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Spring 2013

Subhash Minocha Professor of Biological Sciences and Genetics, travels to Jordan

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Recommended Citation

Minocha, Subhash, "Subhash Minocha Professor of Biological Sciences and Genetics, travels to Jordan" (2013). *Faculty Travel Reports*. 81.

https://scholars.unh.edu/international_travel/81

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Subhash Minocha

Professor of Biological Sciences and Genetics -- Jordan

With travel support from UNH's Center for International Education, I was able to accept an invitation to visit the King's Academy, Amman, Jordan, to give lectures, hold discussions and talk about my research and [UNH Project SMART](#) at the King's Academy and the University of Jordan. My wife Dr. Rakesh Minocha (Research Scientist at U.S. Forest Service and Affiliate Professor UNH) and I landed in Amman on March 8, 2013. From then on, for the whole week, the days were filled with excitement and adventure; meetings with the faculty and students at the Academy, visit to the University of Jordan, the Aljoun National Forest, and a fair amount of cultural osmosis (*a.k.a.* sightseeing).

The first day's travel (Saturday, a part of the Friday-Saturday weekend in Jordan, with Sunday being a working day) included a trip to the Aljoun National Reserve, located northwest of Amman at an altitude of about 4000 ft. Driving through the ancient Roman city of Jarash was breathtaking. At the forest, our host Othman Al Tawalbeh, explained the research and recreational activities currently underway at the Reserve. The [Reserve](#), adopted by the Royal Society for the Conservation of Nature), which oversees the restoration and conservation projects in collaboration with the USAID Office in Amman, is dominated by Evergreen Oak (*Quercus calliprinos*), Carob (*Ceratonia siliqua*), wild Pistachio (*Pistacia palaestina*), and Strawberry tree (*Arbutus andrachne*). The trip ended by touching the Southern Border of Syria and a distant view of the Syrian Refugee Camps.



The King's Academy in Jordan

At the King's Academy, I presented a general lecture on "Biotechnology: Opportunities and Challenges" to the entire School Assembly (400 + participants, including students, teachers, staff), followed by 10 lectures/discussions in small classes on topics that included "Agricultural Biotechnology", "Designer Babies", "Designer Foods", "Ethics of Cloning and Genetic Testing", "Phytoremediation: Cleaning the Environmental Pollution using Plants", "Project SMART Summer Institute at UNH", "Evolution and Epigenetic", etc. Rakesh also presented lectures to students in several classes.

An entire day was spent visiting the [University of Jordan](#), a sprawling campus of over 35,000 students (65% women), located in a beautiful part of the city. We were hosted by Prof. Akel Mansour, Dean of the Faculty of Agriculture, for discussions of some of our research and teaching, mutual areas of possible collaboration and personnel exchange, and visits to their Biological Sciences and Biotechnology facilities, and other interesting units. The University's Hamdi Mango Research Center is a modern, well-equipped laboratory for biotechnological research and teaching. Professor Mansour had arranged meetings with several faculty members in the Department of Horticulture and Crop Sciences, and visits to their research facilities.

Whereas the academic component of the trip was a series of lectures, discussions and discourse with the faculty at the King's Academy and the University of Jordan, the non-academic parts included visits to Amman, Madaba, Jarash, and Petra. Amman is a bustling city with an old history and modern shopping malls. The byzantine mosaic floors in Madaba were truly remarkable; as was the food at local restaurants and eateries. The highlight of the visits was [Petra](#), an ancient city whose history spans over 3500 years.



Mark Kibler, Dr. Rakesh Minocha, and Professor Minocha in Petra

Petra lies south of Amman on the edge of the mountainous desert of Wadi Araba, in between the Dead Sea and the Red Sea – It is believed that first settlements in Petra existed as far back as 1550-1292 BCE (the eighteenth dynasty of Egypt). The Nabataeans inhabited the city in the 6th century BC followed by the Romans, who constructed the Roman Theater in the 1st century AD (the theater could hold about 8000 spectators). The Arabs took over the city in the mid 6th century AD, and it flourished until about the 12th century when the city was almost abandoned due to repeated earthquakes and floods. A Swiss traveler rediscovered the ruins of the city in the 19th century, and it quickly became the most visited site in the region. The city has amazing architecture, some of it carved as caves into the mountains, and is a must visit. We wandered around for the entire day without covering even the most important sites – it tells you something about the enormity of the place.

Traveling to the Syrian border on the Northern end of Jordan and the Dead Sea on the East were equally heartwarming. Of course, without the help of our host Mark Kibler, a resident of New Hampshire, and a renowned teacher of Biological Sciences at the King's Academy; the visit would have been incomplete. Thanks to Mark for making it a memorable trip and to CIE for



Dr. Rakesh Minocha (second from left) and Professor Minocha (second from right) with colleagues in the biotech lab at the University of Jordan

making it possible to get there and back. For more pictures of amazing Jordan and the sites we visited, please visit [my Flickr website](#).



Coffee/Tea on the go at Petra



The Jordan Mall



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