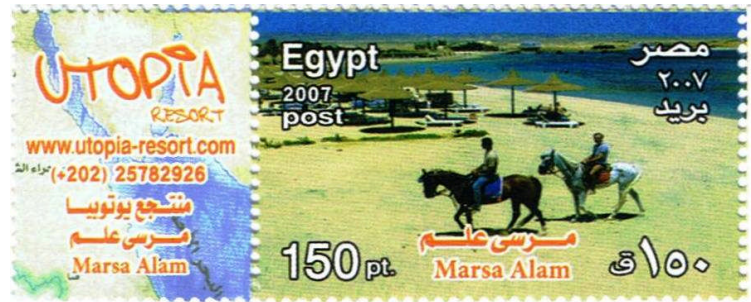


Marsa Alam Resort: Egypt's First "Commercial" Stamp

Mike Murphy (ESC 240)

Far be it from me to feed the frenzy for spurious modern "rarities" (see Edmund Hall, *QC* 226, p.64 ff.), but a recent new issue is wildly popular at the moment even though it is apparently not available either from the Cairo Philatelic Bureau or from post offices throughout the country.

The multicoloured 150-piastre stamp showing two leisurely horsemen on an idyllic beach was apparently printed offset by the Printing House of the National Postal Organisation and issued on December 24, 2007, as a purely commercial venture by the Utopia Resort in Marsa Alam, which is some 100 miles south of Hurghada on the Egyptian Red Sea coast.



According to my information, publication of the stamp was inspired by the British "Smilers" series, in which a small no-value label nominated by the sponsor is printed between authentic stamps, which are valid for postage and bear a Post Office value. Here however, the whole design was sponsored by the resort's owners, and all 100,000 printed copies were delivered to the resort itself for sale only to registered guests.



Though the stamp bears a value, and the word "Post" in English and Arabic, it will be interesting to see whether it is valid for postal purposes. The Post Office published its usual trilingual information sheet (*left*) with the stamp, describing it as a "commemorative" and naming its designers as Amani Ahmed Ali and Rasha el-Zonkoli, both regular designers for the PO – but I understand that the brochure was later withdrawn and destroyed. All stamps of Egypt are now submitted for authentication to the UPU-based World Association for the Development of Philately. Perhaps it is no surprise that its website (<http://www.wnsstamps.ch/en/>)

records no Egyptian issue between December 16 (anniversaries of Ahmed Shawky and Ibrahim Hafidh) and 30 (Handball Federation anniversary) in 2007. Yet despite the doubts, philatelists in Egypt are being told: "You must have a sheet of this; it's going to be a real rarity"; and blocks of four are being offered on a collectors' website for 10 euros and a block of nine for 25 euros. This latter, a top marginal block, carries information indicating a printing date of December 28.

Footnote: Egypt Post accepts the stamp as valid for postal purposes: Dr Sherif Samra (ESC 311) has kindly sent me this cover, franked only with the stamp in question (the correct Air Mail rate for UK is 150pi). It is not the world's best handstamp CDS, but there it is, from the Mohandessin office in Cairo, and quite clearly dated 7.10.2008. Perhaps this will after all become a collector's item but only – because the date slug is inverted!

