

Diving the Thistlegorm

Dahab is my number one destination to let off steam, relax, and enjoy some scuba diving. For the Prophet Mohamed's Birthday (a national holiday here) we had a five day weekend. I ended up taking a mini-bus with some teachers from our school. The only problem was the other teachers were going to Sharm El Sheik, the larger, touristy, expensive version of Dahab.

There were no more buses going north to Dahab by the time we got to Sharm. Rather than pay way too much for a taxi to take me the hour drive, I decided to get a room and stay over in Sharm for the night. It turned out to be a late night on the boardwalk.

I was awakened at 6:30 am by someone entering my room. I was scheduled to be out of the room by noon, and had actually planned on leaving by 8:00 to catch the bus to Dahab. The desk had booked the room early and given some guy the key to my room! I took it in stride. It was my first day of vacation and I didn't want to waste any energy on the way this expensive hotel was treating me. I just made the best of it and ate breakfast with the dude after he dropped his backpack in the room. Fellow travelers are always interesting people to talk to. This guy turned out to be a software programmer working in Cairo, taking a long weekend in Sharm. We both had the complementary continental breakfast and shared malaria stories.

A few hours later, I found myself in a packed bus on the way to Taba with a stop in Dahab. Magdi and Mohamed (owner and manager) of the Divers House hotel/PADI Dive Center had a room waiting for me even though I hadn't let them know I was coming. Very lucky of me.

I signed up for the Thistlegorm trip this time. Normally, I only dive the local sites but they are getting a bit drab for me. You can only dive one site so many times. The Thistlegorm trip turned out to be much MORE than I had expected.

At 11:30pm the group loaded up into a minibus. Fifteen Germans and yours truly traveled down to Sharm El Sheik to one of the large marinas. By 1:30, I was sleeping on the upper deck of our 27m/81ft dive boat. Our gear was aboard and checked, we had already had our briefing, and at 4am the boat would leave the marina for the Thistlegorm Wreck. The following pictures and texts are taken from several web sources. I had no way of taking quality pictures 30 meters below sea level.



The Thistlegorm lay at anchor awaiting further orders. A British supply vessel, she was laden with a vast array of military equipment destined for the British troops in North Africa. A long distance German bomber came across her on the night of 6th October 1941 and dropped its bombs on her. Two landed right on target penetrating number four hold, ripping her stern apart and resulting in the loss of nine lives.

The Thistlegorm is 126m long with a beam of 17.5m and has a capacity of 4898 tons. She lies on a sandy plain at a depth of 30m but her bridge extends to a depth of just 17m. A strong current flows from bow to stern, although with tidal variations the direction can reverse. Safety precautions are essential when diving this outstanding wreck, and ascents and descents on a rope, usually secured to the wreck by the dive guide, are obligatory.



The wreck itself features a vast array of military hardware ranging from anti aircraft and bren guns, airplane wings, ammunitions and shells, railway carriages and tenders, wellington boots, trucks and motorcycles.



This is a minesweeper found on the upper deck.



The ammunitions found inside the holds are all over the p
You can see the dates on the bottoms of the shells.



Diving through the wreck is not for the feint of heart.
The walls seem to get closer, there are a few places where the ceiling is only a few feet above the trucks, and the darkness adds a feeling of eeriness from movies like "The Deep" or "The Abyss"



Charlene and Yasser Married!

The month of April was exciting for Charlene and Yasser. They had a small wedding and reception in their apartment. The invite list was rather small due to the small apartment.

Charlene is a third grade teacher at AISE that happens to be a fellow cheese head. In fact, Yasser is in for a few surprises when he and Charlene head out to Wisconsin to have another wedding on the farm.

Indoor Croquet Continues With Codi James

It is my pleasure to include another croquet story. We only have Joey Kiedinger to thank for the game. There are new players joining our leagues in vast numbers. So far, we have five. Our newest member hails from Seattle. The beautiful "Elven" Codi James traveled a long way to see her best friend Crystal and join us in a game of indoor croquet, among other events.



The Pyramids at Night!

Whenever friends come to visit it is a chance for us to go to "touristy" attractions that we normally don't go see. Codi's visit was another such occasion. We went to the Sound and Light Show at the Giza pyramids. The show is nightly and presented in at least ten different languages on specific nights. The show is certainly impressive, except for the Scottish bagpipe parade in the beginning. I will never understand the connection!

Codi came all the way from Seattle to visit Crystal San Juan. What a pair of soul mates. We were all glad to finally have Codi here visiting because Crystal had been talking about it for several months (hah!).

(Codi - left- poses with Crystal along the Nile)



Codi and Crystal and I ventured to Alexandria for a day trip. It was a first for Crystal and I on the trains and a first time to Alex for Codi. We had a grand day touring the city, going to eat at Gad, having shisha and tea along the Mediterranean, and fending off the gawking Egyptians.

A beautiful blonde in Egypt is the target of every Egyptian male's attention. We started charging the younger guys that wanted to take a picture with either Codi, Crystal, or both. At one point, our taxi driver asked me about the women. I simply told him one was my wife and the other my girlfriend. When he asked me which one was my wife, I told him it didn't matter because both of them are mine.

The most excitement of the day came at the end of the trip. The trains with first and second class seating were completely booked. It was the end of a holiday. We were left with no choice but third class. It cost us each a dollar. We got what we paid for.

The train stops at every station. It took us about four hours to get home as opposed to the first class train that got us to Alexandria in two hours (non-stop). Not only did the train stop at every station, the people kept exchanging seats. The first half hour was fine because we were sitting next to some little children. When they got off, they were replaced by some young punks. After ten minutes of bothering Crystal and Codi, we switched cars. Crystal left us in search of another set of seats and called on the cell phone a few minutes later. It would have worked, except the group of young guys (now about a dozen) followed us into the next cars.

Imagine having fifteen young guys fighting over who gets to sit closest to one of the ladies. Imagine fifteen guys taking turns asking which one is my wife and if the other wants an Egyptian husband. Imagine the rude comments in Arabic. Packs of Egyptian boys do not have one iota of respect for Western women!



Finally, all of the commotion caught the attention of the conductors. Five tourist police and several conductors kept the pack of wolves at bay while we were escorted to the middle train car and offered seats in the conductors' area. What a break. The policeman that sat next to me was very wary of how we were treated for the rest of the trip. That was truly a bad experience. Crystal and I agree that it would have been different even with one other man in our group. I was pressed to keep so many guys away from the women. We had expected problems, but not that bad.





Golfing at the Pyramids!

David San Juan and I decided we just HAD to go golfing at the pyramids. The Mena House is one of the oldest golf courses in Egypt but they don't keep up the greens very well. It seems very run down for a course in such a prime location.

The pyramids are right there! Every hole has the Great Pyramid Cheops in view. Wow.

It is truly amazing to be playing golf in the shadows of one of the ancient wonders of the world. This picture shows David explaining how he is going to bounce his next ball off the pyramid and into the hole for a birdie.



Galapalooza Golfing Day

Bart Walker is one of the original screwballs that call themselves "Pull My Finger Entertainment". On the 6th of May, the second annual Galapalooza was held at Golf City golf course.

Galabeya- the traditional long shirt worn by Egyptian men and women.

According to the rules, each player must wear a galabeya or be docked a few strokes. Decorations as a team or individual was also strongly recommended.

The mantra of the Galapalooza is...

"it's not how well you golf, but how good you look!"

Gala-GreenBay-ya

It was my honor to wear the Green and Gold for this special occasion. I bought the white galabeya and some paints. My friend Sebastian happened to have a cheesehead that completed my outfit.



“That’s All Folks!”