

d i s t r a c t i o n s

Tommy Travels

A Deaf, Dumb and Blind Travel Guide For The Debutante Traveler
Murray Thorpe Hands Over This Column to Smarty Peedop



Artwork by Nina Botten

Abu Dhabi the Garden City of the Gulf

July 1991. Freshly arrived from the cool Atlantic breezes of Halifax to the sticky heat of Aurora, Ontario. A game of hearts, evening thunderstorm outside. A classic-fuzzy-time-delay-who-the-hell-could-this-be long distance call comes for me. Fizzt...crackle...hi its Al...Al Macdonald from UNB...pissht ...I'm in Arabia...gurgle...gotta job for you here...if you're interested ...snurble...pipeline survey...blabbe ...pays hundred and eighty pounds a day...bloody hot here...cuss...computer work...blither...think about it...CLICK.

Two weeks later. 52 degrees out, yes that's Celsius. 9 time zones from home. 14 inch water pipe, hmmm, a grout bag extra, let's just delete that, playing video games for work - deleting pipe joints and supports as if they were alien marauders worth 2000 points a piece. 12 hour shift, I should ask the Scottish lads from Aberdeen if it's almost time for a spot of tea. 74 days of work in a row, no time off, no weekends, the heat shimmering off the desert sands of the Rub Al Khali ("the empty quarter") turn Tuesday into Saturday, or is it Wednesday today?

Abu Dhabi, the largest of seven emirates (cities) in the United Arab Emirates. Dubai, the second most populous of the emirates, is more famous - cricket and tennis tournaments ("The Dubai Open"), duty free shopping for gold and silk, airline connections between Europe and the Indian subcontinent. But Abu Dhabi is the Garden City - trees, flowers and plants on all the boulevard medians, and along the Persian Gulf shore. Clever. They recycle their waste water to sprinkle the desert sands. Fresh water comes from the desalination plant,



A Mosque- United Arab Emirates

and once flushed down the toilet, is filtered and then serves to keep the trees alive. They've actually changed the microclimate. Two old women in rocking chairs on a stoop: "Yep, seems like there's more rain than the old days, eh?" But nowhere near Biblical proportions, in this land of Islam. Seven days a year average, since the gardening began, used to be four. Even a cloud in the sky is a miracle of Allah.

Of course, you don't see women in rocking chairs on the porch talking about the weather here. There are less than 20,000 natives here in this city of 350,000. They live in walled villas in the outskirts of the compact high-rise burb. They rarely show their faces. The women may not. The men are shadows through the tinted glass of their Mercedes or BMW. The \$27,000 per year (no income tax in the U.A.E.) that each citizen gets from the government (isn't oil wonderful?) means that the local Arabs all own businesses "for a living." I met the owner of our survey company for thirty seconds. He was the only Arab I spoke to during my almost three month sojourn.

Edge of the metro area. Simple to locate. A six laner ends abruptly in sand.



Everything of value is for sale at the Souk.

Endless sand. This would be a ghost town, but for the foreign workers. Afghani ex-mujahideen fighters conduct the taxis-look both ways twice before you cross the street! Lebanese and Egyptian restaurateurs turn Jordanian vegetables into yummy Tabouleh or fruit cocktails or Hummus, with Pita bread of course. Young Philipinos smile their way through maid chores, or serve the British oil specialists dining at Pizza Hut. Palestinian hotel clerks- "yes, sir, breakfast is between six and nine in our lounge." And who can forget the Pakistanis selling wares at the Souk. The market is alive with humanity, a welcome change. Silk wraps, cameras, diamonds, green Moroccan hash, gold earrings, everything of value is for sale at the Souk.

The Gulf War is just ended, but this far out towards the mouth of the Gulf, no oil slicks, pollution, corpses, or any signs of military rise and decline are evident. Clear water, beaches forever, and tropical sunsets abound by the ocean. An oil rig, or is it a mirage?, in the distant bay. I can sip a Grolsch swing top lager by the poolside in that precious non worksleepeat hour, laugh about the

cockroach my Scottish roommate Willy left on my hotel bed, and almost forget that this is really an Arabian night.

Story and photos by Martin Kruus

Who Will Care?

Who will care for this world,
If we don't?
Who will care for the trees that sigh in the wind,
And give us oxygen to breathe?
Who will care for the babbling streams,
Which spring from the hills,
Whose cool clear water is the fountain of life?
Who will care for the soft earth beneath our feet,
Which yields fall harvests,
Of the food we eat?
Who will care for fresh air unpolluted,
And clean enough to breathe?
Or the sunlight that drives the seasons,
Opens the flowers and warms the earth?
Who will care for the animals and plants,
That share our planet and teach us how to live,
In harmony with the earth?

But when the earth is desolate,
And there aren't any more animals,
Except us,
When the sunlight burns and blinds,
Us unprotected,
When the soil is washed or blown away,
When we're down to our,
Last,
Mouthful of bread,
Handful of water,
Gasp of air,

Who will care?

by Robert Palo

Fragments of Harvest Dancing

people sing to remember people dance to forget
A man plays air guitar with his fly obscenely gaping
The woman with long gray hair and the face of a twelve year old closes her eyes and reacts to the bass player as he plays her sacrificed body with each string touched
The boy dances with the uncommon vitality of his youth. He hears the blues for the first time and tries unsuccessfully to relate. Just another sad song, but at least you can dance to it
A large girl unaccepted by her peers stands to the side and looks on. She IS the dancer among them
The elderly hipster dances in a purple polyester suit and loud orange tie. He is alone in the room as he bumps into the people around him. He snaps his fingers and shakes his head. He's heard the tunes before
A man is with his girlfriend, he does not know the blues. He bounces up and down erratically and tries to imitate her smooth movements. She does not notice his presence any longer as she seeps back into familiarity
A woman leans on the stage and gazes up to the jazzman's eyes. Sweat pours down off of him and onto her. Her feet move involuntarily as she falls in love with the man who makes her cry
The jazzman's eyes stare off at a spot at the end of the room. One spot where all his misery and blues are channelled and reflected back to him. He accepts them back with a father's love
A middle aged couple dance together off to the side. They try out a new move they had seen on television that morning. He grunts loudly as he dips her. She looks at his worn face indifferently and mildly wonders if the babysitter will remember to do the dishes
A young man listens to the words alone. He has stopped dancing and is staring at the girl who dances in her love's embrace. He looks at his hands and runs them through his short hair. He turns away and gets swept into the unforgiving crowd. Suddenly he's tired and wants to go home
A very young girl of about sixteen stands in the doorway smiling. She watches the jazzman sing his blues to shades of apathy and she makes her revelations of life
Slowly the song ends and the jazzman gets ready for the next tune. The people have exhausted themselves of emotion, it's time for something fast and noncommittal. The jazzman takes a breath...

By: Erin Bidlake

The Rose Of Fire

The rose lies in the dying embers,
But it doesn't burn.
Flames of burning fire,
Resembling the hot flames of
passion we shared together in love,
They lick at the edges of the
still red rose petals.
As I lift the rose in the
Darkness of the night
It glows -- sparks framing
its petals.

Finally, giving up hope, I
throw the rose into the consuming
flames.
The fire burns brighter.
The rose turns black.
Then disappears.
Like our love, it has been
Turned to ashes.
Like our love, the fire has
diminished.

Later, when I return to the
silky gray ashes,
I notice a petal is left.
One red rose petal, has been
left to suffer loneliness;
Has been left to feel the pain.
The only way the petal will burn,
is if the emptiness is filled,
and the void is forgotten.

-Written By Deborah Corey
On August 9, 1995.

Note: We are planning to offer prizes for the best travel story (300-500 words with two pictures) and the best piece of creative writing (poem, short story, etc.) next year.