

IFEAT STUDY TOUR TO EGYPT

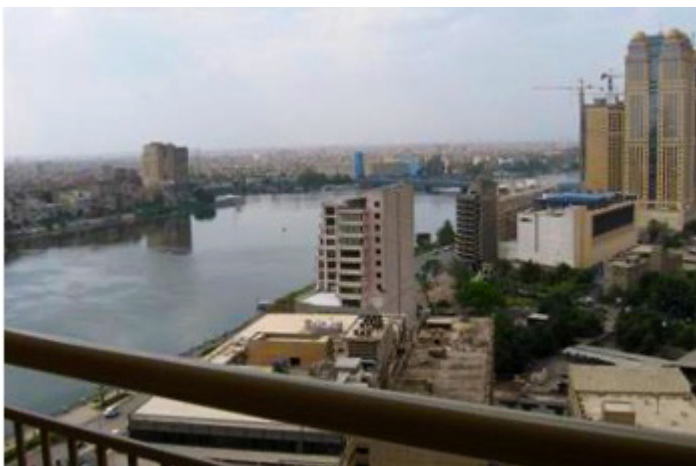
Saturday 26th May – Friday 1st June 2007

Even the most worldly and jaded veteran of the essential oils industry would have learnt something during the IFEAT 2007 Study Tour to Egypt. Notwithstanding that the tour was very efficiently sandwiched between two weekends, from arrival on Saturday 26th May to departure on Friday 1st June, it more than met the primary planning objective, namely, to enable participants to gain an intimate knowledge of the Egyptian essential oils industry.

As the Chairman of the Organising Committee commented in his opening remarks at the welcoming function, study tours are expensive, both in money and time and it was extremely important that they were of value to participants and their sponsoring organisations. The Egypt Study Tour was worth a great deal more than the cost of participation. By all accounts, it was an outstanding success and from the participant's experience, appeared to go completely according to plan, despite a few minor adjustments for inclement weather and mode of transport. That it went so well, especially considering the distance travelled, the range of visits and the other activities that were packed into a busy schedule, with little room for error, is a huge credit to the Organising Committee. While the programme ticked along seamlessly and without a hitch, it was quite obvious that an enormous amount of planning and co-ordination had preceded the delegates' arrival. Clearly a great deal of thought and preparation had been made by all concerned.

The Organising Committee was chaired by Mr Hussein A. Fakhry (A.Fakhry & Co) and supported by Mr Tarek Abou-Bakr (Fridal), Mr Alaa Hashem (Hashem Bros), Mr Mohamed Roushdy (Kato Aromatica) and Dr Sayed Machaly (Machalico). The Chairman and his extremely able and ubiquitous Programme Coordinator, Mrs Chérifa Rachad-Fakhry (A. Fakhry & Co) seemed to be everywhere at once and admirably kept it all together, enhancing the value of our Egyptian experience with encyclopaedic knowledge and good humour throughout.

The busiest people on Saturday 26th May, the arrival day for the majority of the delegates, would surely have been Mrs Amira Iskander, Messrs Ravi Sarkis and Khaled Mohi Eldin and their drivers, all of Liberty Egypt, the local tour agency. The earliest arrivals were just after daybreak and throughout the day and at the mercy of airline scheduling, the Liberty team were there to provide a most welcome and enthusiastic 'meet and greet' and assistance with airport formalities and hotel transfers. From the first day until the last delegate had left for home on Sunday 3rd June, the Liberty personnel were remarkable, accompanying the tour group throughout the programme, smiling, courteous and efficient to the end. The Conrad Hotel, located on the banks of the Nile in downtown Cairo was a well-chosen, with sympathetic staff and splendid home base from which to foray out into the Nile Delta and other areas.



View of the Nile from the Conrad Hotel

With most of the participants ensconced in the hotel by early evening, the tour programme started with evening cocktails and dinner with members of the Egyptian essential Oils Industry. Mr Hussein Fakhry welcomed the delegates and gave a detailed overview of what is clearly a very substantial essential oil industry and outlined the forthcoming programme. With pre-dinner drinks and dinner taking place in the Aida and Cleopatra Rooms, the scene was set for the 'Egyptian Essential Oils adventure'. There was a palpable excitement among the delegates.

By the time the delegates were assembling at the coach early on Sunday morning, all introductions had been made. The group was a good size comprising thirteen delegates from nine countries. Delegates included Yasuko Inoue, of Y.Inoue & Son (Hong Kong) Limited; Rob Schломann of John H. Elton, Inc, Forest Hills, New York, USA; Clarke Teng of Taiwan Fine Chemicals Company Limited, Taipei, Taiwan; Guy Vincent of Aromatherapy Associates, Brentford, United Kingdom; Pradeep Kapoor of Jagat Aroma Oils Distillery, Kannauj, India; Gary Zak of Global Essence, Inc., Freehold, New Jersey, USA; D.A Perera of EOAS Organics (Pty) Ltd, Ratmalana, Sri Lanka; Vasanth Venkatasamy of Jasmine C.E. (Pvt) Ltd, Tamilnadu, India; Greg Knowles from Berjé, Bloomfield, New Jersey, USA; Jim Casson of Frith Farm in Basingstoke, United Kingdom; John Fergeus of Australian Botanical Products, Victoria, Australia; Tirta Salim of PT. Indowangi Nusajaya, Medan North Sumatra, Indonesia and Ian Mclean of S&D Botanicals (Pty) Ltd, Cape Town, South Africa.

The first port-of-call was Kato Aromatic based in Harreneya near the Pyramids at Giza. Kato Aromatic, founded in 1971, and a pioneer in the Egyptian market, produces and exports more than 60 essential oils, flavours and fragrances as well as herbs and onions. Kato Aromatics is an important entity within the Kato Investment Conglomerate. The company, with its own farms and extensive production and processing capacity at various locations, has established itself as a world leader in the distillation and extraction of essential oils, with a strong position in jasmine



First day of the tour

concretes and absolutes having access to nearly 800 hectares of jasmine plantations. Following a presentation by Mr Mohamed Roushdy, Managing Director, the group was taken on a guided tour of Kato's impressive production facilities. For those of the group unfamiliar with large scale essential oil industries, the scale of the facilities was an eye-opener and an indication of what was to follow. This was clearly a large, well-developed industry. With a thoroughly enjoyable first exposure and with delightful gifts of jasmine perfume and other artefacts, a fragrant-smelling bus departed Kato's well manicured gardens and tidy facilities for the next event.



Chamomile distillation facility Kato Aromatics

The Study Tour promotional flyer had advised participants to be prepared for hard travelling by coach for long distances. "The tour' it said, ' was for the dedicated industry enthusiast'. As if to prove a point, the next leg of the programme had the large luxury bus barrelling along the Desert Road towards Alexandria, to the 'Diva' Farms located on the periphery of the Delta and basically in the Desert. The Diva Farms, comprise some 10 000 hectares of aquifer-irrigated land and provide contract growing opportunities for Fridal F. Tarek Abou Bakr & Company across a range of products. Met by Fridal's

Chairman, Mr Tarek Abou Bakr and his son Hussein T. Abou –Bakr (Herb and Spices Manager) and a brief but welcome refreshment stop at the entrance to the Diva Farms, the tour proceeded through the huge farming operation, past numerous crops ranging from wheat to wine grapes, bananas to deciduous fruit, to the Fridal curly parsley and onion operations. Fridal, founded in the early 1950' has grown into a leading Egyptian producer of Herbs and Spices, Essential Oils, Extracts, Flavours and Fragrances.

With the Conrad Hotel's impressive lunch box providing sustenance, the direction changed southwards in the direction of Fayoum, visiting Fridal's tagetes and parsley plantations en route. Mr. Abou Bakr Snr is clearly a committed parsley enthusiast and was given the moniker 'The Parsley King' by the group. Parting company with Fridal for the day, the bus headed back towards the Nile and an organic-certified Small



Fridal parsley fields Diva Farms

Farmer Co-operative near Fayoum. One of the remarkable aspects of this tour was the intimate introduction to rural life in the Nile Delta. The narrow roads meandered through small towns and villages, past hundreds of small verdant farms in a picture book setting of palms, busy people and animals and abundant harvests. It made a lasting and dramatic impression on the group. Idyllic as it was however, the narrow roads, edge to edge farms and oddly-shaped bridges were soon to become an obstacle for the tour bus. Certainly the bus attracted attention as it was probably the first time that a vehicle of that size had ever been in some of the villages it passed through. Amam, the driver was very skilled and patient and managed to negotiate some tight corners, enabling the tour to arrive at the Co-op in the late afternoon. Hussein Fakhry and his wife Chérifa who provide support and markets for the Co-op joined the tour party for a walk into the herb fields and a demonstration of herb drying and processing. With considerable charm and with open hearted hospitality, the Co-op Manager and his family invited the group to enjoy some splendid food and take away samples of the Co-op's products. Everyone seemed pleased with the visit. It was rural Egypt at its very best.



Dressed for the occasion, Fayoum Organic Co-operative

In the dark, the narrow roads and bridges proved too taxing for the driver, despite his obvious skill and the bus was unable to proceed. In attempting to turn about in a field, the bus ran aground and bogged down. With kit and parcels in hand, the group squeezed into two cars and a police pick-up truck and headed for the Auberge du Lac, our hotel for the night, leaving the driver and Liberty staff to solve the stuck-bus problem. After a long, uncomfortable ride for some, the group arrived at the unusually-named Auberge du Lac. The hotel was an absolute oasis; a splendidly refurbished bird- hunting

lodge on the shore of a huge lake, Birket Qarun, and very aptly named as it turned out. It had been a very long first day. The Study Tour promotional flyer was proving to be correct but not so bad that supper and a glass or two of subtle Egyptian Rubbayyat Red couldn't put right! Monday 28th May, Day Two, saw the group driving in a somewhat smaller replacement bus towards Beni-Suef and a visit to Fridal's impressive almost- complete production facilities. When operational, in August 2007, these facilities will allow continuous processing of herbs, initially parsley, from freshly harvest through washing, cleaning, steam pasteurisation drying and packaging, with herbs being delivered from outlying growing areas including Diva Farms. Fridal's new facilities are located in close proximity to the important geranium growing area that provides some 95% of the Egyptian Geranium oil output. There are between 30 -40 co-operative owned distilleries supplied mainly by small-scale farming operations with larger companies purchasing oils on a contract basis. A visit to an operating co-operative distillation unit had been arranged and provided a good insight into fixed point group distillation facilities. The arrival of the tour attracted much attention from the local area and a festive atmosphere, complete with ice cold coca-cola, made the visit one of the many highlights of the tour. (The estimated geranium oil production for 2007/2008 is between 80-100 tons).



Small farmer co-operative distillery

Leaving behind the small scale farmers and co-op owned distillation facilities, the programme shifted to Fridal's substantial essential oil and concrete production facility and herb processing plant. Tagetes was 'in the pot' and freshly harvested curly parsley was being processed, from cleaning through to drying and packing. After lunch, the long drive back Cairo saw the group back at the Conrad Hotel in time for a clean up and rest before departing for dinner at

the Rubbayyat Restaurant in the very impressive Mena House, near the Giza Pyramids. The dinner was followed by a floor show featuring splendidly colourful and extremely energetic traditional Egyptian music, dancing and whirling. The singer, Mazhaz deserves a special mention as one of the best Frank Sinatra/Marvin Gaye - 'You heard it on the Grapevine' - impersonators of all time. By the time the group returned to the Conrad, it had been a long day, albeit an instructive and satisfying one.

The third day of the Study Tour, Tuesday 29th May, saw an early departure to Kalioubeyya to visit the fields and factory of Hashem Brothers. The Hashem Brothers family partnership was established in 1974, with the essential oils and aromatic products division being formed in 1994. Today, Hashem Brothers is one of the foremost producers of oils and aromatics products in Egypt with a range of nearly 50 quality Essential Oils, Concretes and Absolutes. For many of the participants, Jasmine and Egypt were synonymous and it was a rather special privilege to be present during Jasmine harvest and interacting with the Jasmine pickers. And what a happy team of pickers they were, expressing their welcome with much ululation! The noise and the technique employed to make it greatly intrigued Yasuko Inoue who tried unsuccessfully to emulate the women, despite their enthusiastic encouragement and mirth at her difficulties. Ululating is undoubtedly difficult or even impossible for a Japanese speaker. Much fun was had at Yasuko's expense although she took to picking rather well.

With baskets brimming with fragrant flowers, the women pickers made for the weigh in and the fragrant blossoms found their way into the solvent extraction vessels. Carnations had also been harvested and deliveries of Calendula and Violet leaf were being checked, with the production facility large enough to be able to handle multiple products simultaneously with no cross contamination from flower state to absolute. Steam distillation of Marjoram was underway at a large multi-pot distillery. All in all, the facility was a hive of activity. Following a tour of the geranium



Yasuko Inoue picking jasmine

blending store, laboratory and finished goods store, the group were treated to a splendidly presented, delicious buffet lunch of traditional Egyptian delicacies before returning to Cairo.



Baskets brimming with jasmine flowers

During the early part of the afternoon, a breeze had built up into a warm gusty wind, bringing with it dust and sand particles. By the time the group were back in Cairo, visibility was very poor, taking with it any chance of the planned Sound and Light Show at the Pyramids. With dinner reservations at the popular Abu El Sid Restaurant originally scheduled for after the show, the group took advantage of the respite and went poolside, went horizontal or went walking to the local mall until departure for downtown Cairo for supper at the Abu El Sid. Two slap-up traditional meals in one day was a real bonus and enjoyed by all.

The places, the people and the character of each Company and facility visited had been refreshingly different, albeit a similarity of products and processing technology. The visit to Machalico at Gharbeyya, about 100 kms north of Cairo was also different.

The group visited the agricultural sites at Bassioune and the Machalico Factory at Mehallah, located alongside the agricultural site.

Machalico has an advantage with 60% of its raw material comes from its own agricultural sites, producing concretes and absolutes of a wide range of flowers including Jasmine, Marigold, Carnation, Bitter Orange, Geranium and Cassie, among others. Agreements with small Geranium producers in Beni-Suef provide for approximately 20 tons of Geranium oil per year.

The Bassioune site was in an idyllic setting of date palms waving in the breeze with Bitter Orange trees lining the roadways and violets forming a carpet under the palms. Carnation and violet leaf harvest was underway during the visit, the raw material making its way to the production facility –or rather the 'Usine de Matieres Premieres de Parfumerie Machali'. Under Dr El-sayed Machaly's enthusiastic and energetic leadership, the group was able to see the full working facility and get maximum exposure to the production of concretes.



Machalico's Bassioune farm



Machalico's concretes

The trip back to Cairo was, as had been the case in all the previous instances, comfortable, quick and traffic free due primarily to the organisation of escort vehicles, whose drivers made a point of clearing the way ahead for the bus with frequent blasts on the horn and siren.

Travel this way made light of Cairo's legendary traffic.

A quick refresh at the Conrad and the group was on the way to Giza Plateau for the Sound and Light Show and what turned out to be a highly memorable and thought-provoking evening. The history of Egypt, the Nile and its Pharaohs is indeed the history of civilization. Having been witness to some breathtaking negotiating skills by Greg Knowles during the purchase of a glass pyramid from the curio sellers, the group left for yet another memorable meal in a downtown restaurant and then back to the Conrad. A certain level of sustainable stamina is a definite requirement for such tours, although the opportunities for 'partying' per se were rather self-regulated due to the early departures and the long days.

Thursday 31st May saw the group depart early for the last visit. Since its inception in 1955, A. Fakhry and Company located in the heart of the Nile Delta has devoted itself, from father to son, to the extraction of essential oils from aromatic plants. Located north of Tanta, the Company

All in all, a well organised farm and impressive production facilities. Dr Magued Machaly's daughter, Ayat (Little Miracle) Malicaly had co-ordinated a superb sit-down lunch, rounded off with the most outstanding dessert of mixed baklava.

Egyptian cuisine was attracting much attention by this stage of the tour!



Ayat's baklava

is committed to working in an environmentally-friendly approach. Its activities are organised around a nucleus of 65 hectares of fields planted with some 50 varieties of organically certified aromatic crops. This organic nucleus as well as a conventional farming network of over 1000 hectares gives the Company considerable advantage and is able to produce approximately 130 different variously-certified naturals, including Essences, Essential Oils, Hydrolats, Concretes, Absolutes, Waxes and a number of specialty fresh and dried botanicals.



Hussein Fakhry outlining activities

The Owner-President of A. Fakhry and Company and Chairman of the Tour Organising Committee, Hussein Fakhry travelled in the bus with the group providing, through the microphone, enlightened commentary and insight into Egypt, its history, its agriculture, its demographics and its opportunities and threats. Expanding on his opening presentation on the industry at the welcoming function, Hussein was able to pull together the various elements of the programme so that by the time the bus had arrived at the Fakhry establishment, many loose ends had been neatly tied, leaving everyone with a thorough overall understanding of the Egyptian essential Oils Industry.

Hussein Fakhry describes his activities as "doing different things and doing things differently". That is certainly apparent when walking over the farm and touring the production facilities. He is the quintessential organic crusader and proves it by deed. He is an environmental activist and is concerned about the water and pollution issues in Egypt as they affect agriculture and living standards and the residual impact on products. From the nursery to seed banks, from composting and vermiculture to biological controls and water management, from having one's own bees to creating soil complexity and balanced plant nutrition as a means to preventing disease, from a 'seed to shelf' quality commitment, there is much evidence of a sincere and total commitment to organic production.

A wide range of essential oils were presented for sensory evaluation in a charming setting under a spreading grape vine, to the haunting accompaniment of an Egyptian version of a horizontal harp, and ice-cold refreshments.



Sensory evaluation



A farm view

Following the sensory evaluation session, the group visited a second company farm notable for its dairy operation and substantial field crops, before joining Chérifa Rachad-Fakhry at her father's outstanding stone built house for a wonderfully prepared lunch, taken on a 'breeze-block' enclosed verandah which provided a perfectly cool and tranquil setting. From the arrival welcoming carnation garlands draped over the

necks by a group of pretty young girls to the warm hospitality and sumptuous feast, couple with the undoubted and pervasive commitment to good agricultural and manufacturing practice, the visit to A Fakhry & Co was extremely satisfying.



The delicate aroma of organic Egyptian jasmine

Organising Committee no less) into showing their belly dancing skills or lack thereof. Except for one, who showed remarkable talent (and for reasons of anonymity, won't be mentioned), the others should rather stick to essential oils. The cruise ended with fond and grateful farewells to the Committee and the party changed location to the Conrad, where a few die-hards kept the flame alive.

Chérifa Fakhry's earlier gift to each member of the group was a silver "Key of Life' or 'ANKH', the symbol of Egypt. A fitting gift as a reminder of an outstanding and memorable study tour.

Not only was the tour an invaluable learning experience, it provided a clear picture of the range and quality of aromatic products available from Egypt and inevitably, there will be good commercial spin-offs from the group's exposure to the Egyptian Essential Oils Industry, not to forget the valuable lessons that they take back to enrich their own endeavours. Attending the Study Tour satisfied a long-held wish of most of the delegates who were unfamiliar with the Egyptian industry, namely to see and experience it first hand. Thanks to a superbly organised and executed programme, that



The group

wish was more than satisfied and without exception, all the members of the group left Egypt very satisfied with the tour, the organisation thereof and no doubt fond memories of friendship, fellowship, hospitality, good humour, generosity and enthusiasm of all those involved. Most significantly, the genuine willingness of the Egyptian Essential Oil Industry's leading members to share their knowledge and experience underpinned the success of the tour.

The final event of the programme was the farewell dinner on the Nile Pharaoh, an elaborate 'Cleopatra' barge that would cruise up and down the Nile as we partook of our food and refreshments. The members of the Organising Committee and their wives attended along with the tour members. It was a perfect evening and the 'rivers-eye' view of the city and the brightly-lit hotels along the banks of the Nile showed everything to advantage.

A truly remarkable city of almost 20 million people, with its harshness hidden by the night. The band played and the barge cruised gracefully and slowly up and down river. The floor show, with its lithe and attractive belly-dancer and a colourfully attired whirling 'dervish' was partly disrupted by three of the group members being press-ganged (by the