

# SHAPE Sub Aqua Club

## *Egypt Trip*

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**A**lthough I returned to French national duty this past summer, I couldn't help joining the annual SHAPE Sub Aqua Club (SSAC) yearly trip to Egypt. This trip, opened to SSAC and their family, takes place at the same time of the year, at the same place, like a long-awaited family reunion. And, as with every year since I joined the club in 2013, I was not disappointed.

Above all, the welcome of Egyptians was just perfect this year. Being used to a serious downfall in the tourist industry since 1997, things got worse for Hurgh-



ada last year. On 31<sup>st</sup> October 2015 in Sharm el-Sheikh international airport, the crash of Metrojet Flight 9268 was the deadliest terrorist attack both in the history of Russian aviation and within Egyptian territory. For sure, setting foot in Egypt requires a certain cautious behavior. But it is rewarded by the wonders of it. And it is necessary to help preserving them. So we like to mix business with pleasure.



Hurghada Grand resort hotel is a very comfortable place to stay, commonly welcoming German and Russian tourists. The arrival of our little international community always brings a refreshing diversity to the usual dwellers of this hotel: American, Belgian, British, Polish, French, German, Danish, Dutch, Spanish, Irish, Canadian, between friends or complete families, notwithstanding the well-known friendly spirit of any diver community. Many moments were to be remembered by our hotel colleagues or when most of us were sitting outside having a shisha, and our Irish-Canadian diver started singing some of his well-inspired traditional songs, inspiring silence amongst his audience. This happened as well when he started telling us some jokes, inducing burst of laughter's. The mix of accents when chatting all together is the most delightful melody one could imagine, especially after a long day diving. As the tradition is now set, the whole group gathered in the restaurant Samos in the new city center of Hurghada at the end of the trip.

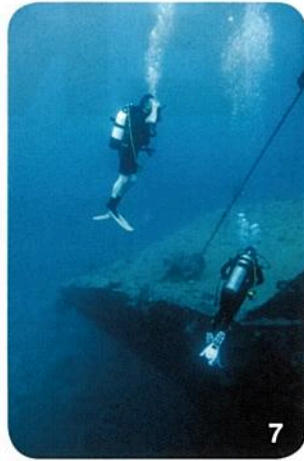
As every year, we also got to celebrate some birthdays. Is it on purpose that this trip is organized somehow around my birthday? I like to think it is. Best way to see how different nationalities celebrate their special day. It is not so different in the end, only friendly feelings and cheering prevail. The all-inclusive makes it even more fun. When birthday occurs on the diving day, the crew gets the best of the boats limited facilities to prepare a cake and accompany the group's rejoicing.

Indeed, more than anywhere else in Egypt, the diver's boat is the best place to be. Our diving company, Aquanaut Blue Heaven, has been providing our club with great dives and





## Travel: The Great Getaway



coral state. The fall in tourist influx might also explain the general improvement, in addition to the effort of Egypt towards more sustainable use of its resources. Yet, the result was visible: less dead corals and lots of sea life everywhere. We were lucky enough to spot crocodile fish, clown fish, or even a very rare pair of robust ghost pipe fishes, so difficult to spot as they look exactly like algae.

fun environment for years now. All is available on board. There are skilled (and very patient) dive guides to diversely experienced divers, competent and friendly crew members to help us with our gear, amazingly tasty food to keep us going, boiling hot tea to warm us up after staying quite a while under water, and a comfortable roof top to get the perfect tan and get our colleagues and friends jealous. The sun is constantly provided in Egypt: it is something we can also rely on.

The wonders of Red Sea underwater are alone worth traveling 4000 km from Belgium, via Germany. Two dives a day for 5 days, one night dive, and plenty to be admired... and captured on our cameras. This year, the group was relatively small and we could all fit on one boat:

the Winner, good omen for a fantastic week. A couple of freshly new divers joined us, making the whole trip even more enthusiastic. The first real dives are just amazing: the first time you are nervous, but it is still the best thing you ever tried. The more you do it, the better it gets. With experience and amongst other divers, you learn new techniques, you go longer and deeper. It is easy to love diving and this yearly family trip to Egypt is the best way to start loving diving.

During the week, we went to very different dive sites from walls to sandy bottoms, or even coral gardens. The water temperature of 27 degrees made it even more pleasurable.

Compared to 2015, the underwater life was far richer. Generally speaking, the Red Sea is full of more than 1,000 species and 200 types of coral. But the 2015 Pacific Tsunamis had an impact on the Red Sea temperature and

Some dive sites were just exceptional by their nature. As an example, the dive on the Hurghada Harbor wreck El Mina is pretty impressive. El Mina is Arabic for "The Harbor". The "Harbor Wreck" is an Egyptian owned, Soviet built type-43 minesweeper, 570 tons, approximately 60m in length and with a beam of 9m. It was destroyed by the Israeli Air Force during the six-day war between Egypt and Israel in 1967. It was our deepest dive (close to 30 m deep).

To have a perfect stay, one also needs to relax, at least that's how I see it. We tried a remotely located spa last



year, and it was some kind of experience. We had to do it again this year, twice for my part. Wasn't it Cleopatra who was known for being the most beautiful woman in human history? She certainly had great beauty secrets such as milk baths with almond oil and honey, golden masks. Better try those secrets when you are in Egypt, don't you think? The Lotus Hamman Spa is the place to use for such purpose. One can also walk in local shops and get some very inexpensive and efficient local beauty products, Argan, Sesame, and Moringa oils or even hibiscus tea. Of course, shopping in Egypt is always a must-do, especially if you are after refined golden jewels. Egyptian goldsmiths are particularly talented. Same for oriental pastries. This is for local production. All those made even more tempting by the fall of the exchange rate of Egyptian pound to Euro.

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1. 2. 3. Group picture / Hurghada Grand Resort Hotel 4. Crocodile Fish sleeping on a wreck 5. Safety Stop! 6. Robust Ghost Pipe Fish 7. 8. Wreck El Mina, torpedoes are still stuck in the wreck! 9. 10. 11. 12. 13. 14. Egyptian architect during Pharaoh's time.



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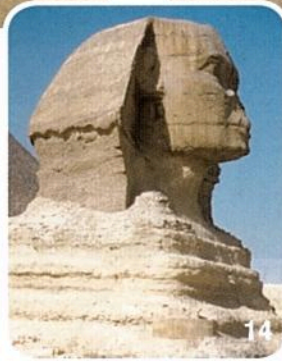


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Even better to leave the dive chapter and enjoy Egyptian real life, are the two visits that were organized by our club. They were animated in the best manner ever by our guide, Botrous Helmy alias Peter, with Timeless Egypt Tours. He has been showing the beauties of Cairo and Karnak temples to successive groups for a couple of years now. Flowery English and jokes are always part of the show.

Our first trip was organized on Tuesday to get visit Luxor, to see the tombs of former Pharaohs in the Valley of the Kings, the Temple of Hatshepsut Temple, the second historically confirmed female pharaoh, the Colossi of Memnon which "whispers" when the weather is windy, and finally the Karnak Temples.

Our second trip was to Cairo. Getting up very early morn-



ing could not spoil the pleasure of taking a grasp of the capital and its pyramids. "From the heights of these pyramids, forty centuries look down on us," said Napoleon Bonaparte during a speech to his troops in Egypt (21 July 1798).

As with the Luxor trip, Cairo was full of wonder. We started the visit with the Pyramids, then we joined, on a camel back, the panoramic view to take some pictures and then drove to see the well-known Sphinx.

In the afternoon we went to the Egyptian Museum to see a part of Tutankhamun's treasure with the famous golden mask made of more than 10 kg of gold. We ended the day by spending a few Egyptian Pounds in the famous Cairo market, Khan el-Khalili, to buy scarfs, statues and souvenirs.