



The Hurgahada Tourist Village eventually will have 200 bungalows around a clubhouse, all in the style of a bikini-and-fun Club Med resort.

## Red goes Med New-wave resort

by the sea,  
by the sea

Story and Photos:  
By IRIS SANDERSON JONES

HURGHADA, Egypt — A deep blue sea washes a golden sand beach. But this is the Red Sea, not the Caribbean, and the sand beach flows for a desolate 100 miles to the horizon.

Can you really build a tourist resort on the edge of the Eastern Desert, in a land so barren that water must be hauled from a single nearby well or piped hundreds of miles from the Nile?

When I arrived at this new resort, I was cynical. The sign that read "Welcome to Paradise" was backed by a desert that only a camel could love.

When I left, I had a different view about deserts. The Eastern Desert never lost its barren look, but it has advantages after all.

It literally never rains here. The sun is hot but dry, and the average summer temperature is 70-90 F. It is sun hat and suntan lotion weather in the noon-day sun.

The tourist trade hasn't discovered it yet, so the people who live in the nearby desert village are curious and friendly. There is nothing but disco and authentic bedouin dance entertainment to distract you from the eating and drinking and playing that are at the heart of resort life.

Best of all, there is the Red Sea, described by marine experts as the last unpolluted sea in the world. It has an underwater smorgasbord for snorkeling, scuba diving and above-or-under-water photography.

**WHERE IS HURGHADA?** If you think of Egypt as a square 600 miles long and wide, with a green river valley called the Nile cutting it in half north to south, the Eastern Desert covers most of the land from the Nile to the Suez Canal and the Red Sea.

It is a 45-minute flight or a seven-hour drive southeast from Cairo, or a four-hour drive east from Luxor, to Hurgahada. The Egyptian government is encouraging public and private investment here, as well as on the Mediterranean coast near Alexandria, as part of its effort to add 27,000 hotel rooms and double the tourist trade by 1983.

There are no antiquities here, although the desert sand had filled in the swimming pool of this resort hotel when it was abandoned during construction because of the Mideast war.

No battles have been fought here, but it has been an extensive military zone. Even now you must put cameras away and go through security to check in at the army-run Hurgahada airport.

The hotel opened as the Hurgahada Sheraton this month. A second resort, run on the Club Med principle, opens one mile to the south next fall.

The Hurgahada Sheraton is built on the courtyard theme, with rooms built like stacked circular bracelets around an open atrium. Tourists use the hotel as a homestead, eating, drinking, dancing and socializing inside the hotel or on the terraces and beaches. The only place to go, except by bus to the nearby village, is out to sea.

Phase two of the hotel includes an international diving center, but the main occupation at sea right now is fishing.

AS THE MOTORBOAT moves across the sea at dawn, the low desert

landscape makes a golden ring around the water. The low hills of Hurgahada are behind us and the sawtoothed sandstone mountains of the Eastern Desert are misted in blue against the western horizon.

To the east is Saudi Arabia. To the northeast, the Sinai has just been transferred back from Israel to Egypt.

Tourists are sitting in fishing chairs at the back of the boat and on the short upper deck, all of them eating breakfast that has been served in lunch boxes.

"My daddy wouldn't have called that fishing" said a voice that was clearly from Mississippi. Below on the fountain aft, an Egyptian deckhand bails a red that makes the only skyline against the capped blue sea.

The hotel staff assured us that we need only drop our lines overboard and we could "haul in a fish every three or four minutes." The tourists have lines overboard on all sides, but we catch nothing but the reef. The young Egyptian deckhand with the same line and bait, but a lifetime of experience, pulls in a small red fish, called bongos, every few minutes until they are piled against the bulkhead.

On another boat, fisherman have hauled in a 25 km nagell and a 10 km twina fish.

**THE NEARBY VILLAGE** of Hurgahada is one of the main sources of fish in Egypt.

On the village beach, where boats are towed in for repair, another sign of war remains. Smuggled boats, their owners now in jail, rot on the beach.

The village includes a large mosque, and a small shopping area where you can buy authentic bedouin goods. A few blocks away, in the small market street, villagers sell melons, potatoes and huge seashells on either side of a dusty road. This is the Egypt of the ancient desert, with only a few T-shirts and polyester slacks to remind you that it is 1979.

Women robed in black carry pots on their heads and men herd goats down the street. Children follow you, saying, "Hello! American? Welcome? What's your name?"

Tourists are the center of attention here. This is the frontier of tourism. The people are used to soldiers of every kind, now, but they are still curious about tourists from across the sea.

**A SHORT DISTANCE** south of the town and the hotel is the C.M. Magawish Hurgahada Tourist Village being built by MERT Travel, a public-private Egyptian travel organization which is the main organizing force for travel in Egypt.

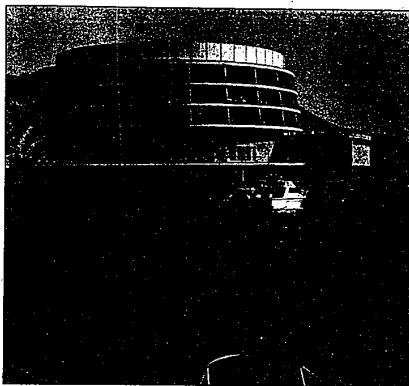
More than 200 bungalows are scattered across the desert landscape around a central clubhouse by the sea. For most of the year, Club Med will run this resort on the bikini-and-fun principle of other Club Med resorts.

Land and water sports facilities will be available, as well as dining room, bar and discotheque.

The village is expected to attract large numbers of young European travelers eager for guaranteed sun in the middle of dreary European winters.

It's a long way from the slums-and-hieroglyphics Egypt that most people come here to see, but it is a definite travel adventure for anyone content to live with sand, seas and first-class cooking.

TWA flies to Cairo from Detroit twice daily from Kennedy airport in New York City. Air Egypt flies twice a week to Hurgahada. For information, contact your travel agent.



The Hurgahada Sheraton is helping to attract tourists to pleasure spots being developed on the Red Sea.

## TRAVEL LOG of Iris Jones



Monday, July 2, 1979

(F1C)

## Some teary eyes, some sad goodbyes

**QENA, Egypt** — As we drive away from this desert city, the young student is waving politely from the town square outside the bus. He no doubt is confused by the shine in my eyes. Why should I get all choked up because a bunch of kids want to shake hands with a stranger?

I've only been in town half an hour, on my way from the Nile to the mountains of the Eastern Desert. My destination is the Red Sea.

All the pictures I carry away in my head from Qena are about hands. Men wave their hands from the steps of an ancient building on the square. A young boy with a big grin waves both hands from the back of a burro, where he is making his friends laugh with his antics. He wants his picture taken and uses all the international kid tricks to attract attention.

There are people scattered around the square, in front of the mosque, lined up at a shop door and gathered around the place where they make pottery. Women go by without raising their eyes but the men and children stare.

**FEW TOURISTS GET** this far off the beaten track. The Arabs in most places are curious and friendly. Only in the most well-known tourist sites like the pyramids and the Valley of the Kings do they push beads in your face or ask for money.

One small child here pushed his small hand forward tentatively and said "baksheesh," the eastern word for "give me money" but his elders scolded him.

That outstretched hand was one more hand of Qena. I grabbed it playfully and circled the palm with my fingertip, singing "All Around the Mulberry Bush."

It was a sensation and soon every small child in town wanted to play "Pop Goes the Weasel."

There was another hand, unseen, that made me jump. I did not expect to get pinched by a teenager in a long Arab robe in a desert town. But the main story of the hands began with the serious young man, perhaps 15 years old, in a pair of slacks and a brown knit shirt. His arms were full of school books, when he stopped in front of me.

"Good morning," he said.

"Good morning."

"Are you American?"

"Yes. You speak English?"

"A little. I learn in school. Where are you from in America?"

"I'm from Detroit," I said. He looked puzzled so I started to talk about living in the city where they make cars. Detroit was as foreign to him as Qena was to me. A crowd of children gathered around us.

**SUDDENLY THE BUS** horn sounded our departure. "Goodbye," I said, shaking his hand. He shook hands solemnly and that's when it happened.

A small hand shot into the circle. It was so low the owner couldn't have been more than 6 or 7 years old. "Goodbye!" he said. I shook his hand, too.

Goodbye, goodbye, goodbye.

Hands shot out on all sides. I waded through them to the bus, shaking their multiple outstretched hands with both of mine and saying "goodbye, goodbye" as I walked.

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