



A Day in the Life of a Bell Teacher in Libya

If you're an owl rather than a lark, leaving the villa at 7.30 a.m. may take some getting used to. The journey to work can take in a variety of routes through Tripoli, depending on the whims of the individual drivers but the seafront is scenic and the volume of traffic astounding compared to when I was last here in 1998. For the owls, the trip is a chance to slowly come to...

The first class of the day starts at 8.30 sharp (ish). The Libyans have a relaxed and probably healthy (given the summer heat) attitude towards time. If you want to be a stickler for punctuality, insist on 'English time' (their phrase). Class won't begin properly until the atmospheric battle has been enacted. Some students make a stand for fresh air, others for cool air, while a few prefer shade. So the usual compromise is the aircon set at say 22°C with the windows partly open and the blinds partly drawn.

The lessons generally comprise 2½ hours of contact time and teachers are required to take two such sessions, the second of which may involve a split shift (i.e. coming back to the school at 4.30pm), although these are avoided where possible. The main texts used at present are Cutting Edge and English File which, allowing for certain cultural anomalies, work reasonably well. The demands of the mid-term and end of course exams mean that the majority of the lesson will be spent on course material but games and communicative activities can also be worked in for reinforcement.

The vast majority of the students are exceptionally good-natured and friendly. Most are also very aware of the potential of English to enhance their careers and are thus motivated to learn. However, all the students also have to fit the course in around work and the demands of home life and personally I allow some leeway with completion of homework. In fact flexibility is also key to lesson planning, as pairwork activities (for instance) can be affected by a student suddenly being required at work or by the call to prayer.

Overall living and working with Bell in Libya is an enjoyable experience. The teaching is rewarding, the villa accommodation is luxurious (marble floors, literally thousands of satellite TV channels and our own gym) and a Moroccan cook and his wife who look after us well. There is a beach nearby with good snorkelling and also a tourist village we can use. Tripoli is an easy taxi ride away. Two of Libya's three World Heritage sites are within easy access. Ghadames and desert sites are feasible for a week-end break and other facilities (diving, windsurfing, tennis etc.) are improving as Libya opens up to tourism.