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THE FUSION OF BUSINESS AND  
ART: THE JOURNEY OF A  
YOUNG SELF-TAUGHT ARTIST

# Labyrinth

ISSUE NO. 01

JHUMKA BELLS AND  
SARI SWIRLS: A GUIDE  
TO INDIAN WEDDINGS

EXPLORING RAMADAN'S  
CULTURAL TAPESTRY THROUGH  
RAMADAN DRINKS

UNVEILING HIDDEN  
DIALECTS WITH  
PROFESSOR AHMED ALI

AED 25



# LABYRINTH



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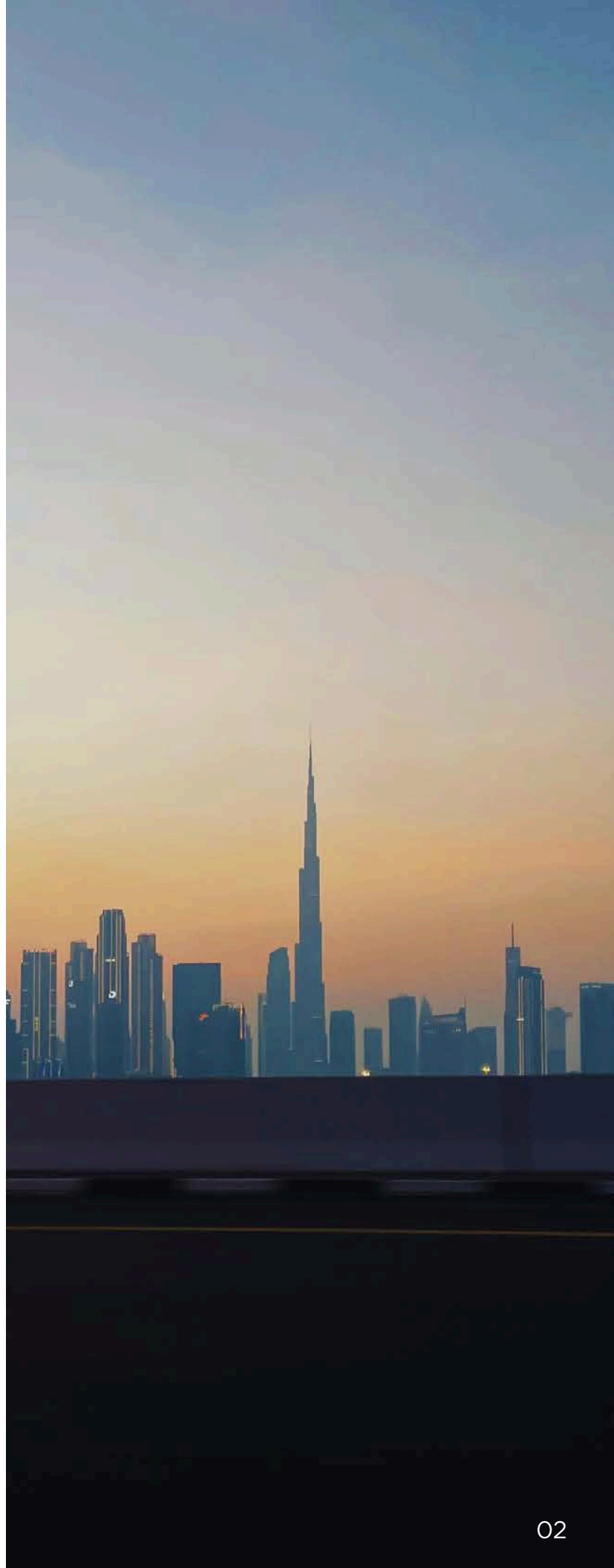
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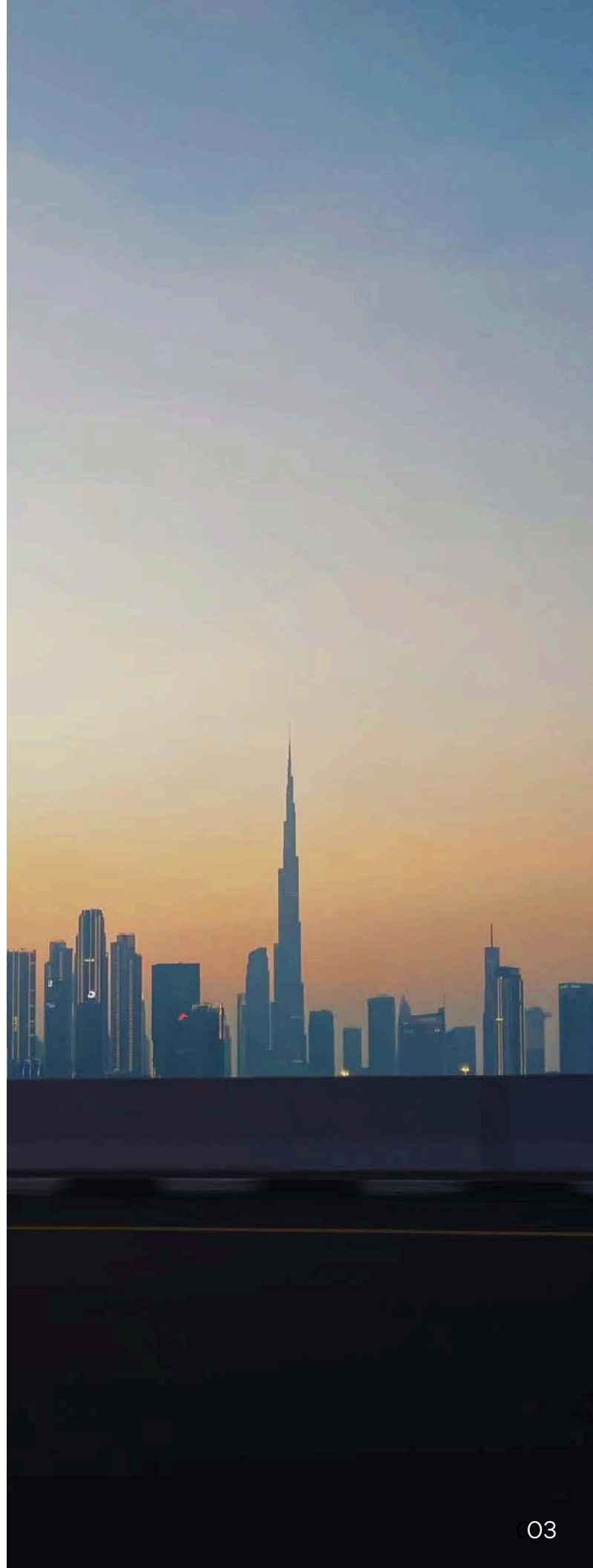


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# FROM THE EDITOR

Dear Readers,

Passion is a powerful word, holding distinct meanings to each individual. Our differences make our stories interesting, particularly our passions to which we surrender. When we are often lost and confused, our passions guide us because how satisfactory is it to do something you love? Whether that be pursuing art, cooking, teaching, discovering languages and learning about cultures, self-development or even pet training.

Labyrinth's first issue focuses on uncovering interesting personalities and journeys. From discovering new cultural aspects to unfolding recent trends, the articles in the magazine aim to shed light on different perspectives through diverse demographics. What unifies most of the articles is the focus on the featured subjects outside of their daily routines.

For example, "From the Stage to the Classroom: The Multifaceted Journey of Gregory VanderPyl" talks about the journey of an English professor who started off as an actor around the US then eventually found his passion in tutoring through his travels. Meanwhile, "The Fusion of Business and Art: The Journey of a Young Self-taught Artist" features a university student who decided to shift to traditional forms of art and step out of her comfort zone.

In this issue, we also explore different cultures and specifically highlight topics of interest for different personalities. This includes topics about different cuisines, travel, lifestyle as well as an article which discusses why different cultures can bond together. "Jhumka bells and Sari swirls: A Guide to Indian Weddings" explores the wedding industry in India, highlighting their opulence and high expenses, a topic of growing fascination.

There is something enjoyable in this magazine for different demographics and interests. Do you like reading about travel, art, food, lifestyle and beauty, self-help tips or pets? Whether you are drawn to one of these topics or curious to learn more, we hope you enjoy this issue as you dive into the articles.

*Dina Helmy*  
Editor-in-Chief







**BEX**  
ETICAL  
than you think  
michaelson

**PETZL**





# 4 MUST-TRY EXPERIENCES: UNVEILING HIDDEN GEMS AROUND JORDAN

By Tala Zoubi

Residents and tourists who are searching for an exciting experience in Jordan are unaware of the magnificent locations that await them. Aside from the usual tourist destinations like Petra and Aqaba, the country has a wide array of hidden gems to be explored. From nature reserves to historical treasures, these four experiences are hidden from the usual route among mountainous ranges and vast deserts. Here are four must-try experiences that you might have not heard of:

- **Umm El Jimal**—Umm El Jimal is an archeological site and town showcasing Jordan’s rich history. Located in the North of Jordan, this ancient site has roots in numerous ancient civilizations. The site houses museums showcasing Bedouin heritage and historical artifacts, a café and a restaurant. After immersing yourself in this cultural journey, you can learn the art of Basalt stone carving, camp in the desert and savor the local cuisine.
- **Bait Shaker** – Bait Shaker is a restaurant and sanctuary where you can experience adventure in the picturesque wilderness of Al-Salt. The restaurant provides traditional Jordanian dishes and international flavors using local ingredients. After dining, activities, including buggy rides, are available for a thrill-seeking experience around the nature-filled property with riverside views.
- **Wadi al Mujib Trail**—Wadi al Mujib is located in the Mujib Biosphere Reserve, the lowest nature reserve in the world. The trail is a pathway with free-flowing water that surrounds you with sandstone swirls. Wadi al Mujib is still being explored, with its diverse plants, birds and rare mountain animals along the sandstone trail.





# Ajloun Forest Reserve

## محمية غابات عجلون

Situated in the Northern city of Ajloun, this reserve is filled with lush green mountainous ranges that surround a campsite with cottages, restaurants and activities, including zip lining, nature trails and guided tours. The reserve showcases local businesses that sell homemade products, like a biscuit house, soap factory and souvenir shop filled with handcrafted goods.





# 5 TIPS FOR SWEAT-PROOF MAKEUP IN THE SUMMER

By Sabah Zaheer

Sunkissed and glowy makeup is in tow with the approaching summer season, as is the scorching heat and humid weather. This means that your otherwise flawless makeup is bound to sweat off and melt away in the summer air. While you can't control the weather, you can control your makeup routine to stay creaseless and smooth throughout the beach trips and barbeques with a few tips.



## 1. Apply a gripping primer before your makeup:

Begin your makeup routine with a gripping primer for long-lasting makeup in the summer heat. The sticky and tacky feel of a primer grips your otherwise creamy products while providing a smooth base for your makeup to last all day.

## 2. Set your makeup with powder:

Setting powder is a crucial step of finishing off your makeup especially when you want it to last for hours. After you've completed applying your makeup, begin by setting it with a matte pressed powder, specifically in oily areas like your nose and forehead. Then grab a powder puff and layer a thin layer of loose powder all over your face. This will ensure everything is smooth, even and oil proof.

## 3. Spray a light spritz of setting spray:

Lock your makeup in place with a setting spray with a matte finish and is formulated to withstand sweat and heat. There are countless setting sprays in the market that provide a light weight, long lasting and refreshing spritz for your summer makeup routine.

## 4. Look for waterproof makeup:

Buying waterproof makeup is the best investment you can make this summer for a flawless base. Whether it's mascara, eyeliner or foundation, waterproof makeup is formulated to combat all the moisture that builds up in the heat. Say goodbye to panda eyes and mascara fallout.

## 5. Add a flush of color with lip and cheek tints:

A pretty pout and rosy cheeks is essential to complete a perfect sun kissed look but lipsticks and blush fade quickly under the blazing sun. Look for watery tints for lips and cheek that provide a sheer layer of color when you're out and about on your daily errands. Tints also leave a beautiful stain and are available in a variety of shades to match your outfit of the day.





# ISNTREE HYALURONIC ACID WATERY SUN GEL : THE ULTIMATE SUMMER BEST FRIEND

By Sabah Zaheer

As the days grow longer and outdoor adventures beckon, sunscreen is the most important weapon against the blistering sun. Whether it's quick runs to the grocery store or hiking with friends, your skin needs the right sun protection and while the skincare industry has endless options to the types of sunscreens available, how does one choose their ideal sunscreen? With the perfect natural finish and clean ingredients, the Isntree Hyaluronic acid watery sun gel ticks all the boxes of a good sunscreen while staying within an affordable price range.

Isntree is a popular Korean skincare brand that focuses on clean products that are made of raw and pure ingredients from nature. Their most popular product is the Isntree Hyaluronic acid watery sun gel. It was awarded best skincare product by Amazon's choice in 2020. With a broad spectrum of SPF50+ PA++++ to block harmful UVA and UVB rays using six filters. The product is infused with naturally derived ingredients like Centella Asiatica extract to soothe irritated skin, Heartleaf extract to regulate sebum production and Fig extract to smoothen skin texture. The sunscreen is named as a hyaluronic acid gel because it contains eight different forms of hyaluronic acids, which is a humectant that helps hydrate the skin.

While other sunscreens feel heavy, thick and have a strangely distinct sunscreen smell, the Isntree sunscreen has a lightweight, watery gel-like texture that glides onto the skin and has no scent. It feels comfortable on the skin, absorbs fast and leaves behind a dewy and slightly matte finish.



*The Isntree sunscreen and other Korean sunscreens have become popular recently.*

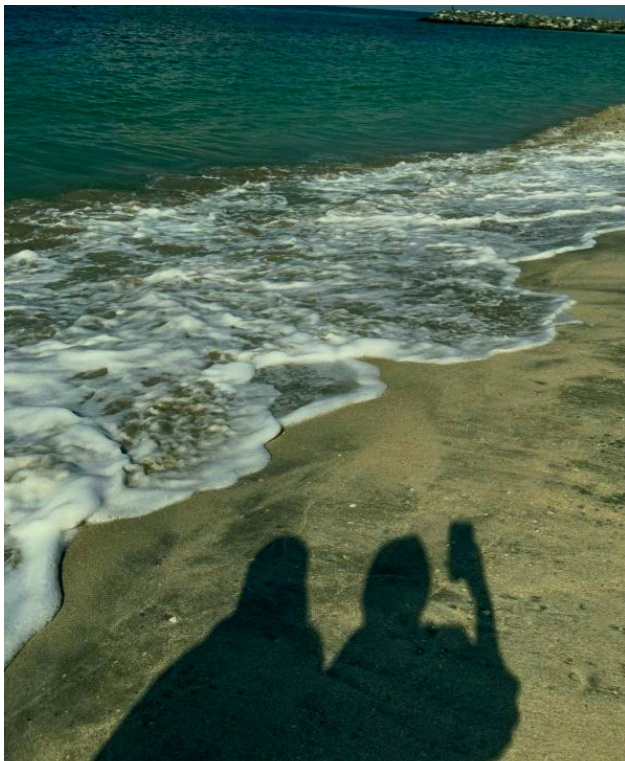
**MAKE SURE THAT YOU USE  
THREE FINGERS OF  
SUNSCREEN WHEN  
APPLYING FOR OPTIMAL  
PROTECTION.**





*Sunscreen sticks are practical for quick application.*

**LAYER TWO THIN LAYERS OF SUNSCREEN FOR SMOOTH APPLICATION.**



**ENSURE THE SUNSCREEN IS ABSORBED BEFORE APPLYING MAKEUP TO AVOID POSSIBLE PILLING.**

Another factor that makes the Isntree sunscreen unique is its sustainable packaging that is easy to recycle, printed with soy ink and made of eco friendly raw materials. It is the perfect product for environmentalists because of its green packaging and vegan friendly ingredients.

The Isntree sunscreen is ideal for all ages and all skin tones. Sumayyah Khan is a student that struggles with finding the right sunscreen for her skin tone as most sunscreens leave an obvious white cast or have pore clogging ingredients. She’s tested various products and found that only expensive sunscreens suit her skin tone by not leaving a white cast, but she can’t afford to buy them in bulk.

“When I tested the Isntree sunscreen for the first time, I was so delighted to find that it leaves no white cast, is quite affordable and doesn't make me breakout. I just couldn’t be happier,” said Khan.

The best thing about this sunscreen is that it’s easy to carry and also has a sun stick version that is perfect for reapplication every two hours. The Isntree hyaluronic acid airy sun stick is a part of the Isntree sun protection launch and leaves behind zero residue, which makes it easy to apply on top of makeup. For makeup lovers, this sunscreen sits beautifully underneath makeup without causing any pilling or patchiness and lasts for over five hours.

The approaching summertime will be filled with stress free beach trips where your skin is protected from the sun, hydrated to perfection and glistening under the sun. A natural finish and no white cast? We’re officially sold. For more information on the Isntree Hyaluronic acid watery sun gel and Isntree hyaluronic acid airy sun stick, visit [isntree.com](http://isntree.com) or head to Instagram and follow @isntre






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*Traditional mehndi is applied in intricate patterns for Indian weddings.*

# JHUMKA BELLS AND SARI SWIRLS: A GUIDE TO AN INDIAN WEDDING

By Sabah Zaheer

The phrase *Big Fat Indian Wedding* is a popular buzzword that encapsulates weddings in India that are so lavish and opulent that they feel like one has stepped into a Bollywood movie. It's the kind of wedding that is carried out over the span of a month, countless guests are invited and is hosted at the most illustrious of venues. This description may sound familiar to readers with the recent ultimate Ambani wedding and its invitation of A-list celebrities and insane performances.

According to some estimates, the wedding industry in India is worth \$50 billion a year, with an annual growth rate of 25% to 30%. Industry insiders believe that India may hit \$75 billion during the 2023-2024 wedding season. Could this increase of money spent on weddings be a result of the lavish weddings seen recently? Or is it the Indian way?

While normal weddings would never reach this magnitude of opulence, most Indian weddings do go on for several days, host thousands of guests and are very regal in terms of décor, fashion and food.

The preparations of Indian weddings begin months in advance, so much so that families book wedding venues before their children have found spouses.

In 2019, I remember speaking to my aunt about her looking for a wife for her son. When I asked her when my cousin's wedding might be, she confidently replied with the answer, "On July 16." I asked with confusion, "Have you guys found someone for him to marry?", to which my aunt said no. In response, I asked, "Well then how do you know when the wedding will happen?" My aunt said, "because I've booked the venue already so the wedding's going to happen on July 16 for sure." This instance is the least of what goes on in preparation for Indian weddings.

The prewedding part of Indian weddings consists of Haldi, Mehendi or Dholki. Haldi is a pre wedding event in which friends and family gather together to apply turmeric paste on the faces and body of the groom and bride. The event is very colorful and some people play dhol, Bollywood music and dance.

The color scheme is very bright and vivid with colors like blues, yellows, oranges and pinks. Brides typically wear Rajasthani styled outfits, colorful and mirrored lehengas. The Mehendi is the event assigned for when the bride and her guests get henna applied to their hands in intricate patterns by professional henna artists.

Most Indian brides get mehndi applied on the entirety of their arm in patterns like mandalas, amins (mango shapes), swirls, flowers and sometimes even peacocks. The entire process takes hours to complete.

The Nikah is the most important day for Muslim Indians and consists of the officiation of marriage. The process is a beautiful ceremony where the bride signs the Nikah contract in agreement of the marriage and the groom does the same. The officiator then asks the couple for verbal confirmation and the couple says the words “Qubool hai,” which means I accept.

Since the Nikah day is one of tradition and customs, brides wear bejeweled traditional outfits like Saris or Lehengas with intricate beading in shades like red, cream, golden or warm tones in general.

When I asked my cousin who got married recently of her number one tip for brides to be, she said that while following traditional color schemes for wedding events is a beautiful concept, one must wear a bridal outfit that follows a color scheme that matches their skin tone.

She said that her mother-in-law insisted she wore a traditional red lehenga but she knew bright red clashes with her skin tone so she opted for subtle pink. My cousin also insisted that brides “wear outfits that aren’t too heavy because many Indian bridal outfits can have extensive heaving mirror work, beading and layers of tulle.”



*Brides wear elaborate gold jewelry and gowns.*



*Indian wedding stages are ornately decorated with chandeliers and flower arrangements.*

An interesting part of South Indian weddings is how many fun rituals occur throughout the event. One of which is a family favorite: the Joota chupai ceremony.

It is a funny prank played on the groom where the bride’s side of the family steals the groom’s shoe when he is distracted. With his shoe stolen, the groom must now dole out how much he will pay the bride’s side of the family in compensation for getting his shoe back. It is a hilarious tradition that allows for some family fun.

**Joota Chupai: It translates to ‘Hiding the Shoes’. The bride’s sisters indulge in stealing of shoes.**



The Walima is the final event in the saga of Indian wedding events and is the day when most guests are invited to celebrate around delicious food. An abundant variety of food from different parts of India is served and displayed out for the buffet. Hyderabadi biryani, Lucknowi kebabs, Punjabi lassi and South Indian Dosa Vadas are family favorites at Indian weddings.

In terms of fashion, the grooms usually wear western style clothing, such as posh suits or tuxedos, while the brides opt for gowns and long fanciful dresses with cool tones like blues and purples.

Indian weddings are an elaborate affair that consists of family, incredible food, vibrant fashion and following long standing traditions.

One may consider the amount of overconsumption and how unnecessarily over the top some Indian weddings are. That perhaps the special day that is one's wedding, is lost in the noise of the showy and fanciful affairs. Looking at all the ritz and fanfare that goes with Indian weddings, one really gets a feel for how important these events are to Indians. But why? Why splurge all this money, time and food on a wedding?

It all goes back to the importance India places on family. And an event such as a wedding signals the beginning of a family, and the couple, in doing so, also end up merging their own families into a bigger one. India loves its familial connections, and this is a true culmination of it all: a big, fat Indian wedding.

**WALIMA: IT IS AN ISLAMIC WEDDING RECEPTION HELD AFTER THE MARRIAGE CEREMONY WHERE COMMUNITY MEMBERS COME TOGETHER TO CELEBRATE THE NEWLY MARRIED COUPLE.**

**LUCKNOWI KEBABS: THEY ARE KEBABS THAT ORIGINATE FROM THE CITY OF LUCKNOW AND ARE A DELICACY POPULAR FOR THEIR TENDER TEXTURE AND RICH FLAVORS.**



*An arrangement of fruits and vegetables are in display for guests to enjoy.*

## HOW TO FIND THE PERFECT BRIDAL OUTFIT FOR YOUR SKIN TONE?

**Step 1:** Identify your skin's undertone, which could either be cool, warm or neutral. You can do so by looking at the veins on your wrist and whether they are blue (cool toned) or green (warm toned).

**Step 2:** Explore with color choices: you may have a previous preference to what colors you believe suits your skin tone the best, but sometimes adventuring out and observing how new colors look on you may help you pick out the best one. Focus on whether the colors wash you out or make you look healthier.

**Step 3:** Get a color analysis by a professional: there are countless color and fashion professionals that conduct a color analysis and decide what colors suit your skin tone the best whether it be your jewelry, clothes, makeup or hair color.

**Step 4:** Trust your gut: At the end of the day, no one can tell you what colors you look best in. It's all about how you feel when you look in certain colors that matters. If you feel great in a particular color, it's likely a good choice for you regardless of conventional guidelines.



# HOW TO MAKE SPICY MUTTON KARAHI

By Sabah Zaheer

Sizzling sounds of cumin and the aroma of fried onions are the sounds and smells in a desi kitchen, creating a sense of nostalgia for South Asians, especially when preparations for a daawat (party) are in tow. The most popular dish in Northern India and Pakistan when hosting a feast is Mutton Karahi. Originating from the Shinwari and Afridi tribes hailing from the town of Landi Kotal, Pashtun cuisine is known for its use of minimal ingredients.

Mutton Karahi gets its name from the vessel used to prepare it. A Karahi is a deep and circular pot made of wrought iron and resembles a wok. This flavorful dish is commonly found across commercial dhabas (roadside food stalls, frequented by travelers) all over India and Pakistan. Over the years, Mutton Karahi has been a staple at weddings, parties, birthdays and dinners, whether it's eaten with ghee rice or naan. This dish has an intricate spicy flavor and yet requires a handful of ingredients.

**Cooking time: 1 hour 30 minutes**

## Ingredients:

- Half a cup ghee or oil
- 500g lamb or mutton
- 600g tomatoes, pureed
- Two tablespoons ginger-garlic paste
- Two teaspoons salt to taste
- Two teaspoons red chilli powder
- One and a half teaspoon black pepper
- One teaspoon chilli flakes
- Half teaspoon cumin powder
- Half teaspoon coriander powder
- One teaspoon onion seeds
- Two green chillis
- Half a bunch coriander, finely chopped
- Ginger sliced into match skits



*Mutton Karahi is famous for its tender meat and spicy flavors.*



## STEPS:

1. Heat up your oil/ghee in a wok, cast iron skillet or karahi. Add the lamb/mutton and fry on high, stirring constantly until all the meat has changed its colour.
2. Add the ginger-garlic paste and cook it until the raw smell goes away. Don't let the ginger and garlic cook for too long.
3. Add all the spices and three cups of water for the mutton. Bring the water to a boil, then turn the heat down to low and put the lid on. Let the mutton simmer for two hours. Keep checking during this time to ensure there is sufficient water and add more if required.
4. Once the simmer time is up, the meat should be mostly cooked and there shouldn't be much water in the pan. The pan will look quite oily (remember, you can remove the oil at the end if you want).
5. Turn the heat to high. Add the tomatoes. Let this cook on high, stirring constantly and scraping the bottom of the pan. The tomatoes will release a lot of moisture. Keep stirring and just allow everything to fuse.

6. Once the gravy (masala) looks wet but almost done and the oil is beginning to come to the surface, add in the chopped coriander and green chilli. Turn the heat to low and allow this to simmer without the lid on for five minutes.

7. Garnish with additional chopped coriander and the matchstick-cut ginger.

**IF YOU WANT THE KARAHİ WITHOUT TOMATO SKIN, YOU CAN PEEL IT OFF IN COLD WATER BEFORE CHOPPING.**

**BRINGING THE OIL TO A VERY HIGH HEAT IS KEY TO ENSURE THE MEAT IS COOKED EVENLY AND IS MOIST ON THE INSIDE.**

# UNITY IN DIVERSITY: HOW DO STUDENTS FROM DIFFERENT CULTURES COME TOGETHER?

By Dina Helmy



Groups of students are gathered at the Iftar event held by the American University of Sharjah.

Approximately 90 nationalities make up the student body at the American University of Sharjah. Despite this diversity, students unite and embrace the similarities and differences in various cultures. According to the AUS website, the university was named by Times Higher Education in 2017 and 2018 as the top university in the world with the largest proportion of international students. [1]

Several elements, such as food, religion, events, interests and academics, contribute to bringing students from different nationalities together. At AUS, most students socialize during events held by clubs and organizations, coming together through shared interests and passions.

“I believe food brings cultures together [...] us sharing our culture's foods with others expresses a deeper understanding of each other, so food is just an easy and non-controversial way to get to know others,” said Sabah Zaheer, an AUS Indian student.

Global Day is an annual event held by AUS that helps foster cultural exchange between students. Through cultural performances and setting up country pavilions, students engage in experiences that honor diversity. Interestingly, many students actively participate in performances for foreign clubs and help them prepare their booths.

Honestly, I loved being a part of a different culture, Palestinian, and participating in their dance. I definitely learnt a lot whether about their culture or about them as people, as well as understanding their dialect better or other things such as understanding their humor! Even though I definitely felt a little out of place sometimes,” said Malak Wael, an Egyptian AUS student.

**AT THE END OF THE DAY, I ACTUALLY GOT AN INDIAN OUTFIT TO WEAR AND EVERYONE WAS LIKE OH MY GOODNESS [...] YOU'RE NOT INDIAN BUT YOU'RE DOING THE DANCE, YOU LIKE INDIAN FOOD, YOU'RE AN UNOFFICIAL INDIAN**

Similarly, Kessa Claire-Woldt, an AUS international student from the United States, performed for a foreign club, the Indian Cultural Club, and enjoyed the experience of assimilating into a different culture. Her friends who danced for ICC last year inspired her to perform this year on Global Day. By the end of the event, her friends called her an “unofficial Indian” since she was dressed in Indian attire.

“I feel like I made good friends and got to know more about the culture. At the end of the day, I actually got an Indian outfit to wear and everyone was like oh my goodness [...] you're not Indian but you're doing the dance, you like Indian food, you're an unofficial Indian,” said Claire-Woldt.



International students often face challenges adapting to new environments, given the presence of diverse cultures and traditions. Moving to a new country often raises questions about adjusting to and integrating into an unfamiliar culture. In the United Arab Emirates, one thing that can make it easier for international students is the presence of various cultures and a diverse community.

"I've been living in the GCC for a long while and although the cultures are different in different countries, the basics are similar. Also, a lot of UAE culture stems from Islam which is the same religion in my country so it wasn't too difficult to blend in and understand. Because UAE also has a lot of other nationalities, it's more open to accepting different people so fitting in is not as hard as it might be in other places," said Hafsa Hamid, an AUS Pakistani student.

For some students who struggled to adapt easily, having supportive friendships helped ease their transition. Making friends can specifically help international students socialize and expand their social circle, which can help them overcome their fears of not being able to fit in a new environment. For Amira Eldomiaty and Zaynab Ghani, the comfort of having friends made their adjustment easier.

**"AT THE END OF THE DAY, WE'RE ALL JUST HUMANS WITH VERY SIMILAR INTERESTS. HAVING A DIFFERENT CULTURE DOESN'T MEAN WE WOULD HAVE DIFFERENT GOALS AND DREAMS. DIFFERENT GROUPS CAN JOIN TOGETHER BASED ON SIMILAR INTERESTS AND DREAMS."**

"It was very hard - like a whole switch to a different world. What helped me was the friends I made," said Eldomiaty.

Ghani recently moved from the United Kingdom to the UAE and said that her social circle made it easier for her to adapt. She also said that living in a Muslim country made her feel more connected to her religion and allowed her to enrich her culture.

The similarities and differences across cultures act as a unifying force, bringing together students from diverse backgrounds. Commonalities include social norms, parenting styles and boundaries, while differences might manifest in varying understandings of music, food and beliefs.

It's refreshing and eye-opening to learn about new things. Despite that, I feel like you're more likely to see people from the same country sticking together. I feel like it's because of their shared culture and things they do that their unspoken bond is cemented," said Aaliya Shafi, an AUS student.

Despite our differences, we discover shared experiences and goals as students on our university journey. Connecting over passions and common interests is a recurring theme among students.

"At the end of the day, we're all just humans with very similar interests," said Eldomiaty. "Having a different culture doesn't mean we would have different goals and dreams. Different groups can join together based on similar interests and dreams."

The differences between cultures remain an interesting aspect to explore. Zaheer said that even though cultures have different cuisines, individuals can bond over discussing the distinctive flavors of their foods. Thus, various tastes serve as a common ground for cultural exchange.

"At the end of the day, we are all students who probably deal with the same challenges so that could be an easy bonding part. I feel from my own experiences that maybe it is hard to initiate a close friendship with someone from a different culture but once you do become friends, you start to realize that hey, we're not that different after all," said Shafi.

[1] <https://www.aus.edu/sustainability/our-priorities/diversity-tolerance-and-community-service>

# EXPLORING RAMADAN'S CULTURAL TAPESTRY THROUGH TRADITIONAL DRINKS



By Tala Zoubi

The athan, meaning “call to prayer” in Arabic, starts, and a family of five recites a du’a, meaning “supplication,” before breaking their fast with a date. Immediately after, they grab their cups of cold Jallab, Vimto, and Rooh Afza, which signifies the arrival of the holy month of Ramadan.

The array of beverages not only pleases the differing tastes around the table but is also a cultural marker of the melding of cultures and traditions held in that family.

The father and mother consume a glass of Jallab as it's what they grew up with in Beirut, Lebanon, in the 90s.

Jallab is a drink consisting of date /grape syrup, rose water, and carob topped with pine nuts and served cold. It is popular in the Levant region and Egypt.

Two children, impatiently waiting to take a sip, grab the glasses of Vimto. Vimto is arguably the most popular drink in Ramadan. It is made from grapes, blackcurrant, and raspberry mixed with water, and popular in the Gulf region.

Vimto Arabia's official website says, “Vimto Cordial was first introduced to the Middle East in 1927 by the Aujan family, 2023 marks our Centennial 100th Ramadan Celebration.”

As Vimto has been passed down and consumed by newer generations, innovative ways to consume the drink, like ice cream, cake, Kunafa, and more have been implemented to help businesses mark the festive month and increase sales.

Vimto sells 25 million bottles in the Middle East alone during Ramadan, according to the Vimto Worldwide website.

The aunt, left at the table, takes a glass of Rooh Afza, which translates to “refreshment of the soul,” mixed with milk to connect to her cultural roots, which differ from those of the others sitting beside her.



*This Vimto flavored ice cream is crafted from a specialty ice cream shop in Sharjah.*

Rooh Afza is a concentrate made from rose, fruit, and herb extracts, commonly served with water or milk. Originating in British India in 1907, it has become popular all over South Asia.

Hakim Majeed created the popular drink, which originated in Delhi, India. It was meant to refresh and hydrate customers and contained up to 21 ingredients. Despite the partition, the drink endured, and Majeed's son expanded to Pakistan and later Bangladesh. Popularity surged in Pakistan and Bangladesh, where they changed elements of the recipe to adapt to local resources, according to Al Jazeera.



Looking around the iftar table, three different beverages represent the vast tapestry of cultures celebrating Ramadan and the generational difference and nostalgia connected to each sip.

For 1446 years, Muslims worldwide shared drinks during Ramadan beyond quenching their thirst but as a form of celebration and a tangible link to cultural heritage. Intergenerational transmission of cultural knowledge and family traditions through these beverages has existed for centuries and will continue at every iftar table.

According to Sabah Zaheer, “I remember how every Ramadan, every family member has their drink of choice on the dining table. My brother and I would always drink falooda with ice cream. My dad loves Jazeera, and my mom's favorite is always Rooh Afza with milk.”

The multitude of traditional Indian drinks that Zaheer and her family love is an example of their clinging to the cultural traditions and memories that each beverage represents.

On the other hand, for Sulafa Mubarak, mixing a pitcher of Tang right before iftar for her and her grandfather was a cherished memory that connected them alone, as no one else at their iftar table enjoyed the beverage. That memory is something Mubarak still remembers even after her grandfather's passing, invoking a bittersweet memory.

### **ACCORDING TO CNN, “NASA SENT TANG DRINK MIX INTO SPACE WITH JOHN GLENN ON HIS FAMOUS ORBIT OF THE EARTH IN 1962.”**

Tang is a fruit-flavored powder mixed with water popular in the Middle East, Indonesia, which has the largest Muslim population, and Malaysia.

Other beverages that are consumed during Ramadan include Sobia, Qamar al-Din and Karkadeh.

In the holy month of Ramadan, families and friends gather around a table to break their fasts at sunset and enjoy the food and beverages prepared. For some people, this is the only time that allows their loved ones to culminate in one place. The unity of all brings together many cultures, generations, and flavors, helping create stronger bonds through the consumption of Rooh Afza, Jallab, Tang, or Vimto, to name a few. For some, an ordinary beverage holds great memories while evoking varying emotions in others.



## **VIMTO MOJITO RECIPE :**

### **INGREDIENTS:**

- 1 LIME, CUT INTO CIRCLES
- 1 LEMON CUT INTO CIRCLES
- BLACKBERRIES AS DESIRED
- STRAWBERRY AS DESIRED
- BLUEBERRIES, AS DESIRED
- ½ CUP OF FRESH MINT
- ICE CUBES, AS DESIRED
- 4 TBSP OF VIMTO CORDIAL
- 660 ML WATER

### **PREPARATION:**

- PUT THE LIME SLICES, LEMONS, BLACKBERRIES, STRAWBERRIES, BLUEBERRIES, AND MINT IN A BOWL.
- USING THE PESTLE, GRIND THE INGREDIENTS.
- ADD ICE CUBES, VIMTO CORDIAL, AND WATER AND STIR UNTIL COMBINED.
- POUR THE MOJITO INTO SERVING GLASSES AND GARNISH WITH A SLICE OF LIME.

# HOW TO MAKE THE PERFECT TRAY OF BASBOUSA

By Tala Zoubi

Basbousa, Harissa, Namoura, and Revani.

The sweet, syrup-soaked semolina cake has different names depending on the community you ask. Families and friends serve this moist, syrup-filled semolina cake at gatherings and events like Eid, the Holy month of Ramadan, or Lent celebrations.

Basbousa is popular in the Middle East, North Africa, and some parts of Europe. The ingredients and additions vary depending on the country or region. Depending on the region, people include various flavors such as cream, pistachios, cardamom, orange juice, orange zest, honey, date spread and fenugreek in their recipes.

The Ottomans first created the dessert in the 16th century to celebrate their conquest of Armenia. It was named Revan after the battle of Yerevan, the capital of Armenia, then changed to Revani, meaning “the precious” in the Ottoman Turkish language. Revani is still the name used for the semolina dessert in Turkey and Greece, preserving history through food.

This recipe is the version most popular in the Levant. Fillings and toppings can be added based on preference.

## INGREDIENTS: SEMOLINA CAKE

- Two cups coarse semolina
- One cup unsweetened shredded coconut
- Half cup unsalted butter, melted
- One-third cup white granulated sugar
- One teaspoon baking soda
- One cup plain yoghurt or sour cream
- One-third cup whole roasted almonds, for garnish

## SYRUP

- Two cups white granulated sugar
- One and a half cup water
- One tablespoon rosewater or orange blossom water
- One teaspoon lemon juice

## STEPS:

### SEMOLINA CAKE

- Preheat oven to 200 degrees Celsius.
- Lightly grease a square (23 by 23 cm) cake pan with vegetable oil or butter.
- Blend the semolina, coconut, sugar, and baking soda in a large bowl.
- Add the butter to the dry ingredients and incorporate using your hands until it is mixed well.
- Add the yogurt and mix with your hands until it is combined and easy to press together. It should be thick, not runny like cake batter.
- Press the mixture evenly into a one-inch layer in the square pan. Score the mixture with a butter knife into a square or diamond-shaped design and place an almond on each pre-cut shape.
- Bake for 30-40 minutes, or until golden brown. While the cake is baking, make the syrup.
- Cut the cake along the pre-cut slices and pour the cooled syrup on top of the cake while it is still hot so it is absorbed throughout.

### SYRUP

- Mix the sugar, water, rosewater and lemon juice in a saucepan and boil for 10 minutes or until it is thick and coats the back of a spoon.
- Take it off the heat and let it cool.



*This Basbousa is freshly baked according to the Levantine style.*



# PROFESSOR AHMED ALI REVEALS FAIFAA MOUNTAIN'S SECRET LANGUAGE

By Hoor Ibrahim

Professor Ahmed Ali is the Head of the Department of Arabic and Translation Studies at the American University of Sharjah. With a profound passion for linguistic and cultural exploration, Professor Ali is currently conducting research on the language spoken by the inhabitants of the Faifaa Mountain in Southern Arabia.

## What sparked your interest in studying the language of the inhabitants of the Faifaa Mountain in Southern Arabia?

My interest in studying this language was owing to several factors. The Faifaa Mountain region is vastly understudied, with only sporadic information available about it. Encountering individuals from this area and observing their communication in a somewhat unusual language, despite being Arabs themselves, piqued my curiosity. During my years of work in Southern Arabia, I had a colleague from the Faifaa region, but I never heard him speak the way some Faifis do. When I inquired about this, particularly given his mention that his father was a poet who composed poetry in their local dialect, he described it as a “cursed language.” He made it sound like the language of the Devil. Although his choice of words intrigued me, I remained uncertain as to why he characterized it in such a manner. Upon further investigation into this “language,” I discovered its rich cultural heritage and unique linguistic characteristics, rendering it an intriguing subject for linguists and anthropologists alike.

## You mentioned hearing people speak Faifi and your work colleague commenting about it. Could you elaborate on how you got to know about this obscure language?

I worked at some stage of my life as a professor at King Khalid University in Saudi Arabia where I taught translation and Linguistics.



*Professor Ahmed Ali is the Head of the Department of Arabic and Translation Studies at the American University of Sharjah.*

With the university being in Abha, in the Asir region, it was not too far from the Faifaa Mountain region. This provided me with a unique vantage point to encounter various linguistic and cultural nuances of the surrounding areas. During my time at KAU, I also taught students from diverse backgrounds, including some from the Faifaa Mountain region itself. Through interactions with these students, I became increasingly interested in the language spoken in their ancestral homeland. Curiosity and a genuine interest in understanding the linguistic fabric of the region prompted me to try to investigate the Faifaa language further. I also had a South African colleague who shared some interest in the literary production of the region. While our initial plans to conduct research together did not materialize, my fascination with the Faifaa language continued to grow. I ended up taking on the project much more seriously and academically after moving to AUS.

## Are there any existing linguistic resources or databases that you're utilizing in your research?

Not exactly. While Faifi may be considered an obscure language,

there are still valuable resources available that contribute to our understanding of its linguistic features and cultural context. However, I must state first that there are rarely any serious academic publications, linguistic studies and ethnographic works that provide insights into the phonology, grammar, vocabulary, and sociolinguistic aspects of the Faifaa language. Accordingly, there are no scholarly works to offer detailed analyses and documentation of the language or works that draw on fieldwork conducted by linguists and anthropologists in the region. This makes getting reliable documented information a very difficult task. Based on this you can say that in the presence of a dearth of research work that any researcher would have to rely on physically going to the region, speaking to its people, recording and documenting their speech himself. Living for a substantial period of time among the locals would also be a great advantage. But most importantly, Faifaa has produced a number of academics who have recently started speaking about the language of the region and its history and culture. They utilized platforms such as YouTube and Facebook to post their videos addressing those aspects. Such individuals possess firsthand knowledge of Faifaa. Personally, I made a few trips to Faifa myself. I was accompanied by a local friend who graciously acted as my host and guide and his accounts provided wealth of firsthand information. The experience was of phenomenal importance to my research work in this area.

### **What implications do you hope your research will have for our understanding of linguistic diversity in the region?**

I aim to contribute to a deeper understanding of linguistic diversity in the region and its broader implications. Faifi, like many indigenous languages, is at risk of extinction due to various social, economic and cultural factors. By documenting and studying Faifi, my research can raise awareness about the importance of preserving endangered languages and the unique cultural heritage they represent. This may lead to initiatives aimed at language revitalization and community-driven efforts to maintain linguistic diversity.

Additionally, language plays a central role in shaping cultural identity and preserving heritage. By examining the linguistic features of Faifi and its connection to the cultural practices and traditions of the Faifaa Mountain inhabitants, my research can provide insights into the rich cultural diversity in the region. Studying Faifi can also contribute to our understanding of linguistic typology, language contact phenomena, and the historical development of languages in the region. Comparative studies with related languages may reveal commonalities and differences, shedding light on broader linguistic patterns and processes. At this stage in my research, I can categorically say that in spite of the differences between Faifi and modern Arabic, it is indeed a dialect of an Arabic that is older than what we now have, but still Arabic though.

### **Can you describe the historical development of the Faifaa language and its origins within the broader context of Arabic dialects?**

The Faifaa dialect is part of the southwestern Arabian dialects, influenced by ancient Arabic forms preserved by the region's geographical isolation. It reflects a rich linguistic heritage, potentially including pre-Islamic elements. Some say that it may have Himyarite origins. Himyar is the last of the pre-Islamic kingdoms that existed in Yemen. It annexed under its rule all previous kingdoms such as Saba', Ma'in and Hadramout. One of the latest natives was Wa'il ibn Hujr who met the Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him, with a Yemeni delegation, and accepted Islam.

### **Has the Faifaa language been influenced by other languages?**

Given its location and historical trade routes, the Faifaa dialect may have absorbed words and phrases from African, Asian, and other Arabian languages, enriching its vocabulary. But this is only an assumption.



But the evidence that exists points out to classical Arabic. Instead of the definite article (al) in Arabic, they use (im). They say imjabal (the mountain); imkitab (the book). This feature is still used till today in our everyday speech. We meaning yesterday. This is an البارج, say /imbārīḥ/ which is الطمطانية. old Arabic dialect called

**Within the Faifaa region itself, are there any notable variations or sub-dialects? How do these variations manifest?**

Within the Faifaa region, there might be slight variations in dialect depending on factors like specific villages, family lineage and interaction with neighboring regions. But much more research is required to make an informed determination.

**How is the Faifaa dialect perceived within the broader Arabic-speaking community? Are there any social or political factors that affect its status?**

The Faifaa dialect is a marker of regional identity and perhaps pride. However, in broader contexts, speakers often switch to Modern Standard Arabic or other regional dialects for wider communication or formal purposes.

**Are there resources or programs available for people who wish to learn the Faifaa dialect? What are the challenges in teaching this dialect?**

Resources for learning the Faifaa dialect are extremely limited, no more than personal initiatives. Teaching the dialect formally poses challenges due to its primarily oral tradition and lack of standardized orthography.

**What is your perspective on the future of the Faifaa language? Do you believe it will continue to evolve, or is it at risk of being overshadowed by more dominant dialects or languages?**

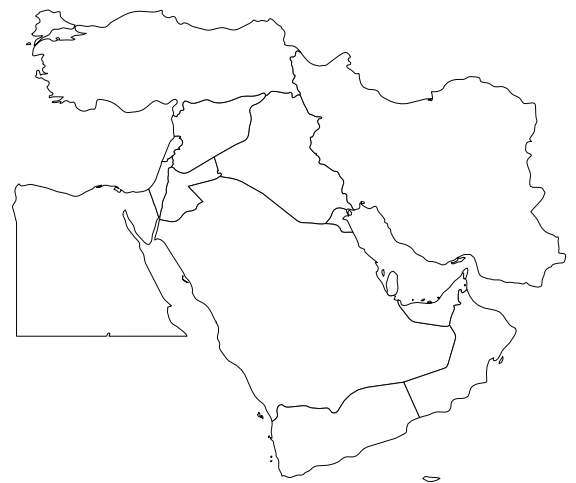
The future of the Faifaa dialect, like many regional languages, depends on the balance between cultural preservation and modernization.

While it faces challenges from the dominance of Modern Standard Arabic and global languages, there's a growing awareness of the importance of preserving linguistic diversity. However, most likely as generations progress not learning it, and older generations perish, this dialect will only exist in research papers.

**What efforts are being made to document and preserve the Faifaa dialect, and what challenges do you face in this work?**

Efforts to document and preserve the Faifaa dialect should include recording oral histories, compiling dictionaries, and academic research. However, very little is done in any of these areas. Challenges include the dialect's oral tradition and the dominance of Modern Standard Arabic in formal settings. Additionally, young faifis no longer use their forefathers' language, as they communicate in Arabic of today instead. Also, the school system does not support old dialects of this nature.

**AT THIS STAGE IN MY RESEARCH, I CAN CATEGORICALLY SAY THAT IN SPITE OF THE DIFFERENCES BETWEEN FAIFI AND MODERN ARABIC, IT IS INDEED A DIALECT OF AN ARABIC THAT IS OLDER THAN WHAT WE NOW HAVE, BUT STILL ARABIC THOUGH.**



# UNVEILING HIDDEN DIALECTS WITH PROFESSOR AHMED ALI

By Hoor Ibrahim

“Encountering individuals from Faifaa Mountain and observing their communication in a somewhat unusual language, despite being Arabs themselves, piqued my curiosity,” says Professor Ahmed Ali, Head of Arabic and Translation Studies at the American University of Sharjah.

Professor Ali has a rich background in linguistics and translation. He started with a bachelor’s in English language and a master’s in simultaneous interpreting and written translation from the Faculty of Al-Asun at Ain Shams University. Dr. Ali also earned a doctorate in comparative translation of the Holy Qur’an, which led him to study Arabic linguistics, rhetorical studies and Islamic studies deeply. His love for languages even took him into the world of Egyptology, where he learned about the language of Ancient Egypt.

“Witnessing the power of language to connect people, preserve heritage and shape identities deeply resonated with me.”

Professor Ali's passion for languages guided him to a teaching career, where he worked with students from all over the world, including at King Khalid University in Saudi Arabia. This experience helped him see how language connects people and cultures.

“Engaging with diverse linguistic communities heightened my appreciation for the necessity of preserving and honoring linguistic diversity.”

Professor Ali's journey into the world of the Faifaa dialect is a story of curiosity, fortuity and academic pursuit. The uniqueness of the region and its language sparked his interest.



*Professor Ahmed Ali has a rich background in linguistics and translation.*

## **"HE MADE IT SOUND LIKE THE LANGUAGE OF THE DEVIL," SAYS DR. ALI**

Despite being Arab, the inhabitants of Faifaa Mountain communicated in a dialect that stood out to him. This was a language area largely unexplored, with less information available, which naturally aroused his curiosity. While working in southern Arabia, Dr. Ali met a colleague who was originally from the Faifaa Mountain area. This colleague shared that his father used to write poetry in their local dialect. What caught Dr. Ali's attention was how this colleague referred to their dialect as a "cursed language." Such a description, likening the language to something forbidden or of another realm, intrigued Dr. Ali further.

His accidental discovery of the Faifaa language happened while he was a professor at KKU. The university's location in Abha, near the Asir region, was close to the Faifaa Mountain. This proximity allowed him to encounter the linguistic and cultural details of the area firsthand.



Professor Ali taught students from various backgrounds at the university, including those from the Faifaa region. Interacting with these students, he grew more interested in their ancestral language. His curiosity, coupled with a genuine desire to understand the linguistic complexities of the region, pushed him to delve deeper into the Faifaa dialect.

Although initial plans to collaborate on research with a South African colleague fell through, Dr. Ali's interest in the Faifaa language only intensified. He decided to undertake the study of this dialect more seriously and academically, especially after moving to AUS.

Dr. Ali's exploration into the Faifaa dialect underscores the importance of linguistic diversity and cultural heritage preservation.

His journey illustrates the vital role linguists play in documenting and preserving the world's endangered languages.

"Understanding the language of Faifaa inhabitants can foster greater appreciation and respect for their heritage," he says.

Professor Ali's research into the Faifaa dialect reveals a world where language intertwines with culture in complex ways. Despite the scarcity of academic studies on Faifi, his dedication shed a light on its rich linguistic and cultural landscape.

Dr. Ali adds that the lack of formal research on Faifi poses a significant challenge. There are few scholarly articles or books that delve into its phonology, grammar or sociolinguistic nuances. This absence of documented information makes understanding Faifi a daunting task for any linguist.

Professor Ali's own journeys to Faifaa have been instrumental in his research. Accompanied by a local friend who served as both host and guide, he gained invaluable insights.

The professor believes that preserving endangered languages like Faifi is crucial for maintaining our cultural heritage. His research aims to spotlight these languages, hoping to start projects that bring them back to life.

Dr. Ali points out the struggle between keeping the Faifaa dialect alive and the push towards modern languages like Standard Arabic. Despite these challenges, he remains optimistic about raising awareness for linguistic diversity.

As generations change, Dr. Ali worries the Faifaa dialect might only survive in studies, not spoken by its people. He highlights how the younger Faifaa community is moving away from their ancestral dialect.

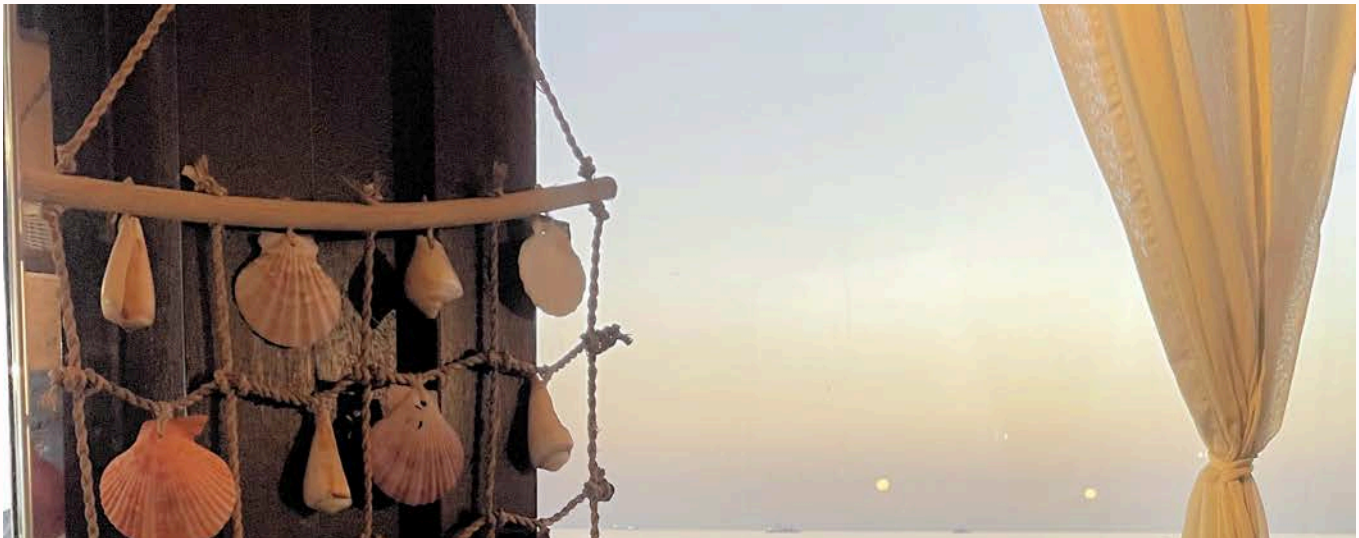
"Young faifis no longer use their forefathers' language, as they communicate in Arabic of today instead," says professor Ali.

Through his dedication and love for languages, Dr. Ali's efforts continue to bridge cultural gaps and preserve linguistic heritage, leaving a lasting impact on the field of linguistics and beyond.

**“THE EXPERIENCE WAS OF PHENOMENAL IMPORTANCE TO MY RESEARCH WORK IN THIS AREA,” SAYS DR. ALI.**

# 3 TIPS TO DEAL WITH OVERTHINKING AND STRESS

By Dina Helmy



*Connecting with nature can help ground your energy and keep you focused.*

If you constantly worry about the future or you often second-guess decisions, you are not alone. Overthinking, usually driven by fear of an undesirable outcome or missing out, can be exhausting. However, you can train your mind to be more present and less stressed.

## HERE ARE THREE TIPS TO HELP SHIFT YOUR PERCEPTION:

- **Remember that it is not just about the outcome but the process too:** Reaching the desired outcome is indeed satisfactory but appreciating the journey toward it can be equally rewarding.

- **Put things into perspective:** Today's worries will soon be memories and understanding this can help comfort you. Try connecting with nature to ground yourself and meditate. This can help you gain a positive perspective.

- **Take action:** Instead of dwelling on stressful thoughts, take proactive steps to address them. For example, write a list of 10 things that can help you overcome a current problem (talking to a friend, journaling, asking for help, etc).

Changing your perspective will not happen overnight; it is a process in which you need to be patient. Remember to be kind to yourself as it will make a huge difference. In the end, nothing is more important than your mental health.

**NOTHING IS MORE  
IMPORTANT THAN  
YOUR MENTAL  
HEALTH.**



# MAKING ART AND NOT CONTENT: FROM DIGITAL TO TRADITIONAL ART

By Dina Helmy



*The young artist stands in her booth at Comic-con International 2024.*

Rahma Zuhair is a young freelance self-taught artist and illustrator. She started her art journey when she was 14. She is an information systems and business analytics major at the American University of Sharjah and is the president of the Startup SBA organization. Zuhair was also a presenter at Comic-con International 2024.

## **You recently presented at Comic-con International, can you share your experience and thoughts about how it helped you as an illustrator?**

I heard that Comic-con was a really good place to check if people would respond to your art through a different media. However, being a university student, I did procrastinate a little bit with the prep for Comic-con 2024. I ended up making everything that I sold in the last week.

So far I've been a purely digital artist but when it comes to the prints, there are so many things involved. I wanted to learn how to make stickers and print on wood, ceramics and acrylics, so I took a membership at SoiLAB and I learned how to 3D print in one week. But I'd say more than the exposure, more than the kind of people you meet and the kind of interactions you have with people who like your art at Comic-con, what really made my experience a whole lot meaningful was definitely the week before where, because I procrastinated and I didn't have time to send all my art out for printing, I was forced to learn all of it on my own.

**I FEEL LIKE TAKING THAT STEP FROM JUST BEING A CREATOR TO THEN GOING INTO SELLING YOUR ART AND TURNING IT INTO A BUSINESS IS WHERE GETTING OUT OF YOUR COMFORT ZONE COMES INTO PLAY.**

## **Why do you believe it is necessary to get out of your comfort zone and seize opportunities?**

As an artist, I feel like digital art itself is not very out there. With visual media, it is more of a behind-the-scenes thing where you are stuck a little bit in your comfort zone and I feel like taking that step from just being a creator to then going into selling your art and turning it into a business is where getting out of your comfort zone comes into play, at least for me. I think it's extremely important because when people start with art it's always from a place of "it brings me comfort, it's a hobby." But when you want to start taking it seriously at some point you're gonna have to put your foot down and be like, okay, now's the point where I have to start making less fun things.

## **What was the most challenging part of your art journey?**

The change in mindset from becoming like a creator to a business-minded person was very difficult for me initially because when you're drawing and when you're creating art for yourself, it's different. When you're creating art and putting it on the internet, it's different.

And then when you're creating art to sell, it's completely different. I think I was in that stage when I was trying to grow my account, which is when I switched to selling it. So then it obviously no longer became what gets more likes, it became what sells more. It's very hard to keep your love for what you're doing when that happens. But I think I've been able to navigate it a little while.

**I noticed you have mentioned on your profile that you are focused on creating art rather than generating content. Can you explain what that means to you?**

I feel like intentions and your goals for what you create matter because people can go around saying I'm just doing this for fun. But the second it starts getting a little bit more serious, the second you start getting a bit more orders, a bit more followers and you start not dreaming, but kind of seeing this going somewhere and you start believing. Oh wow, this might take off. Then there's so much pressure on yourself. Art has always been about expressing myself and the second that changed; it wasn't a very good experience. So yeah, definitely make art, not content. And if people like your art, great, because content you're making for other people, but the art you're making for yourself.

**What is a moment you believe altered your perception and helped you grow as an artist?**

I started murals a few months ago. So during the middle of 2023, I did my first wall painting and it was traditional. I think that was a very defining moment in my journey because so far, until 2023, I was purely a digital artist, and in 2023, I got a commission to do two walls at the Radisson Red Lobby by hand. To be fair, I hadn't drawn traditionally, or professionally in like ever. I had to learn everything from scratch again. This first experience gave me the confidence to believe that I'm doing it for the first time, but also the stakes are so high. So I have no option but to get it right. So yeah, I think that's definitely a moment that gave me the confidence that I needed.

## **IF PEOPLE LIKE YOUR ART, GREAT, BECAUSE CONTENT YOU'RE MAKING FOR OTHER PEOPLE, BUT THE ART YOU'RE MAKING FOR YOURSELF.**

**How did it feel to turn your digital art into actual products?**

Honestly, the first day of Comic-Con was my first time selling my art. The first person who comes and buys my things told me she's been following my art for a year or so and she came all the way to buy my Percy Jackson stickers. I was over the moon cause this had never happened to me before. From digital to traditional, it makes it way more real. Like when people are walking by and they see some character that they like or a sticker sheet that they like, and then they start freaking out to their friends.

**If you could go back in time, what is one thing you would encourage your younger self to do?**

When I was younger, I would just not keep any of my art because I started doing it because I used to think a lot. I had a really big issue with overthinking and I used to always scratch something with a pencil when I used to overthink. And then it just gradually turned into drawings and I would just not think and do sketches. So I'd probably encourage myself to keep those sketches because I don't know, I never considered my art good or never considered myself an artist in a way where I'd keep myself. I'd just always throw it away. But yeah, I'd probably say keep your art so you can see how you grow.

**What kind of advice would you give to similar young artists who are just starting?**

It's less inspirational, and more technical advice. I feel like if you're just starting, if you've just sat through at least one tutorial or one YouTube video it would help. The second thing I'd say is references.



Using references has made my anatomy and has made my structure so much better. Using references is not cheating; it's just a way of learning.

**What are your future plans regarding making your artwork tangible?**

I am doing a few murals at AUS's student center. I'm very excited about it because they've given me 10 walls. The fact that I get to leave behind a legacy at AUS is absolutely insane. Another thing I'm looking into is World Art Dubai. They've invited me to do a few live drawings there. Another thing that I'm looking into is teaching. There's this company that's starting workshops for kids and for digital art and murals and pottery and ceramics and stuff, so I'm registering as an instructor.

**What is something you believe will help you massively in this journey?**

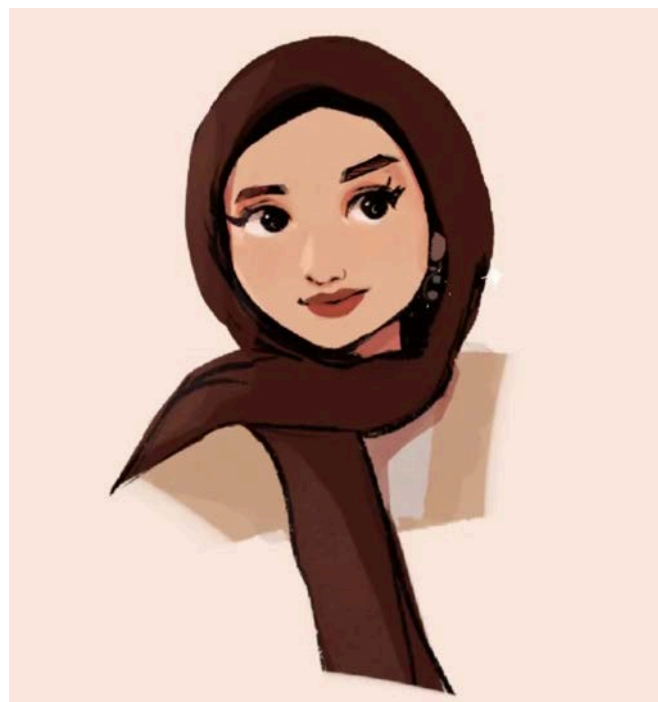
I guess it goes back to my overthinking problem. This whole "it doesn't hurt to try" mentality really helps. Even though I have that mentality, I do have a lot of self-doubt so maybe work on it a little bit. That'll definitely help. Just getting a bit more confident with my own things would definitely help.

**How do you feel about collaborating with other artists or brands to help put your artwork out there?**

That's definitely something I'd be interested in because I do have a lot of ideas for things like that. I feel like I need to work a little bit more on my socials and get a bigger reach for things like that. I still haven't explored my art on clothing. I have gotten a few requests to do denim jackets



*Zuhair's art work can be found on her Instagram page @rahmaybe*



*Zuhair often enjoys drawing her friends and loved ones*

**THIS WHOLE "IT DOESN'T HURT TO TRY" MENTALITY REALLY HELPS**

# THE FUSION OF BUSINESS AND ART: THE JOURNEY OF A YOUNG SELF- TAUGHT ARTIST

By Dina Helmy



Rahma Zuhair exhibited some of her work at Comic-con International 2024.

Authentic, expressive and bold are styles that would describe Rahma Zuhair's aesthetic. Her distinctive choice of necklaces serves as a noticeable aspect of her style.

Those are usually long and unique. Sometimes it is a dragon, while at other times it is a pocket watch necklace. Her dedication and passion for art resonate through the paint stains on her clothes, reflecting her work. These stains give a sense of belonging and connection to her art. She usually wears striped clothes, expressing her love for combining different colors.

"If I were living on my own, just know I'd dress only in primarily yellow colors."

Zuhair, 20, studies information systems and business analytics at the American University of Sharjah and is the President of the Startup SBA organization. She also presented at Comic-con International 2024. Zuhair was primarily a digital artist for five years before transitioning to more traditional forms of art.

"As an artist, I feel like digital art is not very out there. I feel like it's a lot more behind the scenes because at the end of the day, it's not you who's going on stage and it's not you who's presenting it."

She decided to present at Comic-con International this year to see if people would respond to her art through a different medium. It was her first time selling her art.

"The first hour happens and nobody comes and I'm just sitting there like, oh God [...] I was just like, I have made a huge mistake," said Zuhair about her experience at Comic-con. "And then the second hour happens and [...] the first person who comes and buys apparently told me she's been following my art for a year or so. And she came all the way to buy my Percy Jackson stickers."

Zuhair reflected on this by explaining how she usually doubts herself and that this journey is helping boost her self-confidence by giving her more opportunities to believe in herself.

The young artist described the challenges of the change in mindset that follows integrating business into art. Now, the art that she is creating to sell is very different from what she used to do for herself.

"It becomes narrower and narrower what exactly you're enjoying. When it's just for yourself, you're just making whatever you want [...] but then as you go on, it becomes for other people."

When Zuhair shifted her focus to selling her art, she found it challenging to completely enjoy what she was doing and felt like there was less freedom for her to express herself. Zuhair said that her art content became no longer about what gets more likes, but about what sells more.



“It’s very hard to keep your love for what you're doing when that kind of happens.”

On her Instagram page, she wrote that she is focused on creating art rather than content because the moment she stopped expressing herself through her art, it was not a good experience.

“Definitely make art and not content. And if people like your art, great, because content you're making for other people, but the art you're making for yourself.”

Zuhair started her art journey when she was 14. She is a self-taught artist who began by sketching whenever she was feeling stressed or was overthinking. She used to play around with a pencil and this gradually turned into drawings. Through the process, her art skills improved and she started exploring them further.

The young artist seems to enjoy figuring out things on her own and learning how to do them from scratch, even if this process becomes challenging. When she started her art journey, she would explore the software she used without watching any tutorials beforehand.

However, she said it would not have hurt to sit through one tutorial to make things smoother for someone who is just starting. When she decided to make her artwork more tangible, she also wanted to learn how to make stickers and print on wood, ceramics and acrylics manually without asking someone to do that for her.

“I was forced to learn all of it on my own,” said Zuhair.

Recently, Zuhair has been given the opportunity to paint on 10 walls of AUS’s student center. Zuhair said it is important for her because it makes her feel like she is leaving a legacy behind.

**“I WAS FORCED TO LEARN ALL OF IT ON MY OWN,” SAID ZUHAIR.**

In the future, she plans to continue pursuing her passion for art.

“I'm looking into World Art Dubai. They've invited me to do a few live drawings there. [...] Another thing I'm looking into is teaching. There's this company that's starting workshops for kids and for digital art, murals, pottery and ceramics [...], so I'm registering as an instructor.”

Zuhair’s journey has been full of ups and downs. Making her artwork more tangible forced her to step outside of her comfort zone, which helped her identify her goals and seize opportunities.

“This whole ‘it doesn't hurt to try’ mentality really helps.”



*Rahma Zuhair is painting on a tote bag at the Art Assembly event hosted by the College of Arts and Sciences at the American University of Sharjah.*

# 3 WAYS TO OVERCOME HOMESICKNESS

By Dina Helmy

We have all been there at one point, missing home and hoping to get back as soon as possible. However, that might not always be a viable option; or even a good one. Leaving your home country to study abroad can be anxiety-inducing.

There are so many things that can come to mind that will make us scared of not being able to fit in or be as equally happy as we were before. Feeling homesick can stop you from living the best experiences of your life, but acknowledging that this feeling is temporary can make a big difference.

**LEARN TO ENJOY YOUR OWN COMPANY BECAUSE THIS IS WHAT WILL KEEP YOU FOCUSED THROUGHOUT YOUR JOURNEY.**

## HERE ARE 3 WAYS TO OVERCOME HOMESICKNESS:

### 1. Socialize, Connect and Put Yourself Out There

It is normal to feel like you want to isolate yourself or avoid social interactions in the first couple of weeks or even months, but that will not help you overcome homesickness. Rather, this would make you feel more unfamiliar and unhappy.

Connecting and socializing with people who have similar interests is very helpful because then there would be someone you can relate to and share your moments with. Having friends in a new place can certainly make you look forward to spending your days with them. It brings a sense of excitement into your life, which is very useful.

Consider joining clubs in your university because it is one of the things that will ease your transition.

Being part of a club allows you to interact and meet new people with similar goals and interests, which helps expand your social circle.

Do not forget about your friends from back home. Even if your lives are different now, it is always nice to connect and share with them your new routine.

The same goes for family; no matter how hectic your schedule gets, try to make time for them.

### 2. Slowly Return to Your Routine

Practicing your usual activities can make the experience less overwhelming since you can divert your energy into something that normally brings you comfort. Whether it is going to the gym, taking a walk, trying new restaurants, or picking up an instrument, these activities serve as distractions that help you get used to a new environment while maintaining comforting habits.

You can even rediscover a hobby of yours such as painting, photography or writing, which will help you unwind and enjoy your own company.

Consider journaling too as it can help you deal with stress and anxiety. Writing your thoughts down can make them seem less overwhelming and help you deal with them better.

### 3. Get Out of Your Comfort Zone

It is essential to avoid comparing your current and previous lifestyles because they will certainly be different. Getting out of your comfort zone and trying out new things can help you adapt and feel less homesick. You can start adding new activities to your routine such as things you have always wanted to do but never got the chance to.

This will make your experience better and filled with positivity since you will recognize the differences between your old and new lifestyles. You will eventually realize that your life is more interesting because of these differences.

You should not rush the process nor be hard on yourself. It is normal and common to feel homesick, especially if you have recently moved to a new country where this feeling is more intense. Nevertheless, you can get past it and make the most of your current situation. Remember, you are right where you need to be so embrace the journey and cherish your experiences.



# FROM THE STAGE TO THE CLASSROOM: THE MULTIFACETED JOURNEY OF GREGORY VANDERPYL

By Tala Zoubi

“I was learning the New York life of a freelancer, of an artist, a bohemian,” said Gregory VanderPyl when describing his move to New York as a newly graduated aspiring actor in the ‘80s.

With around 50 countries traveled VanderPyl's extraordinary journey to becoming an educator has culminated in over 30 years of experience teaching, acting, a delving into the film, theatre and arts industries.

Born and raised in Rhode Island, USA, VanderPyl gravitated towards the arts initially. He did a bachelor's in communication with a minor in theatre, later studying theatre, film and art for a semester abroad in London to expand his interest. Exploring Shakespeare, musicals, and off-theatre street productions helped him dive further into the field.

After his undergraduate studies, VanderPyl experimented with all types of jobs, ultimately landing in California to pursue acting. He completed an acting and stuntman course and took roles in popular shows like “Baywatch,” “Renegade” and “MacGyver.”

New York City marked the beginning of 12 years of commitment to pursuing traveling, film and visual arts work.

“I was a production assistant for Micheal Jackson; I drove Michael Jackson on one of his concert tours,” said VanderPyl.

Later, he worked on an independent film that did well on the independent scene. The director of the film offered him free rent in Manhattan.

“Robert De Niros restaurant was around the corner, and his house was three blocks down.



*Gregory VanderPyl is a senior instructor at the Department of English.*

Drew Barrymore roamed around the neighborhood all the time. So you go and get your coffees and see them,” VanderPyl said.

As the independent film did well, VanderPyl and his team were invited to the Munich and Venice film festivals. He decided to travel solo through Europe to attend the festivals.

When he returned to New York, VanderPyl switched gears from acting to art as an artist's project manager and installing art in galleries with side jobs in independent films.

However, he got tired of the instability of the field and decided to explore Southeast Asia after a friend's recommendation.

“Things get rough, and you just get abused, too; you work 16-18 hour days. You get treated like meat. Even as an artist, people would call me at 4 a.m. with ideas, threatening me if I didn’t immediately start working,” said VanderPyl.

As VanderPyl embarked on his journey through southeast Asia, his teaching career also began. He tutored English to students in Malaysia and Thailand as an easy and efficient way of making money.

In Laos, while staying in a stilted guest house above the Mekong River, a significant hurricane destroyed the bungalows and left the owner, Mr. To, with nothing. Mr. To's generosity inspired VanderPyl to offer to rebuild the entire complex using his experience as a carpenter in the US. Mr. To accepted, and in return, he would provide free food and accommodation during the two-month build.

Locals all over the island heard about VanderPyls' work and wanted to employ him to translate menus into English for potential tourists. Local work continued throughout Vietnam and Cambodia, where he met fellow teachers.

VanderPyl learned the English language's profound impact on people through his travels and community work and wanted to pursue it professionally.

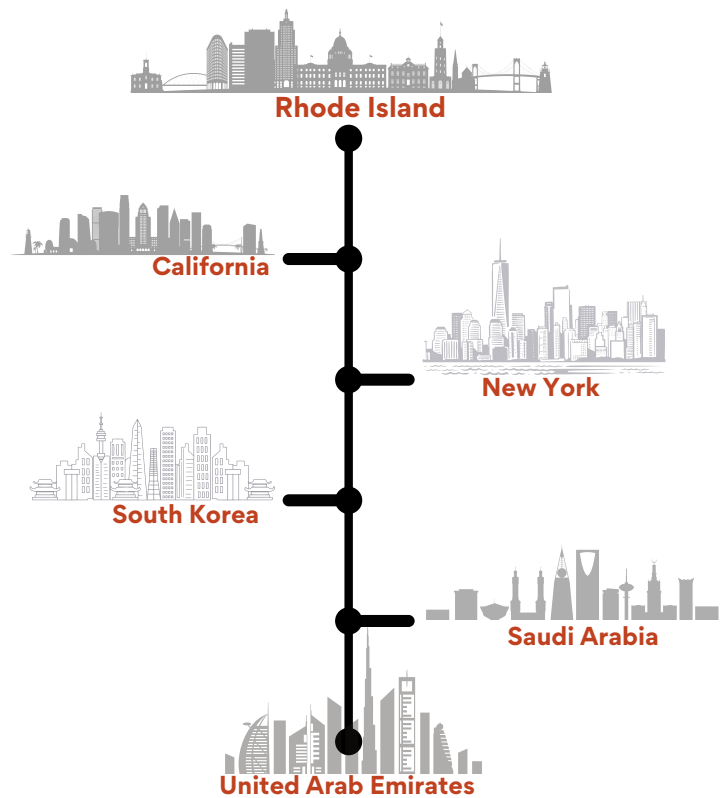
VanderPyl collected memorabilia from his adventures, hoping to publish travel pieces.

“My goal was to write a book or a travel book or at least journal magazine articles about traveling on a shoestring budget,” said VanderPyl.

The memorabilia was eventually published in a famous men's magazine in Singapore, which helped pay for VanderPyls only daughters birth.

VanderPyl returned to the US in 2000 to work and earn money to return to Asia and continue teaching. He moved to Seoul, South Korea, for his first official teaching position at a high-end private school.

While in Seoul for six years, VanderPyl worked with all grade levels, created English campaigns for Samsung, and helped Ph.D. and MA students write their thesis papers and prepare for interviews.



When asked what VanderPyl's most fulfilling moments were, he described teaching young kids in Seoul.

Incorporating art into teaching, VanderPyl emphasized the importance of process and development to his kindergarten students. He created a life-size portrait using Gustav Klimt's painting, revealing one color daily. The project earned recognition from a mother who was an educational psychologist, resulting in a feature story in a major Seoul newspaper.

VanderPyl then decided to pursue a master's degree at the and continued teaching in Singapore, Saudi Arabia, and lastly, Sharjah.

Determination and creativity have a symbiotic relationship in Gregory VanderPyls' life. Whether paving his way in the film industry as an actor or teaching students worldwide with unique techniques, he continues to strive for his goals no matter where they lead him.



# PENSION MARIANNA: THE CHARMING GREEK HIDEAWAY OVERLOOKING THE MEDITERRANEAN

By Tala Zoubi

Throughout Europe, people use the term pension to describe a boarding house or accommodation.

Pension Marianna is a picturesque hotel that overlooks the glistening Mediterranean Sea in the southern Greek coastal city of Nafplio.

Featured in the Lonely Planet Greece travel guide, Pension Marianna is a family-owned, quaint, traditionally styled hotel. As you step onto the communal patio, one of the Zoto brothers will greet you with a slice of fresh orange cake and a refreshing glass of lemonade, both made from citrus grown in the family's home garden and around the property.

While basking in the tranquility of the communal patio, the cool breeze hits your face as you overlook the traditional Venetian-styled town lined with narrow cobblestone streets. As you turn and take in your surroundings, towering over the city is the Palamidi Fortress, built by the Venetians in the early 19th century on a 216-metre-high hill.

Sarah, a traveler who has visited over 50 countries, expresses her gratitude and satisfaction for her stay at Pension Marianna, ranking it among the top three she has ever stayed at.

“The hospitality and interior made the stay so charming. It is the most relaxed and comfortable hotel I have ever stayed in. From the freshly made baked goods to the clean and cozy rooms, it felt like home,” she said.

Citrus-colored accents run throughout the hotel and in modern rooms, while traditional rooms are entirely stone-made. All accommodation is located below the patio and accessed via steep, cobblestone steps leading to a square courtyard with potted plants, creating a homey ambiance.



*The view of Nafplio while climbing 900-steps to the Palamidi Fortress is captivating .*

**ONE OF THE ZOTO BROTHERS AND HIS FAMILY HAVE A SIDE PROJECT CALLED NAFPLIO BIO FARMS. IT INVITES TRAVELERS TO EXPLORE THEIR ACRES OF PRODUCE AND ORANGE ORCHARDS USED IN A COOKING CLASS TO CREATE A TRADITIONAL GREEK FEAST.**

Freshly made breakfast is served daily using local ingredients and homegrown products. The options are limited, but the quality is superb.

Pension Mariana is only a 300-metre walk to the center of town, which has access to local jewelry and clothing businesses, restaurants and beaches. The people of Nafplio are extremely friendly. Their close-knit community values simplicity and tradition.

Summer temperatures in Nafplio reach a high of 37 degrees Celsius, making Nafplio a perfect summer destination for families, couples and solo travelers with low to moderate crowds compared to other destinations around Greece.

# THE PERFUME YOU NEED FOR ALL OCCASIONS: L'INTERDIT GIVENCHY

By Dina Helmy



*L'Interdit perfume takes inspiration from actress Audrey Hepburn.*



“There are night and day perfumes, summer and winter perfumes, but L’Interdit is neither this nor that. It is the only scent I have found suitable for all times and events,” said Malak El-Etreby, an Interdit lover, who is planning to repurchase it for the third time.

L’Interdit Givenchy, which takes inspiration from Audrey Hepburn’s rebellious spirit, is a representation of empowerment. It was created in 1957 and was made in France at Ateliers Givenchy. L’Interdit, French for forbidden, is a floral woody perfume with top notes of pear and bergamot and base notes of vanilla and patchouli among other complementary scents.

What sets L’Interdit apart is its versatility. Whether it is a casual day or a glamorous night out, this perfume will seamlessly complement any occasion and be your go-to. Say goodbye to switching between perfumes to find the right one, L’Interdit will become your signature scent, all thanks to its addictive and elegant fragrance.



Givenchy later introduced a range of L'Interdit perfumes in 2021 including L'Interdit Rouge and L'Interdit Intense, which are the most popular. L'Interdit perfumes range from subtle eau de toilette to intense eau de parfum, offering something for every mood and occasion. It is more than just a nice scent; it is about having confidence and freedom to express yourself. L'Interdit offers you the fragrance that would make your friends stop and ask you what you are wearing.

Prepare for compliments everywhere you go as L'Interdit is a long-lasting perfume that will leave an unforgettable impression. It will stay on your clothes for days, which is why many people love it and cannot substitute it. When you first spray the perfume, you will smell hints of tuberose and pear, and then cozy vanilla and woody notes fade in. It is the perfect match if you crave bold florals with a hint of sweetness. Givenchy describes L'Interdit as “a white flower crossed by a dark woody accord.”

Because the perfume is both sweet and woody, it is suitable for many age groups, including teenagers and above. L'Interdit can be found in multiple stores and online too. You can buy it online from Givenchy's website or if you live near a Sephora store, you can pay a visit and check the whole line to see which suits your personality best.

Consider getting a sample too if you are a bit reluctant about which L'Interdit perfume to buy. It is always worth a try to spray the perfume and leave it for some time to see how the fragrance blends with your skin and how the notes unfold one by one. The perfume bottle comes in different sizes to suit your budget, ranging from 50ml to 125ml bottles.

“L'Interdit Eau De Parfum Fragrance is a great new addition to my collection of Fragrances! I can spray some on in the morning and still smell wonderful at the end of the day without getting a headache in the process. The Perfume itself has a warmth about it that makes it both comforting and perfect for the upcoming cooler weather. I love it,” said a Sephora customer, reviewing the product.

**It is more than just a nice scent; it is about having confidence and freedom to express yourself.**



*L'Interdit has a specific line for body care such as body milk products and shower oils.*

**You can buy it online from Givenchy's website or if you live near a Sephora store, you can pay a visit and check the whole line to see which suits your personality best.**

# TRANSFORM YOUR HOME INTO A HAVEN OF CLEAN AIR

By Hoor Ibrahim



*The Dyson air purifier seamlessly integrates into your home decor.*

Many of us take the quality of the air we breathe at home for granted. Yet, it is surprising how indoor air can be just as polluted as the air outside, if not more. Common household activities like cooking, or simply having pets around, can significantly affect indoor air quality. This is where the Dyson Purifier Hot+Cool Gen1 comes into play, offering a seamless solution to purify and maintain the right temperature in your living spaces.

Dyson's Purifier Hot+Cool Gen1 detects, captures and holds onto pollutants to clean up the air in your living spaces. It's powerful enough to filter out 99.95% of tiny particles, even as small as 0.1 microns. That means it can tackle pet dander, which can stay in the air and settle around your home, along with the smells they bring.

Household products, like cleaning sprays and aerosols, can let out gases known as volatile organic compounds. The Dyson purifier is engineered to trap these gases to help keep your air clean.

Cooking can also affect your home's air by releasing different smells and emissions, depending on how and what you cook. The Dyson machine works to clean these from your air.

The Dyson Purifier Hot+Cool Gen1 uses Air Multiplier technology to capture far-away pollutants and circulate a powerful stream of purified air across the room, at a rate of 290 Liters per second.

**Regular maintenance is key to keeping the air in your home clean. For the Dyson Purifier Hot+Cool Gen1, it's recommended to replace the combined HEPA and carbon filter every 12 months. Filters can become full of pollutants and start to let bad smells back into the room over time. The purifier will let you know when it's time for a new filter, and you can always check the filter's status on the machine's small screen.**

This technology ensures the purifier quickly and evenly heats up a room or provides a cool breeze when necessary. The machine doesn't just purify the air in one step but two. It combines a high-efficiency particulate absorbing H13 filter and activated carbon filter within a 360° sealed system to filter out tiny allergens and pollutants effectively. The entire purifier is sealed to the HEPA H13 standard. So, what goes inside, stays inside.



The purifier has built-in sensors to continuously check the air quality, while an advanced algorithm processes the data every second, providing real-time monitoring and adjustments to the air quality.

You can purchase the purifier at any Dyson store or other appliances stores. For online shopping convenience, it is also available on the Dyson website, Amazon and Noon as well.

Unboxing the Dyson Purifier Cool Gen1, you will discover the sleek purifying fan, a 360° glass HEPA and activated carbon filter, along with a user-friendly remote control. This remote is thoughtfully designed with a curved shape and a magnetic feature for convenient storage right on the top of the device itself. Despite its substantial appearance, the purifier is surprisingly lightweight, making it effortless to move around your home, where it's designed to fit seamlessly into any space.

“I have always struggled with allergies, to the point where spring felt more like a season to dread than enjoy. Since I started using the Dyson Purifier Hot+Cool Gen1, it’s been a total game changer. I can actually sit in my living room, surrounded by my plants and pets, and breathe easily. Coupled with my regular allergy medications, this purifier has truly improved my quality of life,” said Ahmed Ibrahim, a long time allergy sufferer and a Dyson purifier user.

**I have always struggled with allergies, to the point where spring felt more like a season to dread than enjoy.**



*The Dyson Purifier Hot+Cool Gen1 is light and easy to move.*

# HOW TO TRAIN YOUR PUPPY: THE FIRST 3 COMMANDS EVERY DOG SHOULD KNOW

By Hoor Ibrahim

Puppies love to play and interact, which is why training them the right way to behave is very important. Teaching them is not always quick; it needs a lot of time, doing things over and over and your hard work. Sometimes, your puppy might get what you're teaching them right away. Other times, they might get distracted by something else. But if you keep being patient and putting in the effort, your puppy will definitely start to understand. This is also a great way for you and your puppy to become best friends.

There are three simple things you can teach your puppy that are really important. These are “sit, come and stay.”

## HERE'S A GUIDE ON HOW TO TRAIN YOUR PUPPY WITH THESE COMMANDS:

### 1. Sit

The “sit” command is often the easiest for puppies to learn, making it a good starting point for both you and your new furry friend. Here's a simple guide to teach the “sit” command:

- Hold a treat in your hand so your puppy knows you have something tasty.
- Hold the treat near your puppy's nose and then slowly raise it above their head. As their head tilts up to follow the treat, their bottom should naturally lower into a sitting position.
- As soon as your puppy starts to sit, say the word “sit.” This helps them associate the action with the command.
- The moment your puppy sits, give them the treat and lots of praise.
- Repeat this sequence a few times daily until your puppy masters it.





## 2. Come

Teaching your puppy the “come” command is not only essential for their obedience training but also crucial for their safety. This command ensures they return to you when called, preventing potentially dangerous situations. Here's how to teach it:

- Start somewhere without distractions, using a leash for control.
- Kneel down to your puppy's level to seem more inviting.
- Call your puppy with a cheerful voice. Say their name followed by "come."
- Hold out a treat to encourage them to come to you.
- If they don't move towards you, gently pull on the leash to guide them.
- Give them the treat and lots of praise when they reach you.
- Keep practicing, slowly adding more distance and distractions. Try without the leash in a safe area as they get better.

## 3. Stay

Training your puppy to “stay” is a basic yet essential skill that boosts their self-control and can be lifesaving in risky situations. Here's how to teach your puppy the “stay” command, broken down into easy steps:

- Begin by having your puppy in a sitting or lying down position. This starting position makes it easier for them to understand the “stay” command.
- With your puppy in position, hold your hand out with your palm facing them, like a stop signal, and say “stay” clearly and calmly.
- Take a step back. If your puppy stays, even just for a few seconds, return to them and reward them with a treat and praise.
- As your puppy gets better at staying, gradually increase the distance you step away and the time you ask them to stay before rewarding them.



*This well-trained dog demonstrates a perfect sit,*

- It's important to teach a release command like “ok” or “free” to let your puppy know when the stay is over, and they can move again. This prevents confusion and reinforces the control of the “stay” command.

**Every puppy learns at their own pace. Always use the command in a positive way, never in anger.**

These commands might sound simple, but they're very helpful for your puppy to learn. They help your puppy know how to listen to you and control themselves. This means you can have fun going out with your puppy and not worry when you have people over at your house.

# A LOVE FOR THE PEOPLE: INSIGHT FROM A COMMUNITY SERVICE COORDINATOR

By Sabah Zaheer



*Amawi El Khalifa and AUS students visit Cambodia for a culture and service trip.*

“I love people. Wherever I go I want to talk to people, do something for the people, but it feels good when you understand the needs of other people,” said Amawi El Khalifa, a community service and outreach coordinator at American University of Sharjah.

El Khalifa’s love for people stems from a place of love for gaining knowledge and using it as her tools in life. She grew up with a profound passion for reading, writing and studying.

“I think my need to want to get as much knowledge and education is because of my grandmother. She would always play the radio all day long and I would listen to every detail,” said El Khalifa.

Her childhood was one of peace and simplicity. As a kid, she was raised by her grandmother in the city of Khartoum, Sudan, and she spent most of her youth in solitude to develop into the best possible version of herself. She values the quiet things in life and ponders about the meaning of life quite often.

After completing her bachelor’s in psychology in Sudan, El Khalifa’s plan was to go to New Zealand and continue her studies in psychology. She completed her master’s in clinical psychology and is planning to get a doctorate in psychoanalysis. She believes her interest in psychology is related to her need to understand humans and their behaviors.

Her dream to pursue psychology was put to a halt 11 years ago when she got her first job in the residential halls of AUS. El Khalifa made her way to the Community Services and Outreach Department when the students and faculty around her realized she had a way with people. She has been in the department, bringing changes to people’s lives, since 2014.

When asked if she feels happy with her job, Amawi El Khalifa reiterated a conversation she had with a student. They discussed the difference between happiness and feeling content.

“Happiness is a temporary thing; it comes and goes. But feeling content is a lasting feeling and that’s what I feel for my job.”

She says how feeling content comes from a place of fulfilling one’s life motives.

She dedicates most of her life in running events and campaigns for community service and some of her favorite memories are her trips to Cambodia, building homes for underprivileged children, trips to the zoo or ski Dubai with orphans and hosting fundraisers for good causes.



“My job is the center of my life and is extremely rewarding, especially with the help and support of my team,” said the community service coordinator.

The community services team has recently helped in the rebuilding of a house for two orphans and El Khalifa feels elated with the big impact the team is bringing to the orphans’ lives with the small improvements to their home. In discussion about what difficulties she faces in her job of humanitarian work, she changes the word “difficulties” into the word “challenges.” She believes money is always a barrier in this world and most obstacles arise from the challenge of acquiring finances.

Despite this recurring challenge, El Khalifa says every obstacle is overcome through the help of the students at AUS.

“The students are my angels and no positive words can describe how much they support every cause.”

Even having casual conversations with the students at the university brings an uncontrollable urge to the coordinator to want to host further events where students can join in. She adds that every community service activity is met with so much enthusiasm and it shocks her every time. Her biggest goal in life is to encourage the generation ahead to find the joy in bringing changes to people who need it the most. Be it the smallest actions, she finds that every action results in greater good.

**“I KNOW FOR SURE THAT THERE IS NO BETTER FEELING THAN HELPING OTHERS.”**

According to El Khalifa, there are endless means to help the community. With recent events around the world, the biggest way to bring change can be through talking about difficult topics and raising awareness. She added that bringing habits into our routine like putting change at the grocery store into the charity box, volunteering in causes around your neighborhood and donating resources or money are some ways that people can fulfill their job as an empathetic human being. She strongly encourages bringing purpose to our lives through the help of others.

“I know for sure that there is no better feeling than helping others.”



*Volunteers pack boxes of food and clothes for refugees in Syria and Turkey.*

# AUS ALUMNUS FINDS PURPOSE IN SPECIAL NEEDS EDUCATION

By Sabah Zaheer



*Special needs children paint sceneries on canvases.*

Angel Merchant is a special needs teacher in Widad, a center for child development. She is an alumna at the American University of Sharjah. She worked as a kindergarten teacher previously and is a part time assistant professor at AUS.

## **What inspired you to become a teacher at an autism center?**

The children and the environment. So I was leaving my teaching job for kindergarten and it wasn't an amazing environment; the staff weren't so great; it was all very political. The pay was also very low and I realized kindergarten teachers don't get paid very much. When I was looking for jobs, I came across this job, and I never thought that I'd ever be a special needs teacher because I didn't have a passion for it, but I said let me go for the interview and see how it goes.

When I went there for the interview, I immediately fell in love with the center, the people, the staff and the children. They were just so sweet, and the pay was pleasantly high compared to my previous job.

## **Tell us about your first day as a teacher. How was your experience?**

My first day was actually extremely calm and relaxed. Everybody was super well-behaved and I thought how are these special needs kids? They're so smart! However, they were in a new environment and I was new so they still hadn't opened up to me yet. It was the next week that they showed their true colors, and I realized the difficulty of it in the coming days.

## **What does a day-to-day schedule look like for you?**

I have no time to breathe! I wake up at 6 a.m. and get to school at around 7 a.m., a little before school starts. I set up things at 7:50 a.m. I go to receive the students. The kids come in and play till about 8:30 a.m. and we start off the day with gym or yoga or mindfulness, just chill activities. Next, we do circle time and just chit chat with the students and get them feeling comfortable. After that we move on to the main subjects, which are either Math or language arts, where we do some reading and spelling, alternating depending on the day.



Then we have a break where they eat, play and just have fun. After that we have science or woodwork or food prep, where we go to the supermarket and cook. We have a woodwork workshop, right now we're making a swing for my garden. That's usually the end of the day; we just drop the kids off at the gate to be picked up at around 2:30 p.m. Usually, after that we prepare for the next day or attend meetings and just call it a day.

### **What are the challenges you've faced?**

One of the main challenges is how in a normal school you teach your students something and you see them learn and progress from your teaching. Like one week you're teaching a student their alphabets and the next week they can make sentences; it doesn't work like that here. These kids are slower; they learn differently. So, you don't always get to see the results of what you teach, and it can be a bit disheartening because I've been teaching a certain concept for a month so why aren't you learning this? But with time you learn ways to cope through these challenges and how to stay positive throughout it all.

### **What are the benefits you reap?**

My favorite part is the laid-back environment. I don't have to talk to nagging parents or soccer moms and get questions like "why isn't my kid getting A's and why isn't my kid progressing" because obviously they can't ask those types of questions. There's no report cards or anything so it's a very relaxed mode of teaching with not a lot of expectations. There are no goals to meet; there's no pressure on the teacher or the student. And again, the money is definitely a big plus though!

### **What is the difference between teaching at a regular school and at an autism center?**

The whole idea of it is that you don't have to teach something at a certain time. If a kid takes two years to learn addition, they take two years.

There's no stress on the teacher or the student to finish things by schedule. There's no pressure to be perfect or be supervised by the Ministry of Education or anything. It's very homely. If you want to teach a kid how to do fractions you can take them in the kitchen and bake a cake. We go to the supermarket once a week to teach them how to buy groceries and just learn life skills. It was less of the fact that I was teaching difficult special needs children and more of the fact that I was teaching kids in such wholesome ways that made me love this job.

### **Did teaching bring a change in you as a person or do you think you're the same?**

No, it brought a change in me for sure; I feel like I've learnt a lifetime of lessons. Not only do I feel like I've learnt how to deal with special needs kids but also kids in general. Kids who are troublesome and what are the tips and strategies I can use to calm them down. It's taught me to take actions carefully and to observe behavior better because it's a must as a teacher.

### **What helps you become a better teacher and connect more with your students?**

I've done a lot of googling and research online. Like for example one of my kids wasn't getting how to add fractions with different denominators; so I did a lot of research on that and searched for methods to get through it. But also talking to teachers is the best thing. I feel like therapy for teachers is to talk to other teachers and get their advice on things or even just talk it all out. You listen to them and go "oh I did that wrong and oh I did this right." Talking to the students helps too because they're actually very talkative and a lot of the time they give me opinions that are super helpful and get them feeling comfortable too. Talking to their parents is also very important because it gives you insight on how to deal with each kid differently or what unique strategy works for each kid's struggle.

### **What's an important lesson you learnt on the way?**

Patience, Patience and more patience. It is the big lesson I've learnt as a special needs teacher because they're slow and everything takes them extra time, but that's ok and there's no hurry. Sometimes you teach them one thing one day and they forget everything the other day, that's why it's very important to never lose your cool because these kids are not to blame. It's a hard working job but we should remind ourselves how hard it is for the actual kids.

### **What is a misconception people have about autistic kids?**

A lot of people think they're dumb; they're actually geniuses. I have human calculators in my class. A lot of people think they're super dependent and can't do things on their own.

There's so many kids who at first glance you wouldn't even guess are autistic or special needs kids. It's only after teaching them that you realize they don't learn things like everyone else does. But also people don't realize that there's varying levels of autism and every kid is different from the other; it's a spectrum. In my class, I'm very lucky to teach kids who have a very high academic level and they're very proficient. So, there are kids like that, kids that can go to college.

All misconceptions are somewhat true but people definitely exaggerate their behavior in their heads.

**“PATIENCE, PATIENCE AND MORE PATIENCE.”**



*Staff host an exciting carnival for the children at the autism center.*



*Autistic children take part in baking and cooking workshops.*





(OMAR AL-HAJ PHOTO)



# PALESTINIAN SHOWJUMPER OMAR AL-HAJ: BALANCING ACADEMICS AND OLYMPIC DREAMS

By Tala Zoubi

Omar Al-Haj is a Palestinian showjumper who has competed nationally for 11 years as part of the UAE league and internationally as the Captain of the Palestinian national team. He is a 3rd year accounting student at the American University of Sharjah and is the Sports Coordinator for the Student Council.

## How did you get into horse riding?

I got into horse riding from my dad. My dad's been in the sport since the 80s, and in 2008 he sold his old horses and he semi-retired. Horse riding is like a drug you can't leave it, so three years later he came back, and he used to train my older brother, but my brother wasn't as invested as I was in the sport, so I went into it and I started competing nationally in 2013. This is my 11th season competing professionally in the UAE league.

## Why showjumping and not another discipline/sport?

Because showjumping is the only Olympic horse-riding sport. I see endurance and dressage riding. They're not as physically and mentally tiring as showjumping, because in showjumping, you have to calculate the distance between you and the jump, and you have to control the horse properly. In endurance you're just like a bag of potatoes; you're just on the back of the horse and the horse is running. With dressage, it's not as exciting. There's no risk in the sport. So, dressage is you making the horse dance; there's no failure or success, like obvious failure or success. So showjumping was in between the race and in between the dressage; it needs technicality, but it also needs a challenge. You need to be challenged to do it.

## How often do you practice?

Every day, every day ... I don't miss a day; my day off I even spend it in the stable. I maybe take a day off every two months.



Omar Al-Haj wins third place at the Nations Cup competition (OMAR AL-HAJ PHOTO).

## Take me through your routine when you practice?

Ok so, I have three horses, so when practicing it's not jumping; we don't jump with the horses in practice; we only jump with the horses in competitions. In practice, we do muscle group work, so [if] the horse has weak back muscles, we train his back muscles. There's certain techniques, you have to put his head down, so he works more from his back. If his shoulders are weak, you work his shoulders. Sometimes, a horse is more stubborn when turning [to] the right [rather] than turning to the left, so you work on his right turn. So, you work around the problems between the competitions ... cause competitions are between weekends; every weekend I have a competition. So, this weekend I saw that the horse has trouble turning right; throughout the week, I worked on turning right so next weekend I don't have the same problem while competing.



Ya, and some horses we jump [with], especially the young ones you have to jump with them because they're not as used to jumping as the more experienced horses. So, ya, each horse has a different training regime.

### **So, your ambition after university is to go pro?**

Honestly, it's to go Pro and at the same time have a work life. So just like how I'm balancing it now. I'm a full-time student and a full-time athlete at the same time.

### **What lessons and skills has it taught you that may have influenced who you are now?**

Honestly the patience, because in horse-riding, the horse is stronger than you in every muscle; his mouth is stronger than your mouth; hands are stronger than your hands, so you can't beat him with power. So, if a horse is overpowering you, you can't beat him. But the only thing you have that's stronger than the horse is your mind, so the patience that you have to sit and work with the horse for hours till he loosens up and listens to what you're doing. It's helped me even in studying when sitting down and having the patience to read and study; it helps a lot. Just like how they say fishing needs patience, I think horse-riding needs equal patience.

### **Have you faced any challenges while being on the Palestinian team while competing internationally?**

I'm the captain of the national Palestinian team. I did compete internationally. I got Palestine its first two Asian titles, under 15s and under 18s, so I was under 15 Asian champion and under 18 Asian champion. I got it its highest world ranking, I was ranked 7th under 18 in the world, but honestly, competing internationally is very very challenging since the Palestinian federation doesn't have monetary backing, like other federations so everything has to come out of my pocket. All the horses, all the equipment, all the transportation has to come out of my pocket. So, the quality of horses that other people get from their federations is much higher than mine, so I have to work on mine and help develop it to be as equal as theirs.

### **What is your proudest achievement or award that you have gotten? Why?**

My Nations Cup second place finish. So, there's a competition called the Nations Cup. All the nations in the world make a team of 4 riders and they have to compete against each other and the team of the lowest amount of faults wins. So, our first time competing ever, we got second place, the Palestinian national team, so that's number one by far.

### **What motivates you to continue?**

It's not motivation it's more determination for me. It's just like a moving car if you put a car in neutral, it's just gonna keep going, so I don't need to be motivated to go ride horses every day. Even [when] some days I don't wanna see horses, I don't wanna hear the word horse, [...] I have to keep going because it's just my life now. It's like how I'm a university student I have to come to classes; same thing with horses, I take it as the same.

### **Any next steps or plans?**

Yes, the Olympics is my next step, Inshallah. I qualified for the Youth Olympics, but I'm not a youth anymore, so not Olympics 2024, 2028 Inshallah. That's my next goal, working on that.

### **What advice would you give young riders today to give them the best advantage they can as athletes?**

Honestly, to not quit very early because so many people quit very early into the sport; they face their first speedbump and they quit. You have to be patient. Patience is number one and you have to be determined and dedicated. You can't skip a day. You can't say oh I'll just go tomorrow. You can't have gap days because a bad day is better than a no day. If you go train and have a bad day, it's still better than not going and training.

**By Hoor Ibrahim**

“After a long week filled with classes and exams, I am so ready to sleep till noon on the weekend. But my boy has a different alarm clock in mind; he is all about that 7 a.m. walk, no snooze button allowed,” says Dana Ibrahim, a student at the American University of Sharjah.

Welcoming a loyal, furry friend into your life might just be the most rewarding decision you will ever make. Dogs are creatures that are able to fill your days with happiness and your heart with warmth. They offer a rare form of love that is unconditional. They also have a unique way of compensating for life's challenges, turning every moment into an opportunity for joy and connection.

Yet, alongside the stream of joy and unconditional love, dog ownership brings its own set of daily challenges. From early morning walks to unexpected vet visits, the life of a dog owner is filled with moments that test patience, stretch budgets and demand a level of commitment that goes beyond simple pet care. These struggles, often

For dog owners making plans for weekend getaways or longer vacations becomes a bit more complicated. The thought of traveling, especially to another country, brings up a lot of extra concerns. They have to figure out who can look after their dog while they are away, or if it is possible to bring their dog with them, which isn't always easy. This can include searching for someone reliable to sit with their dog, finding pet-friendly places to stay and understanding the rules for traveling with pets, which can vary from one place to another. It is a lot for a dog owner to think about before they can even pack their bags.

**From early morning walks to unexpected vet visits, the life of a dog owner is filled with moments that test patience, stretch budgets and demand a level of commitment that goes beyond simple pet care.**

## **BARKS AND BURDENS: THE UNTOLD STRUGGLES OF DOG OWNERS**



*Rico, the multipoo, is on his way to the vet for his regular checkup.*



“Last summer, we ended up cancelling our usual trip to Egypt because finding a trustworthy dog sitter for our baby was impossible, and all the pet hotels we looked into were way too expensive,” says Ibrahim.

Welcoming a dog into your life also means you need to be ready for some extra costs. The basics every dog needs, like their daily food, a comfy bed and fun toys, all cost money. And these are not one-time expenses; they keep adding up month after month. But that is not all. One of the biggest worries for dog owners is the vet bills. Whether it is a regular check-up, shots or something unexpected, going to the vet can be really expensive.

Getting your dog out for walks or just letting them play outside is a really important part of taking care of them. But, it can be tough to keep up with, especially when your schedule is packed. On days when you are running from one thing to another, finding the time to make sure your dog gets enough exercise and fresh air can feel like a big challenge. Dogs need to go outside not for their toilet needs, but also to burn off energy and stay healthy. So, even when life gets hectic, dog owners have to figure out how to fit these walks into their day, which is not always easy.

“Arriving home late from university after a long drive, I would love nothing more than to sit and rest, but I have to walk my dog at that time to avoid a smelly house and nonstop barking,” says Seifeldin Abbas, an AUS student.

Having a dog is a big responsibility, bigger than just feeding them or taking them for walks. It means you have to be there for them, not just when it's easy or fun, but all the time. Dogs need a lot of attention, love and care. They rely on you for everything - from making sure they are healthy, to seeing the vet when they need to, to helping them feel safe and loved. You have to be ready to put in the time and effort to train them, play with them and sometimes deal with challenging behaviors. It is like having a furry family member who counts on you for their happiness and well-being.

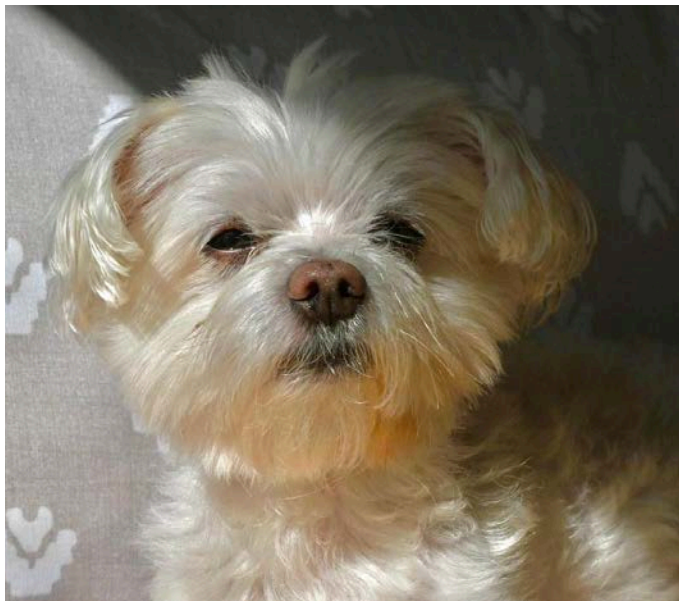


*Rico loves car rides, his eyes bright with excitement as he hits the road*

**“Sure, I've got my share of challenges with my dog, but really, the love and joy he brings to my life make every struggle worth it. To me, he is more than a dog; he is like my son,” says Ibrahim**

# WHICH MALTESE MIX ARE YOU?

By Hoor Ibrahim



*Malshi is playful and affectionate, perfect for family life.*

Curious to see which Maltese mix matches your personality? Answer the questions below, tally your points, and discover your ideal furry friend.

## 1. How do you prefer to spend your leisure time?

- A) Snuggling at home in a cozy spot (1 point)
- B) Doing a fun activity like crafting or cooking (2 points)
- C) Going out for a social event or party (3 points)

## RESULTS:

- **5-7 Points: Maltese-Shih Tzu Mix (Malshi)** - You value comfort and tranquillity but also have a playful and affectionate side, much like the lovable Malshi.
- **8-11 Points: Maltese-Poodle Mix (Maltipoo)** - You're intelligent and lively, enjoying both learning and engaging activities, similar to the versatile Maltipoo.
- **12-15 Points: Maltese-Yorkshire Terrier Mix (Morkie)** - Full of energy and always looking for fun, you share a lot with the spirited and bold Morkie.

## 2. What's your approach to exercise?

- A) Gentle exercises like stretching or leisurely walks (1 point)
- B) Regular, moderate activities like brisk walking or light jogging (2 points)
- C) Energetic and intense workouts (3 points)

## 3. How do you describe your social style?

- A) Reserved, preferring a few close friends (1 point)
- B) Friendly, comfortable in small or medium groups (2 points)
- C) Extremely outgoing, the more the merrier (3 points)

## 4. What kind of movie do you enjoy the most?

- A) Romance or drama that feels deep and emotional (1 point)
- B) Documentaries or mysteries that are intriguing and informative (2 points)
- C) Action or comedy, something fast-paced and entertaining (3 points)

## 5. When faced with a challenge, how do you react?

- A) With caution, after lots of thought (1 point)
- B) By planning a balanced approach with a bit of risk (2 points)
- C) Head-on, with lots of energy and little planning (3 points)

No matter your score, each Maltese mix offers unique and lovable traits that make them wonderful companions. Discover which one mirrors your lifestyle and get ready to meet your perfect match.





# **LABYRINTH MAGAZINE**