
THE HOYA

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FEATURES

Off the Beaten Path

Spring Break in Egypt Proves Necessary

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I thought that I was having adventures in Italy, but the day-to-day Villa grind is a big yawn compared to my spring break. I spent my last two spring breaks back home, in Chicago, where spring doesn't start until June. I spent this one in Egypt.

Saturday

After a bus and two trains, I was a little frazzled by the time I landed in Cairo. I've definitely decided that the next time I enter another continent for the first time, it won't be by myself. Sweaty and terrified, I handed money to people right and left who performed such exerting tasks as carrying my luggage 10 feet or pointing out where the soap is in the bathroom. But I was consoled by the cool Coke cans written in Arabic, and was slightly less neurotic when I finally met my boyfriend in Hurghada, the resort town on the Red Sea where we were staying.

Monday

Our hotel was one of the most surreal places I've ever seen in my life, reminiscent of "Tommy's Holiday Camp." There are approximately three things to do there: swim, eat and sleep - lots and lots of sleep. Occasionally energetic cross-dressing people hired by the hotel (I hope) would try to encourage us to play volleyball, but we just pretended we didn't understand. It was strange to be the only Americans there. (Note: Apparently Russians and Germans are very persistent people. They will not be discouraged from speaking to you in their various languages even if you make it known that you don't speak it yourself.)

Tuesday

Our first adventure. My boyfriend and I went with some of his friends, who study with him in St. Petersburg, on a "safari." The beginning of said "safari" (which I had assumed would be about as intense as the Jungle Cruise at Disneyworld) included a 45-minute hell ride in a Land Cruiser over the desert dunes, at 60 mph with no seat belts, of course. It was like a roller coaster, only with no seatbelts, no tracks, no safety regulations and, instead of being run by and ridden by yokels, was driven by what I can only assume was an Egyptian on PCP and otherwise occupied by very earthy Russians. But I calmed down, as we

reached a small village of sorts, and did touristy but nevertheless cool things like ride camels, smoke hookas, climb the desert mountains and after it was all over, take about half the desert home in our shoes, eyes, noses, ears and hair.

Wednesday

The most exciting part of the day came when my boyfriend stepped on a sea urchin on the coral reef. I was being very good and girlfriendishly concerned until we went back to the place of the occurrence.

While he had been acting like the thing crept up on him, in actuality, it was about the size of a desktop computer and very much resembled an underwater porcupine, so I stopped feeling too sorry for him. However, we did spend some quality time that afternoon throwing rocks at the urchin to teach it a lesson (thus illustrating that yes, spring break does make you stupid.) It was not clear whether we actually brought harm to the anemone, but, as my boyfriend says, we sure "gave it something to think about."

Thursday

Big day. Our trip to Cairo. Land of King Tut (as in "buried with a donkey, he's my favorite honky.")

Pyramid-town.

Sphinxville.

It was absolutely incredible and not at all marred by the 6-hour bus ride it took to get there. I saw the treasures of K.T.'s tomb, I climbed on the Pyramids, I took about 5,000 pictures, and I did not mind that I was doing something rather cultural rather than puking at Señor Frog's.

What could top these amazing archaeological sites? Lots of crappy souvenirs, of course! We were taken to a papyrus "museum," which is code for "store," and then a perfume "museum," which is code for "store," and then a plain ol' souvenir store (which, surprisingly, was only a store.)

Friday

Would you believe it? We were supposed to return from Cairo Thursday night, but our bus broke down in the middle of the night and we didn't get home until sunrise. Around midnight, things were looking grim, as our bus driver would drive for about 10 feet, stop, get out and make a frown at the flat tire, and then do the same thing. I could imagine swarms of bandits descending from behind the desert dunes to maraud us. However, we finally reached a café, and we actually started having fun for a while.

The majority of the Russians got taken home in an alternate emergency bus, and, for some bizarre reason, Speed was on the TV in the restaurant. It was comforting to know of a bus situation more dire than our own. Finally, a tiny minivan came, equipped for eight people, but there were eight of us and six other Russians. We got a good glimpse of the ol' Egyptian space-conserving spirit, however, and we all squished in for the 3-hour ride.

Saturday

Last day. I was not feeling especially well, and, as a traveler's tip, recommend to all of you who plan on going to Egypt to not eat or drink anything while you are there; bring a nourishing IV instead!

I was kind of hoping that it would turn out to be a parasite, since it would be cool to have somebody eat my food for me, plus, I always like new friends (especially since my boyfriend and the majority of his group had to leave that day.)

For the rest of the day, my sweet if not misguided roommate and nurse for the rest of the trip, Meghan, plied me with junk food and Smirnoff (by "plied," I meant that I was able to swallow perhaps a sum total of three-quarters of a shot) until we fell asleep in front of Money Train, which, unlike Speed, was not identifiable to our situation, but still a fine film anyway.

Sunday

I ate all my complaining words about scary Russians and creepy Egyptians once I was on the plane back to Rome. The minute the fasten-seat-belt sign was turned off, the entirety of the plane jumped up to literally sing, dance (with a boombox), scream, smoke and apparently all gather together in order to jostle my seat.

I would have hidden myself in the bathroom had I not had a duty-free Toblerone to console myself. At the end of the flight, all the Italians applauded madly. I don't condone this sort of behavior, however, since I believe it is somewhat the pilot's job to land the plane.

What is the theme of this column? Why, as always, adventures abroad, of course. But I guess I wanted to address the definition of "spring break."

I always used to think that it was overrated to always do something crazy and expensive with that time, but now I think it's a necessity to do it just once. Especially if you have the chance to do something very, very extraordinary ("extraordinary" not necessarily defined by the presence of MTV at your beach.)