

Cultural differences between the united states and saudi arabia essay examples

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**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

It is easy for anyone to see that the world is becoming a global village.

However although we are told daily that we are just like our brothers and sisters on the other side of the world, travelling to those parts of the world will show that there are indeed things that still divide us as we see differences in culture, religion, custom and the myriad of other things that makes us separate and unique. I experienced something similar not long ago when I was fortunate enough to sit back and look at the differences in culture between Saudi Arabia and the United States.

I realised that one is never fully prepared to go to a land with a totally different culture from yours and that no matter how many geography books or tourism books that you read you are bound to be faced with a culture shock. That was what happened to me with relation to Saudi Arabia. I could see that both countries were immensely wealthy although Saudi Arabia got their immense wealth through her vast supply of oil and I could tell that they were doing great via oil from all the companies that had been erected to ensure that they milk every single drop of wealth this oil would bring them. Unlike most of the world where the weekend is Saturday and Sunday, the story in Saudi was different as their weekends were Thursday and Friday which means that they work on Saturday and Sunday. Although I could not immediately gauge how I felt working on my weekends I had to applaud their workers and business men who did everything to observe their five daily prayers. These people especially the traders would leave all they were doing to ensure that they took those prayers at the right time and if it meant leaving a customer like me hanging, they would do so. For those minutes of prayers the whole land was praying in unison and I felt that was some sort of

people builder.

While the five a day prayers were a daily occurrence I was also fascinated by the period of fasting which is called the Ramadan. Because Saudi Arabia is an Islamic land, the whole land had to partake in the fasting. Employers of labour and owners of businesses had to make allowances for their employees to be able to carry out their religious obligations. Two things happened to me during the days I experienced the Ramadan. One of this was the fact that I was not allowed to eat in public so as not to tempt those that fasted and the other thing I experienced was the fact that tents were erected on the side of the streets from 6pm and food was served to anybody who walked in once the fast for the day had been broken. I took advantage of this generosity and many of my dinners came as a result of that.

The pace of life in Saudi is so much slower than in America and their dress sense was different. It was normal to see a business man in his traditional attire as opposed to the suits and ties that are favoured in America. They displayed their pride in their traditions with every opportunity they had. They seemed to share a kinship with each other and I believed this was easier to achieve in Saudi than in America because they have so many things in common. In America you can see ten different Americans with ten different religions but in Saudi Arabia if you saw ten Saudis they were Muslims so religion was a very strong bond with them.

One thing that was glaring to me is the gender gap between men and women in Saudi Arabia. American women would tell you that they still felt they were treated as being less than men but in Saudi Arabia it was lauded when you put a woman in her place. The interaction women had with men

was very controlled whether it is at work, at home or even on the streets.

While I cannot categorically confirm this I do believe that this behaviour must stem from somewhere in their religious tenets as Saudi Arabia is run on the laws of Islam.

I learnt a lot from this comparison and some of the lessons I got I received through a stern correction of a wrong step I might have taken. One very good example was when I was told that I should not point the soles of my feet to anyone. A lot of emphasis was also put on the giving of respect. While I do not consider Americans to be a disrespectful bunch, they were not compelled to be nice to you; they could be cordial in business or in life but that was about it. That was a totally different story with the Saudi Arabians as they took it upon themselves to go the extra mile. It almost seemed like it was some unwritten tenet of their religion. They always had time to offer refreshments like dates and their strong tea before they did anything.

Culture separates us from others through what we value and consider sacred. A good example of another culture difference I experienced was in the area of greeting. In America a handshake usually suffices but in Saudi Arabia their greetings are more elaborate with kisses on the cheeks and nose being common place. I watched these expressions of welcome and it warmed my heart to see that a people that have received so much flack justly or unjustly could still revel in things as common as greetings. The sights and sound of Saudi Arabia was also so much different from America. As common with most Arabian communities, Saudi Arabia smelt of various spices as they could be seen sold everywhere. These spices added a touch of mystery to this exotic land and I was falling in love with it.

While there were many things I saw that made me fall in love with Saudi Arabia, there were some things that made me think back to the many things taken for granted in the United States. I saw women that were chaperoned wherever they went and I was glad for the freedom of movement in America. Although people will always abuse whatever is given to them, the fact that the American may never know what it is to be denied freedom of movement is an amazing privilege. Although I never experienced this first-hand I could see that their government was totally different from that of America.

Whereas America practiced democracy the Saudi government was a monarchy with their government officials being from their royal family.

Although both cultures claim to be founded on religion with Saudi Arabia being heavily influenced by Islam and America, Christianity; when it came to government America practiced a secular government. These in my opinion allow the people to live their lives without being restricted by the religion of the land. It is one of the many reasons that have made America the melting pot that she is today.

While I could tell that Saudi Arabia is a very wealthy country, something that struck me unlike in America is the fact that the wealth was contained to a specific group. It was easy to tell by looking at the names attached to some of the business structures that they mostly belonged in some way to members of the royal family. This was further confirmed when I made enquiries and I could see that class mobility was different in America than in Saudi Arabia.

As I have mentioned above, the gender divide is a glaring difference between America and Saudi Arabia. In America women can do almost

anything men can and in most cases they even get away with more than men ever could. It is a normal occurrence in America to see women out and about and doing things on their own. American women are free to choose – from what they wear to whom they choose to marry. Unfortunately the same does not ring true for the women of Saudi Arabia. Just as it was normal to see women move around freely in America, here the women were chaperoned and dressed appropriately. It seems almost like their freedom was tied to the men that watched over them. I believe it must be working because they have lived like this for years but I also know that at times change comes to make us better. It is my belief that this curtailing of freedom may deprive these women from being the best they can be and that is a shame. Because women around the world have done great and mighty things but they have to see the opportunity to enable them make a difference in this life.

I will like to touch on religion again because this was one difference that you don't have to come to the shores of Saudi Arabia to be able to know about it. In America there is the freedom of religion. This means that you are allowed to practice any religion of your choosing as long as it does not cause harm to anyone. Which is why you could walk down the street in America and speak with ten people and you are likely to hear a list of religions. I know that many things have their pros and cons but you determine how beneficial they may be by weighing them and I honestly believe that this is one of the things that have made America a great nation today – her multiplicity of religions and cultural fusions. People can rise up and contribute to the growth of this nation without being hampered by what they look like, what they believe in and now who they fall in love with as all hands can be put on deck to move

the country forward. Saudi Arabia is governed by the Islamic law and Islam is the accepted religion. This strict adherence to Islam has affected businesses and foreign investors as I am sure that it must have. To me it seems the message that this puts out is adhere to our way of life or stay out and some may have chosen to stay out as a result. While Saudi Arabia is a very wealthy country because of her oil reserves and people may think she is fine by herself doing as she chooses, I believe that every good country needs that little something to make her a great country and if a country seems uninviting due to her political, religious or cultural outlooks, that country tends to be the loser at the end of the day.

In conclusion I must state that I am not an authority on either land and my only right to write this is because I have seen (albeit for a short period of time) how the other side lives. I also watch the news and see media of the world and it is easy to tell why both countries are somewhat distrustful of each other even though they are tied to each other on various levels – the most common being one country's possession of oil and the other country's dependence on oil. The difference in religious beliefs and the activities of fanatical religious people have left a bad taste in the mouth of Americans so that only adds to their distrust. Religion plays an important aspect of the life in Saudi Arabia and it is also reflected in their education as their children are taught to memorize the Quran as they are taught to study.

The sandy terrain of Saudi Arabia makes it very unique and the pace and scent of the land is totally different from what is seen in America. In Saudi Arabia they eat a lot of lamb and spice with their meals. Dates are their most common fruit and they use it to make almost anything. On the face value

they are a very generous people and really appreciate when foreigners make an effort in speaking their language or dressing like them. It was an eye opening experience.

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