nationalities, and I particularly liked the event that celebrated Palestinian culture. I would say AUK definitely presents international students with the opportunity to express themselves." Laura, an English Literature student from Egypt and Romania, expressed the same appreciation for international events, "I think these events are important because they highlight international students. I would love to see more events and more opportunities for foreign students to highlight their culture. There are many aspects of Romanian culture different from that of Kuwait. My favorite aspect of Romanian culture is called 'Romanian Polka,' which is an old folk dance."

Lama Abdo, Events Management Coordinator, spoke about how AUK never misses out on involving international students in their events. "Based on data we have regarding the different nationalities at AUK, we host diversity-related events such as International Week, Cooking Competitions, Parade of Nations, Global Village, and more. Of course, being an American university and following the American system, we include aspects of that culture, such as Halloween events. I think it is important to encourage foreign students to participate in such events, feel proud of their culture and feel like they belong. We focus on celebrating diversity and helping local students explore different cultures and see them from different perspectives."

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# Mountain of Clouds

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By: Shana Bijumon



I wasn't always a lover of mountains since I thought it was a waste of time and energy to trek up and see nothing but a barren landscape. However, the past few years have taught me that the beauty of nature should not be underestimated. 2020 provided me with opportunities to travel across beautiful landscapes. This mountain, 'Meesapulimala' in Kerala, is one of them. It was the gorgeous view, not the feeling of satisfaction from climbing the mountain, that made me feel like I had accomplished something. I yelled with delight at what I saw at the top. The clouds, the greens below and the cool air were the gift to my eyes.



# My Traveling Experience

By Adam Cruz

In December 2019, my family and I decided to travel to Dubai and spend our winter break there. I had also recently graduated from 12th Grade, and we figured that this trip would be a great reward for such an exhausting and stressful school year. On the day of my graduation, we hastily returned home and finalized our luggage immediately after the ceremony, as our flight was the same evening. We drove to the airport and checked our luggage a few hours before our flight. We then lounged briefly and had some coffee for our late-night flight. Soon after, we boarded the plane and got into our seats. After a few peaceful hours on the plane, we landed in Dubai.

We departed the plane and walked towards the arrows' direction. The first thing that caught my attention was the airport's train station. The Dubai International Airport is huge, and so they have train stations to transport passengers across different places in the airport. It caught my attention because there are no trains in Kuwait, and it was actually my first time sitting in one. The train was fast and got us to our destination in no time. When we stepped out of the airport, the second thing I noticed was the weather. The weather during that time of the year was very lovely. It was not too hot, nor was it too cold. We then packed our luggage into a cab and headed to our hotel.

The hotel we checked in at had a beautiful view of Dubai's tall skyscrapers and towers. We then got dressed and immediately headed out to do some exploring. My mom explained that to get the most out of our trip, we should explore Dubai as much as possible. So, coming from a flight, we headed to the biggest mall in Dubai – Dubai Mall. There, we had lunch and walked around the mall. It was pretty big and felt bigger than Avenues here. After a short sightseeing trip in the mall, we returned to our hotel and rested for the rest of the day. Our hotel room was very comfortable and came with a built-in kitchen.

We woke up very early the following day and got ready to leave for our next stop – Dubai Miracle Garden. This garden is a famous tourist attraction and is very crowded throughout the year as it showcases awe-inspiring and beautiful craftsmanship of flowers, bushes, etc. The garden was very crowded with tourists like my family and me. There were people taking pictures and posing in front of each display.

The garden had an array of designs, patterns, and displays all over the place. It was very beautiful, and the colorful scenery definitely cheered up whoever saw it. After a day of posing in front of displays, we head back to our hotel and rest for the next adventure the next day.

The next day, we took a break from venturing out and explored more of Dubai Mall, which we hadn't reached yet. We had lunch at a new and cool restaurant and continued walking around, just getting a feel for Dubai's energy. My mom's friend recommended us a shop to get souvenirs from, and so we headed there and bought souvenirs and gifts for people back in Kuwait. After that, we went home a bit early and just relaxed in our hotel, watching a movie before going to sleep.

The next destination of the trip was Global Village. We went to the Dubai Mall again, which is connected to Dubai's train station, to go to Global Village. After a lot of walking to reach the station, we bought ourselves our own train passes and boarded the train. The train was bigger than the train in the airport and looked more like the trains in movies and films. The trains were very clean and very organized. When we arrived at our stop, we then took a taxi to the address as the place is isolated and it is hard to come across any form of transportation.



Upon reaching the venue, I was in awe at the display at the entrance. I was in line to buy the tickets, and the architecture that peeked through the walls was impressive enough. We were greeted by the iconic Big Ben Tower from London and the Eiffel Tower from Paris at the entrance. Like the Dubai Miracle Garden, the Global Village was packed too. A lot of families took pictures of their children and vice-versa. Being the picture-obsessed person my mom is, she immediately began taking pictures of the place and, of course us. The venue was extremely spacious, and it even held a concert in the middle of the field. There were dancers dancing and people floating in the air as part of their performance.

My family and I made sure to cover every part of the village. We visited different cultures displayed there, such as – India, Pakistan, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Nepal, USA, Canada, China, Japan, Vietnam, South Korea, Philippines, Egypt, Nigeria, Ghana, Syria, Iran, Iraq, Turkey, Cambodia, Malaysia, Indonesia, and many many more! Each country's venue had a small history lesson, booth selling snacks, traditional garments, etc. I can definitely say I had a blast learning about different cultures and trying their food! By the time we finished touring the entire village, we were extremely exhausted and done for the day.

We took a bus back to the station and rode the train back to Dubai Mall. When we arrived at the hotel, we were so ready to pass out and sleep till noon the next day. Because of the exhausting events yesterday, my family and I decided to relax and rest in the hotel room before our flight the next day. We made lunch in the built-in kitchen and lazed around all day, reminiscing about the beautiful architectures and pieces we saw the night before. Soon enough, it was already time for our flight. And just like that, we were back in Kuwait just in time for New Year with friends.



