

Sightseeing Tour of Kabul

By Ted Cookson

About the size of Texas and with a population of 28,000,000, landlocked Afghanistan lies to the north and west of Pakistan, to the east of Iran and to the south of Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan. Pashto and Dari are the primary languages. Sunni Muslims represent 84% of the population while Shi'a Muslims represent 15% of the population.

Afghanistan has a continental climate with less than a meter of rainfall annually, most of which falls in March. The rest of the water supply comes

from melting snow. Much of Afghanistan consists of empty desert or mountain ranges. Only a small portion of the land can be cultivated while the rest is barren. Since the late 1990's the country has been suffering from drought.

Kabul, with a population of some 2,000,000, is the capital of Afghanistan. I made the notes below after visiting Kabul briefly in mid-July 2003.

I departed from Cairo on 12 July 2003 at 6 p.m. on Kuwait Airways, and I arrived in Kabul on 13 July at noon

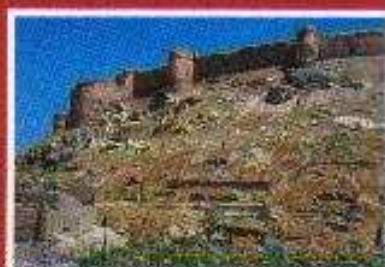
local time, which is 2 1/2 hours ahead of Cairo time in the summer. En route I spent two hours at Kuwait International Airport and eight hours (overnight) at Dubai International Airport. Interestingly, my Ariana Afghan Airlines flight from Dubai to Kabul required only 2 1/2 hours in an aging 727.

Upon arrival in Kabul, which lies at an altitude of 5,800 feet (approx. 1,800 meters), I found an interpreter and a driver with a van and proceeded to the so-called Inter-Continental Hotel which sits on a hill overlooking West Kabul. As I was only allowed to purchase a one way air ticket from Dubai to Kabul in Dubai, my first order of business upon arrival at the hotel was to purchase a Kabul-Dubai air ticket for USD 160 from Ariana Afghan Airlines. I also bought a guidebook on Kabul and some postcards at a bookstore and explored several gift shops. The airline



Darulaman Palace, built by King Amanullah in the 1920's, is situated on a small hill in front of the Kabul Museum. Although fighting from 1992 onward destroyed the palace building, it remains one of the most impressive structures in Kabul.

Six young Afghan children pose for a group photo.



Bala Hissar, an ancient citadel on the edge of Kabul, rises behind a graveyard. Used by the British as a barracks from 1839 to 1879, Bala Hissar is now known locally as the "British fort." It is off limits due to the presence of unexploded ordinance.