

STUDY ABROAD JOURNAL



TRAVELS THROUGH TUNISIA

Camels, couscous — and the Kasbah

by **Willena Moye, Rashida Powell and Kia Smith**

Master of Arts in professional writing students

The three of us, along with 14 other graduate and undergraduate students, took advantage of a new study abroad opportunity this summer in Tunisia, a north African country located between Libya and Algeria. We resided in Sfax, Tunisia's second largest city, which is located in the Sahel, halfway down the country's Mediterranean coastline. We spent most of our time taking classes such as Arabic, travel writing and postcolonial north African literature (in French and English), but also enjoyed conducting field work and experiencing the culture.

Some of our adventures included parasailing over the Mediterranean, riding camels across the Sahara, visiting the Phoenician, Roman, Byzantine and Arab ruins of Carthage and haggling in Sfax's Medina, which dates to the ninth century. The Medina's walls, or Kasbah, were initially built to protect the city from invaders, but now they enclose a stone maze of jewelry and clothing shops, fish-markets and residences.

We also visited Zarzis, where we stayed at a hotel on the Mediterranean; Djerba, a prosperous island of olive groves and souks (marketplaces); bald interior sites featured in various "Star Wars" movies; El-Jem, which houses the amphitheater filmed in "Gladiator"; Tozeur, a dusty tourist Mecca straddling a 50-kilometer oasis; Ong Jemel, where we rode 4x4s vertically along the sides of stony promontories; the capital city of Tunis, which houses the parliament and Bardo Museum; Sidi Bou Said, with its whitewashed homes decorated with aqua wrought-iron doors and window casings; peerless Carthage; and the

Sahara, whose sand at sunset is as soothing as cool water.

But to ensure that we benefited from more than a tourist experience, we lived with the families of Sfax University students who were studying English. The families provided safe homes and a warm and accepting atmosphere for us. The mothers and daughters cooked meals of Brik (fried phillo pastry enveloping parsley, egg and, sometimes, meat), couscous, Tunisian salad (made with blood-red tomatoes, cucumbers the size of magic markers, diced onion and vinegar, often topped with tuna), spicy harisa (chile sauce) and fish netted near the Isles of Kerkhenna, just 20 kilometers from the Sfax coastline. The families arranged many small and large parties for us, braided our hair and hennaed our hands, ankles and arms, took us to cafes and generally treated us as sons and daughters, sisters and brothers.

As a result of our immersion in Sfaxian families, we came to understand and adapt to traditions and moral codes that differ from our American traditions and values. For instance, because Sfaxian culture is characterized by economic thrift and conservation of resources, many of us returned home with a new appreciation for saving money and living within our means.

This study abroad experience was the result of a collaboration between KSU and Sfax University — the first of its kind. The goal is to build a partnership that will allow students from each institution to study at the other.

OUTSIDE THE CLASSROOM

A HEAVENLY EXPERIENCE

Showing a priest the way...to fluency in English



by **Nubia Polendo**

Modern language and culture, '06

I can honestly say that my internship experience was one of a kind: I was assigned to teach English to a priest who had just arrived from Colombia. I was given no curriculum or any kind of guidance; I was to develop the course completely on my own. I was quite surprised, having expected a more "traditional" position, such as assisting a Spanish teacher with his or her students or maybe working alongside another intern to teach Spanish with pre-set lesson plans.

My internship began at Transfiguration Catholic Church in Marietta, Ga. The first day I was nervous because I had no clue what to expect. First of all, I had never taught anyone English. The only experience I had with assisting Spanish/English communication was interpreting on international mission trips to Mexico and Portugal. The fact that I was responsible for creating and preparing lesson plans was daunting — not to mention the fact that my pupil was much older than me.

Every day was a challenge for me, but a positive one that taught me so much. Every night, before the next day of class with my student, I would prepare my lesson plans and activities, which included reading and comprehension, question and answer discussion, American culture, including common phrases, slang and geography, and exposure to periodicals, literature, television and radio. By doing this, I helped expand and improve his writing, as well as his conversational and analytical English skills — and I managed to challenge him, too. I also translated

some of his sermons, and we would both discuss the subject matter and the correct way to enunciate the words. By the end of the summer, his co-workers could definitely notice and hear a difference.

I got so much out of this internship, more than I could have ever imagined. I learned how to prepare challenging activities that benefited the student and myself. I know that I will always remember this experience because I am always telling people about it.

Nubia's professor was so impressed with her work that she keeps her lesson plans and activities as an example to show her other students. Nubia is considering attending graduate school in Portugal to study interpretation.

Study Abroad Statistics:	
6,200	University System of Georgia students who will study abroad annually by 2007
5,000	USG students who studied abroad in 2005-2006
330	KSU students who studied abroad in 2005-2006
37	Countries visited by KSU study abroad students
30	KSU study abroad programs in 2006-2007
27	KSU study abroad programs in 2005-2006