



## **Jordan's Al-Azraq Refugee Camp**

### **A Pictorial Essay**

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When the conflict in Syria broke out in March of 2011, there was no indication as to the duration or the enormity of the ensuing humanitarian crisis. According to a recent [United Nations statement](#), over a quarter of a million people have been killed as a result of the violence and over 4.8 million have fled the country. In addition, there are 6.6 million that are internally displaced. As refugees continued their escape, neighboring countries opened their borders and sheltered the men, women and children fleeing the unbridled brutality of this new war. Jordan, which neighbors Syria to the south, received 636,040 registered refugees and countless others that crossed into Jordan are living outside the camps.

The first official refugee camp was set up in July 2012 and was catering to incoming refugees from the Dara'a area on the Jordanian-Syrian border. Now the 4th largest "city" in Jordan and the world's second largest refugee camp, the [Za'atari](#) camp is home to thousands of UNHCR tents, a supermarket and makeshift streets and villages. As the families kept crossing seeking refuge, the camp continued to grow in an ad hoc manner in an attempt to accommodate the massive influx.

In order to continue catering to the continuous influx of refugees, Jordan opened a new camp in the Azraq area which was very well planned with a capacity of up to 130,000. The camp is divided into nine "villages" or communities with 3,500 caravans each housing up to 15,000 refugees. Each "village" has two clinics, playground, police units and a school. Registered refugees in the camp receive vouchers for food and other supplies that they purchase at the on-site [Sameh Mall](#). School students are provided snacks by the [World Food Program](#). NGOs working in Azraq Refugee Camp hire staff from within the refugee community to help them meet the needs of the camp population, thus generating income for their families instilling a sense of productivity. In addition, a UK contractor, [Siren Associates](#), is training local Jordanian police in managing security at the camp as well as members of the Syrian refugee communities as civil police that operate inside in the camp to keep the peace and liaise with the respective police departments.

Entry into the camp is allowed only with permits issued by the Ministry of Interior's Refugee Affairs Coordination Office, a process that can take anywhere from 7-10 days.

Once I obtained my permit, I drove along the desert road to the Azraq Camp, located in a mostly arid area about 62 miles east of the capital city of Amman. Upon arrival at the camp, I was greeted by Jordanian Police Officers who checked the authenticity of my permit and then proceeded to allow entry into the camp. The Jordanian Police officers were very friendly both with me and with the refugee kids that surrounded our vehicle as we made stops through the camp. The kids would come up with their beautiful innocent smiles and ask to have their pictures taken. It was heartwarming and heartbreaking at the same time.

On site at the refugee camp were two enclosed and fenced in areas, each designated for a particular vulnerable segment of refugees. One is for women that have been victims of various acts of violence and the other area is for underage children, most likely orphaned, that crossed the Jordanian borders without adult family members. For safety and security of all these individuals, no photos were allowed in either area within the camp.

Jordan's commitment to sheltering these refugees is highly commendable and is in sharp contrast to the treatment and reception they received in Europe as they desperately clung to unsafe boats seeking safety on European shores only to find themselves in some of the worst humanitarian conditions seen [outside their home country](#) of Syria.

The following is a photo essay of my findings inside the Azraq Refugee Camp in Jordan.



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The desert road leading to Azraq Refugee Camp. As you can see, there is little on either side of the road but the roads were well paved making for a relatively easy ride.



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There were road signs along the route indicating location of Azraq and the Azraq Refugee Camp.



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White metal and zinc huts (referred to as caravans) filled the space in a very organized and planned pattern. Every six huts share a bathroom. The huts are meant to protect from the scorching summer heat and the bitter cold of winter.



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There are paved roads within the Azraq Refugee Camp connecting the 9 communities or “villages” there.



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Marketplace at the Azraq Refugee Camp where residents go to buy and sell homemade items.



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Each community or village had it's own water supply through these water tanks. The night lights in the common areas are all solar powered.





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Playground for the kids with swings, slides and benches. The playground has adult supervisors watching over the children as they played. I was saddened to see a little girl, maybe 5 years of age crying when she saw the Police escort with me. I was told that she is afraid of uniformed officers as a result of some trauma she may have experienced in Syria. The other kids were very friendly and came up and said hello with big smiles and wanted to have their picture taken.



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The Camp has an area for soccer enthusiasts to enjoy some sports (above) as well as a volleyball court adjacent to a basketball court (below). Men and women play sports separately.



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Benches are set up within one of the sports areas for those who aren't playing to socialize. The walls have "NO SMOKING" and "NO LITTERING" signs and are very nicely painted with murals (above).



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Kids playing soccer together as they would in their neighborhood back home in Syria.





Kids sharing a bike ride on one of the paved roads within their “village” (above). There were numerous kids on their bikes at the camp. They were able to purchase them from the store in exchange for vouchers.



Such murals, encouraging families not to litter, can be found around the two “villages” that are currently occupied. The camp had a large number of industrial-sized garbage bins within the “villages”.



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Sameh Market is the grocery store where refugees can purchase foods and other necessities through a voucher system. This market is a branch of the well-known [Sameh Mall](#).



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All over the camp are similar posts listing the contributors/donors to the various components that keep the refugee camp functioning and the refugees cared for.





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The Azraq Camp Hospital is easily accessible. I saw an ambulance bring in someone and I saw families leaving the hospital after receiving medical treatment for an ailment. The hospital also engages expectant mothers on pre-natal care. As the photos show, this EU-funded hospital is quite clean.



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Some of the artwork on the Azraq Camp Hospital fence in an attempt to make the hospital more child friendly and less intimidating to kids.





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The hospital is a fenced facility with various on-site capabilities including childbirth by C-section.



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There is a school in the camp whose academic curriculum is based on the Jordanian system. I was unable to get a photo of the inside of the school since it was Friday and the school was closed for the weekend.



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There is a mosque on the refugee camp grounds. The sign has the flag of the State of Kuwait and states “Thank you for your support”. The sign also shows the flag of The Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan alongside the UNHCR logo.





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These are just some of the beautiful smiling faces that greeted us as we toured the Azraq Refugee Camp



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