For my Summer Placement I was given the opportunity to research the status of corals at one of the best dive sites in Oman. I undertook research on beautiful corals, experienced the unique Omani culture and got to know some very talented people. All this contributed to a very valuable experience.

Research involved using a side scan sonar device attached to a boat which creates an image of the seabed (see photo below). It was really interesting learning how to use this equipment and seeing these images overlaid on to a map was very rewarding. One of the highlights was surveying the coral reefs. Every time I dive on a coral reef it feels like I am being transported to a different world. The corals were beautiful and we even saw a turtle chilling on the bottom (see photo). I also had an opportunity to assist with an environmental baseline survey to see the effects of an ammonia chemical plant on the local marine environment. This was a great experience as I learnt how to conduct a marine environmental baseline survey in a tropical setting and got to spend time with some interesting people.
Experiencing Omani culture was insightful and having worked in several Arab countries I found Omani culture a refreshing change. For example the United Arab Emirates is a very consumer driven materialist culture. Some of my friends in the UK unfairly associate Arab culture with terrorism. In general Omani people are the most hospitable, welcoming and genuine people I have ever met. Several times I have been welcomed into strangers’ houses for coffee, dates and conversation, which were all humbling experiences.

My colleagues at Five Oceans were very intelligent, enthusiastic and talented people and made me feel very welcome. Several colleagues invited me to their houses for dinner and to meet their families. I also hosted my first ever dinner party and had a fun time getting to know my colleagues and their families and learning about their different lives. One weekend I went out on the work boat with a few of my colleagues in search of whales and dolphins and we were lucky enough to see several groups of spinner dolphins. Another weekend I went into the mountains with a colleague and his family and hiked up a dried up river bed (see photo below)
To summarise I had a fantastic time studying corals in Oman with 5 Oceans and I am particularly grateful to Oliver Taylor, my placement supervisor at 5 Oceans who was very knowledgeable on corals in the region and fun to be around. I would certainly recommend this placement to future MEM students. If any future MEM students are interested in undertaking their summer placements in Oman and would like more information please feel free to contact me: gdjohn006@hotmail.co.uk