



# Soma Bay

## Egypt's Up-and-Coming Hotspot

Over the last few months, I had been functioning on mad overdrive to team my busy work schedule with my social life. This, alongside the obligatory stress we all experience daily, courtesy of living in Cairo – the beeping cars, stagnant traffic and exhaust fumes serenading the air – caused my energy to fizzle out. I was adamant to find a way to recharge, to revive my more gleeful spirits, and to relax. I figured a weekend getaway, on my own, would work magic. I was in search of a dreamy local destination where I could pamper myself to oblivion, and which is close enough for me to escape to whenever I needed to unwind.

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On the recommendation of a friend, I was encouraged to head to La Residence des Cascades, the thalasso center and golf resort in Soma Bay, the independently owned 10 million square metre peninsula that is 45 kilometers away from Hurghada. I had never been there before nor knew many people who had, but I was made so curious by my friend's endless accolades of the place, that I decided to try it out. My verdict? I am going again soon.

There are so many good things to say to CT's readers about Soma Bay as a whole, to let them in on a good destination for their next vacation, that I don't know where to start. I think I'll begin with the hotel I stayed at, La Residence (as I continually abbreviate it) because it is a trophy discovery. I wasn't remotely surprised to learn that La Residence, with its impeccable location, facilities and service, is a member of *The Leading Hotels of the World*. Situated on a high point of the Soma bay peninsula, it is designed so that no matter where you look, the view is beautiful. From my room, I could see the blue seawaters against the desert landscape, and every morning I enjoyed my breakfast at the Dunes restau-

rant terrace overlooking the lush green golf course and a tranquil little lake. In the evenings, I sat in "The Gallery," one of the hotel's lounges and saw the starlit sky and the speckled neon lights all over the resort. And all throughout the day, there was not a single ruffle to be heard, nothing but the soft music played by the hotel or the sounds I chose to listen to on my Ipod.

What I like about La Residence is that it is luxurious without being pretentious. The hotel's brand of sophistication is the simplest kind. The furnishings are colored in classic monochromatic beiges and browns throughout, even in the rooms, which is relaxing for the eye and gives a feeling of warmth and coziness. No ostentatious marble pillars or huge gaudy chandeliers; just elegant interiors with nothing obtrusive. I also loved the service, for which I have to wave my hat off to the management. Aside from the unflawed cleanliness and the timely delivery of the guest requests, I was very happy with the genuine friendliness and positive disposition of the staff. Perhaps it's the relaxing weather of Soma Bay, the excellent instructions, the fact that the resort provides the staff with their own housing, the constant exposure to foreign guests, or all those factors combined, but from the front office to the porters, waiters, and housekeeping, I never came across a single disgruntled or clueless employee. Everyone at the hotel is always wearing a sunny smile and will tell you exactly what you need to know should you have a query. Which is more than can be said for many hotel venues in Egypt.

### THE STELLAR SPA

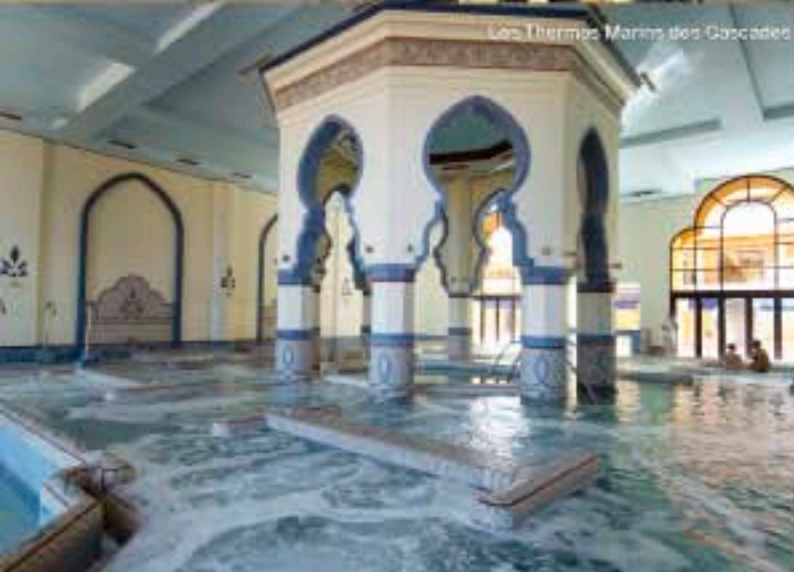
One of the most important features of La Residence is that it is home to "Les Thermes Marins des Cascades," a fully-equipped thalasso center (with 54 treatment cabins for the male and female guests), and also a member of *The Leading Spas of the World*. Yes, we have it right here in Egypt, yet many of us don't even know about it. For spa enthusiasts like myself, this is close to a dream come true, the ultimate venue to harness your well-being and indulge your senses. Thalassotherapy is, by definition, "the therapeutic use, under medical supervision, with preventive or curative aim, of sea water, marine climate and the derivatives." Simply put, it is the use of the sea (and anything coming from the sea) to enhance well-being: from showers of warmed seawater, to the use of marine mud or algae paste, to the inhalation of sea fog. All this in a pleasant venue in front of the sea to benefit from the climate and the sea view. This form of therapy was founded in France in the 1950's and is becoming popular worldwide as more people turn to nature to get away from the stress of modern life. It is almost a way of being for many people living in France and in Francophonized countries like Tunisia. The spa at La Residence is operated in cooperation with Les Thermes Marins de Saint-Malo, a renowned French thalassotherapy center, also responsible for training the staff at La Residence's spa.

Les Thermes Marins des Cascades offers a wide variety of invigorating face and body thalasso treatments for recuperative as well as aesthetic needs, including hydrotherapy, reflexology, slimming and draining treatments, pressotherapy, endermologie, body scrubs/wraps/massages, sea mist room, sauna and hammam. I tried out quite a few of the body treatments in a row. The first one was a marine scrub with 3 different algae to smooth the skin. The second was the seaweed wrap, where I was completely smothered from neck to toe in thick seaweed mud and then covered in a self-warming wrap for 25 minutes. It was so relaxing with the soft music in the background that I almost fell into baby-like sleep. The heat, coupled with the rich vitamins and minerals in the seaweed (such as vitamins A and C, magnesium, iron and potassium) soak into the skin, calming and re-mineralizing the body. Both treatments were followed by a sea water rinse. This is actually the beauty of thalassotherapy: whilst undergoing the treatments, regular shower water never touches your skin. Natural seawater is always used, even when washing off the treatments. To top off the luxurious pampering, I received the 'aromatic relax' massage. The masseuse asked me if I had a particular fragrance preference, and held out a tray of many essential oils for me to sample, of which I chose the zestful orange oil.

Between each treatment, I would take the spa elevator and head downstairs to the famous Aqualonic pool. I think I need an entire book alone to describe the pool experience. The Aqualonic is a 750 square metre pool subdivided into a number of distinct zones of water jets currents



The Cascades Championship Golf Course



Les Thermes Marins des Cascades



La Residence des Cascades Hotel

and counter-currents, and showers, each designed to revive and tone a specific part of your body. All throughout the pool, you are standing or sitting completely immersed in seawater but the jets are located at higher and higher points as you move from zone to zone, so that, effectively, the first zone begins at your ankles and you move along till you reach your upper back and neck. I also followed one of the instructors to perform some of the exercises against the water current. It was quite a challenge, but was formidable for muscle toning. When I had had jet massages galore, I went for a tan by the outdoor heated seawater pool, all the while ordering water and fresh juices from the spa's Health Bar.

Although I didn't have enough time this visit, I intend to use the spa's Sea Mist room in the future; this is a cabin immersed in sea fog from salty seawater. As soon as you step inside and inhale, you even feel traces of salt on your lips, and inhaling this sea breeze is one of the important treatments of thalasso centers. It is excellent for the breathing and the lungs. I also intend to try out the Under Affusion Massage, where oil is slowly massaged onto your body while a soft rain pour of warm sea water drips down on you and interlaces with the oil to give that relaxing oil and water sensation. I am smitten with Les Thermes Marins des Cascades. I felt so healthy and so invigorated from all the treatments that I inevitably found myself using the hotel's gym facilities everyday and eating well. This spa is the perfect place to relax, detox, rejuvenate, and feel absolutely amazing. It was a well chosen venue for my unwinding purposes.

### THE CASCADES CHAMPIONSHIP GOLF COURSE

Golf aficionados will also love La Residence des Cascades, where they can enjoy the game throughout winter and summer. The Cascades Championship Golf Course, which is almost 7000 yards, is unique because it is the first golf course open for play on the Western Red Sea coast, and also the first Championship Course in the Middle East designed by one of the the "Big Three" golfers in the World Series of Golf: Gary Player. It is an 18 hole, par 72 course that offers players a three-fold panoramic view while they play: the verdant golf Course, the stark desert landscape and the azure sea.

In addition to the Championship course, there is a 9 hole, Par 3 Chal-

lenge Course at the Cascades, also designed by Gary Player. This smaller course offers players (beginners and advanced) the chance to practice a variety of shots with emphasis on the short game.

For those who are clueless about golf, like myself, the Cascades has a Golf Academy to teach the sport. You can join individual and group tuition given by Head Pros and Pros. Classes start for individuals ages 8 up. I actually saw a couple of children training in the academy when I was there, with their little mini golf clubs that they rented from the "Golf Pro Shop" situated inside the hotel. If you're at the shop, you'll most definitely meet "Major," the friendly and long-standing golfer who manages the Cascade Golf. French, German, Italian and Swiss players can be seen all over the golf course, ready to strike their golf balls.

The Cascades Championship Golf Course has impressive golf practice facilities, including a 60 bay driving range, and several putting and pitching practice greens. And is if this all weren't enough, yet another golf course will be opening around the hotel. In a recent issue of *Golf Journal* magazine, the Cascades Championship Golf Course was ranked the 7<sup>th</sup> best golf course in the world, outside of Europe. Actually, for the past three years, the hotel's golfing course has been ranked amongst the top 20 golf courses worldwide.

### OTHER HOTELS IN SOMA BAY – ROBINSON CLUB AND THE SHERATON

La Residence is one of three major hotels in Soma Bay. The second is Robinson Club and the third is the Sheraton. Although my personal preference is always for independent hotels, each of the three has its own special identity to suit different people. Whilst La Residence caters to those seeking deluxe accommodation, as well as those more specifically inclined towards golfing and thalasso, Robinson Club, for exam-

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Sheraton Soma Bay

Soma Bay's beautiful waters.



The guests are drawn to Robinson Club because it offers extensive sports facilities include diving, snorkeling, windsurfing, sailing, archery, tennis, aerobics, pilates, stretching, as well as a gym and aerobics center.



ple, is an all-inclusive branch of the well-known German club and caters mainly for the German-speaking community. As soon as you enter the hotel gates, you notice the flags of Switzerland, Germany and Austria put up. The guests are drawn to Robinson Club because it offers extensive sports facilities include diving, snorkelling, windsurfing, sailing, archery, tennis, aerobics, pilates, stretching, as well as a gym and aerobics center. I saw a lot of young people on the hotel's beautiful beach renting surf-boards and catamarans.

Robinson Club also has continuous programs of entertainment and animation, including after dinner shows in the amphitheatre. It also houses a popular bar and disco. You basically don't need to move from the hotel; it is a fully-fledged holiday village. You're either swimming in the pool, lunching in one of the restaurants, watching a show, using the beach or dancing at the disco. Something very interesting about Robinson Club is that you don't pay in cash, but, rather, spend using cash-cards. And all the hotel staff are addressed by their first name, to instill the community feel of this holiday village.

The Third hotel in Soma Bay is the Sheraton. This is more lively for the guests who seek out a renowned 5-star hotel chain with all its amenities. The Sheraton Soma Bay has 3 restaurants, 3 bars and a disco. Much of the hotel's setup is modelled around Ancient Egyptian architecture, with constructions shaped like the pyramids, sphinx, and various pharaonic figures. The resort is home to an absolutely beautiful beachfront set against the backdrop of desert mountains. This is where you'll enjoy swimming in one some of the most pristine, transparent waters you will ever see.

There are also two more hotels under construction in Soma Bay, one of which will be called The Breakers, specialized for divers and kites. The second hotel will be managed by a luxury international brand and will feature 340 rooms with distinctive Moorish architecture and diverse water features. Moreover, an apartment hotel called Sea Breeze is also under construction. This will comprise fully furnished apartments complete with concierge, security and a 24 hour reception.

#### MORE TO COME

I can really see Soma Bay becoming Egypt's new exclusive hot spot very soon. As I toured around the resort, I saw a gorgeous harbor docked with many boats, gathering kite-surfers and sailors. Close to it a Marina center is being set up. This will imminently include brand name shops, bars, restaurants, bowling alleys and entertainment venues. No unknown brands will enter – to preserve the exclusivity and high standards of the resort.

There are also a lot of homes being constructed in Soma Bay; prototype villas and apartments. There are three types of villas in the resort; reef villas, marina villas and golf villas, depending on where they are located and the view that they are overlooking. The ones by the marina will be close to the commercial center of the resort, the ones further away will overlook the golf courses, while the reef villas will be in proximity to the house reef in Soma Bay, which is beautiful and actually has a huge 420 metre long jetty! Owing to this reef, which is one kilometer long and one of the finest in the region, a multitude of divers and snorkellers flock to the resort to revel in the marine experience. They also enjoy Soma Bay's diving center, which is one of the largest on the Red Sea, and accessible to guests staying in any of the resort's hotels.

Moreover, Soma Bay's flat waters and sandy beaches have made it such an ideal place for kiting that, within six months time, the resort will be home to a kite station.

Aside from all that, Soma Bay has a utility center, where the resort produces its own water out of the sea, and where all matters related to gardening and architecture take place. The resort also has its own gas station, central laundry and dry cleaning center, its own staff housing and workshop for repairing cars.

Whilst much of Egypt's tourism has been centered around historical sightseeing, our country has endlessly more to offer; beautiful beaches, excellent sporting facilities, spa services, diving, snorkeling, golfing, sailing, amongst other diverse activities. Soma Bay happens to combine all these recreations in one single place. To find out more about the resort, log on [www.somabay.com](http://www.somabay.com) ■

By Shaimaa Fayed