

# Student visits family in the midst of crisis

Seven years of grueling war have left a country that was once the epicenter for tourism in the Middle East vastly different. Syria and the nations citizens have had to undergo major lifestyle changes since the beginning of the war in 2011. Not going out at certain times when bombs were flying overhead, only going outdoors when absolutely necessary, etc. all became new parts of life in Syria.

However, with seven years gone by, there have been significant improvements to life in the country in certain areas.

For myself, this was my second time visiting Syria in the past three years with my mom and sister. For a majority of the time I stayed in the capitol, Damascus, where some of my family members live.

Just two years ago it was next to impossible to enter other major cities outside of Damascus such as Aleppo and Homs. However, this time I was able to enter these cities that were formerly major conflict areas.

In Homs, I got to scope out the total destruction of a significant part of the city that marked the beginning of the conflict.

Upon entering the city, I was taken aback by the endless rows of apartment buildings where families used to live, shops in the marketplace and various places of worship that had been completely obliterated by missiles and mortar bombs.

It was the same story with varying degrees wherever I went as there was damage to infrastructure that will take years to rebuild everywhere.

Despite this, social life and life as a whole in Syria has improved greatly in the past two years. People are overflowing in market places, shops, malls, etc. and beginning to return to life as normal.

During my stay, I had the chance to visit some of the

historical sites in Damascus.

I got to walk around the famous marketplace located inside of the old walled city of Damascus known as Al-Hamidiyah Souq.

When inside the old city, I also had the opportunity to view the historical and well known Umayyad Mosque and take a tour of the Azem Palace as well.

Throughout my stay I enjoyed attending the concerts of some well known Syrian musicians and singers. To my surprise, there were thousands and thousands of people at these concerts which marked the great improvement of social life in the country.

In addition to this, I also did many things that I would typically do back at home such as going to shopping malls, stores, museums, etc.

Despite the significant improvements to the social scene in Syria and progress that has been made over the past two years, there are still many issues at hand.

Infrastructure and housing is set to take years to rebuild, the extreme inflation of Syrian currency lead the economy to a serious crash and there a still hundreds of government-installed checkpoints throughout the country that make travel a real hassle.

It is always interesting visiting Syria because I enjoy viewing a different lifestyle and drawing connections from one country to another.

Despite the hardships of the past ten years, life has improved profoundly for many while there is still large room for continued progress.