

Bedouin Paths Ltd

Bedouin Lives – Column 5: Saturday 19th April 2008

"Bedouin planning..."

If you own a Bedouin guesthouse (as we do), then you are faced with the need to update and improve it. Our kitchen needs upgrading so I chat with Saleh my Bedouin guesthouse manager about what to do. I say we need a new design, a check list of what we need, a plan of action and a clear and detailed budget on what we need to spend. He agrees.

At 8am the following morning I am awoken by loud banging and the sound of broken stone. I enter the restaurant to find I no longer have a kitchen. I have a small building site instead. What happened to the plan I ask Saleh. We need a new kitchen so I am building you one replied Saleh; so what's the problem? Erm ...

Saleh and the staff have created an outside kitchen for the guests and its bar-b-que time at every meal. Saleh reckons it will take 2 days to rebuild the entire kitchen from scratch. This is two days Bedouin time. Debate is had over every step of the rebuild between the Bedouin, the local Egyptians, the builders, passing customers and me. Should the tiles be classy or plain, where to get shelves from, where should the frying pans be strung up and so on. At every decision, everyone stops work and starts debating. Much tea is drunk and cigarettes smoked. The Bedouin need to discuss everything, from every point of view and from every angle before an agreement can be made. This allows everyone to have their say, to establish their credentials and to earn the respect of their peers. Work progresses; decisions are made.

The kitchen is finished in 10 days exactly (equivalent to two Bedouin days) and a large feast is prepared to celebrate. I am pleased. The Bedouin do not plan, they simply just do. The benefit of this is that things happen. The downside is that you are never sure exactly when the job will be done and how much it will cost.

The Bedouin planning model consists of doing it and then arguing over the cost later. The principle is that it needs to be done, therefore it should be done, therefore it shall be done. The details are not relevant.

We also need an Arisha; that wonderful design of a simple roof with comfortable cushions on the floor that allows you to sit back and relax; take a drink and quietly while away the day. I tell Saleh that this time I would like an idea of timescales and costs before work starts. No problem. We will down the next day and plan the details. He agrees.

I awake the next morning to find a huge pile of stones lying in a pile where the new Arisha will be. I ask Saleh what they are doing there. We need a new Arisha so I am building you one he replies.

Erm ...



Bedouin Paths runs ethical hiking tours out of their Bedouin Camp in St. Katherine in Sinai. Contact mark at mark@bedouinpaths.com or call the Bedouin Camp on +20 189662010 or go to the website at www.bedouinpaths.com .