

Excellent driver and contact for travel in Erbil  
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I recently visited Erbil with a mate, stayed at the Divan hotel (pricey but excellent), it was a Century Club "country-bagging" excursion and we wanted to get out and explore the mountains around Erbil. I got Karwan's name and number from an earlier post on the Thorntree message board run by Lonely Planet. Our first night looking around the citadel was somewhat underwhelming, and we hailed a local taxi to take us to the German Bar and Restaurant...an exercise that demonstrated the difficulties of using general cabs in Erbil...typically the driver will speak little or no English, and not know of the location of expat/tourist orientated locations. Luckily we navigated our cabbie to the excellent German bar via Google maps, which worked surprisingly well!

I called Karwan the day before, and arranged for him to pick us up from the hotel at 08:00. I was pleased to see that his vehicle was in excellent condition, and that he spoke fluent English (which was self taught from years driving for teachers from an International School in Erbil). As the day proceeded, it became apparent that Karwan was also a skilful, safe and efficient driver, plus was able to discuss all aspects of Kurdistan life with us, being knowledgeable and an interesting conversationalist. He took us to a couple of sights; a natural spring flowing from the mountain, and a well known local waterfall, both places where the opportunity to interact with local Kurds (it was a weekend) exceeded the intrinsic interest of the sights themselves. We also went to a superb lookout which few people know about, a friendly local café and a restaurant with icy cold beers, plus an antique shop. We had a memorable and very satisfying day.

Sadly, we didn't have more time in Kurdistan, as Karwan was able to suggest several more excellent trips, which could be arranged as day trips or overnight trips. He actually can arrange accommodation as well as put together tour itineraries, and, judging by a recurring theme around accessing reasonably priced clean accommodation prior to arriving in Kurdistan, this would be very useful to anyone planning to visit.

In fact, I was so impressed by Karwan that I would recommend contacting him as a first step prior to any travel to Kurdistan. Next day we arranged to go out to dinner with Karwan, to an excellent Indian restaurant, he then dropped us off at one of the few remaining bars (since the oil price crash and the ISIS threat, many expats left Erbil and most bars have closed down), and returned us to the Divan later.

On our final day, he ran us to the airport, and as a leaving gift, gave us a souvenir Saddam banknote. I would say that having the good fortune to meet Karwan significantly enhanced our Kurdistan visit, and recommend him without any reservation.