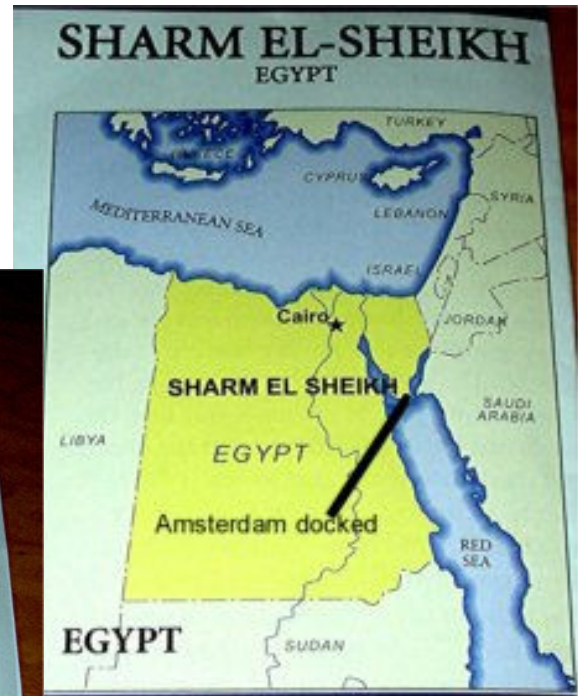
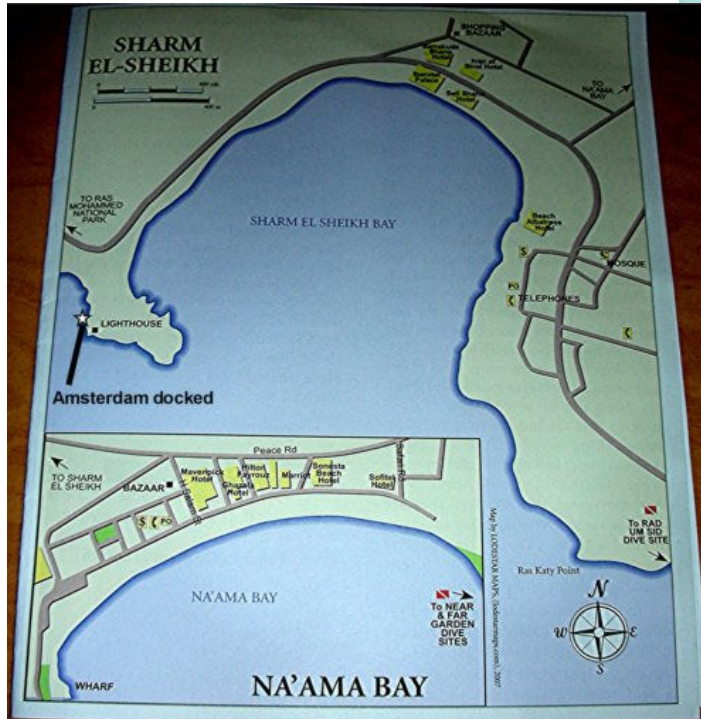


4/2/07 Day 77 – Sharm el Sheikh, Egypt -
Monday, 2 April, 2007: We arrived in the harbor
of Sharm el Sheikh, Egypt about 7am with clear
sky and cool, comfortable temperature. The name
Sharm el Sheikh is Arabic and has the meaning in
English of Bay of the Sheik. Here is where we
were located on the map.



As we entered the
harbor here is
what we saw.

The large white
ship was the
Oriana and lots of
small boats were
visible.



The ship was scheduled to leave Sharm el Sheikh at 2pm so this was a short visit. We took a bus tour that provided a brief overview of the main part of the town and some of the surrounding area. The first thing we noticed was the presence of a lot of Egyptian security/army personnel. The bus picked us up at the ship but before we could leave the



dock area we had to get off the bus and go through a metal detector. This is where we picked up an escort who sat beside the driver. The escort gentleman was dressed in a nice dark suit and occasionally when he got up to leave the bus his jacket was pulled aside to reveal a serious looking pistol in an underarm holster. There were 5 or 6 buses and we were

kept in a convoy, probably for security purposes.

Our guide's name was Henz and she spoke very good English. Henz explained a little of the recent local history. In 1956 Egypt nationalized the Suez Canal and took it from England. In 1967 Israel occupied the Sinai Peninsula in the Six Day War. In 1979 there was a peace treaty between Egypt and Israel but Israel stayed in Sharm el Sheikh. In 1982 Israel withdrew from Sharm el Sheikh. Henz said that in the 1967 to 1982 time period Israel started the building of an infrastructure that supported a tourist industry. When Israel gave up the area the Egyptians continued the development of Sharm el Sheikh as a tourist destination. Our friends, Paul and Maria Bradley said that they enjoyed flying down to Sharm el Sheikh from England during the 1980s and 1990s for their vacations. Swimming in the bay and diving along the local coral reef are main attractions of Sharm el Sheikh. Paul and Maria observed that the hotel and other tourist facilities in the town had been significantly increased and improved since they used to come here.

The tour bus took us through the town of Sharm el Sheikh which looked pretty much like any small tourist town. There were lots of souvenir shops, restaurants, gambling casinos, and hotels. We asked the guide about the gambling casinos and she said that because gambling is ruled out in the Muslim religion, Egyptians are not allowed to gamble in the casinos but tourists from other countries are encouraged to gamble in Sharm el-Sheik. This seems like a difficult rule to enforce and we probably don't have the whole story on this subject.



We also ran across the local Hard Rock Café in Sharm el Sheikh.

The restaurant shown below looked inviting.



The tour took us to a national park and protected area along the coast north of Sharm el Sheikh. Our guide pointed out the over all of Egypt there are 24 protected areas that cover a total of 9 percent of Egypt's land area. We passed

quickly through the small town area and out into the countryside. However, extensive recent construction in the form of condos or apartment houses was evident alongside the road. Here are some typical views.



The guide said the rent in these apartments would probably be about \$1000 USD per month. Not too bad by US standards but for most Egyptians, way out of reach according to our guide.

When we arrived at the park the wind had suddenly picked up and was blowing hard.



Here our guide, Henz, on the left talks with one of the passengers on the tour.

The mangrove trees can be seen growing in the shallow sea water of the coast. Below are some fishermen shacks that were next to the national park on the beach.



While we were in the park area we were entertained by a singing and dancing group of brightly dressed people. These people represented the Bedouin tribes that the guide said inhabited the Sinai Peninsula. In the



background are mangrove trees growing in the shallow sea water. The guide was persistent in telling us how much the Egyptian government is trying to preserve the natural habitat. Some of the more energetic tourists just couldn't resist joining in the dancing. Here, Evelyn decides to spin out of the group.



Sharm el Sheikh is a tourist destination for many people other than cruise ship passengers. These tourists have rented all terrain vehicles (ATVs) and taken a ride out to the park. Not shown in the picture was a jeep with a couple armed security people who accompanied the ATVs.

Our trip to the back country was capped off by sighting of a lone dromedary.



We returned to the port and got back through the security gate. The security guard on our bus left us here and joined his friends on the sidewalk.



The Amsterdam got underway for the Suez Canal about 2pm. We traveled north in the Gulf of Suez. There were some oil rigs in the water on the East coast of Egypt. As the sun was setting Barbara got this silhouette of an oil rig showing a flame of burning waste natural gas on the left end.



Later, in the evening we got together with Paul and Maria for dinner in the Pinnacle Restaurant. That is always a time of good food and conversation that we have looked forward to during the cruise.



With this happy scene of Maria and Barbara with their crème brûlée we brought the day to a close.

Tomorrow we transit the Suez Canal.