

ON THE
GROUND
LUXOR

“Have a cup of tea and stop worrying”

Life in Luxor can be slow going – and that’s its charm, says local blogger Ruby Tuesday



EGYPTIANS HAVE MANY fine attributes to recommend them. Their hospitality is charming, their sense of humour is keen and their history is virtually unparalleled. But punctuality is not a cultural virtue.

To the locals, everything is *bukra* (tomorrow) or *insha’Allah* (God willing). Sometimes a *malesh* is even thrown in for good measure; a word that means anything from “No problem” to “There’s nothing you can do, so have a cup of mint tea and stop worrying.” After all, in a country with 5,000 years of history, what’s one extra day?

Take the seemingly simple task of purchasing a train ticket. After queueing for ages, you finally reach the glass window and catch the attendant’s eye – just in time for them to get up, walk away and return with a cup of sweet tea and a falafel sandwich. Apparently they have no qualms about chewing and slurping in front of the waiting customers, and certainly wouldn’t disrupt their digestion by continuing to sell tickets.

Shops provide a similar experience. Let’s say you’ve decided to have a relaxing day strolling around the world-renowned open-air museum of Luxor. But wait – you’ve

forgotten your sun cream. At the nearest pharmacy, a souvenir seller tells you the pharmacist has popped out to get some *koshary* (rice and chickpeas). An hour later you’re finally admitted, but there’s no sun cream today – the supply truck from Cairo didn’t turn up. *Bukra, insha’Allah*.

For those unused to the Egyptian sense of time, it’s frustrating, but it doesn’t take long to slip into the gentle flow. After all, why would you want to rush a sunset sail on the River Nile when you’re lying upon silk cushions, a cool drink at your side, gently drifting along past Luxor’s riverbanks, watching a landscape unchanged for centuries?

This slowness can even improve some things. North African dishes call for meat, fish or vegetables to be stewed for hours in *tagines* (traditional clay pots), the only way to fully absorb the spices.

Thanks to living in Luxor, I’ve come to realise that time is a gift to be relished. It might not move quickly, but it’s fast enough. If something doesn’t get done, there is always tomorrow – or the day after. And even if it isn’t – *malesh*. *British-born Ruby blogs about family life with her Egyptian husband at orangesbythenile.blogspot.co.uk*