



Devil's Head: Egypt's unexplored natural beauty

Ahmed Megahid

Cairo

Devil's Head can be totally cut off of all modern-day features: Paved roads, skyscrapers and modern cars are nowhere to be found.

Nonetheless, the parched area – 500km east of Cairo and on the fringes of the coastal town of Nuweiba on the Sinai peninsula – is never dissociated from excitement, rest and meditation.

None of the thousands of people who visit the area know where its name came from. Some attribute the “Devil's Head” to its location on the tip of Nuweiba's Red Sea coast. Others ascribe it to the magnificent coral off the coast and its particular marine life.

Regardless of this, Devil's Head has become an Egyptian attraction unmatched by any tourist site in the country.

“This is one of the most fascinating places in this country because it gives nature and meditation lovers everything they need,” said

Karim Ahmed, a tour guide. “From the very simple nature of accommodation in the area, to the beach, the very nice activities visitors can make there and the food, Devil's Head offers visitors an experience that lingers in their memory for years.”

Devil's Head is breathtaking at first sight. The area, which is made of a number of camps, depends on the most basic of requirements for life. Televisions are rare, toilets are very simple and the cottage-like rooms of the camps with their palm leaf ceilings have nothing in them but beds, wardrobes and simple mats on the ground.

Under the austere existence, however, there is unlimited joy for nature lovers and adventurers. Outside the simple cottages, visitors find themselves in direct and uninterrupted contact with the clear sky, the Red Sea and the soft sands of the beach.

Jasmine Galal, an Egyptian university student, said she had not known about Devil's Head before friends invited her to a five-day stay there.

“I did not hear about it before but when my friends told me about it I collected information about the place from the internet and was excited,” Galal said. “When I got there, however, I

discovered that everything written about the place was a painful understatement.”

Rich in natural beauty, Devil's Head is a place for those who do not want to spend a lot of money. The area's camps charge a visitor a maximum of \$22 per night, including bed, breakfast and dinner.

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The camps serve Bedouin cuisine. Breakfast usually includes fava beans, eggs with *pastirma* (a highly seasoned, air-dried cured beef of Anatolian origin), *baba ghanoush* (a Levantine dish of eggplant mixed with onions, tomatoes, olive oil and various seasonings) and red tea. Dinners usually contain fish cooked in a manner suitable to the type of the catch and rice or pasta.

Most noticeable inside the camps is the generosity of workers, room service and the people who serve food, visitors said.

Galal said she was surprised that most of the food offered her and her friends during their stay in Devil's Head was more than enough in each meal.

“Sometimes I had to leave almost half the dishes I was offered because there was so much food, although it was all so delicious,” Galal said.

Devil's Head is not, meanwhile, only about the sky, the breeze, the sea and the sands, those who know the place will say.

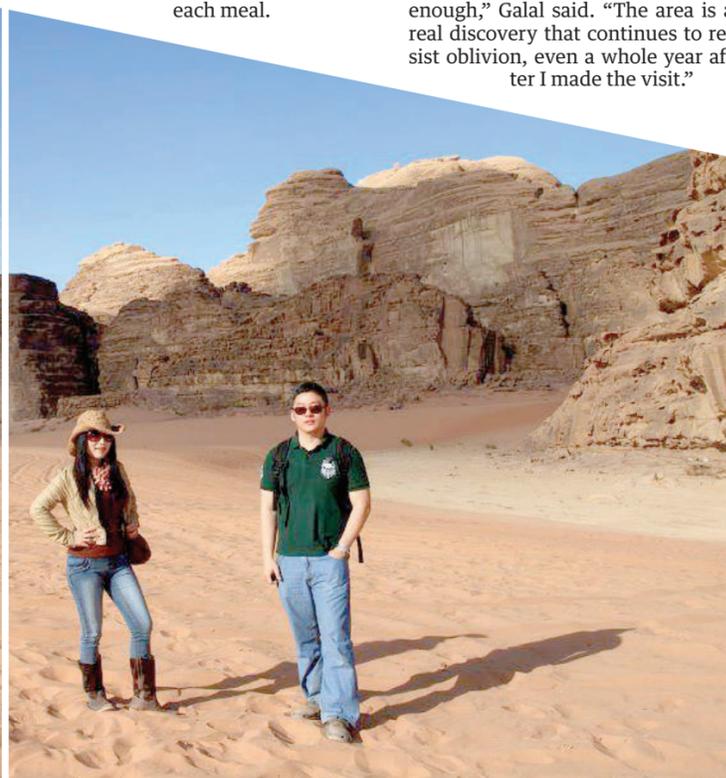
“It is only the gate to a whole world of adventure and beauty,” tourism expert Sameh Osman said. “Snorkeling, swimming, mountain climbing, safari, camping and enjoying the sun are but a few of the activities visitors can make in the area.”

Close to the area is Tarabeen fortress, a 500-year-old structure built by the Mamluk Sultan Ashraf al-Ghawri to defend Sinai from Ottoman invaders. The fortress was also used for security purposes, especially during the Muslim pilgrimage season.

Safaris into the desert and mountainous hinterland of Devil's Head are always rewarding. The mountains and the hills that fill the space for kilometres behind the Red Sea coast assume diverse colours and offer visitors a generous treat of beauty.

Snorkeling is a memorable experience in this area with colourful coral and fish that take divers to a world of dreams.

“There are so many things to do in Devil's Head that any stay, regardless of how long it is, is never enough,” Galal said. “The area is a real discovery that continues to resist oblivion, even a whole year after I made the visit.”



Foreign tourists during a safari in the desert in Devil's Head.



Agenda

Dubai:
Through September 24th

Cirque Du Soleil returns to Dubai with a new concept called *Var-ekai*, which means “wherever”. The acrobatic performances take place at the Dubai World Trade Centre.

Tangier:
September 22nd-25th

The 17th *Tangier's Jazz Festival* hosts renowned international and local jazz artists for one of Morocco's premier cultural events. Festival guests have the opportunity to attend free street performances, free dance courses and jazz concerts.

Washington:
October 5th-9th

The annual *DC Palestinian Film and Arts Festival* (DCPFAF) returns for a sixth year, bringing 33 films, five talks and an impressive visual exhibit to Washington. This year's festival is titled: *Palestine Across the Diaspora: Stories on Home and Migration*. The aim of the DCPFAF is to reflect the dynamic formation of a transnational identity common to Palestinians and diasporic communities in general.

Beirut:
October 5th-13th

Established in 1997, the *Beirut International Film Festival* has evolved from a mainstream film festival to an event with eclectic and daring selections as banned subjects are the focus of many of festival submissions. Carlos Chahine will serve as the festival jury president. Organisers plan several activities throughout the year leading to the festival's 20th anniversary in 2017.

London:
October 21st-November 6th

The *Nour Festival of Arts* highlights the best contemporary Middle Eastern and North African arts and culture each October and November in venues across Kensington and Chelsea in London. The festival programme features exhibitions, music, cinema, food, talks and dance performances.

Abu Simbel, Egypt:
October 22nd

Twice a year during the *Abu Simbel Sun Festival*, people gather at the Abu Simbel temple, to see the sunrise provide a unique show. The temple is situated so that twice a year – during February and October – on the anniversaries of the birth and coronation of Ramses II, the sun lights up an internal chamber. After viewing statues of Ramses and Queen Nefertari, visitors celebrate by enjoying food as well as the dance and singing programmes arranged by local residents.

Tunis:
October 28th-November 5th

The *Carthage Film Festival* is an annual festival that showcases films from the Maghreb, Africa and the Middle East. In its 27th edition, the festival will take place in Tunisia over eight days. A parallel programme will include world cinema projections, seminars, debates and meetings. The 2016 festival will celebrate the 50th anniversary of the event's founding in 1966.

We welcome submissions of calendar items related to cultural events of interest to travellers in the Middle East and North Africa.

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