**Warming to a Red Sea resort**

A beach holiday meant boredom for Sean Sheehan but Sharm el-Sheikh in Egypt changed all that.

**HOLIDAY in Sharm el-Sheikh** does not appeal to me. The idea of a beach resort holiday suggests boredom. I mean, what do you do after lying on your back for an hour? Read another few chapters of the book you’ve packed? Turn over on the towel and get the other side of your body toasted?

No thanks, get me out of here, especially when “here” is the Red Sea resort of Sharm el-Sheikh, a place where the sun received a severe shock last year because it rained for four hours one day, as opposed to the usual five-minute shower that occasionally falls across the baking hot land on the southern tip of Egypt’s Sinai peninsula. I want a week’s holiday not a 24/7 sauna.

*“Get a life” admonished my companion, showing factor 50-plus suntan lotion in my hand and saying how the dry heat around the Red Sea is perfect for alfresco evenings at the restaurants and bars on the beach strip along Naama Bay. This is the nucleus of Sharm el-Sheikh, though the resort has spread to the east and west of Naama Bay, hugging the Red Sea coast all the way and enticing jaded folk in search of winter sun. The Russians love Sharm el-Sheikh and steely-eyed Russian women like to display their tattoos of anchors.*

I’m sure I can make out Russian women like to display their tattoos of anchors.

**DAY ONE AND THE first languid session on a sun lounger. My doorstep of a book, Mahfouz’s The Cairo Trilogy, should get me through the first couple of days and I’m just getting into its 1,300 pages, and thinking of escaping on a day trip to Cairo, when I’m dragged off to a shop to buy a snorkel and mask.**

*“Pleasingly surprised by only having to pay €7, I reluctantly agree to try snorkelling. I’m not comfortable in water and a little shortighted but here comes a surprise. There is no need for fins because there is little current and startlingly coloured fish abound within metres of the shore. The hotel has its own pontoon and from the end of it I slide elegantly into the gorgeous-ly warm waters of a marine paradise.*

*A man smitten. Attractive women with anchor tattoos are for-gotten about and a snorkelling trip to Ras Mohammad National Park yields an even more astonishing range of exotic-looking fish and amazing coral.*

**The logical next step is sign-up for an introductory scuba-diving course.** I am tempted but lose my nerve and cowardly agree to sit in on the tuition that begins in a classroom and then observe the training session in a pool from the safety of a deckchair. I follow my companion**

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**Sharm el-Sheikh where to…**

**Stay**

There is a huge range of hotels, from five-star luxury to middle-of-the-road three-star.

*sharm-el-sheikh-hotels.com, savoy-sharm.com.*

**Eat**

Three-course meal at a quality restaurant, like Little Buddha or the Ritz-Carlton, costs about €35. Dinner at Al Fresco or Pomodoro is from around €20.

**Go**

Entertainment at Soho Square (soho-sharm.com) attracts crowds every evening. For late-night revelry head for the disco at Little Buddha (littlebuddha-sharm.com).

Clockwise from above: beach scene, Sharm el-Sheikh; snorkelling; nightlife; Sharm el-Sheikh harbour; and water pipes, Old Market, Below; volleyball on the beach. Left: masked butterflyfish. Photographs: Doug Allan, Slow Winds Images, Nicholas Pitt/Photodisc, Khaled Desouki/AFP/Getty Images, Peter Macdiarmid/Getty Images, Dan Kitwood/Getty Images, Marcus Bean/Shutterstock.
and the instructor down to the beach, watch them don the gear and say a silent goodbye as they wade into the sea, gradually submerge and disappear. Now hooked on the James Bond moment when they emerge dripping sea water.

“Awesome” exclaims my enraptured companion, after completion of an introductory half-day course, and for once the word seems justified. The price for being chicken-hearted is to be ignored as the two divers excitedly tick off from a coloured chart the objects of their visual intoxication: batfish, giant trevally, blue-spotted stingray, parrotfish, lionfish and, looking like an ironed-out sea horse, the snake pipefish.

Get there
Fly from London/Manchester with return fares from £345 in November, and around £240 in December and January. Flights and hotel packages (B&B) are from around £260pp for a week in November, and from around £400 for a week in December and January, monarch.co.uk, firstchoice.co.uk, thomascook.com.

I'm from Dublin but, like a lot of cabin crew, I've a fairly multinational background. My mum is from Cavan but my dad is French and a diplomat, which meant we moved countries every six years. I've lived all over.

Prior to joining Emirates two-and-a-half years ago I was an IT recruitment consultant. I'm based in Dubai and spend half my month there and half travelling. We fly to 115 destinations and on the 22nd of each month I'll get my roster.

The first thing I'll do is check what's on in each city. I'm visiting and get in touch with friends to say I'm on my way. I'm just back from an eight-day schedule from Dubai to Bangkok, Sydney, Christchurch, Sydney again, Bangkok and Doha, with 24 and 48-hour layovers along the way.

On other occasions it could be short run flights, such as Muscat or Doha, where I'd be there and back in a day. I've always loved

Julie Ardoin: “I love meeting people from so many different cultures, and hearing their stories”

travelling. Very often for my holidays I'll head back to an Emirates destination to explore it in more depth.

This year I spent two weeks in New Zealand.

For each flight the first thing we do is have a briefing to introduce yourself to the other crew members.

We have over 3,000 cabin crew and are recruiting all the time so you're constantly meeting new people.

We also need to know what languages and special skills the people you are flying with might have.

We have some doctors and nurses who gave up their former jobs in order to travel and they're always good to know on a flight, even though the training we all get in the Ritz-Carlton before enjoying first-class Middle Eastern cuisine at the restaurant downstairs. Other good nights are spent listening to live music at the Al Fresco buffet in the grounds of the Hilton Fayrouz and tucking into excellent fusion food at Little Buddha, available until 1am and with sushi served until an hour before its lively disco closes at 4am. The Pomodoro restaurant and the adjoining Indian restaurant in Naama are also to be recommended. How surprising to be pleasantly surprised. Now I want to return to Sharm el-Sheikh.

MY DAY
JULIE ARDOIN – CABIN CREW, EMIRATES

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SHARM EL-SHEIKH is a family-friendly resort and there are plenty of activities away from the sea: ice-skiing and bowling at Soho Square, camel rides (as uncomfortable as they look), Bedouin dinners (very touristy) and trips across the bleak and rocky desert to St Catherine’s Monastery at the foot of Mount Sinai. What is fun is dressing up in fatigues to say I'm on my honeymoon and get in touch what's on in each city I'm visiting.

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