



Bread : where bread is life and life is about getting bread !

What is your staple food?

Most of us “agaenib” (Arabic for foreigners) have forgotten what it is like to be in a country that has a STAPLE food. If I were to ask you this question, you may immediately think of what is the popular food:

In England, probably curry!

In America, possibly pizza and ice-cream.

In South Africa... probably steak...?

But here in Egypt, the food that is:

- * the basic dietary item
 - * the pre-dominant daily item
 - * the main constituent
 - * and an integral part of life....

IS BREAD!!

Interestingly, the Arabic word for bread “aish” is similar to the word “to live”!

What type of bread is this?

Well, in this country, nowadays, you can get bread which is what we would call “normal”: it comes delivered in a small van, is in a packet, is pre-sliced and is scathingly referred to by the locals as “toast”. This is far from what they call bread!

Shammy bread:

This is what Egyptians love, and no meal is complete without it. The look, ingredients and size may vary depending on where it is made. But in the cities, there are 2 main options:

1. a local “government” bakery, usually found in the local souq (market). You usually find this by following your nose: that wonderful permeating smell of fresh bread. That and the teeming mass of agitated people, yelling and gesticulating to the bakers (behind bars) who are taking orders from the people. This bread is subsidised (read: very cheap) and bought by the load... literally! They are then carted off (sometimes literally) in bags, cardboard boxes, on pallets balanced on heads or on trays. But there is a trick: they need to be cooled off individually, separated, before they are packed, or else they get damp, sticky and not well! So on any surface near the bakery: pavement, table, tram seats, station....you will find these breads laid out to “dry”. Once they have cooled sufficiently, they will be packed up and taken home. This process happens usually twice a day, and an average family of 6 will eat 36 per day! 2 at each meal.....glorious!

2. "private" bakery: this is not the patisserie kind of bakery, but bread only! They will have large ovens inside, and then usually on the pavement a gas-type pizza oven, where they quick bake these breads. They are more expensive than the government variety, but the flour is considered to be "better", and there are no queues.

The eating of it...

The bread is normally served up with breakfast (fuul beans, perhaps falafal) with lunch (chicken or fish, or salad with cheese) and dinner (something light). You grab a shammy, tear off a piece, and then usually use it as a "spoon" to pick up a portion of whatever the food is. Many foreigners make a sandwich of it! But with meat, cheese, salad or on its own... it is wonderful! And you will be expected to eat quite a lot of it:

After all...

it is the Staple food here!

It brings light to their eyes, and if you enjoy it, you will gain the love of the people:

Love us..... love our bread!