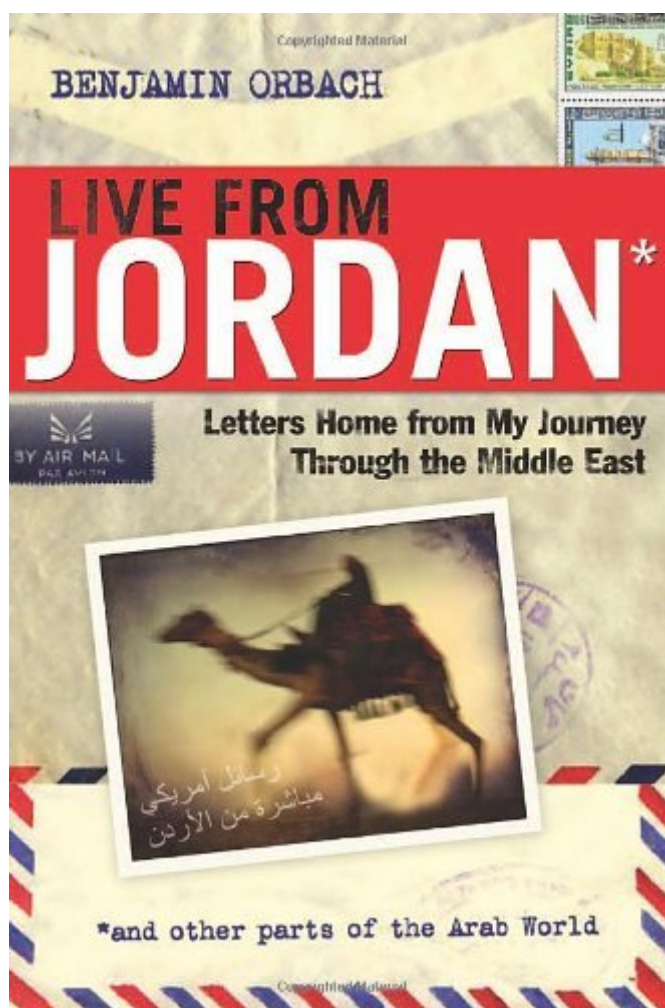


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Live From Jordan: Letters Home From My Journey Through The Middle East



Synopsis

"One man's irreverent and insightful chronicle of his journey into the Arab World. The deejay put on a James Brown remix, and the club went nuts again. Everyone started singing in English, and people climbed up on all the club's tables and chairs to shake their hips. "On my way home at 4:00 a.m. (the club was still hopping when I left), I couldn't help thinking about all these wealthy Jordanians and Palestinians, dressed in American and European labels, dancing and singing to American music with such sheer joy. . . . As far as I know, there isn't a word in Arabic for "longing for America," but that is what this night, this scene, and this club seemed to be about.--from *Live from Jordan*

On the eve of the U.S. invasion of Iraq, 27-year old Pittsburgh native and grad student Benjamin Orbach traveled to Amman, Jordan, in search of answers. Young, confident, and optimistic, Orbach anointed himself America's secret diplomatic weapon. He was finishing a degree in Middle Eastern studies, had a working knowledge of Arabic, and possessed the determination to "negotiate a peace treaty." He also had no place to live, little money, and no friends to speak of in Jordan. As Ben Orbach spent his first few days in the Middle East in search of a hot shower, the address of his new flat, and a decent haircut, he began to discover something much more important. In the cafes and salons, and on the buses and streets of Jordan, Egypt, Syria, Palestine, and Turkey, he found conflicted, curious, and multilayered people who had more to teach him than he ever imagined. From bustling bazaars to an underground brothel, *Live from Jordan* is the incredible story, told via his eloquent, compassionate, and irreverent letters home, of Orbach's 13-month journey through the Middle East. Through Orbach's eyes, we begin to see a world where nothing is quite what it seems, a world that is more intricate than what is portrayed in 30-second sound bites on American television. We meet people like Sundos, a Jordan University freshman who digs surfing the Internet, and Fadi, his sensitive, passionate Palestinian flatmate, who belts out the lyrics of Mariah Carey songs and decries the policies of George Bush. From the privileged young clubbers of Amman to the beleaguered workers who cram themselves into buses every day in search of a meager salary, we begin to see the Middle East as it really is. As he travels from the throbbing streets of Cairo to the friendly living rooms of ordinary people in Jordan, Ben Orbach offers an honest, balanced portrait of a region in turmoil. Engaging, witty, and evocative, *Live from Jordan* is a myth-breaking book that transports us to a world that is more multifaceted, more beautiful, and more seductive than many of us have ever imagined. "

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Customer Reviews

Loved this book so much, mostly because I just returned from an amazing life-altering trip to Jordan just two weeks ago. We visited many of the places he mentions in the book. I'm from New York, I've studied Arabic both Fuhsa and the dialect of the Levant and thankfully, I've been to Syria, Lebanon and Egypt. I plan to visit as many Middle Eastern countries as I possibly can. Although the book is dated (2002) I completely felt the vibe that the author was giving us as he described his adventures in Amman, his struggle to master a very difficult language and getting to know the culture. I learned a lot from reading this book about the identities of the Jordanians, Palestinians, refugees and the sentiment of America in the Arab East. It was a pleasure to read this book and I only pray that things in this beautiful region of the world get better.

Y life in the different regions of the Middle East! I knew there are different dialects of Arabic, but not that it is determined by your fathers' lineage, and where he's from.

Sincere, honest, and funny are words that come most readily to mind when summing up this book. Young American Ben Orbach showed significant courage in traveling to the Arab World (and Turkey) post-9/11, and he was on the ground with war in Iraq brewing and then breaking out. He is

a true traveler in the classical sense, going afar to seek wisdom and change, not to impose or justify prejudices or preconceived notions. He is clear about his convictions, but humbly does his utmost to understand the many different opinions he encounters along the way. His insights, informed by his knowledge of the local language, are passed on to us through the e-mails that he wrote home from the Middle East--those missives are the substance of the book. His distinction between "America haters" and "American policy critics" will help Americans who are struggling to grasp the nuance of Arab/Muslim politics and society. In this and some other sections of the book, Orbach outlines what he believes are some of the implications for U.S. Middle East policy. The author's personality comes through with a great sense of humor. His account of using the facilities in high-class hotels is hilarious--something any young and cash-strapped traveler who has searched desperately for clean restrooms in developing nations can surely relate to. The Jordan snowball fight is awesome. This will be a sort of guide book for Americans studying in the Arab/Muslim world. It can also be a Middle East primer for any Americans who are seeking to be more-informed citizens. Perhaps the most important question to ask of any text is, "what of it?" At first glance, pursuing peace might seem a somewhat grandiose ambition to link with this book, but I believe that is the author's primary motivation. His search is in the spirit of U.S. Middle East envoy Dennis Ross, who dedicated his book "To the Children of the Middle East." The Middle East is controversial, and readers will surely find cause to disagree with Orbach at points along the way. But they will also find his views to be balanced, fair, and reasonable. In sum, the author's sincerity, credentials (advanced Arabic, SAIS masters degree), and his travel and work experience (notably with the U.S. government's Middle East Partnership Initiative) demand that his book gets a serious look and a fair read. At a time when the need for mutual understanding between the U.S. and the Arab (and Muslim) world has never been more vital, this is a timely, important, and enjoyable book.

I originally bought this book (Kindle Version) because I thought we were going to go to Jordan for a holiday/vacation, and I wanted it in my Kindle to read when we were going to be there. As it turned out we booked Cyprus instead. Having now read the book I'd like to cancel the plans to Cyprus and book them to Jordan. The author has a way of bringing the people he met and wrote about to life. I truly felt I could understand them and their points of view, which helped to challenge and inform my own point of view on several issues. Although I do not live in the Middle East, as an American expat living in the UK, I was able to understand (and relate to) several of his observations about living in a different culture than the one you were brought up in. My only complaint about the book was that it wasn't long enough. I wanted it to keep going on - I wanted to learn about more of the people he

met!

Mr. Orbach's affection for the people he encountered is obvious. He describes the grim realities of their situation in the Middle East realistically and objectively. His experience is one that a woman could only read about. He describes quite well the differences in the strata of society and the ways that women have to conduct themselves within the culture. I am glad that Mr. Orbach had courage to have made this journey during such a tumultuous time in East/West relations (and lived to tell the tale). I thank him for his book.

Ben Orbach has done a wonderful job of translating his personal experience in Jordan into a meditation on the Mideast. He has a unique voice and offers views into the lives of the many Arabs that he befriended. I used his work to help me through a visit to Jordan, and his observations provided useful context for my own experiences. I am grateful to him for that. -- John Wolf

Wow, really liking this travelogue book. It's a collection of letters he sends home during his long stay in the Middle East. It's honest, authentic and I feel I am able to connect with the country(s) and the people in a way that not all travel books are successful at.

The author gives a fascinating look at the everyday lives of Jordanians, Egyptians, Palestinians and others in the Arab East. His determination to speak Arabic and learn about the nuances of life in different cultures was inspiring. His comments on how the United States would be seen after the Iraq war were prophetic.

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