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NEXT TIME YOU'RE IN ... CAIRO

## Walk Like an Egyptian. A stroll through Old Cairo

A WALK DOWN THE MAIN THOROUGHFARE OF Darb al-Ahmar is a fascinating, raucous look at daily life in the Egyptian capital: you get honked aside by trucks and motorcycles, sideswiped by donkey carts and greeted enthusiastically by children. The area is home to the poorest population in the city, but these days many of its once decrepit mosques and palaces, from the Fatamid to the

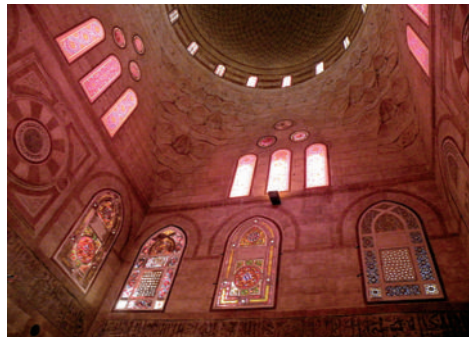


**FRESH HEIGHTS** The revival of Darb al-Ahmar brings new life to the center of Cairo

Ottoman eras, are being restored under the auspices of the Aga Khan Development Network's (AKDN) Historic Cities project.

The project has offered not only architectural but also social regeneration. Residents of Darb al-Ahmar are being trained at restoration sites as a way to revive traditional skills and ensure future maintenance of the monuments. "Crafts development is important to the economic sustainability of the people," AKDN preservation manager Dina Bakhom says. A renovated square at the 14th century Aslam al-Silahdar Mosque allows neighborhood artisans to sell their wares. Local shopkeepers have also started stocking items catering to the burgeoning tourist trade, but the area's residential character is being strictly maintained.

With a panoramic view of the Saladin Citadel from its gorgeous vernacular-style Citadel View restaurant, the tranquil Al-Azhar Park makes an ideal jumping-off point on this newly rich tourist itinerary. A pristine oasis built on a 500-year-old dump, Al-Azhar is the green heart of the new restoration work. One of its gates opens onto the famous City of the Dead (a vast cemetery whose mausoleums serve as makeshift homes to more than half a million living souls and their flocks of goats and cows) and, midway down the park's Ayyubid wall, a stairway in the Bab al-Mahruqi gate leads into Darb al-Ahmar and Aslam Square. This is the nexus for the principal sites of Old Cairo, with the Sultan Hassan Mosque and the Citadel to the south and Khan al-Khalili to the north.



**TIMELESS** The restoration of the Khayer Bek Mausoleum and Mosque, above right, is one of many projects in the revival of Darb al-Ahmar, but despite growing interest from tourists, the area has lost none of its traditional character, as a walk through its narrow streets makes clear



Darb al-Ahmar's main street, Darb Shouglan, runs south past barbershops, mechanics and cafés lined with *shisha* smokers to the medieval Blue Mosque, so called for its colored tilework (final restorations are scheduled for completion in 2012). Farther on is the area's biggest concentration of renewed historic buildings: some Ottoman houses, the Khayer Bek Mausoleum and Mosque, the Alin Aq Palace and the Mausoleum of Tarabay al-Sharifi. From there, the intersecting Bab al-Wazir street leads straight to the massive 10th century Bab Zuweila gate, past the Bayt al-Razzaz palace (refurbished by the American Research Center in Egypt), the mosque and madrasah of Umm al-Sultan Sha'ban and the minaret of Zawiyat al-Hunud—and beyond, to

where the redesigned Islamic Art Museum has just opened to rave reviews.

The next phase of the AKDN project is the new Museum of Historic Cairo and commercial complex, which will connect to a promenade alongside Al-Azhar Park. All of this work is being seen as a prototype for similar AKDN projects in Muslim districts around the world, like New Delhi's squalid Nizamuddin Basti quarter (already initiated with the renovation of Humayun's Tomb and gardens, upon which the Taj Mahal is patterned).

As Darb al-Ahmar's cacophonous symphony of horns softens toward sundown and the calls to prayer crescendo and intertwine, it reveals a quieter face. "Welcome! Are you lost?" a café denizen calls out. When I smile and shake my head, he beams and answers his own question with "Not yet!" The warmth of the encounter reflects the work being done in Darb al-Ahmar. This is not a soulless tourist zone, but a heritage-rich city center, full of friendliness, vitality and a new pride. —BY CATHRYN DRAKE



**AFTER DARK**

## Good Evening, Vietnam. A U.S. radio personality turns Hanoi bar owner

**THE DUCAL REALM** Duc devotes much of his bar to exhibitions, happenings and readings by local and visiting luminaries

**WHEN DOES A BAR RAISE THE bar?** When it's Paris' Café de Flore, New York City's literary White Horse Tavern or Harry's in Venice. Or when the humble barkeep is someone like Nguyen Qui Duc.

A memoirist, poet, scriptwriter, translator, former on-air personality for U.S. National Public Radio and the son of the highest South Vietnamese official ever imprisoned by the North, Duc now presides over Hanoi's Tadioto—a hip, brick-lined spot in a city fast becoming a place of cultural ferment.

This isn't just a place to sip Hanoi beer. For one thing, the upstairs rooms have become a free space for literary readings, informal salons and outlandish installations that dare to treat images of communist icon

Ho Chi Minh with irreverence.

While a West Lake location would have been more lucrative, Duc puts more stock in the fact that "the bar is a point of unlikely intersection for all sorts of people: film directors and street kids, gays and multiracial couples who don't want to be hassled." To keep nosey parkers and police from objecting, he pulls down Tadioto's shutters when proceedings go late.

On our visit, Swiss NGO workers unwound next to Hanoi's leading rap group while Aussie kids strummed bluegrass. They were all made welcome by a media host turned cultural emissary—a half-sage, half-schmooser who has replaced John Wayne as Vietnam's leading "Duke."

For more information, see [tadioto.com](http://tadioto.com). —BY JOHN KRICH

**AMUSE-BOUCHE**

## Black Ops. Like truffles? Start digging

LAST DECEMBER, A TRUFFLE gatherer in France's Rhône Valley was arrested after shooting dead a man he suspected of raiding his truffle groves. That's the kind of frightening passion that one of the world's most expensive foodstuffs can provoke. But hopefully gunfire won't be a feature of the truffle tours organized by Bernard Dugdale. His company specializes in cycle tours in France and Italy, but recently began running trips to the Périgord region of France to share Dugdale's love for the area's "little black gems."

The weekend tours are based around the town of Sarlat-la-Canéda and don't involve cycling. They take place three times a year during truffle season (December to February), although more are planned for next season. If you consider yourself a foodie, then you'll be in your element. The tours enable you to not only hunt for truffles but also to buy, cook with and gorge on the delicacy.

Searching for truffles is undoubtedly the highlight. On a bright, crisp January afternoon we set off expectantly into a *truffière* (truffle grove) with local guru Edouard Aynaud and watched

**IN THE BLACK** The *Tuber melanosporum* can easily fetch over \$1,500 a kilo

intently as his two truffle hounds almost immediately sniffed out their quarry—it was a decent size too. The fungus has to be gathered this way, and commands such a premium because it's virtually impossible to cultivate. Its spores are spread by small animals and fruit underground beneath oak, lime and hazel trees when weather and soil conditions are exactly right.

Three types of edible truffle can be found in Périgord, which is home to the sought-after black truffle, *Tuber melanosporum*—a variety that can fetch up to \$1,600 a kilo. Truffles can also be found in Provence, and famously in the Umbria and Piedmont regions of Italy, the latter being where the *Tuber magnatum* (white truffle) is found. That can sell for an astonishing \$14,000 a kilo.

Buying the best black truffle needn't be prohibitive, however. You can pick up a single one at Sarlat market for under \$50. Try it with scrambled eggs in the dish known as *brouillade aux truffes*. Of course, you could try to save money by gathering your own in the wild. But pick your groves carefully. The last person you want to offend is a *trufficulteur* with a gun.

For more details, visit [truffletours.com](http://truffletours.com). —BY SIMON HORSFORD

