

Photos: Left— No firearms are allowed in the Inter-Continental Hotel in Kabul!

Two pigs, donated by China in 2002, are on display in the Kabul Zoo.

Right: The Titanic Market in the dried-up Kabul River takes its name from the Hollywood movie. When the river floods, the market sinks. Factory-produced carpets from Iran are sold here.



office and the shops were all conveniently located in the lobby of my hotel. Then I went to bed as by then it seemed like I had not slept forever.

For the record, my hotel had at one time actually been an Inter-Continental

up to the twentieth century. However, during the past decade some 70% of its collection has been pilfered.

Across the street from the Kabul Museum is Darulaman Palace, built in the 1920's by King Amanullah and later

Next I visited the Babur Gardens. Built in the 1500's under Babur Shah, the great-grandson of Tamerlane, the gardens are contained within a large walled hillside compound. The bullet-pocked tombs of Babur Shah and his wife and family may still be viewed there today. A small marble mosque built by Babur's successor, Shah Jahan, in the middle of the sixteenth century, also survives.

The last Afghan king, Zahir Shah, finally returned to Kabul in April 2002.

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hotel. Nowadays, it is no longer part of that chain, but it continues to use its old name. At about USD 100 a night for a deluxe room, the hotel offers no air-conditioning; but at least electric fans are provided. This was important in July when daytime temperatures were in the 90's.

On the morning of 14 July I awoke early and met my interpreter and driver for a sightseeing tour of the city. We began with a drive to the Kargha Dam about 20 minutes outside Kabul. Along the shore of the lake is a restaurant set in a grove of pine trees. My interpreter explained that locals sometimes enjoy picnics at this lake on Fridays.

I continued on to West Kabul which had been a residential area at one time. But during the Afghan civil war thousands were forced to flee as rival Mujaheddin militias shelled the various avenues and villas from the surrounding hills. Today West Kabul is all but destroyed.

Stopping by the Kabul Museum, I found painters and plasterers hard at work; so unfortunately there was nothing to be seen. At one time this museum was well-known for its extensive collection which extended from prehistoric times

used as the Soviet embassy. While fighting from 1992 onward destroyed the palace building, it remains one of the most impressive structures in Kabul.

The Kabul Zoo, which sports two pigs, some bears, a wolf and various other animals and birds, receives about 3,000 visitors a week. Blind in one eye and toothless, the Kabul Zoo's most famous resident, 40-year-old Marjan the lion, a gift from Germany, had managed to survive the intense fighting of the 1990's when the zoo had been in the line of fire of rockets fired from nearby hills. Marjan lost his eye when a Taliban fighter climbed into his cage in late 2001. Starving, Marjan ate the man. But the fellow's brother soon returned to seek revenge by throwing a grenade into Marjan's cage, leaving the lion both blind and lame. Marjan died several weeks later in January 2002.

A moneychanger sits on the ground, awaiting a client as he endures the midsummer heat.



The interior of the mausoleum of Babur bears witness to more than two decades of conflict in which the rockets of rival factions were fired over or into the Babur Gardens.