

Dammam (Saudi Arabia)—Multi-faceted and Far From Stereotypes! What Stunned Me the Most! Amazing Video in Spanish

Level A2-B1-B2

As the year draws to a close, I can't help but reflect on how destiny took me to places I would never have dreamt of visiting.

For the first time in my life, I had the privilege to see the [Victoria Falls](#) . [Chobe National Park](#) was equally amazing. All in all, I visited 7 countries: Zambia, Botswana, Ethiopia, Denmark, Sweden, Bahrain and Saudi Arabia.

The last two countries were the greatest surprise.

A few years ago I would have categorically refused to visit the Middle East.

My mental associations with Middle Eastern countries were full of fearful images of veiled women restricted from free movement.

I guess age and my recent travels have given me courage to explore places that I would not even think of going to when I was in my twenties or thirties.

First of all, Dammam is the fifth largest city in Saudi Arabia after Riyadh, Jeddah, Mecca and Medina. I had previously heard of the other four cities but it was my first time hearing about the existence of Dammam.

After some research, I found out that this city is home to the largest oil company in the world: Saudi Aramco. It also has a beautiful waterfront called the Corniche which attracts both locals and tourists.

Before visiting Dammam in Saudi Arabia, I did extensive research on how to dress there. This was my main concern.

I did not want to be stopped in the streets because I was indecently dressed.

There are several factors to take into consideration: the weather and the places which we would be staying in or visiting.

I visited Dammam in late October. Autumn was the season in Warsaw and needless to say that it was cold.

Dammam's climate required loose and ample clothes that were not see-through. Polish boutiques were full of warm clothes such as sweaters and woollen skirts. I did not want to order the clothes online so I had to go on a wild goose chase in the city to find suitable clothes that I would wear.

In the beginning I was looking for clothes that would resemble an [abaya](#). Of course, I could not find this type of clothing in shops such as H & M or Mango.

In the end, I checked my own summer wardrobe to see if I could garner some articles of clothing there. I was lucky to find some long loose-fitting dresses, ample trousers and cardigans.

I completed that with high-necked blouses and flowy skirts that I found in a quaint boutique in Warsaw. Different types of scarves were also thrown in my suitcase. I was relieved!

Later on, I was able to buy an abaya in Bahrain. It was quite costly and I only wore it once while I was in Saudi Arabia.

While in Dammam, I experimented with different types of outfits. Finally, I mostly wore black, or black and white clothes in order to fit in and not attract too much attention.

I was surprised on several occasions when I saw foreign women dressed in tight clothing. No one bothered them so I became more relaxed as days went by.

Most of the times I felt safe but stared at. I was offered help each time I went to shopping malls. People were very friendly and hospitable even when they did not speak English. I was not catcalled or inconvenienced in any way. It was a unique feeling to go out and know that I would be left alone. This freedom was exhilarating!

Women were often in groups, strolling casually or having a meal at a food court in a shopping mall. I also saw many women drivers and employees. However it was rare to meet a woman walking alone in the streets.

In any case, during the day, it was very hot and there were not many souls that dared to brave the heat. Most people used cars.

The weather was an aspect that caught me off guard. I knew that it was hot there but I did not expect it to be that hot. Mind you it was not even supposed to be hot in October as summer was already over. During the hot season, temperatures can rise up to 50 degrees Celsius! It then makes much sense to wear loose-fitting clothes in this type of weather!

Air conditioners are the norm. The contrast between exteriors and interiors are stark and it is quite a challenge to adjust.

Our hotel provided rooms with a small kitchen, a living-room and a bedroom. This was very practical and comfortable. We had nice perks such as a toothbrush, a shaving kit, a sponge, a comb and other small stuff that made our stay easier. However I had to draw the curtains closed most of the times because of the glaring sun.

I especially enjoyed the buffet breakfast. It was so delicious and had a wide choice of food including fresh and cooked vegetables. Each day, I had chapati and several delicacies that I would not readily find in Europe.

The hotel atmosphere was very nice and friendly and I felt at ease.

There were things that I did to facilitate my stay. I exercised everyday without fail. I even brought my gym mat from Warsaw. I also walked in the evenings with my husband. It was important to keep active.

There are also many fitness centres where you can do activities such as Zumba. The hotel also had a gym but I did not use it. My husband did. He also used the swimming pool but I could not. There were no restrictions but I felt uncomfortable.

Outdoor sporting activities were what I missed the most, especially cycling.

The huge and modern shopping malls made up for this. There were also a lot of luxury brands. I was surprised to see H & M, Mango and Sinsay. McDonald's, Dunkin' Donuts, KFC and other fast-food were also equally present.

We used Uber and Bolt as our mode of transportation. We were even able to visit neighbouring Bahrain from Dammam.

The food was excellent and oddly enough, I ate one of the best tiramisus in my entire life in an Italian restaurant. Women and families sat in one room while men sat in other areas. This is compulsory in the majority of restaurants in Saudi Arabia.

What also surprised me was that there was a lot of greenery: grass, palm trees and flowers. They were irrigated because, apparently, it only rains about ten days a year! I expected to see desert-like landscapes but I was often greeted with tree-lined roads, parks and well-tended lawns.

I did not have much time to visit cultural landmarks but what I saw gave me a taste of life in Saudi Arabia.

This visit removed some fears concerning life in the Middle East.

I feel privileged to have experienced life in the small neighbourhoods during our evening strolls. Now, Saudi Arabia is synonymous with small shops where I could grab some samosas or small groceries, local parks where women sat in groups as their children played and enjoyed the cool breeze.

As a matter of fact, Dammam became alive at dusk.

I don't know if the future will take me back to this city or other Saudi Arabian cities.

However, when I watch the news about this country, my judgement is not clouded with stereotypes and empty assumptions.

I have been there; I have seen how people lived and there is a comforting reassurance of knowing the place and the people.

For the first time in my life, I had the privilege to see the [Victoria Falls](#) . [Chobe National Park](#) was equally amazing. All in all, I visited 7 countries: Zambia, Botswana, Ethiopia, Denmark, Sweden, Bahrain and Saudi Arabia.

The last two countries were the greatest surprise.

A few years ago I would have categorically refused to visit the Middle East.

My mental associations with Middle Eastern countries were full of fearful images of veiled women restricted from free movement.

I guess age and my recent travels have given me courage to explore places that I would not even think of going to when I was in my twenties or thirties.

First of all, Dammam is the fifth largest city in Saudi Arabia after Riyadh, Jeddah, Mecca and Medina. I had previously heard of the other four cities but it was my first time hearing about the existence of Dammam.

After some research, I found out that this city is home to the largest oil company in the world: Saudi Aramco. It also has a beautiful waterfront called the Corniche which attracts both locals and tourists.

Before visiting Dammam in Saudi Arabia, I did extensive research on how to dress there. This was my main concern.

I did not want to be stopped in the streets because I was indecently dressed.

There are several factors to take into consideration: the weather and the places which we would be staying in or visiting.

I visited Dammam in late October. Autumn was the season in Warsaw and needless to say that it was cold.

Dammam's climate required loose and ample clothes that were not see-through. Polish boutiques were full of warm clothes such as sweaters and woollen skirts. I did not want to order the clothes online so I had to go on a wild goose chase in the city to find suitable clothes that I would wear.

In the beginning I was looking for clothes that would resemble an [abaya](#). Of course, I could not find this type of clothing in shops such as H & M or Mango.

In the end, I checked my own summer wardrobe to see if I could garner some articles of clothing there. I was lucky to find some long loose-fitting dresses, ample trousers and cardigans.

I completed that with high-necked blouses and flowy skirts that I found in a quaint boutique in Warsaw. Different types of scarves were also thrown in my suitcase. I was relieved!

Later on, I was able to buy an abaya in Bahrain. It was quite costly and I only wore it once while I was in Saudi Arabia.

While in Dammam, I experimented with different types of outfits. Finally, I mostly wore black, or black and white clothes in order to fit in and not attract too much attention.

I was surprised on several occasions when I saw foreign women dressed in tight clothing. No one bothered them so I became more relaxed as days went by.

Most of the times I felt safe but stared at. I was offered help each time I went to shopping malls. People were very friendly and hospitable even when they did not speak English. I was not catcalled or inconvenienced in any way. It was a unique feeling to go out and know that no one would bother me. This freedom was exhilarating!

Women were often in groups, strolling casually or having a meal at a food court in a shopping mall. I also saw many women drivers. However it was rare to meet a woman walking alone in the streets.

In any case, during the day, it was very hot and there were not many souls that dared to brave the heat. Most people used cars.

The weather was an aspect that caught me off guard. I knew that it was hot there but I did not expect it to be that hot. Mind you it was not even supposed to be hot in October as summer was already over.

During the hot season, temperatures can rise up to 50 degrees Celsius! It then makes much sense to wear loose-fitting clothes in this type of weather!

Air conditioners are the norm. The contrast between exteriors and interiors are stark and it is quite a challenge to adjust.

Our hotel provided rooms with a small kitchen, a living-room and a bedroom. This was very practical and comfortable. We had nice perks such as a toothbrush, a shaving kit, a sponge, a comb and other small stuff that made our stay easier. However I had to draw the curtains most of the times because of the glaring sun.

I especially enjoyed the buffet breakfast. It was so delicious and had a wide choice of food including fresh and cooked vegetables. Each day, I had chapati and several delicacies that I would not readily find in Europe.

The hotel atmosphere was very nice and friendly and I felt at ease.

There were things that I did to facilitate my stay. I exercised everyday without fail. I even brought my gym mat from Warsaw. I also walked in the evenings with my husband. It was important to keep active.

There are also many fitness centres where you can do activities such as Zumba. The hotel also had a gym but I did not use it. My husband did. He also used the swimming pool but I could not. There were no restrictions but I felt uncomfortable.

Outdoor sporting activities were what I missed the most, especially cycling.

The huge and modern shopping malls made up for this. There were also a lot of luxury brands. I was surprised to see H & M, Mango and Sinsay. McDonald's, Dunkin' Donuts, KFC and other fast-food were also equally present.

We used Uber and Bolt as our mode of transportation. We were even able to visit neighbouring Bahrain from Dammam.

The food was excellent and oddly enough, I ate one of the best tiramisus in my entire life in an Italian restaurant. Women and families sat in one room while men sat in other areas. This is compulsory in the majority of restaurants in Saudi Arabia. We also had to bear in mind that alcohol and public demonstration of affection were not allowed in the country.

What also surprised me was that there was a lot of greenery: grass, palm trees and flowers. They were irrigated because, apparently, it only rains about ten days a year! I expected to see desert-like landscapes but I was often greeted with tree-lined roads, parks and well-tended lawns.

I did not have much time to visit cultural landmarks but what I saw gave me a taste of life in Saudi Arabia.

This visit removed some fears concerning life in the Middle East.

I feel privileged to have experienced life in the small neighbourhoods during our evening strolls. Now, Saudi Arabia is synonymous with small shops where I could grab some samosas or small groceries, local parks where women sat in groups as their children played and enjoyed the cool breeze.

As a matter of fact, Dammam became alive at dusk.

I don't know if the future will take me back to this city or other Saudi Arabian cities.

However, when I watch the news about this country, my judgement is not clouded with stereotypes and empty assumptions.

I have been there; I have seen how people lived and there is a comforting reassurance of knowing the place and the people.



Learn **English**
With Africa