

Bus Stop to the Dunes..

موقف باص.

# German Students Explore Egypt

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"What is the aim of your visit?" this was the most frequently asked question by Egyptians where ever our group appeared; at the phosphate mines in Abu Tartour, at the informal quarter of Manshiyat Naser in Cairo, at the Red Sea tourist resort of Elgouna, at the Nubian settlements near Kom Ombo, at the villages that are named after Arab cities and countries (Sana'a, Palestine etc.) in the oasis of Kharga in the New Valley or in the city of Ismailya. Twenty three German geography students and four teachers from the University of Mainz, headed by the Director of the Centre for Research on the Arab World, Professor Gunter Meyer spent three weeks in Egypt last February and March. The trip was part of the study's program at the Institute of Geography.

The educational program of the trip consists of three phases: First, a preparatory seminar in Mainz, Germany, at which each student has to present a working paper on a selected topic about Egypt. The topics cover various general historical, economic and political issues as well as specific applied geographical issues like urban and rural development, water resources and irrigation, tourism development, environmental problems, issues of minorities and migration. Second, the trip itself whose routes and stops are adjusted to the topics and themes of the papers. For example, the student who prepared a paper about industrialisation

during the era of Naser presented his paper in Helwan and the student who prepared a paper about cultural tourism presented her paper in Luxor and so on. The teachers gave on location detailed explanations, tackled specific problems, filled in the backgrounds and corrected the delivered information. The third phase involves the inclusion of the new information, experiences and insights gained in Egypt by the students during the trip into extended versions of their papers. Cairo played a central role in the trip as the political, economic and cultural capital of Egypt. Cairo's metropolitan area delivers numerous venues where the historical and

urban developments of the country, as well as the current challenges and achievements, can be exposed. The Pyramids of Giza and Memphis, Old and Medieval Cairo, Heliopolice, Garden City, Maadi and Helwan demonstrate the different political and socio-economic periods in the ancient and modern history of the country. The informal quarters of Manshiyat Naser and the "Cemeteries" show the problems of poverty and the upgrading of urban infrastructures. Both the students and the local inhabitants of the informal quarters were astonished and surprised by the visit. The majority of the students, have never before been in such ➤



Tea and Falafel in a street cafe in el-Gamalya.

شاي وفلافل في الجمالية



The Famous Boat Sudan Where Agatha Chisti's Death on the Nile Played.

الباخرة سسودان التي صورت عليها قصة أغانا كريستي "وفاة عند النيل".



In Manshyet Naser.

في منشية ناصر



In Bin-Toloun Mosque in Cairo.

في مسجد ابن طولون

high-populated quarters and slums, where the lack of technical infrastructure and exposure to poverty dominate the scene. On the other hand, the inhabitants of the slums are not used to visits by tourist groups. Their reaction was a mixture of traditional hospitality, amazement and distrust. Hospitality always prevailed as soon as the people knew that the group was made up of students who want to understand and explore the "real" Egypt and not only to visit the tourist sites. A mixture of different feelings accompanied the group and Egyptians each time the bus stopped in a non-tourist location: in the city of the Tenth of Ramadan (Madinet el Asher min Ramadan), in the back streets of Gamalyah, in Netroun Valley, in the Ubur Central Food Market and in the BTM textile fabric.

"I am seeing this side of Cairo for the first time" the representative of the Egyptian tourist agency, Mustafa, kept saying during the trip. It was his first visit to the oasis of Kharga, Farfara and Dakhla. Leaving Cairo and the Nile valley towards the New Valley Department, the group was anxious to explore the desert. The landscape changes radically after only a few miles away from the Nile: no more buildings, no more greenery and no more water. An endless stone desert dominates the landscape. The natural wonders make this an exciting trip, especially the remarkable white desert and sand dunes. The oasis themselves are interesting due to their palm gardens, springs and authentic architecture. The old town of al-Qasr in Farfara, which is already partially renovated, presents an Islamic

architectural jewel with a restored mosque, library/school, covered paths and other buildings. The New Valley project was started on the initiative of the former president Gamal Abdel Naser and further developed during Sadat's Green Revolution. The project aims, to gain new agricultural spaces in the desert by using the underground water for irrigation and, on the other hand, to establish new settlements and towns in the new land to encourage migration from the densely-populated Nile Valley. The newly developed Toshka project intends to re-direct Nile water into the desert from Naser Lake of the High Dam, through a network of canals.

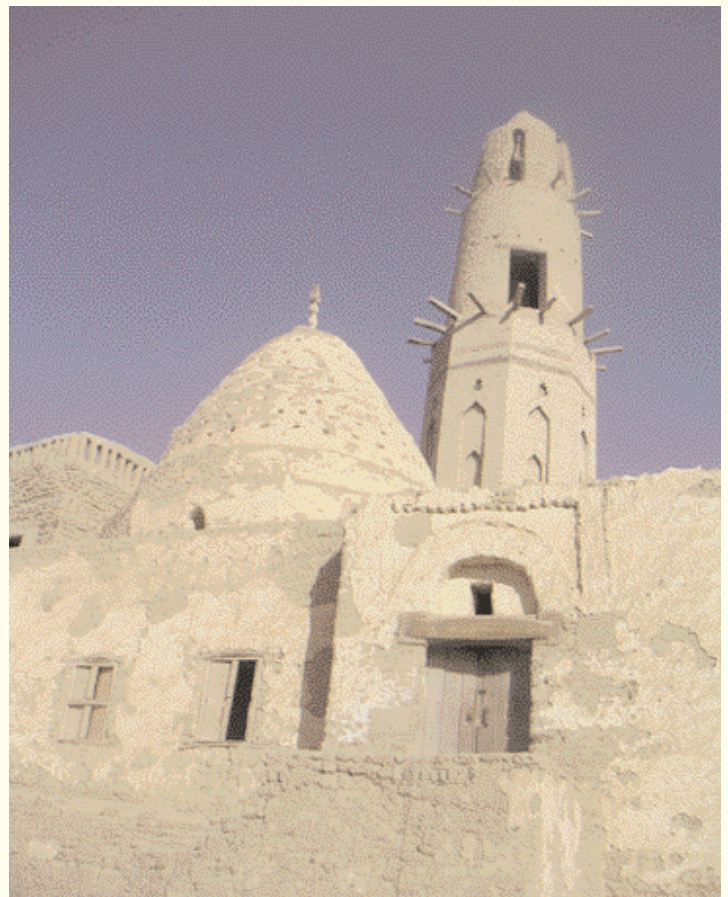
Visiting the High Dam and the old temples and tombs in Luxor and Aswan was another high point of the trip, which included ➤





The Marina in Elgouna.

المارينا في الغونة



The Mosque in the Old Town of Al-Qasr in Farfara.

مسجد مدينة القصر القديمة في فرفارة



The Textile Fabric of BTM.

معمل النسيج



The White Desert.

الصحراء البيضاء

magic and exotic names and places of Karnak, Philae, Theben, Hatshipsut, Tut Anch Amoun, Ramses, Isis, Iris, Osiris, Mut, Edfu, Cataract, Agha Khan, "Death on the Nile", Winter Palace etc. They made the four day stop in Upper Egypt totally mythical and very informative. The modern royal residences, luxurious hotels, cruises and Nubians, on the one hand, and the ancient picturesque tombs and unique temples, on the other hand, were re-joined together again - old and new Egypt, the same way

they stand together hundreds of miles to the north in Cairo.

The Red Sea and Sinai were the third major destination of the trip. The topics of international tourism and tourism development dominated the discussions in Hurghada, Elgouna, Ain Sukhna, Sharm el Sheikh and Taba. Seeing the huge hotels and resorts of Hurghada, one of the students said "it is like being in another world". In the trendy resort of Elgouna, another student said "this is not Egypt any more". Indeed the

contrast is tremendous and impressive between the modern and luxurious resorts of the Red Sea and the towns and villages of the Nile Valley and even Cairo. In Sinai, the Bedouins, who are trying to cope with the expanding tourist industry and the problems of modernity, give a totally different image to the tourist scene in Saint Cathrine, Dahab and Nuweiba. An "Oriental" and "Bedouin" setting and cheap tourist camps still dominate the sea strip between Sharm el Sheikh and Taba, but the trend is towards ➤

upgrading the more luxurious resorts like Taba Hights and the hotels on the lagoon of Dahab. The President of the City Council of Dahab confirmed during a meeting with the group the expansion plans in the tourism sector. After a short visit to Taba to see the damaged Hilton Hotel, we were all pleasantly surprised. The reconstruction of the hotel is nearly finished and the Nelson Tourist Village that is connected to the Hilton is open again. If this is an indication of the future of tourism in Egypt, then it is a good and hopeful one.

Educational tourism is a special type of cultural tourism. It explores the people, the culture and the landscape. Students are an important part of the tourist market in the outward bound countries, especially Europe. The low budget student groups of today are the culturally-interested, ecologically-aware, friendly, engaged and frequent visitors of tomorrow. They are very sensitive tourists as well. Negative experiences may damage the positive image. For example, selling tickets to tourist

groups for the free performance of the Sufi Darwish Dance by some travel agencies is indeed unacceptable, especially when there is a sign in plain English: "Free Admission" on the theatre entrance. Some travel agencies are asking for \$(US)15-30 per person and deliver only transportation to the venue. This must be the most expensive bus ticket in the world. We hope that such practices will be administratively prohibited for the sake of Egypt and its wonderful people and culture. ■

معبد جزيرة فيلة

The Temple on Philae Island.

