

Thoughts from Beirut

September 19, 2004

When I first was asked to go to Beirut, I admit a little trepidation. Certainly, Beirut had not been touted as a vacation spot in the last several years. However, the Arab Air Carriers Organization had asked for a presentation and Beirut wasn't "blacklisted" by the company and so I decided to go. I had also had friends who had gone to Beirut in the 70's and called it the "Paris of the Middle East".

I had just sent someone to Karachi and so I knew the drill and called company international security about my trip to Beirut. They put me on a daily email distribution of warnings and told me to get a hotel car to pick me up at the airport. The daily warnings never mentioned Lebanon, but you might be surprised how many places have problems.

So, I took British Airways and arrived in Beirut at 11pm. The hotel car was waiting and I had an uneventful ride into town. Right in the middle of town, a truck disgorged a passel of Syrian soldiers, but they were smiling and didn't bother us (I don't mind a guy with an AK47 if he is smiling).

I slept late the next day (didn't speak) and went for a walkabout. It was stinking hot, but there were lots of European Tourists about. Here is a shot of the Med from the sidewalk.



This was an end with what appeared to be the “low-cost” beach resorts, they had one which seemed to be just on a cliff.

Traffic control was very interesting. There was a policeman on the 5 way intersection I needed to cross, but it appeared his primary duty was to talk on his cell phone. He only seemed to intervene if some car got really upset and honked their horn. Then he would stop and direct traffic.

I waited for an old lady to cross and went with her (I figured she got to her age by knowing when to cross).



Unfortunately, I had accidentally set my camera on “night” mode and so the shots aren’t as good as usual. Walking down the beach, you could see the “high-rent” district. This is where all of the tourists hang out. I didn’t get a chance to go down there, but this is what it looked like from a distance.



So, I gave my speech at the AACO and that night MidEast Airlines took us out to a Lebanese restaurant for dinner. I wish I had brought my camera. It was a blast. There was a great deal of food, and it was really good. About mid-way through the meal, they brought out hookahs and we all had some puffs before the next course. It was a fantastic meal.

I had to leave early the next day, but I got up a little early to see if there was anything worth taking a picture of. Here is one shot of an abandoned hotel on the street. If you look carefully at the rungs on the second floor, you can see where they have been damaged by some kind of blast.



Anyway, I had an uneventful trip back to the airport and back home. I wouldn't hesitate to go back...in fact I really need to as I have a double handful of Lebanese pounds and nowhere to spend them.