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Morocco – Songs For Peace

*A Country-Wide Family – What I Learned From a Summer In Morocco*

“*Shoukran*” (“Thank you”)

“*La shoukran al wajib*” (“Do not thank me, for it is my duty”)

Just a short, everyday expression used throughout Morocco. When I was first learning Darija, the phrase seemed like a fairly standard way of saying “thank you” and “you’re welcome”, but looking back, I believe that one phrase can describe the essence of Morocco as an all encompassing community of love and happiness.

*Gratitude. Community. Compassion. Understanding.* Just a few words that can only begin to describe Morocco, where I spent 28 days with the Student Diplomacy Corps this summer. Morocco is, quite frankly, the complete opposite of the United States in some regards. Children roam carefree in the streets till the wee hours of the morning, just kicking soccer balls around or playing tag with their friends. In busy cities here in the States? That kind of freedom could only be given to people at least twice these kids’ ages. There’s a special sense of community palpable in Moroccan culture, and I saw it everywhere we went, from the vendors in the *souks* (markets) who treated their customers like old friends to our host families in the (very) rural village of Benikolla. This sense of community, this mutual trust between Moroccan people, is not only what I found to be the most shocking thing about the country, but it was also the most beautiful. Nowhere else I’d ever been had been so welcoming and accepting of us “American tourists.” And even though I am now more than a month removed from my group and the almost magical aura emanating from the country, I still wake up every day and wonder what my host brother Zouhir and his brother Mohamed are up to, or who Malika and Rashid (our in-country guides) are helping that day.

I haven’t even begun to talk about the other students I was blessed to have spent my summer with. From Hong and Jordan’s hilarious jokes to Neysy’s dancing to Jason’s spontaneous personality, I could tell right away that everyone in my group was absolutely meant to be there, whether they had prior experience in music or not. Despite our various skill levels, I was inspired by our collective persistence and drive to learn songs in Darija, a language we had only just begun to learn, and perform them for our audiences. We pushed through long practice days and tedious pronunciation run-throughs to finally get to our final performance in the CCCL (Center for Cross-Cultural Learning) in Rabat.

My time in Morocco, as long as it was, felt like it went by in the blink of an eye. It seems like the more immersed in their culture we became, the less time we had left. And however sad I was to leave Morocco, I couldn't wait to bring everything I had learned back home. I can only dream of America being as united (no pun intended) as Morocco is, and I will be forever grateful to have had this experience and learned so much about magnanimity and pure kindness.