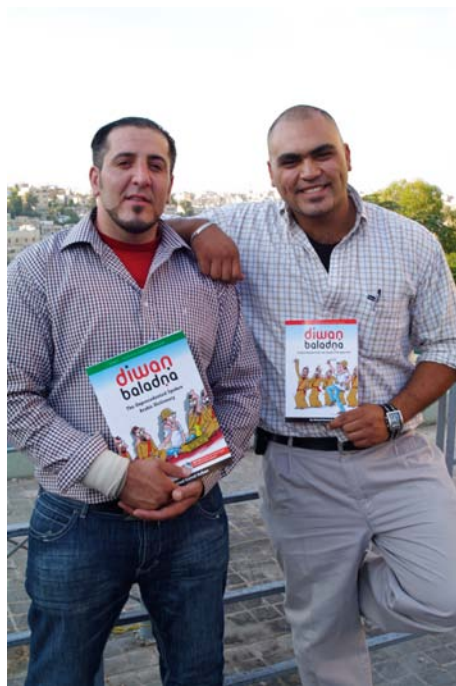


# In the limelight Ahmad Azban & Tony Anqoud

Go's Kinzi Jones sat down with *Diwan Baladna's* creators Ahmad Azban and Tony Anqoud



I first heard about Ahmad and Tony from my kids: "Mom, you won't believe our new Arabic teachers! They're beefy, have ponytails, wear leather, and ride motorcycles!" I could tell Arabic class just got a lot more fun. Our family became fans of the gentle Jordanian giants who recently published their second Hajjaj-illustrated book, *Diwan Baladna: The Spoken Arabic Dictionary*. So I met up with them to find out more...

**Go: What inspired the two of you to write your first book?**

**Ahmad Azban & Tony Anqoud:** The idea of writing the *Diwan Baladna* series started with a dictionary, although we published *Diwan Baladna: Arab Culture from an Arab's Perspective*, first. When foreigners visit, the first thing they experience is our hospitality; that alone is a language. While another goal of the dictionary is to help Arabs learn English by simply translating from spoken Arabic rather than classical.

**AA:** I remember teaching little culture lessons to my students. I was shocked by the huge misunderstandings of our culture they had. I can't blame them, for how would they know my culture if they just came from another?

**TA:** We also noted that foreigners get into embarrassing situations because of misunderstandings. Most learn Arab culture the hard way; through misinterpretation or unintended insults.

**Go: What was the "aha" moment that took it from vision to the first words?**

**AA & TA:** We were with our friend Tom Holts, discussing culture in Jordan. He was the first to ask us to put our notes in book form to give newcomers an understanding of our cultural cues.

**Go: And what encouraged you?**

**AA & TA:** The enthusiasm and

appreciation of everyone who knew about the book was a huge encouragement; knowing we would help make their transition to living in Amman easier was satisfying. It was our dream to bridge cultures and create understanding between west and east.

**Go: What surprised you in your research? Any new discoveries?**

**AA & TA:** After researching for two years we discovered that living in our culture is one thing but explaining it is another. The process helped us learn and appreciate our culture more. For example, learning about pigeons in Jordan, and the interesting (and somewhat strange) relationship between the birds and their keeper.

**Go: What are your readers' reactions?**

**AA & TA:** Some of them were really amazed and others told us how much they had enjoyed our first book, even people who have been here a long time. But we were most surprised by the reaction of our Arab readers, especially with the dictionary. They were so happy to see the terms translated into English for the first time and learning the closest English term to any Arabic. *King's Academy* is now using our material for their local culture class!

**Go: What's next?**

**AA & TA:** We're planning to open a *Diwan Baladna* center for learning the Arabic language and culture. It will be a one-of-a-kind place. We'll have lessons on the colloquial dialect, written classical Arabic, and our culture, including classes on how to cook Arabic food by Ahmad's father, Kamal Azban!

We're also working on the second edition of *Diwan Baladna (Arabic Culture)* with new topics that expand the women's perspective and helping foreign women navigate our culture!

SCAN HERE FOR WEBSITE



To purchase the *Diwan Baladna* series visit [www.diwanbaladna.com](http://www.diwanbaladna.com) or check out most major bookstores throughout Jordan!

## LATEST NEWS



**MASHROU' LEILA LIVE**

Lebanon's rockers Mashrou' Leila are performing live at Amman's Citadel on 10 and 11 September. With opening performances by Hana Malhas and Zeid & the Wings, this is sure to be an unforgettable event. Tickets are 15 JOD and are available at a number of outlets around the city. For more, call (077) 722 8686.



**STREET ART FAIR 2011**

Artists, performers, and foodies are coming together for *Amman's Street Art Fair* from 23 to 27 September. Ras El Ain's Municipality Park will host this open-air festival daily from 5:00pm making it a perfect outing for after work or school. For details, call (077) 722 8686 or visit [www.artmedium.me](http://www.artmedium.me).



**CLEAN UP AQABA**

Aqaba's residents will be uniting for three days starting 30 September to clean up and conserve their city. *Clean Up the World*, a global NGO gathers volunteers yearly to raise awareness about waste minimization and recycling. To take part, find the Facebook event "Clean Up the World Campaign 2011" for more details.



**POETRY BOOK SIGNING**

Lebanese actress and author Rania Salwan will be signing copies of her latest book of poetry, *Omr*. On 8 September, she'll be at the *Good Bookstore* (Rainbow St.), while on 9 September, she'll be at *Virgin Megastore* (City Mall). If you're a fan of hers, then pick up the book now and create a keepsake by getting it autographed!



**SAQ'R BY TARIQ DAJANI**

On 20 September, Tariq Dajani's new exhibition opens at *Jacaranda Images* (Omar Bin Al Khattab St.). This work focuses on interpretations of the majestic beauty of the Arabian hunting falcon and will be presented on beautiful limited edition prints. For more, call (06) 464 4050, or visit [www.jacarandaimages.com](http://www.jacarandaimages.com).



**HAMLEYS' BACK TO SCHOOL SALE**

Every kid's favorite toy store, Hamleys (Mecca St.) is having a Back to School celebration with a range of great supplies for those who will be returning to school this month, or for those just starting their formal education. Check it out if you need to stock up! Call (06) 551 5020 or visit [www.hamleys.com](http://www.hamleys.com).