

## **An Eggcellent Easter in Egypt!**

“Are you mad?”. This was just one of the comments I got when I mentioned where I was going for our Easter break with our 5 month old baby, that and plenty of raised eyebrows.

Our destination was Sharm el Sheikh in Egypt. What attracted us were the 4 and a half hour flight, relatively low cost 5-star hotel, two hour time difference and the mid-twenties temperature. However, the fact that most people who go to Egypt seem to end up with some kind of stomach bug was worrying. A hurried trip to the doctors allayed my fears as he assured me Isabella would be fine, after all we were staying in a nice hotel, near good hospitals if necessary. It was not as if we were backpacking in the middle of the desert.

We were still feeling pretty nervous, this was indeed our first holiday with our daughter. Would it be a total nightmare? Would she scream the entire flight? Would we come back needing a holiday?

We'd booked The Hyatt Regency, the number 2 hotel in Sharm El Sheikh, after the Four Seasons, and trust me I did so much research. The tight security was reassuring, apparently even Condoleeza Rice had dropped in for lunch a couple of weeks before. That said being with a baby seemed to mean we couldn't possibly pose a threat and we were waived through without any checks.

I wasn't sure what to expect, apparently Egyptian 5 star didn't necessarily mean actual 5-star. We weren't disappointed even though I was shocked that a bottle of Evian cost £7 a bottle. We opted for local mineral water. Veuve Cliquot was also available for the rather excessive sum of £300.

Our Seaview room despite being the lowest category was perfect. The fact it included a Graco cot which vibrated and played music impressed me. And hallelujah, our baby did indeed sleep 'like a baby', sleeping through the night for the first time ever.

There were certainly some differences being away with a baby, such as making breakfast early due to being woken each morning around 5.30am by the chattering of our baby wanting to play. The other guests seemed to be early risers too and if you arrived after 7.45 and you could forget getting a table outside.

Each morning one of the rather handsome pool butlers laid out towels on our dark wood sun beds with cream padded mattresses under big square white parasols, so there was no need to worry about getting there before anyone else.

Isabella was in her element, getting endless attention from staff and guests. She played in the shade or slept in her buggy and we took her swimming.

The snorkelling was indeed some of the best I'd experienced. The reef right off the hotel beach was known as Middle Garden. The water was slightly on the chilly side but under the surface the crackling sound of a million fish nibbling the coral, a rainbow of colours flashing in the sun, made you soon forget.

I'd been told Sharm El Sheikh itself was tacky and awful and Starbucks, McDonalds, KFC, they were all there. However it had a fun, buzzy atmosphere, especially by night. The car-free streets were lined with hundreds of restaurants, bars with low seating

offering the chance to try out the hubbly bubbly. You could take your pick of all sorts of flavours from fruit salad to cappuccino, personally not my cup of tea.

We had been warned that the locals would try every means possible to establish you were British and then get you into their perfume shops. "Luvlee jublee", "Alright mate!", the minute you responded in English, that was it. It did seem rude to ignore them, but if you didn't it was at your peril! Once inside the shutters would be drawn, mint tea provided and negotiations would start. You'd only leave after you'd spent a lot of money on something you didn't really want. Luckily they didn't manage to fool us!

Bearing in mind we had a baby with us, who crashed out by 6pm after a busy day swimming and sleeping, we were mostly happy staying within the hotel in the evenings.

So was I mad to take a five month old baby to Egypt? It was obvious from the amount of families with young children and babies on the plane and at the hotel that I wasn't. What a great destination for an Easter holiday.