

# Khartoum

## The tourist capital waiting for peace

Khartoum-Mounir El-Fishawy

As soon as we landed in Sudan we knew it was a unique country with the fertile Nile mud and the river's pure water. It is a painting of bright colours, although green is dominant. Its forests are the homes of wild animals, rare birds and numerous different plants and trees. They seem to have a message for visitors: there is an abundance of food for all of humanity. Like the tourist industry, the country is eagerly waiting for peace.

*Islamic Tourism* representatives, two Egyptians and a Sudanese coming from Cairo, were welcomed at Khartoum airport by Awatif Said, the Director of Media and Tourism promotion in the ministry of Tourism and National Heritage. She gave us a warm welcome and took us to the largest hotel in the city, the Hilton Khartoum, 3km from the airport.

On our way to the hotel in the city centre we noticed the bright lights under the cover of the night but we did not see many people and concluded that the city was asleep. We changed our mind once we got to the Hilton which was busy with guests, top officials and business people. ➔

من معروضات المتحف القومي.  
One of the exhibits in the  
National Museum.





City Tourism

The former head of state Abdul-Rahman Suwar El-Dhahab.

الرئيس السابق المشير عبد الرحمن سوار الذهب.

A mosque belonging to the Dawa Islamiah.

مسجد تابع لمنظمة الدعوة الإسلامية.



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### Khartoum: Three cities in one

Khartoum is made up of three cities: Khartoum or "Khartoum General", "Um Darman" the national capital and "Khartoum Bahri" the industrial capital. All these cities are known as "The Tri-Capital".

There are different opinions as to the origin of the name of the capital, "Khartoum". The generally accepted view is the one which attributes the name to the location of the city at the meeting point of the two rivers, the White and the Blue Niles, in a way that resembles the nose of an elephant. One other meaning of "Khartoum" is the "tongue of land extended in the water". Khartoum, in its splendid location between the two Niles, is attractive and enchanting - it arrests the gaze and attention of sightseers who are enthralled by the beauty of the two Niles embracing each other.

The city is about 28165 sq km. Its climate is generally warm with temperatures ranging between 15-20 C. Summer is tolerable with temperatures ranging between 25-40C.

The archaeological finds in Khartoum are a witness to its old civilisation. The relics of "Khour Abu Angah", three miles to south of the Khour of the Nile, date back to the Ancient Stone Age (10000-8500 B. C.). There are other sites from the Middle Stone Age (8000-6000 B. C.) when early man was collecting fruits and fishing and making unglazed pottery and simple tools. The relics of "Shahinab" some 40 Km north of Karrary and the "Gelly" at the Gelly railway north of Khartoum Bahri, both date back to the late Stone Age (6000-3500 B. C.).

There are more relics from ancient times such as the Morwi period (593 B. C. -350 A. D.) the East Gerif (55 km. from the Blue Nile) and West Sororab (north of Karrary). Khartoum's Christian Age (504 – 1504) takes us back to the State of Alloah on the eastern side of the Blue Nile (14km from Khartoum) in the region of Soba. Some buildings, churches and graveyards from this time still remain. It was followed by the Muslim period of the Al-Fong Kingdom (1504-1831 A. D.) which saw many tombs being built for Islamic figures, including the famous tomb of Sheikh Idris Wad Al-Arbab and Sheikh Abu-Qwron in the Aelafon region.

The era between (1831-1885) left the ➔





The Secretary of State for Culture Mr. Saddiq al-Mujtaba.

وزير الدولة للشؤون الثقافية السيد صديق المجتبي.



Al-Khalifah Museum.

متحف الخليفة.

graves of Turkish rulers at the cross roads of the streets of the palace and the municipality at the Abu-Janzir roundabout. The Mahdi Era (1885-1898 A. D.) is remembered by the walls of Mulazemen, the South Tabiah, the present Um Darman prison, the Abdul-Qaum Gate, the Khalifah House etc.

### Museums

Sudanese museums contain exhibits from all these eras. The National Museum of Sudan has several antique pieces that date back to pre-history. Some belong to the Islamic era. The National Anthropological Museum of

Sudan has an exhibition of the material culture of folkloric heritage which shows the cultural diversity of Sudan.

There is also the Bait al-Khalifah Museum situated at the residence of the Khalifah Abdallah bin Said Muhammad (Torschen) in Udarman with pictures, pots and tools once used in the house.

The Natural History Museum in Khartoum's University Street provides a good introduction to the country's different indigenous animals and birds. The focal point of the Palace Museum, in the midst of the gardens of the presidential palace, is a

Rolls Royce used by different presidents of Sudan or visiting presidents. The big hall also exhibits many arms, military equipment, the relics of wars and mementos of old fighters.

The museums show that Sudan is a very proud nation with a long history and unique culture. Some museums present live folkloric dances. At the National Museum we saw one of these performances in the presence of the Minister of Tourism and Saddiq al-Mujtaba the Minister of Culture. After Friday prayers Darwishes from the Sufi orders put on a show called "Praises of the Nile"

### The Minister of "Promising" Tourism

We got a warm reception from the Minister of Tourism and National Heritage, Abdul-Jalil El-Basha who introduced us to his senior advisers. He talked extensively about his love of Sudanese tourism but was quite frank and admitted that despite the improvement and development of the tourist industry, especially in the infrastructure of the services and building sectors, the ship of Sudanese tourism has not set sail yet. "We are still waiting for a time of peace and the national unity of north and south.

Peace is a victory for tourism and we are confident that our dreams of peace will come true. We are busy formulating an emergency plan to meet the unexpected demands on the tourist sector once peace is achieved. More hotels are being built and we recently signed many tourism agreements with Ethiopia, Kenya, Tunisia, Egypt, Syria and Jordan. The implementation of some of these agreements has started already.

The minister added that Sudan is rich in natural resources which will attract tourists. There are plenty of tourist attractions in the 2.50m sq km country – the size of 20 European countries. We are proud of the diversity of the environment, and are developing safaris so animals can be seen in the wild. Desert tourism is also being developed alongside cultural tourism. The ruins provide an open air museum. Five hundred Sudanese and African tribes have maintained their traditional way of life for visitors to see, respect and enjoy. The Red Sea offers another dimension to tourism ➔



## City Tourism

with its 700km coast, fish and coral. Undoubtedly the greatest asset, is the friendly Sudanese people with their never fading smiles and welcome.

The Minister of Tourism is a man of vision : We pay attention to providing skilled man power in the tourism sector by training abroad and exchanging experiences, as well as expanding colleges of archaeology and hotel schools inside Sudan.

### Investment in Sudan

We also met top Sudanese officials, including the Minister of Culture, Mr Abdul-Bassit Abdul-Majid, who spoke about his days in Egypt in the 1950s, when he studied at the Al-Azhar University. He emphasised the value of the Sudanese culture in general and the benefits of investment in tourism for the local Sudanese. He also referred to the rich culture of Sudan and the importance of cultural tourism, and pointed out that Sudan was chosen the cultural capital of the Arab world in 2005.

Besides investment in cultural tourism, Sudan pays great attention to investment in the tourist infrastructure such as hotels, amusement complexes, zoos and animal sanctuaries. These are considered strategic projects and the Ministry of Investment provides considerable incentives for their development. The General Secretary of the Ministry of Investment told us that these incentives and facilities include free grants of land for investment with a ten-year tax exemption period for strategic projects. For non-strategic projects, the government offers land at a very low cost with tax exemptions on imported equipment.

### Khartoum: A Bracelet of Gold

The highlight of our tour was an interview with a world-renowned figure Abdul-Rahman Suwar Al-Dhahab, a humble, simple, objective man founder of the Organisation of Dawa Islamiah, which he presides over. He praised ISLAMIC TOURISM for its avant-garde role and contribution to civilisation then spoke about the aims of his organisation which is concerned with expanding the call of Islam through the non-Arabic speaking world in particular. It has served Africa by opening 33 Islamic schools, many youth centres,



The National Museum.

المتحف القومي.



The main hall in the Palace Museum.

القاعة الرئيسية في متحف القصر.



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developing social services and promoting environmental conservation.

Turning to Islamic tourism he said: "We are working hard to introduce the Arab and Muslim worlds to the international community and attract tourists. We are also concerned with health, education, and social matters with the aim of creating a tourism renaissance benefiting our people. We follow a well-studied scientific five-year plan. We are going to be proud of the

reception tourists are given by the Sudanese people in the north and south of the country.

At the end of our visit to Sudan, we left this good land after drinking from the water of its Nile with a hope that we would be back soon to participate in the festivities of peace. The tourist genie is still in his bottle – but he will be released soon and Sudan will take its rightful place among Africa's major tourist destinations. ■