

Tourism in a changing Egypt – a moment in time

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Comeback for the pyramids?

Egypt, land of pharaohs and one of the oldest civilizations in human history, has been a tourism magnet for decades. Tourism is one of the most important sectors in Egypt's economy. The pyramids of Giza, the mysterious sphinx and diving spots at the Red Sea have attracted millions of visitors from all over the world. No more - at least for now. The flow of tourists has subsided dramatically since the political changes in the northern African country.

- More than 14 million tourists visited Egypt in 2010, providing revenues of nearly 12 billion US dollars per year.
- In 2011, following the "Arab spring" and the ousting of longtime president Hosni Mubarak, the number of visitors dropped to 9 million.
- In 2013, until October, the number of tourists counted were five million – the lowest figure since 2000. Many hotels closed down in August and September after Egypt's "second revolution" but re-opened once travel alerts in Europe were lifted.
- 12 per cent of Egypt's workforce is directly employed in the tourism sector, such as drivers, hotel waiters and chefs; an estimated 12 million Egyptians – such as souvenir sellers – are indirectly making a living from tourism.

The question is: When will Egypt finally emerge from its two-and-a-half years of political turmoil which began on 25th of January 2011 with anti-government protests, and culminated, so far, in the fall of Muslim Brotherhood president Morsi in July 2013? And will the tourists flock back?

So far, nobody knows the answer. But hope is arising that the country is getting back on track. "Tourism numbers have been slightly up since the travel alerts were lifted in 21 European countries which account for 72 per cent of tourists in Egypt", said Hisham Zazou, Minister of Tourism in Egypt. "I am confident that the numbers will increase even further as we approach the end of the year."

This special edition of "GUC Gazette" puts a spotlight on the changing face of tourism in Egypt – and the courageous attempts for its revival.

by Mohamed Kandeel



Tranquility at the great pyramids in Giza, for once: Tourists visits have dropped from 50.000 a day to about 15.000 in late 2013 - giving the ancient site some space to breathe and recover its magic charme

PHOTO: MARC ONISI

A souvenir seller without customers

The Egyptian revolution and its impact on tourism can be seen in the destiny of one small copper souvenir seller

Saied was holding a copper plate over a fire, slowly circling it around, supported by a stick. After two minutes he put the plate down and grabbed another one. He was sitting all alone in silence looking at his own work. For two hours he continued like that without a single customer passing by, wanting to buy something.

The souvenir maker in Moez Street in Old Cairo and his amazing hand craft found no one interested in it due to the recent political unrest that has affected the tourism in Egypt. Despite the low sales he made compared to 2009 and 2010 – before the revolution –, he had to survive with his five member family. Several countries advised their citizens against visiting Egypt until August and September this year, only recently things are getting more optimistic. This has directly affected laborers such as Saied.

Saied, a 55 years old below average-class citizen in Egypt, responsible for a family of a wife and three children, whose ages ranged between seven and twenty, makes a living from making and selling handmade copper souvenirs.

After the eruption of the Egyptian revolution in 2011, his income from making and selling his products was dramatically affected. "Since the 25th of January revolution life started to get harder and harder, my sales almost dropped to half, the tourist



Working in the streets of Cairo: Craftsman Saied makes coppers lampshades, pots and water jugs by hand



PHOTOS: MAHMOUD MOSTAFA SHIMY

numbers weren't as much as before and even Egyptians didn't buy any of my products" said Saied. The rate of tourism was reduced almost one third compared to 2010, and lots of companies and people generally in Egypt had to accept reduced salaries. Therefore they spent it on more

important life essentials and not on luxuries.

"We tried to plan our life financially as to survive these days the best way we could. My elder son had to find a job to cover at least his own expenses and the selling of few items and the savings i had

previously helped to cover our basic needs".

Saied and his family shared two meals a day Breakfast that included Beans, Falafel and one loaf of bread for each member, and supper in the afternoon that usually was some rice and one type of vegetables.

"My wife was very supportive, she can't work because of her age but she was always by my side and telling me that things will get better".

"OH! I can't really remember when was the time I sold a large number because that was really a very long time ago; probably in the 90s or something. But the best selling time I remember was during the winter of 2010 there was a lot of tourists from Asia, Europe and the USA, I earned some good money back then". Unfortunately Saied's sales didn't exceed five or six pieces a week comparing to 2010 when he sold some times up to about six or seven pieces a day.

Saied was very worried about the future of his kids, he knew that there were no much jobs for his elder son who will graduate soon from the faculty of commerce the Cairo University, he said that he has been always working hard on his studies to be successful yet the current

situations might threaten his future. Yet he believed that things will get better when his other two children grow up, he believed that Egypt will be much more a better place within ten years maximum from today.

Saied started working with his father in making copper pots since he was a kid, he had to quit school and work with his father to support him and his family, he learned the

basics gradually till he became a good souvenirs maker. "I also teach my children my craft during their summer holidays, I decided not to let them leave schools as my father did to me, it is their future to decide what they want to do and it is my responsibility to help

them with that". Saied is feeling much better at the moment, things are starting to get better than before as he said. He started to witness the presence of tourists again recently and his sales started to increase gradually.

"My Dreams?! I guess my dreams are all in my children I wish I can live to see them married and having children around them, I wish to see them successful and I wish they live a life that is better than mine".

by Mahmoud Mostafa Shimy

“I feel pity for the ancient city”

The governor of Luxor, General Tarek Saad Eldein, and his vision to increase tourist rates

It was Friday October 11th 2013, half past six in the morning, when our feet stepped into Luxor's airport. Oriental Egyptian music played and girls wearing pharaonic uniform were holding welcome flowers for 39 students and supervisors from the German university in Cairo (GUC).

We were on a fact-finding mission, invited by the governor of Luxor Gen. Tarek Saad Eldein who wanted to promote for local tourism after the economic recession since the revolution, and has arranged unusual ways to do so.

Luxor governorate is located in southern Egypt, 670 KM south of the capital, Cairo, with population of 1.2 million. Luxor is famous of its monuments as the valley of kings and queens, monuments of the East bank, karnak temple sound and light show, and air balloons trips.

GUC has been the first university to reply to the governors' invitation.

Mr. Governor, how do you want to rescue Luxor?

Since my first day here, I felt pity for what the city of monuments is witnessing nowadays; from eco-



PHOTOS: CAMERON GRANT & FARAH AITA

Beautiful since 7000 years: the temples of Luxor, here the Karnak complex

nomical recession to all the sectors related to tourism, starting from the large hotels till the smallest bazar. This is why I decided to have the initiative to encourage internal tourism to replace the huge losses of external tourists due to these circumstances, so I decided to initiate a campaign, inviting all the private universities in Egypt to send delegations of students and employees to come and stay for few days in the city.

Why especially did you target private universities?

For many reasons, firstly because they will be able to afford paying for flight tickets and for accommodation. Another important reason for targeting the universities community is that I am sure

that most of those students did not explore Upper Egypt cities, but yet they have been to many European countries, because we as parents- did not show them how to explore the beauty of our country and knowing about history and pharaonic civilization.

To what extent could the internal tourism replace external tourism?

For sure, Luxor is depending in the first place, on external tourists; but after the latest circumstances and political instability, many countries had a “red alert” for visiting Egypt which led to the huge economic and touristic recession. And according to the latest statistics, only six of our 245 floating hotels are occupied with 645 tourists dur-

ing November; local tourists forming the majority of them. So this shows that internal tourism can play a great role in refreshing tourism in the city. I also expect that the occupancy will reach 40 percent of the hotels in Luxor by the end of this season, especially after Germany, Italy and Great Britain are now allowing their citizens to visit Egypt again.

What sort of cooperation between the governorate of Luxor and GUC will take place in the future?

As for the future plans of cooperation, Ashraf Mansour, Chairman of BOT, has invited us to have a bazar in GUC campus for Luxor craftsmen to show their products, and he has offered also to provide an opportunity for them to show their hand crafts in Germany to open new markets for them.

by Rana Ibrahim



GUC's Rana Ibrahim with governor General Tarek Saad Eldein during her exclusive interview

NEW GOVERNOR OF LUXOR

General Tarek Saad Eldein was named the governor of Luxor in August 2013. He has been an assistant to the Egyptian attaché in London and has

been part of the executive sector of Tourism Development Authority since the revolution.

After the ousting of Morsi, the General replaced a controversial governor in Luxor who had been a member of an Egyptian Islamist group linked to the terrorist massacre of foreign holiday makers in Luxor in '97.



PHOTO: RANA IBRAHIM

GERMAN UNIVERSITY

The German University in Cairo, GUC, is an Egyptian Private University founded in the year 2002.

It has had approximately 12,000 graduates since opening. It is considered very successful in the quality of education presented in the sectors of engineering, management technology, pharmacy and biotechnology, and applied sciences and arts.

#Egypt #Safe #Travel

Social Media once regarded as a waste of time is now a country's hope for all the time wasted

Social media was usually a means for entertainment and passing time. It has been gaining more importance lately when Egyptians organized protests to change the country's political direction. Thirdly now, social media acts as a marketing tool for business and the country as a whole.

Tourism faced a sharp decline since 2011. Numerous efforts have been carried out to help revive it again including Mr. Hisham Zaazou, the Minister of Tourism visiting other countries to promote Egypt.

But tourists need more reassurance. Although the United Kingdom already lifted the travel ban, Irene, a British citizen among many other tourists has been “fearful to travel to Egypt”. At least, that was what she posted on Tripadvisor on October 12th this year. Irene referred to her social

media network for recommendations. Like many other tourists, she started a discussion on Egypt's homepage if it is safe to travel. In less than a day she received two replies from fellow British tourists assuring her it is safe; one of which was even in Hurgada at that time.

Irene is not a sole case, many examples of Tripadvisor reviews, online blogs, Youtube videos and Facebook campaigns are helping tourists make travel decisions. Statistics show that an average person spends around 3.2 hours on social networks daily and finds recommendations by fellow travelers more trustful than official statements.

But governments, too, along with local and foreign initiatives are penetrating the social media. The Egypt Tourism Authority website (www.Egypt.travel) promotes Egypt as a travel destination. The messages conveyed show that



Message from The Minister of Tourism of Egypt (August 22, 2013)
Using Youtube to attract holidaymakers: Egypt's tourism minister Hisham Zaazou invites the world

tourists are safely having fun in Egypt. The tourism ministry used webcams to shoot tourists enjoying their time in the Red Sea at the golden beaches with clear blue sea,

colorful corals and bright dazzling sun. Isabelle, a featured tourist from Canada said: “It is safe here in Egypt, Please come visit this beautiful country.”

Among many bloggers was also Josh Cahil, an American tourist. Staying in Downtown Cairo, the district known as the center of protests in Tahrir Square, Josh witnessed various protests. However, as he reported on his “Go Travel Your Way”-blog, “Cairo may seem like a battlefield in the news, but it's nowhere close to that. At least not in the center of the city or close to any sights. I felt very safe and the situation seemed to improve as well”.

Social networking makes up an integral part of our everyday lives as individuals, facilitating information transfer. Nowadays, it is picking up even more importance for nations as well, transferring a clearer image of the country from fellow travelers reporting unbiased reviews of their experiences on the spot.

by Shereen Mohamed

A tale of a desperate driver

Critical reflections on tourism from a personal experience

During a conference on tourism writer Moushira Adel Ibrahim is touched not only by facts about declining tourism but by the sad life story of driver Hassan from Luxor

Engage Rotary, Change life" – this was the motto of a Rotary initiative to encourage tourism, getting together 700 Rotarian from all over the country to participate in the first Rotary district conference. Luckily, I was chosen to be among the organizing committee of this conference that was held for the first time Marsa Allam, a tourist resort 226km south of Hurghada, on the western shore of the Red Sea. It is one of the quieter tourists spots and had only recently developed from a fishing village and has become a popular diving spot.

From the first moment I received this invitation, I got extremely enthusiastic to be part of this conference and I was looking forward to a warm memorable comfortable journey.

Live here forever?

After a hectic trip that lasted for 9 hours by bus, we reached our destination and were breath taken by the amazingly beautiful scenery and we wished nothing but to live there forever...

How the arabian desert meets the red sea, the crystal lagoons, the tropical paradise appear-

ance of palm trees, the sea coast fringed with coral reefs makes it exclusive. On the last day of the conference, the forty-year-old driver, who accompanied us through the whole trip with a big smile on his face, was found sitting alone in a corner desperately, and at that moment I was curious to know, why this smile had faded out ...

I took the initiative and approached him and at that moment a conversation started between us on the edge of the water, he expressed genuinely with a tear on his eye, how affected he is with our presence these days, how life returned to this place after being gloomy for so long!

"Before revolution, tourism was outstanding, streets used to be crowded by tourists and lively but since then streets are empty, tourists are few and far between, business is suffering, life became very tough and we are desperately trying to survive, we wait all day for a single customer that often doesn't come" said Hassan the driver.

An estimated of three and a half million Egyptian families are depending on tourism for their living and since the revolution a huge

blow was delivered to tourism.

Hassan is from Luxor, he came four years ago to Marsa Alam and works as a taxi driver for one of the tourist's agencies.

Hassan is one of those semi skilled laborers who are paying a very high price for Egypt pump transition to democracy.

"Every time we heard about new political protests and violence in Cairo, we know that this would have an impact on our livelihood, we need stability, we need investors, we need tourists, I used to earn around 3000LE (App.\$300) before the 25th of January 2011 revolution but now I earn only 500 LE and excepting a decrease every day" Hassan desperately said.

Hungry for tourists

Since the "Arab spring revolution" the number of tourists dropped significantly, 14.7 million tourists in 2010, to 9.8 million tourists in 2011.

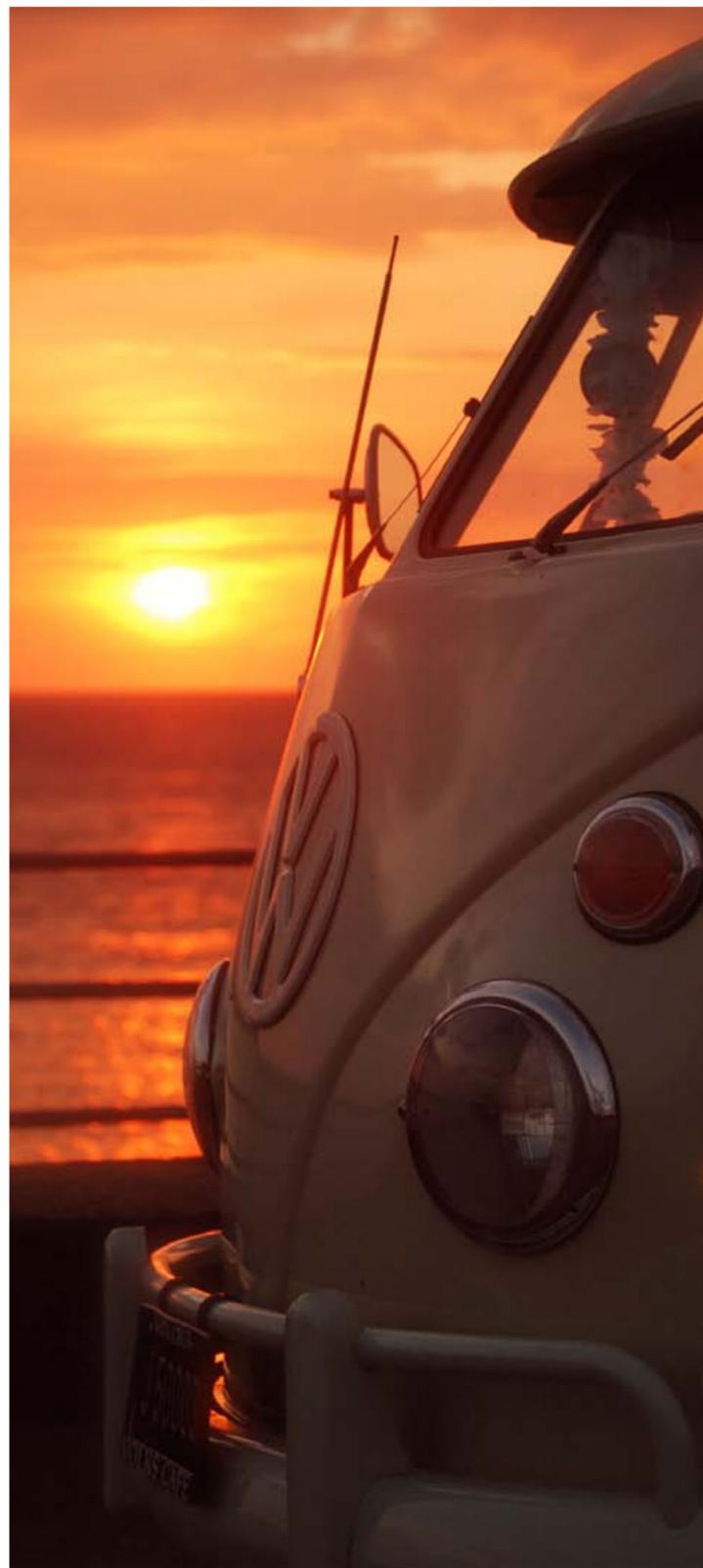
And now after the 30th of June 2nd revolution and the end of the Muslim Brotherhood rule, Egypt is still hungry for tourists.

According to Tourism Experts; Security is the main reason for the catastrophic drop in tourism and to bring tourism back we need stability and security.

Major European travel companies have canceled bookings through the past years after televised scenes of chaos.

"We are all bleeding but we are living on a hope that tourism will take off again. If not we will definitely be prepared for a 3rd revolution ... a hunger revolution."

Egyptians hope that the tourism restores its former glory after being in shade for years but until this happen; they hope it may not be too late for Hassan and every person like him to survive.



Sunset for tourism? A lonely bus parking at a deserted beach at the Red Sea



Hassan, a bus driver who lost his job and his way

by Moushira Adel

Jazz in Cairo, Yoga in Sinai

Egypt is full of festivals. Can they be a tool to attract more tourists? A journey through the charming nights of cultural events

Egypt is a country with an immense cultural mix. In every major city you will find traditions that remain from the era of the Pharaohs, and in other parts you will find pure tribal customs that were brought in by many invaders throughout the centuries. Therefore, Egypt Culture minister, Dr. Mohamed Saber stresses on the importance of cultural events to promote for tourism.

• Luxor African Film Festival: spotlight on African movies

LAFF was launched in 2012 as an attempt to strengthen African cinema in Egypt, to decentralise Egypt's cultural agenda, and to move events beyond the borders of Cairo and Alexandria to other historically rich places, like Luxor. Organisers hope to draw 10,000 attendees from all the continent.

luxorafricanfilmfestival.com

• Cairo International Jazz Festival: famous musicians

Under the auspices of the Ministry of tourism the 5th Edition of Cairo International Jazz Festival took place in March 2013 at Al Azhar Park-Genena Theater. The festival included jazz orchestras from United States, Europe and other countries. Celebrities like Gilberto Gil who served as Minister of Culture in Brazil, the

well-known Spanish Flamenco singer Diego El Cigala, the French singer Christophe Wallemme, the American Singer KJ Denhart, and the famous Lebanese singer Ziad El Rahbani, attended the festival.

Cairo International Jazz Festival also hosts a number of side events such as workshops, master classes, film screening, and kids programs. Cairo International Jazz Festival was founded in March 2009. The



Musicians at the Cairo Jazz Festival: Will it rock tourists numbers?

festival has managed to maintain a reputation of presenting the best of Jazz of the world.

cairojazzfest.com

• Yoga Festival at Sharm El Sheikh: serenity in Sinai

Looking for health of mind and body? Do you need to balance your energies? Egypt's 5th International Yoga Festival offers a very nice travel experience. Taking place at Sharm el Sheikh, the trip also allows you to experience the beauty and serenity of the natural Sinai landscape.

The last International Yoga Festival lasted from 26th April 2012 to 1st May 2012. Egypt First International Yoga Festival was held in March 2006 at El Gouna, Red Sea. This was the first time a yoga festival to be held in Egypt, and in the Middle East. This year the theme of the festival will be 'Egypt Back to Freedom', which is the highest goal of yoga, and also for the freedom of the people of Egypt, following their successful revolution in February 2011.

yogafestival.com



Luxor hosting African films

• Ismailia Int. Folklore Arts Festival: Arab's greatest

The city of Ismailia in eastern Egypt organizes this festival in cooperation with the Egyptian Tourist Authority in September, each year folkloric troupes of different nationalities gather in Ismailia to present the culture and art of their countries through dance and theatre performances. More than 2,000 folk dancers from all over the world participate in the triennial festival. The colorful celebration of folkloric art from Africa, Europe and Asia in Ismailia claims to be the greatest arts festival in the Arab world.

ismailia.gov.eg

by Mai El-Kott

Kiters still go for Egypt

Can sports turn the tourism back to normal?



Riding the waves: Surfers enjoying the perfect conditions of the Red Sea Resort Ras Sudr, only 195 kilometre east of Cairo in Sinai

On a sunny day in Ras Sudr, walking towards the sandy beach looking at the shallow lagoon, a shout of excitement is heard “wind, wind”. Islam rushes towards the beach and shouts: “It’s time to kite”.

After spending the day on the beach watching the surfers enjoy their rides practicing new tricks and flicks, we sat down with a group of kite surfers to get more insight.

We couldn’t help but notice how excited everyone got when the wind came blowing.

Steve, is laughing: “It’s like being in love with a girl you can’t have. You just have to wait”

Randa Tobgy, a young lady with red hair and Steve’s surfing student nods along: “Wind is essen-

tial- but also is a nice beach and Ras Sudr on the west coast of Sinai has one of the best beaches I have come to”. Ras Sudr which is two hour drive away from Cairo international airport, has been attracting an increasing number of kite surfers for the past six years. Kite surfers haven’t stopped coming to Egypt even during the political turbulence the country is facing.

“Why Ras Sudr?”

However, after the toppling of the former president Morsi in June it wasn’t safe to travel on the road and the curfew didn’t make it easy for surfers to come to Ras Sudr. Two months later one of the biggest international kite surfing competitions was held in Egypt; It was a huge success witnessing

60 participants from all over the world from South Africa to New Zealand and the States.

Steve Walden, a British native who traveled 2230 miles to be here says: “Ras Sudr has strong wind on more than 200 days a year along with its amazing lagoons making it a kite surfing haven. I have been kite surfing for 10 years and never enjoyed it as much as here in Sinai”

Randa, a 25 year old software developer from Cairo says: “I first came with some friends to Ras Sudr and thought there is no way I can do that. But Steve gave me my first baby steps and I never looked back since then. Nothing beats the feeling of freedom this sport gives you.”

Steve is an experienced Surfing Instructor and owns a kiting

center in Ras Sudr agrees: “Most girls are scared to start because they think they need to be really strong”. He explains: “But in reality, people of all sizes, ages and strength levels can kite. You’re not holding on to the kite with your arms, you’re steering the kite with your arms. The kite itself is attached to your harness around your waist.”

“Bright future”

Islam El Sherif, a marketing expert from Cairo agrees: “I love the sense of thrilling and freedom it gives me. I am always excited to learn a new tricks.”

Randa, also admits: “All I can think of every Thursday in the office is the new trick I am going to try this weekend.”

There are a number of competitions that occur in Egypt, the biggest is King of the Lagoon an annual international competition in Ras Sudr started in 2008.

“Kite surfing is an extremely young sport and Egypt has one of the best spots in the world to enjoy this magnificent sport”, says Steve. “But Ras Sudr has few hotels where you can sleep over during your weekend, it needs to have more facilities to offer packages to tourists and attract families.”

Islam added: “There are other spots that are perfect for kite surfing like Abu Galum in Sinai where wind reaches 24 knots. But they need more focus and infrastructure from the country.”

by Ahmed Ossama and Mohamed Kandeel



“We need more hotels”, says Islam El Sherif



“Who said girls can’t kite-surf?”, asks Randa Tobgy



“I can live here forever”, says Steve Walden

Local healthy holiday replacing foreign tourism

Cairo fitness club explores beach resorts all over Egypt – 300 dollars for four days

It is early morning, In Sahl Hasheesh - one of Egypt’s prime locations, eighteen kilometers south of Hurghada and the largest fully integrated resort community on the red sea with perfect landscapes that takes your breath away, where sparkling sandy beaches, the nearby Red Sea mountains, majestic deserts and superb climate makes it the place of safety of absolute calmness. Standing around are eighty five young people doing their morning workouts with stallions, all what they want is to have a long weekend leaving their troubles behind to achieve optimal wellness and get know new people.

Organizers of the fitness camp is Stallions, Egypt’s largest fitness club, the idea is inspired by Karim ismail, an athlete and trainer from Cairo. His aim is to design new programs to improve people fitness and help them commit to a healthy lifestyle. But he wants more than this, Stallions

wants to encourage the internal tourism in Egypt by taking the fitness camps to different spots in Egypt. they did three camps; one in Ras-Sudr west of Sinai, one in Sahl Hasheesh south of Hurghada and one in El Gouna south of Hurghada and still planning for more. Every time the number of participants increases, they started with 20 participant and now they almost reach hundred.

“My first time to train with stallions, was in their intensive boot camp in Sahl Hasheesh, I really enjoyed the friendly atmosphere they created”, said Hassan El Manadily, one of the athletes participating in Sahl Hasheesh Stallions bootcamp.

“We stayed there for three nights and four days, we paid three hundred dollars, on a daily basis, there was three workouts and the rest of the day was free time”, answered Manadily when asked how he spends his days in the trip.



Fitness revives tourism: Egyptians working out in the holiday resort Sahl Hashish at the Red Sea

“It was really a great experience, stallions bootcamp motivates people to match fitness goals and help them to commit to a healthy lifestyle through regime of high performance training by supporting and encouraging each

other, but what I liked the most in the place is the lagoons and sandy beaches and endless sea view, I also loved the architecture of the resort that is splendid with domes arches and columns”, said Manadily.

“What I loved most in Stallions that the atmosphere is always fun as it combines both sports and socializing, people are very friendly, we treat each other as one family, the trainers are very sociable, pleasant and down to earth, I really enjoyed the freedom of attending group activities”, said Manadily while describing his experience and what he loved about the trip.

Tourist experts are hoping that more fitness and sports organizations in Egypt could organize regular trips to help in encouraging the internal tourism, and they are also waiting for Stallions’ next intensive bootcamp.

by Ola El Rakhawy

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