

Bedouin Paths Ltd

Bedouin Lives – Column 10: Saturday 20th September 2008

"Ramadan, Bedouin Style..."

Ah Ramadan. As everyone knows the work ethic during Ramadan is, how shall we put it, slightly lessened. The Bedouin take their Ramadan very seriously, especially the lessened work ethic bit, and correspondingly spend most of the day in various forms of rest and repose. This is mainly achieved by staying up as late as possible the previous night and staying in and sleeping as much as possible during the day. Therefore not much happens.

The benefits of this policy is twofold; firstly there is less time spent hungry and thirsty and secondly (more importantly) there is less time spent suffering from nicotine withdrawal. The Bedouins smoke. In fact the number of times per day a Bedouin will reach for his cigarette packet is exceeded only by the number of his breaths. The lack of cigarettes is a pitiful sight and the Bedouin will spend the last hour before Iftar peering anxiously at his watch, a look of ever increasing desperation on his face as he counts down the minutes before he can light up again. The cigarette packet is beside him, opened. A cigarette is pointing out and the lighter is ready by the side. The Bedouin will shift slightly, gaze around, look up to the sky, shift again and then peer once more at their watch. Meanwhile nothing happens.

Nothing that is, except for a small hardy band of Bedouin who act as guides for the hikes. They continue to take the customers through the mountains, pack the camels, make tea over camp fires and do all the work that is expected of them. They seem impervious to the heat and the fasting and carry on as usual. Westerners like myself feel a pang of guilt every time we take a sip of water or munch a biscuit. They get bigger tips during Ramadan hikes.

The work schedules we have in place have come to a grinding halt. The rebuilding in the gardens slows down to a crawl, the school appears deserted and the camp is a quiet reflection of its normal self. Nothing is still happening.

The Bedouin have no real concept of forward planning and time to them is an abstract concept at the best of times. Ramadan is perfect for them since it allows them to remove all time related activities from their lives and concentrate on what they do best; which is gossiping. So nothing continues to happen.

As a non-muslim however, I am expected to rush around as usual and perform my tasks and responsibilities. The Bedouin expect everything to carry on as normal at my end. With whom I am expected to do my tasks is not clear. No-one is around. Staff wander in mid morning and then disappear. They wander back again mid afternoon and then disappear again. They finally return after Iftar, with a continuous cigarette in their hands. Now suddenly everything happens.

Everyone sees everyone else, food is eaten, calls are made, drink is drunk and packets of cigarettes are consumed by the dozen. By midnight, they are fully primed and ready to go on until dawn prayers. I am

expected to join them but need my beauty sleep so I turn in early (by their standards) and go to bed. I awake and wander around the camp. Nothing happens.

Bedouin Paths runs ethical hiking tours out of their Bedouin Camp in St. Katherine in Sinai. Contact mark at mark@bedouinpaths.com or call the Bedouin Camp on +20 189662010 or go to the website at www.bedouinpaths.com .