

Bedouins of South Sinai: Culture and Traditions

Bedouins have traditionally occupied the Sinai Peninsula. Their culture has been founded on strict tribal laws and traditions. Tribal law for example prohibits the cutting of "green trees" - the penalty could be up to three 2-year old camels or their equivalent value. Bedouins say that "killing a tree is like killing a soul".



So what is the best way to experience local culture while on holiday if not to come close to its source and observe it in its environment? The best way to know about them is to take a Bedouin tour offered by many agencies in Sharm-el-Sheikh.

Bedouins will not reveal all their secrets just in one short and really touristy excursion, but still you can know some. For example how Bedouin can ride a camel for a long distance while most of people complain that it is really uncomfortable after the first two steps! Just have a look at these guys and you will notice how they sit. Camel is not a horse so a special way of sitting is required to be comfortable. Usually those guys sit as women on a special women horse saddle: one leg across the saddle near another one. As soon as you take this position your ride will be much more comfortable and you can even try to race!

Do not wonder if you find all Bedouin guys dressed in a long hooded robe called Galabiya and "oqal" (headrope) as it is a typical dress for Bedouin men. The most easily recognized aspect of a Bedouin's attire is his headgear which consists of kufiyya - cloth and 'agal - rope that constitute proper attire for a Bedouin man. The head rope in particular carries great significance, as it is indicative of the wearer's ability to uphold the obligations and responsibilities of manhood.

A real cooking experience can be enjoyed in a Bedouin tent when the guys will teach you how to make bread! This workshop is not to be missed by any means as well as the bread itself. Bedouin bread is a whole other story. Freshly baked, served from the oven to your plate, it melts in your mouth and it tastes like heaven.



There are several kinds of bread like Libbah – the king of Bedouin bread, made of dark wheat, water and salt. The paste is rolled flat and buried in the sand with hot coals placed on top. It is turned over once, then tapped on to test when it is ready; well baked, not a grain of sand sticks to it.

Another kind is farrasheeh, also made of dark wheat but this time thinly spread over a concave piece of metal and baked directly in the fire. The result is large thin bread with holes. Usually this kind of bread is offered to tourists.

Bedouins are famous for their hospitality and friendliness. They wait on you as if you're a king. Before you have time to ask them for something, they're already doing it for you.

Of course you have eaten rice, potatoes, and chicken a million times before, but you haven't eaten them in the Bedouin style. Coal is the key. Chicken and kofta (a kind of beef meat) are grilled directly on the coal, while the rice and potatoes are cooked over the coal fire too.

Give a try to a famous Bedouin tea which tastes a lot better than you are used to drink as habak, a mint-like herb that grows in the Sinai desert in winter is always added to it. Mashed with tea and boiled on coal, the result is unique and delicious.

It is really rare to see a real Bedouin woman but still possible. Nowadays they appear from time to time offering you some hand-made jewelry, bracelets and so on.



Bedouin women of Sinai have their distinctive clothing. Black is the predominant dress colour for them. The Bedouin women's characteristic garments are richly embellished with fine hand embroidery - mostly in red, pink, orange, yellow and turquoise - worked in cross stitch. The intricate dress designs are artistically embroidered across the front and back of the bodice. Married women wrap a black cloth known as asaba around their forehead.

The Bedouin have changed over the last century. Although the word Bedouin still evokes a tent-dwelling community forgotten by time in an inhospitable stretch of desert the reality is often quite different.

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