

2008

Part 2 Cairo to Alexandria

11 April Helnan Palestine Hotel, Alexandria

10pm

Winding my mind back to this morning - already so long ago; we were up early, bags packed and out of the room by 8 am and to the Felucca Room for breakfast. The drive through Cairo was a different experience today. Friday is the religious day here, and the crazy traffic was more subdued..

We returned briefly to Giza to view the mighty Pyramids in bright sunlight before taking the Desert Road towards Alexandria via El Alamein. We drove through desert landscape almost all the way, past some military bases; huge pigeon houses, irrigated date farms, vineyards and fig orchards; and camels, and goats (with Bedouin shepherds in charge). It was all so exotic and different from anything I have seen before. Although I was reminded a little of the Great Sandy Desert near Maree, with shrubs similar to salt bush hanging on grimly to life.

The museum at El Alamein was impressive, however the sight of the war graves in the cemetery was very sobering.

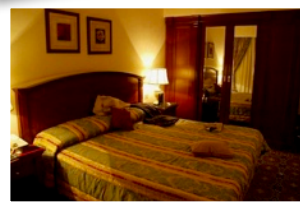
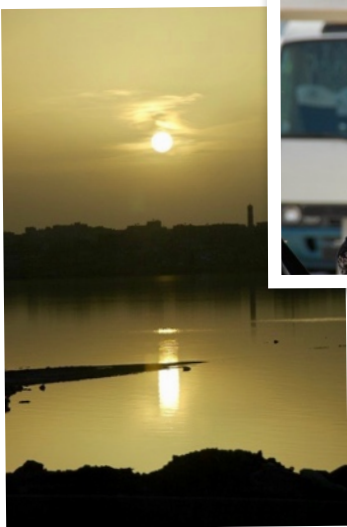




We stopped at a roadhouse for lunch. Norm and I enjoyed a gelato ice cream treat, and bought some dates stuffed with almonds, recommended by Isis, our lovely guide.

The road from El Alamein to Alexandria took us along the beautiful deep blue Mediterranean and past amazing condominium developments, some completed, some under construction, all with walls and guards

We entered Alexandria via huge industrial areas, with many oil refineries, then through a swamp with papyrus and reflections of the setting sun.

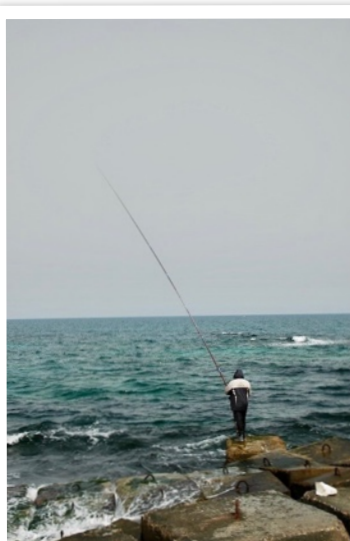
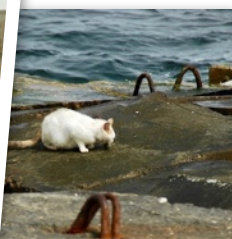


At 7.30pm we finally reached our hotel, in a palace complex built by King Farouk. I can hear the waves breaking, and out of the window I can see a huge palatial building.

Saturday 12 April – Palestine Hotel Alexandria

5:00 pm

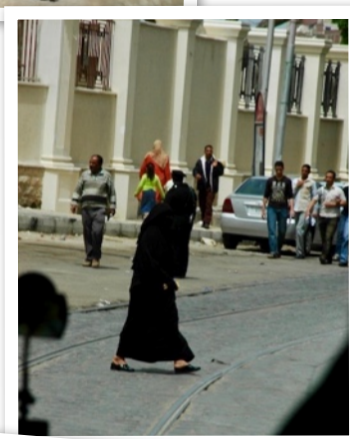
It was go, go, go today. We first drove along the waterfront for about 20 ks to the Citadel of Qaitbay, an old fort on the site of one of the original great wonders of the ancient world, the Lighthouse of Alexandria. The fort is very picturesque but I enjoyed watching the local fishermen with their huge rods. One of the local cats enjoyed a treat of a small fish. There were also some lively and friendly young men who posed for our cameras.





Next stop was Pompey's Pillar and the catacombs (no cameras permitted) which were very spooky. I was glad to climb back up stairs and return to the land of the living.

Our tour took us to a very impressive Roman Amphitheatre, via fascinating narrow streets full of amazing and colourful shops and pedlars.



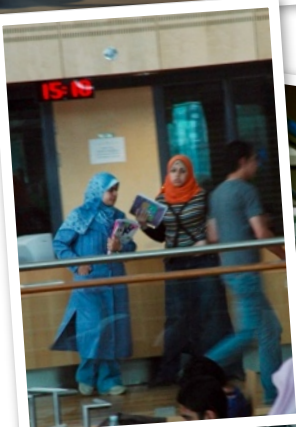
At the Amphitheatre there were statues, columns and other ancient relics on display that had been resumed from underneath the sea.



At lunch time we were delivered to the main waterfront and the Old Hotel Cecil where we joined several of our travel mates for club sandwiches.

The final stop for today was the incredible Alexandria Library. It is very modern, well worth the visit. There were some great displays, one of drawings and maps of Alexandria's history, paintings prepared for the plans of a movie about Imhotep as well as a modern printing machine capable of printing books on demand in no time at all.

Back at our hotel, I am now relaxing before tea after a wonderful day exploring the old city of Alexandria.



Sunday 13 April On board Cairo-Luxor Train

8.30pm

Believe it or not I am sitting in my very small cabin, drinking french chardonnay. Great fun, every one is in a party mood.

We were on the road early again this morning. Farewelled Alexandria and headed back towards Cairo on the Desert Road. Just before lunch we stopped at a coptic monastery, and were taken on a guided tour by one of the resident monks. The loos were something else - they even left the Chinese loos for dead Poo, flies and stink! The Monastery was very interesting, with well cared for gardens and buildings, apart from the loos.

We returned to the Roadhouse where we stopped on the journey to Alexandria for a cuppa and then back on the road to arrive in Cairo right in peak hour, delivered like lambs to the slaughter to a papyrus and gold complex run by the Government. After watching a demonstration of how papyrus is produced, we chose a lovely piece for ourselves of Tutankharmun and his wife on their honeymoon. The sales pressure in the gold section was offensive and so I just backed right off.

We returned to the excitement of peak hour traffic Cairo style and were delivered to Giza railway station, full of people, life, noise and bustle, to wait for our 8pm sleeper train to Luxor

