

## An American Abroad

# Why Would You Want To Go There?

During my brief return from China to Orchard Road last summer, I had the pleasure of dinner at The Beirut with one of my father's colleagues, now well in his eighties. When I told him that I'd now taken a job in Tunisia, he frowned in puzzlement.

"Why on earth would you want to go there?" he asked.

The answer is in our recent history.

For the last thirteen years, news of the Muslim/Arab world has dominated the headlines, reshaped our country's character in troubling ways, and wormed its way into our collective anxieties. We've been told many fearful things about this part of the world.

Tunisia, however, is where the pro-democracy Arab Spring movement began in 2011. It had the most peaceful and most successful revolution of that tumultuous time. So I wanted to see for myself what was true. And I wanted, in some small way, to show the people here what was true about Americans.

Not as touristed as Morocco, not as literarily celebrated as Algeria, not as rich as the Gulf states, not possessed of as much ancient grandeur as Egypt, not as exotic as Mali, Tunisia is easy to overlook. It's about the size of Wisconsin and is sandwiched between two much larger countries: Algeria and Libya. It's been a location for films such as Star Wars, Indiana Jones, and Monty Python's Life of Brian, but usually as a stand-in for some other country (or planet).

Just before I got here, the security situation in neighboring Libya deteriorated. Well-heeled Libyans crossed the border in German luxury cars, hoping to stay until things calm down back home. In Sousse, the seaside town where I now live, the result was to send rents soaring just as I was looking for an apartment. Many landlords were refusing to give written leases to new

tenants so they could keep their options open. It was a very real object lesson in the indirect but very real effects of geopolitical events on people's lives.

Though I'd dreamed of living right on the Mediterranean coast, I scaled back my plans and opted for a cozy garden apartment in an inland residential district. As I walk to work and see people in the neighborhood, I sense curiosity about me that's muted by reticence. I greet people with a wave or a few words, and they respond in kind, but shyly.

I pass by handsomely decorated gates which open into the walls that guard all the houses here. The walls are intended to make the people within feel secure, but they have the opposite effect on me in the street. They make the neighborhood seem so deserted as to almost invite a mugging. Still, I can't help but admire the houses' design. The architecture is contemporary yet timeless, beautifully proportioned, spare but not stark.

A ten minute walk brings me to the commercial district where the American NGO I work for is located. Across from my office on Avenue Yasser Arafat are two cafés: right and left, Arab and European, segregated and integrated, old fashioned and contemporary.

On the right is the Chichkan Café. It's a traditional Tunisian establishment that spreads its chairs and tables all over the sidewalk. Its clientele is exclusively male. Day and night, the place is full. Nearly all the chairs are arranged facing the street. The men sit on plastic chairs, drink coffee or juice, smoke their hookahs, and look out at spectacle of the street far more often than they look at each other.

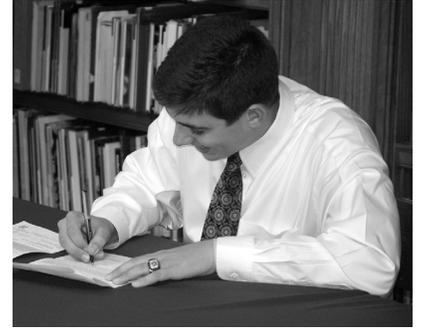
On the left is the Lumière Café. It's on the second floor of a contemporary building. Inside, men and women eat and drink soft drinks facing each other on comfortable cloth-covered chairs and sofas. The décor is crisp and clean, with pictures of French landmarks and replicas of Parisian street signs. It's more expensive than the Chichkan, but it's more comfortable and it has WiFi.

I was also on hand last fall when everyone in Tunisia went to the polls for elections to choose a new parliament and a new president. These were the first elections under the new post-Arab spring constitution. I was eager to see whether and how the cultural differences represented by the Chichkan and the Lumière play out in the political arena. For people like me with an interest in politics, culture, and world affairs, there is no better place to be.

— James F. Trumm

You can read more about Jim's experiences of living abroad at [www.jftrumm.com](http://www.jftrumm.com).

## Abendroth Commits



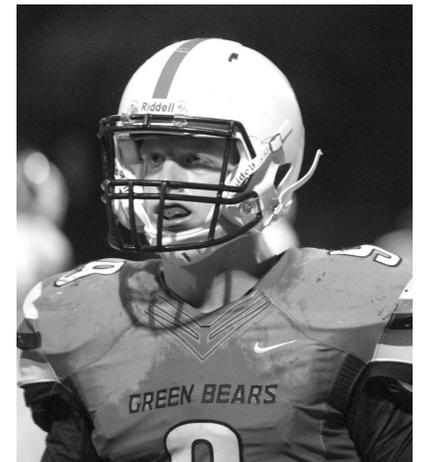
Ottawa Hills High School senior Matt Abendroth in November signed a national letter of intent to play golf at St. Bonaventure University next year. A member of the Green Bear 2013 state championship golf team, he was also a member of the 2014 state runner-up golf team.

This past season Abendroth was named the Toledo Area Athletic Conference player of the year, in addition to being named First Team All District and First Team All Ohio. In 2014, his 18 hole average was 74, with a nine hole average of 37. He shot below par in every conference match this past season.

## Boesel Sets Record

Andrew Boesel, a senior on the 2014 Green Bear football team, broke the school record for the most yards rushed in a single regular season game, when he scrambled for 295 yards during the Green Bears' 36-29 victory over Cardinal Stritch on Oct. 11.

He shattered the previous record of 247 yards set in 2008 by Nasri Hajjar. Boesel went on to claim the number two position on the list when he rushed for 250 yards against Edon on Oct. 24. Boesel earned himself yet another entry in the school record books for the most carries – 235 – in a single season.



— Village Voice photos by Yarko Kuk

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