HISTORIC GRAND HOTELS

PART FIVE
EGYPT AND CRUISING THE NILE

BRIAN ROBERTS
The Egyptian Gazette of December 1907 recorded the arrival of two large motor omnibuses.
The earlier Parts-1 to 4 booklets on hotels around the world, looked at Engineering Services (HVAC, plumbing, lighting and elevators including requirements for kitchens and laundries). This book on Egypt is different, because early hotels had no air conditioning or mechanical ventilation, not even ceiling fans. This Part-5 considers how architecture and travellers dealt with the climate. Featured hotels date from the early 1840s to the 1930s. Respite from the high external temperatures depended on the time of year, the hotel itself: orientation, shading and mass (thermal response) of construction, location and size of windows, provision for natural cross-ventilation, high ceilings, rooms opening onto balconies and verandahs, window shutters or shades and external awnings. Travel generally took place in the cooler winter. Victorian and Edwardian sightseers usually dressed normally but wore protective sun hats (the men pith helmets). Back at the hotel, they often dressed in shorts, relaxed in the afternoon taking liquid refreshment in gardens shaded by trees or on terraces shaded by awnings.

EGYPTIAN HOTELS

ALEXANDRIA: Cecil: 11, Iorio: 12, Khedivial: 13, Majestic: 12, San Stefano: 10
GEZIRO: Palace: 24, GIZA: Mena House: 1,27

FEATURED PLACES

CAIRO: Northern Gate: 15, Old Quarter: 14
[For Pyramids see GIZA]

BMR, Budleigh Salterton 2021.
The River Nile journey from Alexandria to Aswan.
A BRIEF HISTORY OF EGYPTIAN HOTELS

Egypt is known for being one of the earliest civilisations and the evidence of its great structures and buildings still exists, having been visited by tourists for many years. In particular, these sites include the Pyramids at Giza and the Temple at Karnak.

At the end of the 18th century, Egypt was invaded by France under Napoleon, hoping to disrupt British trade routes, but this lasted only from 1798 to 1825, probably because Britain defeated France at the Battles of Trafalgar and Waterloo. But French influence remained and from 1859 to 1869 they built and opened the Suez Canal. However, Egypt became a British Protectorate from 1882 until 1922, with a controlling interest in both the Canal and the Egyptian Government.

Egypt has many of the most important historic hotels in the world. Some were formerly royal palaces and lodges, such as the Mena House, El Salamlek Palace and Auberge Fayoum. Other hotels were constructed by companies like Thomas Cook, a major English Tour Operator, designed to accommodate kings, presidents and rich European and North American tourists. These included the Old Cataract Hotel Aswan Hotel, the Omar Khayyam Hotel in Cairo and the Winter Palace Hotel in Luxor.

However, Shepheard's Hotel in Cairo is one of the most famous in the world, along with the Oriental in Bangkok, Raffles in Singapore and the Peninsula, Hong Kong. These last three still operate, but the original Shepheard's was destroyed by bombing in 1952. Often considered the most romantic, parts were once a harem, but in 1850 it was opened as Shepheard's hotel. Many years ago it was described as "Large, cool and comfortable, and it surrounds one beautiful garden, while it is surrounded by two or three more." Later, an American Lady wrote "Out at the Pyramids I meant to mention the Mena Hotel, a most beautiful hotel, with every comfort, on the very edge of the Desert. Many people spend the winter there for lung and bronchial troubles." The Mena opened in 1892 and "although close to the capital the air is cleaner, drier and fresher than it is in Cairo." Photographs and information on other historic hotels, and their famous guests, is available in the books listed on page 44.

Traders wait outside Shepheard's where they hassle overdressed tourists.
DISCOVERING EGYPT

Mid-1930s poster.
THE GOLDEN AGE OF TRAVEL

Another poster from the 1930s.
ARRIVAL IN ALEXANDRIA 1921

The Cunard Line's *Caronia* at Alexandria in 1921.
LEAVING FOR ALEXANDRIA 1927

Two Imperial Airways Short S-23 Seaplanes preparing to take off in 1927 from Southampton for Alexandria via Marseille.
The San Stefano Hotel-Casino opened in 1887 at Ramleh, a seaside village, linked by light railway to the centre of Alexandria.
Opened 1930, "each room with bath, toilette and telephone. Fireplace in lounges..."
IORIO PALACE HOTEL ALEXANDRIA 1902

MAJESTIC HOTEL ALEXANDRIA 1914
"Having 140 bedrooms, of which 40 had private bathrooms."
CAIRO STREET IN THE OLD CITY

A Cairo Street around 1900, the houses having projecting balconies providing natural ventilation.
The Northern Gate (11th century *Door of Conquests*) of the city wall.
In 1850, the manager, Samuel Shepheard, would acquire and enlarge a nearby building which became the world-famous hotel bearing his name.
BRITISH HOTEL CAIRO
GRAND CONTINENTAL HOTEL CAIRO 1899

Became a hotel in 1899 and the traditional meeting place of the French. Burned down in 1971.
Ladies lounging on the terrace of the hotel, having come to take the waters.
The hotel had 340 bedrooms (and remarkable for the time) 240 bathrooms. This photograph is after 1906 when a third floor was added.
The hotel gardens around 1930.
SHEPHEARD’S HOTEL CAIRO

The hotel entrance around 1920.

The fabulously ornate dining room.
SHEPHEARD’S HOTEL CAIRO

The great hallway at Shepheard's.
The Palace, built for a Khedive (a Viceroy) in 1865 on the "luxuriant" Gezira Island, became a world-famous hotel by the end of the 19th century.
GEZIRA PALACE HOTEL

The original garden designed by a French landscape artist.

HELIOPOLIS PALACE HOTEL CAIRO 1910
HELIOPOLIS PALACE HOTEL CAIRO

Styled as "the most luxurious hotel in Africa." Located in the district of Heliopolis. The main lounge of the hotel with its ceiling 180 feet, or more, high.
MENA HOUSE HOTEL GIZA 1887

Opened with 10 guest rooms.
The Great Pyramid of Cheops (481 ft high) dates from c.2570 BC.
Close to the Great Pyramid of Cheops "it offers its wealthy guests both the magic of the desert and the enchantment of history."
MENA HOUSE HOTEL GIZA

A late 19th century photograph.

The canopied front terrace facing the pyramids.
MENA HOUSE HOTEL GIZA

Guests relaxing on the terrace.
MENA HOUSE HOTEL GIZA
Located on the shores of Lake Karoun, now a luxury hotel and resort.

Prime Minister Winston Churchill at the hotel with King Ibn Saud of Saudi Arabia in 1945.
The huge temples at Karnak were constructed over many years, 2055 BC to 100 AD, but construction stopped with the arrival of the Romans.
King Faud's older brother "with his wife, female attendants and eunuchs."

The Temple was built around 1190 BC.
Luxor dates from around 1390 BC.
Edwardian tourists pose on the front steps of the hotel which opened in 1907. Once called "The finest and most elaborately schemed hotel.... within Egypt."
In January 1923 the Winter Palace was possibly the most famous hotel in the world with the discovery nearby of the sealed tomb of Tutankhamen.
WINTER PALACE HOTEL LUXOR

Arrival by flying boat.

The facade with elegant horseshoe terrace and sweeping staircase.
The crew of a passenger boat (dahabeah) reserved for tourists.
Luggage label depicting nearby Trajan's Kiosk at Philae.
This famous winter hotel opened in 1909. Sometime in the early 1920s, guests assemble for an expedition into the desert.
THE CATARACT HOTEL ASWAN

The Grand Dining Hall in the 1920s.

The Grand Terrace with views over the Nile.
FINALE: THE CAIRO HILTON OPENED 1959
2011  Grand Hotels of Egypt, Andrew Humphreys, American University of Cairo Press.
2018  Vintage Egypt: Cruising the Nile, Alain Blottiere, American University of Cairo Press.

Other information from the Heritage Group Archive and website.