**Cairo – The Flip Side of the Coin**

Greetings from Cairo! Now, without even meeting you I am pretty sure I can guess your perception of life in Egypt. A life full of violence, chaos, anxiety and stress. Right? Wrong! I have lived in Cairo for six years now and I would not have been here that long if my life was full of violence, chaos, anxiety and stress! Cairo is an amazing city, Egypt a fascinating country, and although there are some obvious well-documented problems here, I feel it important that you are presented with an honest view of life in Egypt from somebody who lives through these ‘problems’ day-to-day, the ‘flip side of the coin’.

I am often called ‘the man who brought revolution to Egypt’ by people at school and although I would like to dispute this fact there may be an element of truth in it! I landed in Cairo on January 28th 2011, all prepared for my interview at The British School. For those of you who don’t know, this is the day that the Egyptian people took to the streets en masse in protests that eventually led to the overthrow of Hosni Mubarak. Suffice to say, my interview was an interesting experience, but the fact that I am still here six years on tells you all you need to know about my view of this wonderful country! My interview story, however, is for another time. What about the Egypt of 2017? Six years and one failed democratic process later, what is life in Cairo really like?

I will start off with the short answer: Day-to-day life in Cairo is nothing like the media would have you believe! This is not the place for me to discuss the political events of recent years, but rest assured that any trouble you have seen in Egypt in modern times has always been isolated and controlled. In all the time I have been here I have never personally witnessed one piece of trouble in this country. I may as well have been as far away as you have been throughout this period because I have only seen the same news footage that you have seen on your TVs back home! I actually spent the day of the first ever free and democratic elections in Egyptian history in the middle of Tahrir square, drinking tea with protesters who had been camped there ever since the overthrow of Mubarak! There was a jovial party atmosphere and it is a day I will never forget. The situation in this country is well under control, the democratic process is back under way and, under President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi, security is good. Egypt has avoided the violence and general chaos that the overthrowing of long-standing dictators has witnessed in neighbouring countries such as Libya and Iraq, and the country is well on the road to recovery after the turmoil of 2011. In short, do not base your views on Egypt on what you see on the news! It is worth mentioning that the local economy is currently going through a particularly tough period. For the vast majority of my time here the Egyptian Pound (LE) has been valued at around 10LE-13LE to 1GBP. However, this has plummeted in recent months, so much so that the Egyptian Pound is currently valued at 23LE to 1GBP. Now, whilst this is a real struggle for locals it has actual benefitted our expatriate teachers as we are paid in GBP. Financially, there are few places cheaper to live than Cairo and few places where it is easier to save.

So, what is the ‘flip side of the coin?’ What does my day-to-day life consist of in Cairo and what would your day-to-day life consist of if you chose to move here? Basically, it would consist of anything you like! Cairo is in the top 20 biggest cities in the world so there is no shortage of things to do. It is a city full of life that is characterised by its constant buzz of activity. My life outside of school is dominated by sport. I play rugby, football, tennis, squash and cricket. Yes, cricket in Egypt! I am also a keen golfer and the golf courses you have available to you in Cairo are truly spectacular. Sport aside, Cairo has great shopping, top hotels, a booming social scene, fantastic food and plenty of other things to do to keep you and your family entertained. I have not even mentioned the must-do/must-see ‘touristy’ stuff yet! We all know about the Giza pyramids and The Egyptian Museum, and yes, these are sites you simply must-see, but Egypt is much more than just the pyramids and the museum. In Cairo alone we have the Citadel, Khan el-Khalili, the lesser-known pyramids of Saqqara and Dashur, beautiful mosques, the Nile and countless other attractions, including a beach (Ain Sukhna) just an hour’s drive from the city! Other must-do things in Egypt include Luxor and the Valley of the Kings, Aswan and Abu Simbel, Alexandria, the Red Sea resorts and the Sahara Desert. Egypt is a country that simply must be explored if you are to fully appreciate the history and wonder that it has to offer and a great base from which to tour other fabulous locations in North Africa, Southern Europe and the Middle East.

Now, don’t get me wrong, life in Cairo is not perfect, but when is life ever perfect!? There are times when living in Egypt can be frustrating beyond belief but, for me, this is all part of the charm of a country I have grown to love. The biggest and most frustrating issue I have found is that, how can I put this, Egyptians do not seem to have the sense of urgency that we have in the UK! Nothing can be done too slowly in Egypt and this is something you will need to come to terms with. Although, it has been six years and I still haven’t come to terms with it! This minor issue aside I can honestly say that the Egyptians are some of the nicest people I have ever met. The vast majority of people you meet are really friendly, keen to help and have an excellent sense of humour that I can only compare to the humour of North-West England (where I come from). I have countless stories of Egyptian guys doing their best to help me despite the fact that neither of us have the slightest idea of what the other one is saying! These situations often end in a mutual acceptance of the hopelessness of the situation and a shared laugh. However, many Egyptians do have at least a little English so the language barrier never poses too much of a problem. There will be an initial culture shock when you arrive in Cairo as life here is so different to what we are used to, but it is amazing how quickly you become accustomed to the city’s quirks and bemusements. Of course, it does take some time to adapt, but I find this is easily done as long as you remember one very important fact every single day… this is not the UK! Your life here can be as westernised or as ‘local’ as you like and you could quite easily live your life barely being aware that you are living in Egypt. However, I don’t think that is why the vast majority make the decision to move abroad! However you choose to live your life over here one thing is for certain, the extreme cultural differences will affect your life at some point! An early piece of advice from me would be ‘adapt to survive!’ Ensure you are fully prepared for the searing heat, the crazy traffic, the beeping horns, the eccentric locals, the bustling markets, the infuriating haggling and the exasperating ‘‘insha’Allah’s’’. Throw away all of your previously held convictions about life in Cairo, give it a chance, and I guarantee that in time you will grow to love this city and this country as much as I do.

David Honey

Head of KS1

The British School Al Rehab