



# Bridge in the Desert

by Bernard Magee

January and February are great months to travel to get away from the cold Winter: this year being an exceptionally good one to escape. Mr Bridge has been running breaks in Tunisia for eight or nine years now, using the Royal Kenz Hotel in Port El Kantaoui among others. A great hotel, a lovely atmosphere and good bridge; the weather tends to be 10 degrees warmer than at home and there is usually a breeze to contend with.

It was time for us to try somewhere hotter and, with that in mind, I took a group of players to Sharm El Sheikh. On the Southern tip of the Sinai Peninsula the weather is consistently in the mid 20s in January and can be relied on.

I went out early with one of our helpers, Jo, so that we could prepare the bridge rooms and check out the facilities of both the hotel and the whole resort. After two or three days of sun, the clients were due to arrive and they duly did, in the middle of the worst storm to hit for seven years.

They do not do rain in this part of the world – most of the roofs are flimsy and many are slatted or do not even exist. Hence, after hours of persistent rain everywhere was flooded, powercuts plunged the hotel into darkness and rivers of water greeted the guests.

Electric storms decorated the sky for hours on end – I sat on my balcony to take it all in – at the same time I was wondering how to cheer up the guests.

What a greeting: half an inch of water on your bedroom floor.

Hotels all over the resort were in chaos: millions of pounds worth of damage had been done, but the staff worked tirelessly to overcome the problems and the weather had soon

regained its usual calm sunny aspect. Within 2 or 3 days things were back to normal and we all started to settle a little more. By the end of the holiday, we were able to think of the storm as a wonderful experience.

The bridge room was spacious and held both the seminar facilities and playing facilities in the same area, which made things simpler. We had some noise and temperature problems, but, all in all, I think it has the potential to make an excellent venue for our events in the coming years.

Fortunately our playing venue was not affected by the storm, so we were able to settle in to playing – most people play only in the evenings, but there is bridge available most afternoons and there are seminars on some mornings followed by set hands.

On the first evening after the storm, some players were still to arrive and others had settled in and were playing: the situation was chaotic, but all in hand – you can experience these kinds of things during an auction, but all too often, one player loses control:

West	North	East	South
			1♥
1♠	2♦	3♣	3♥
Pass	4♦	End	

Auctions where all four players bid a different suit are unusual and it is important to be wary on such deals – very often they will be misfits and staying low tends to be the wisest option. West makes a weak but reasonable overcall, North's 2♦ is also reasonable, but East's 3♣ is too much, he does better to pass. However, as is so often true in bridge, if your bad bid induces an equally bad bid from your opponent, then was your bid so bad after all? South has a weak opening bid and no fit for his partner, so he should be wary. His 3♥ bid is poor: opening 1♥ and rebidding 3♥ should suggest a six-card suit: remember that your partner still has a bid – with a little help in hearts he might bid them now. However, North wants to play in diamonds – 3♦ would have been perfect, for +110, instead he has to settle for 4♦ one off.

It is amazing how often one mistake is followed by another in bridge: had East passed over 2♦, South would have rebid 2♥, North would have bid 3♦ and that might have finished the auction. So East will feel his bid was brilliant and it is not easy to argue with success.

Of course, had North-South left their opponents to play the contract (doubled) then they would certainly have got their best score: against accurate defence, declarer will make only six tricks in clubs. When you think there is a misfit and the bidding is stormy, let your opponents play the contract – so often they will end up wrecked. ▶

**Dealer South. Love All.**

♠ 6 2 ♥ Q ♦ A K 9 6 4 3 2 ♣ 10 6 3	<table border="1" style="margin: auto;"> <tr><td></td><td>N</td><td></td></tr> <tr><td>W</td><td></td><td>E</td></tr> <tr><td></td><td>S</td><td></td></tr> </table>		N		W		E		S		♠ 8 ♥ K 4 3 ♦ J 8 7 ♣ K Q J 9 8 7	♠ K Q 7 3 ♥ A 9 8 7 6 ♦ 5 ♣ A 5 2
	N											
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## Bridge in the Desert

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The weather settled down and the skin colours of our group changed gradually: from snow-white to red and then into varying shades of brown. Knowing the weather will be warm and calm everyday makes dressing so much easier. Sharm el Sheikh is a resort: very few locals live in the area; most work for 40 days on the trot and then travel home for 7 days to Cairo or Luxor or the like. One of our restaurant managers, Ayman, took us on a local tour, to the various religious establishments: Coptic Christian and Muslim and then around the resort. It was interesting to get a flavour of the area as well as to see some of their traditions, one of which is to celebrate Christmas on January 6th, which explained why all the decorations were still up, including their nativity figures and manger together with a Father Christmas in the background.

## Snorkelling

Sharm el Sheikh is most famous for its snorkelling. Now you could be forgiven for thinking that this might not interest the bridge group, but by the end of the holiday I would say more than 80% of the group had been in.

My first visit to the 'snorkelling beach' had seen the pontoon (of plastic barrels) going up and down on the waves, so I had thought it best to warn people off the idea. However, as the days progressed and with flat calm seas, the pontoon was much more easily navigated and so I suggested that the bridge group might take a bus down together.

This was not so much an organised tour, rather an opportunity to go snorkelling whilst there were others about for moral support.

Over 30 of us made the trip and it was great to see so many people getting in. With the pontoon so flat, I was able to lead some players up fully clothed (Pam

and Brenda). You could see plenty of fish off the pontoon, especially near the end where a shoal tended to congregate.

So what was the snorkelling like?

Thousands of fish, all sorts of colours, colourful corals of all shapes and sizes, giant clams, sea anemones, seaweeds, little crabs. The sea water is very salty which contributes to its buoyancy. My favourite experience came on a calm day when I was able to lie face down on the water without moving for ten to fifteen minutes. This enabled me just to watch the sea-life beneath me and since I did not need to move, many of the more shy animals made an appearance. Some of the colourful fish tend to swim and dance all of the time, but the quieter fish, especially some of the groupers, hide in the shadows. I hovered above a



large red fish (I think it was a moon grouper) and I stared into its blue eyes for at least a minute, but there was only going to be one winner in that competition. I gave in and turned my attention to some of the camouflaged fish – their skin very similar in colour to the coral. Then I moved closer to the pontoon and swam amongst the shoals of fish and before long I started getting a few pains on my chest which they were nibbling.

Calm days at the pontoon led to very pleasurable snorkelling and so often calm and passive play by declarer will lead to an equally pleasurable outcome. The term passive tends to describe the avoidance of playing new suits: generally, in bridge, the side that leads a suit for the first time is at a disadvantage

unless the suit turns out to be very strong (or very weak).

♠ K 4		♠ A Q 7 6 2
♥ K J 10		♥ 6 4
♦ K Q 6 3		♦ 10 9 8 7
♣ J 9 4 2		♣ 6 3
♠ J 5	N	
♥ 8 7 5 2	W	E
♦ J 5	S	
♣ K Q 10 8 7		
♠ 10 9 8 3		
♥ A Q 9 3		
♦ A 4 2		
♣ A 5		
3NT by South. Lead ♠K.		

On this hand West led the ♣K against 3NT: a perfectly reasonable lead from a good strong suit (KQ10 is a broken sequence so it is worth leading from the top). However, North's club strength makes the lead less potent.

Declarer has eight top tricks. It might be tempting to take some top tricks and look at discards, but so often best play is

to give the opponents the lead blind and let them open up a new suit. Win and lead a club back. West takes his queen but has to switch suits and looking at dummy, he decides to switch to the ♠J. At first glance this looks like good defence – he finds his partner's strong suit – but, as so often when the defenders open up a suit, it gives declarer the upper hand. East takes two spade tricks, but this establishes two for declarer, leaving him with ten tricks.

As suggested, for good switches you want very weak suits or very strong suits. The defence's weakest suits make safe switches: hearts and diamonds give nothing away. Left to his own devices, declarer will probably make only nine tricks: aiming for a tenth by leading towards his ♠K and losing to the ace. ▶

## Bridge in the Desert

continued

Understanding that calmness is often the best defensive technique is not easy, but had you lain on the surface of the water and seen the fish as if in another



world, then you would understand that it is worth considering.

### Tours

There were a limited selection of tours available: a large party went to St Catherine's Monastery near to the site of the Burning Bush. Other tours took you on glass-bottom boats or to Ras Mohammed – a national park at sea – coral gardens that were alive with fish and plants. There were other tours available and we will make sure there is a more extensive range in the future.

### Hotel



The hotel was a great sprawling complex with four or five pools and several restaurants. However, the bridge group had our own private restaurant for the evening meals which was excellent for ambience and social purposes. Perhaps the favourite mealtime was breakfast: the pleasure of



being able to sit in the sun with the temperature already in the 20s at 8am meant that many of the bridge group would sit outside the Atrium restaurant and create a lovely atmosphere and we could almost have had a bridge movement, although early morning bridge would take a little getting used to.

### Till Next Time

The bridge group had great fun: there were plenty of different events and seminars as well as tours and snorkelling. Undoubtedly, there were parts of the holiday that could be bettered (all-inclusive resorts take getting used to) but I



feel sure that there will be a great improvement next year. The new General Manager of the hotel arrived just two days before me and he has great plans for the hotel. I took all my problems to him at the end of the event and he was confident that he will correct them for next year.

Hence it is with excitement that Mr Bridge can offer you two choices next year:

Egypt in January for sun and snorkelling or Tunisia in February for warmth and culture.

They are very different experiences, but I can assure you that you will enjoy either. ■

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The bridge itinerary consists of four seminars and set hand sessions, a quiz with an answer session and a varied evening programme.

\*per person half-board sharing a twin-bedded room and is inclusive of bridge fees. Single supplement £221 per fortnight. These prices are based on air travel from Gatwick. Flights from other airports are available at a supplement, Birmingham, Glasgow, Bristol, Cardiff, Manchester and Newcastle.

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