

Algeria



...visiting the cities
Algiers and Oran...

November 2016

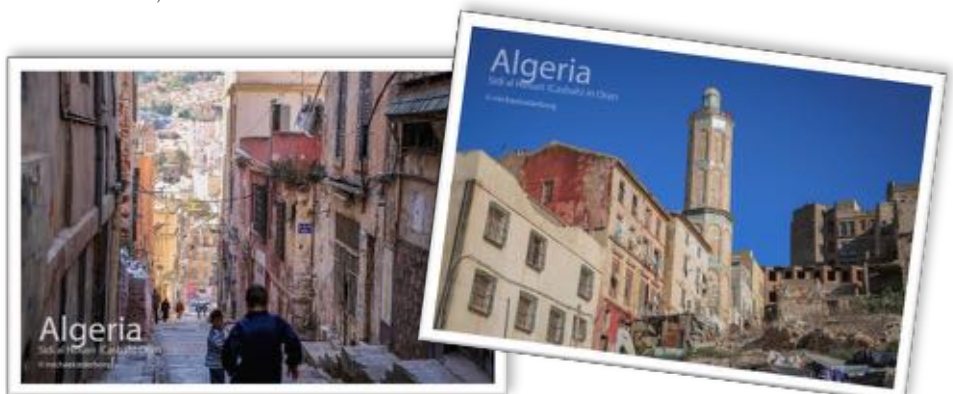
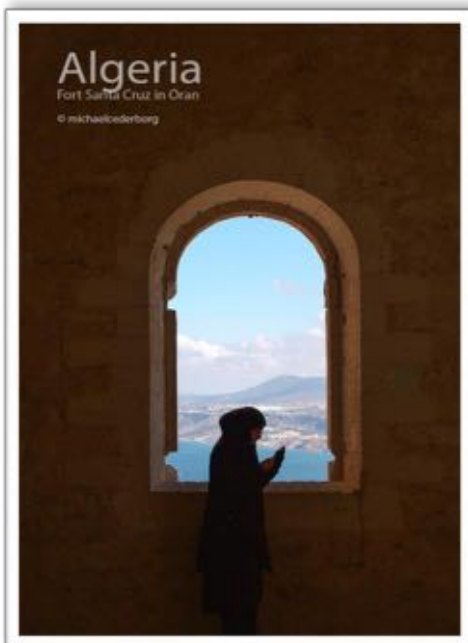


First stop to the ancient city of Oran on the coast.

...at short notice my wife and I decided to take a long weekend to the coastal cities of Oran and Algiers of Algeria. It is much easier to get visa compared with a few years back when the regime much stricter and required business visas and invitations primarily.

...Today it is very easy to fly with Air France via Paris to Algiers. Just leave enough transfer time at CDG (Paris) otherwise it will be a rat-race from arriving gate to departing gate – especially since one has to leave the Schengen area and thereby also pass passport/immigration. Upon arrival in Algiers we transferred to the domestic terminal for an onward flight to Oran.

Make sure to check the black-market for a better exchange rate of the dinar. We got ca: 15,000 instead of the official rate of 11,000 for 100 USD.



Oran - Algeria



Oran

The hometown of the famous writer Albert Camus

We took a taxi from the airport and checked into our boutique hotel – **The Royal Hotel Oran** – smack in the centre of town. This rated the best hotel in all of Algeria. The rooms, reception and bar was top-class and met our expectations. The breakfast is not much to write home about, nor is the service when one needs assistance, guidance etc. We had this as our base for the 2 nights we spent in Oran.

We managed to negotiate a taxi/guide to take us around to the sights we wanted to cover while in Oran. The cost for half a day was approximately 20 USD. **We went to see the old Fort Santa Cruz** on top of the hill overlooking the city and landscape magnificently. This was first constructed by the Ottomans. by the Spanish between 1577 and 1604.

The Spanish defeated the Ottomans, destroyed the old fort and rebuilt it during 1577 to 1604. The Fort was then again later taken over and reinforced by the French in the 19th century (1831). The fort is connected to some 14 other outposts and smaller forts by tunnels. The army could travel with horses and men through these tunnels then unseen.

We made a quick visit to the **Chapelle de Santa Cruz** (under restoration) built by the old Bishop of Oran back in 1847. A statue of Virgin Mary is erected here overlooking the city – a little bit like the Jesus statue in Rio. Virgin Mary – a saint – was there to protect the people from all sorts of danger including epidemics.





Oran – with the old Fort Santa Cruz

We made a “safe” lunch selection at the Hilton in Oran, partly as previous eating experiences had been so-so, but also since all restaurants were closed mid-day due to prayer time.

We continued to cover also the Pacha Mosque and the Casbah of Oran. Apart from the Fort, the most worthwhile visit was the old central station of Oran: La Gare d’Oran. Fabulous old building in Spanish/Moorish style nicely renovated.

A more delicate matter was to select a decent restaurant in town. We opted for the top-rated “La Comete”, walking distance from our hotel. The only place in town serving wine and beer. This could also be had at the hotel, but otherwise nothing served at the restaurants. The second evening we had dinner at the likewise, highly recommended Indian restaurant: Maharaja. I would rate both these restaurants as 3 on a 5-scale, but not higher. Oran does not attract many tourists apart from locals and the odd French/Spanish group.



Algiers – Algeria



Algiers

A capitol of some 5 million people

For Saturday and Sunday, we flew back to Algiers and checked in to the **Hotel El Djazair (former Saint George)**. A landmark and very famous from the French colonial days. A lovely old Algerian hotel, very expensive, but unfortunately not maintained and operated at the level one could expect.

The old bar however and the outdoor patio were quite spectacular. A lot of old mosaic and decoration had been done to try and restore the old look of the hotel. The rooms were quite worn as were the different floors. Again, the breakfast was a disaster and nothing what one could expect at the number one 5-star hotel in town.

A picture gallery is shown of all the famous people who have stayed here over the years – especially in the hey days of the 50-ies. With only a day and a half to spend we had to be a bit selective upon what things to do and see. We made a similar arranged here as we did in Oran – I.e. negotiated a price of a taxi/guide to take us around the city. We then set about to see the city of Algiers with its five million inhabitants – quite a busy town in deed.

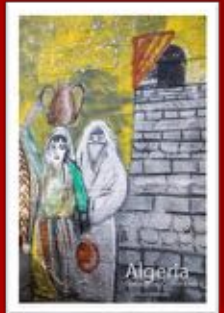
A lot of buildings remain from the French colonial days. Again, many of them are falling apart as there is little money to maintain and repair some of these fine old decorated buildings.



The famous Grande Poste and other shots in Algiers



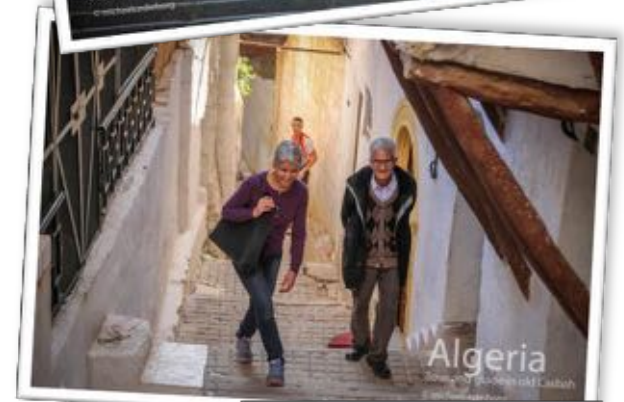
Algiers - Algeria



..So we started with a **visit to the famous “La Grande Poste d’Alger”** in the centre of town. From there we travelled along the waterfront which was nice with the old French lamp posts along the streets. Continuing up to the **Notre Dame d’Afrique situated up on the hill** with a marvellous view overlooking the see front and the city.

We then continued to the famous Casbah of Algiers. Here it was advised to only go into these old quarters in very poor conditions with a guide. This from where Algiers has gotten its nickname the white city, as all buildings were white with some windows and window-covers in blue. This part of the city is partly in ruins and here is also where all the poor people live. The un-employment rate is very high all over Algeria apparently. There were also checkpoints and police in many strategic places around the city. One also should be careful with taking photographs in certain parts of the town, as there are many military installations spread out.

Selecting a restaurant for the evening – our expectations weren’t too high remembering the experience from Oran. We opted for **the Taj Mahal – and yes it was quite mediocre** although listed as the no. 1 in Algiers. Unfortunately – no wine or Beer was served either..



Walk about in the old Casbah of Algiers

