

Postcard from Amman

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The Royal Wedding in the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, a joyfully strategic alliance between the Crown Prince and his Saudi bride. Traffic is even more frenetic than usual - pedestrian and bike friendly this capital is not. Road closures around the wedding route intensify the taxis' horns.

Amman is a city originally built on seven hills with three main wadis, the lights exquisitely luminous as the muezzin calls and evening falls upon the white houses. Drive just a few miles outside the city and it is a Bedouin landscape of tents, camels and horses.

Two and a half million souls live in the densely populated capital, 35% under the age of fifteen. The economy is struggling - the World Bank describes Jordan as a 'lower middle-income country' - but you wouldn't know it from the smiling faces of the youth promenading in the teeming shopping-and-eating malls.

Mosques and churches sit comfortably cheek by jowl. The Courts of Justice are a buzz of activity, a tented community of male typists (Brother manual typewriters circa 1975) working furiously outside on legal documents. The daily Jordan Times has an enviably independent voice and rich international perspective.

Think Jordan's history and geography for just a moment. In Lawrence of Arabia's day, the country did not exist. Founded as an Emirate in 1921, gaining independence in 1946, you can drive into Syria, Iraq, Saudi, West Bank and Israel within two hours from Amman. Two million Palestinian and 1.4 million Syrian refugees are hosted within Jordan's borders.

Unsurprisingly, Amman is home today to a plethora of non-governmental organisations (NGOs). Strong international schools serve the employees' children. USAID has a significant presence when you cast an eye on many new buildings. The US is Jordan's single largest provider of bilateral assistance, to the tune of \$1.65 billion dollars in 2021.

What has drawn me to Amman this month is [IREX](#), one of the powerful NGOs operating here. An especial focus is teacher recruitment and teacher education.

In common with many countries across this region, recruiting teachers into government schools is no less challenging than in the UK. The cocktail of working conditions, pay, perception of teacher in society, other professions with better prospects - these play out the same.

What the dynamic team from IREX is spearheading is the promotion of teaching as a noble profession: exciting young Jordanian graduates to see that schools need their talents and enthusiasms to shape the future of the country.

In a few short years the impressively bilingual team has demonstrated that a focused, intelligent drive - working with the Ministry of Education and partners such as the distinguished Queen Rania Teacher Academy - can make a difference.

A particular success lies in encouraging more males to apply for teaching, and they are nudging the policy agenda around the fundamental importance of improving government schools.

We discuss the conundrum that whilst parents in societies around the world believe that the education of their children is of paramount importance, those same societies don't value the teaching profession.

No school or school system is better than its teachers. The IREX team is intent on Amman and the wider Jordan developing a cadre of young teachers who will be the envy of the region - and who will, over time, raise schooling standards in this youthful nation.

Roy Blatchford's latest book is [*The A - Z of Great Classrooms*](#), published by John Catt.