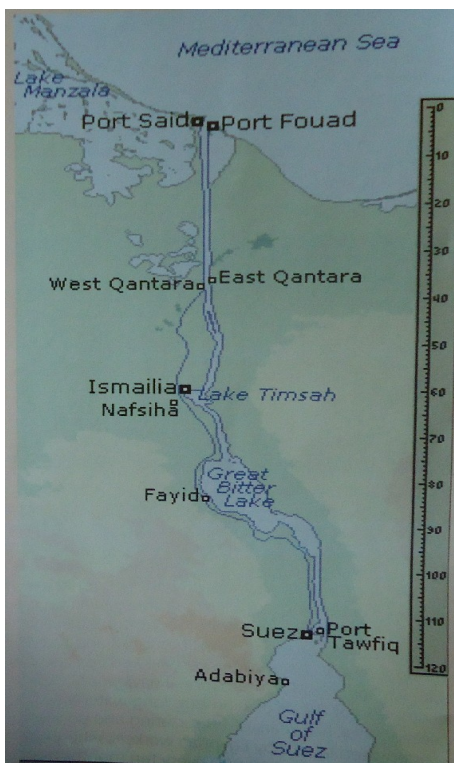


Thursday 19 January 2012 – Suez Canal 15° Bright

Today we are travelling through the Suez Canal, we've done the Panama Canal a few times but this one is different, much more political and no locks. The canal is 101 miles long, 60 metres wide and it costs our cruise liner £173,000 to go one way. When it was first built it started off at 22 feet deep and is now about 75 feet deep. Approximately 50 ships sail through the canal each day. It takes about 9 hours cruising at about 6-7 knots to navigate the length of it. Ships up to 20m (66ft) draft or 240,000 tons and up to a maximum height of 68m (254ft) above water level and maximum width of 77.5m (254ft) can pass through it. Most of canal is limited to a single lane of traffic but there are 4 bypasses which allows the transit of ships in both directions. We weren't awake when we entered the canal as it was 1am but spent most of the morning listening to the commentary and enjoying the experience. It's not a particularly interesting journey, there is sand for miles on either side (96% of Egypt is desert) but there are a few towns on the port side and some Bedouin settlements along the way. There were more people about than I imagined performing military manoeuvres, armed police/guards and a few fishermen. The alternative is to sail around the Cape of Good Hope. An oil tanker going from Saudi Arabia to US has 2,700 extra miles to travel if they can't use the canal. Between 2008 and 2010 the canal lost 10% of traffic due to the threat of piracy from Somalia and another 10% due to the financial crisis. The downside to the canal is that currently about 300 marine species from the Red Sea have been identified in the Mediterranean Sea impacting seriously on the Mediterranean ecosystem.



Rick actually suggested we watch the classical pianist Sebastian Stanley. He was amazing and played for 45 minutes from memory – no music sheets !!! I am just about ready for a gentle gym session – not going to go mad like before. We have to have an early night as it's a 6pm breakfast tomorrow. We are on pirate watch so Rick can't sit on the balcony to smoke his cigar!
Port Said to Aqaba 390 nm

Friday 20 January 2012 – Aqaba, Jordan 0° – 5° sun, rain, blizzard, snow, drizzle, cloudy.

Aqaba is Jordan's only port and is also becoming a tourist resort because of its sandy beaches and coral reefs. Its chief export is phosphates and its main industries are agriculture and tourism. Jordan is a pleasant surprise after Egypt, most Jordanians are well educated, although there is a lot of unemployment, they have a democracy and the towns are clean. It's still a bit of a dodgy area

though as where we are berthed four countries are visible: on the port beam Egypt; on the port bow, Israel; on the starboard bow and beam, Jordan; and on the starboard quarter, Saudi Arabia.

As you can see from above we have been through a range of temperatures and weather conditions. We had booked a tour to see Petra, an UNESCO site and one of the modern wonders of the world. We set off in sunshine and before we knew it we were in the mountains with almost nil viability and snow. This is definitely the wrong way to go round the world, it's been freezing so far and it really was freezing today. After the biting wind in Greece I was quite well prepared: I wore foundation to protect my face as it took four days for my face to calm down after Athens, and wore a vest, one of Rick's polo shirts, a woollen jumper, a fleece, a waterproof jacket, woollen hat and gloves. I still had cold fingers and toes. It was worth the long coach journey and weather conditions as Petra was really something special. Petra was on the caravan route (lots of camels) running from Yemen to the Mediterranean Sea. Caravans were laden with frankincense, gold, silk and other rich merchandise. The Nabataeans (locals at the time) got rich by taxing the goods. Most of the city was carved out of the sandstone during the first century BC and first century AD but a lot of it has been destroyed by earthquakes and weathering. We had to walk about 2.5 miles through the Siq, which is a narrow mountain pass, to reach the city. The Bedouins lived in the caves there until 1985 but to preserve the city and its monuments they were relocated to a nearby village. Today most of them work as local guides, with the horses and camels and tourist shops on the site. Some of the children were shouting "Two for One, make my day". Many of them speak English, French and Spanish and still have retained their Bedouin traditions.



The narrow Siq with the first glimpse of The Treasury which is carved out of the sandstone

Back to the ship for the Tropical theme evening – it's a bit cold for that but I did make an effort. Our table companions, Stuart and Hilly, had lunch in a Bedouin tent. Stuart has bought Hilly a poncho but says it smells of camel dung and wood smoke.

Aqaba to Safaga 174 nm

Saturday 21 January 2012 – Safaga 17° – sunny

There's not much at Safaga, it exists solely as a commercial port for grain imported from Australia and US and to export aluminium. It's a 30 minute taxi ride to Hurghada where there are lots of hotels with private beaches. We decided to stay on board as it's not really hot enough to spend the day at the beach and as it happens all the shops and restaurants were closed today. Egypt is very dirty and they continually hassle you. Most of the passengers today are off to Luxor, Karnak and the Valley of the Kings but we've done that already and it really was amazing. Each day we get a copy of "Horizon" the ship's information paper to help us plan the day's activities. We met a chap yesterday who said he enjoys a leisurely breakfast in his cabin each day and that his cabin steward sets it all out for him. I ordered mine for 7.30am to give me time to digest it before my "Stretch & Relax". I had a restless night wondering if they would just come into the cabin with it, would I

need to be dressed and what about Rick. There is no way he will get himself dressed at that time in the morning just so that I can have breakfast in the room. As I was so restless I got up at 7am and put my dressing gown on. Breakfast eventually arrived at 7.50am and I'm not sure if he knocked and came in or if I opened the door. Anyway, he was stressed and forgot most of what I ordered and had to keep rushing in and out. He didn't set anything out and I never did get my orange juice. Rick, still naked in bed, said the problem is that we don't have a suite and that chap probably even has a dining room table. No-one including the instructor turned up for "Stretch & Relax" but we made the cinema in time for "The Debt". The technicians must have all gone ashore as it was pitch black and all the oldies were using their walking sticks to find seats. We then spent 15 minutes listening to just the sound, no picture until Rick managed to sort out a technician. There are quite a few launderettes on board, all free, and I did 3 loads a few days ago running up and down between two floors. It's a real experience as normally meek and mild women turn into tyrants once they enter the launderette, it's a frightening experience. It's Rick's turn tonight, he's not done it before and is panicking that he's not doing it properly. He lost the bag and is breathless running in and out and up and down. Elaine will be interested to know that as this is a bigger ship than we are used to and as a few fatalities are always expected the medical centre has a fridge to take up 20 people. Another thing we have been told is that they have sonic guns attached to the ship to use on pirates. We've now got 5 days at sea before we reach Dubai, let's hope the weather warms up.