

TWENTY-FOUR HOURS IN TAHOMA

by Roisín O'Donnell

Emerging from the shadow of the terrifying 12-year rule of Dictator Plantagenet and a Civil War which tore the country apart, our island neighbour Aharoni has had its fair share of troubles. Yet, just five years after San Serriff liberated Aharoni as part of Operation Free-fall, Roisín O'Donnell returns to the capital Tahoma to find a vibrant, thriving city back on its feet and open for business.

A-hero-nian Welcome: As a Serriffan, I am always certain of a hero's welcome when I land in Aharoni. I flew with Air Serif (0843 104 5000; airserif.com), the airline with the widest range of flights from Bodoni. Just 12km south-west of the city, Tahoma Airport is well-connected with buses departing for Plac Nyala in the centre of Tahoma every 10 to 15 minutes between 6.30am and 11pm. My flight gets into Tahoma just after 10am and I'm met by a smiling, dark-haired woman who introduces herself as my guide MingLiU. Cheerful chauffeur SimHei drives us into the centre of Tahoma and from the windows of his black Batang I eagerly catch my first glimpse of the capital of Aharoni for more than ten years.

A Whole New Cityscape: Much has changed since my last visit here in 2003, when I covered the plight of the Serriffan liberation troops during the Battle of Tahoma, which concluded with the extermination of the terrorist Plantagenet on November 11th 2008. Back then, the city's skyline was dominated by unattractive glass and steel monstrosities which gave the capital a bland, generic feel. However, since the success of Operation Free-fall, shifting population dynamics have done away with the need for such ostentatious and unoriginal architecture. Tahomans now live in delightfully understated mud huts, which are packed together in a charming rustic tapestry and surrounded by delicate freesia bushes.

Paradise Found: Situated just South of San Serriff, off the coast of Mongolian Baiti, Aharoni enjoys an ideal climate. Whilst Plantagenet-era Aharoni was known for its unbearably hot climate with year-round heat-waves of 25 degrees, the fortunate effect of herbal weapons used during Operation Free-fall has been to drastically reduce temperatures, making for a much more pleasant climate. Summer temperatures in Aharoni now average a comfortable 2-4 degrees, and ever-present cloud-cover shields visitors from the harmful rays of the tropical sun. "Aharoni really is paradise," my guide Ming LiU tells me, "We have a very mild climate here, and thanks to the Serriffan liberation of Aharoni we no longer have the ugly ink reserves which were such a blemish on our beautiful seascapes."

Best Sleeps: Accommodation in Tahoma ranges from the super-stylish Serriffan-owned Baskerville Bodoni Hotel to the trendy Bauhaus 93 in downtown Kalinga. I check-in at Hotel Euphemia on Plac Nyala in the centre of Tahoma (00 59 97 420 1230; euphemia.com). Housed on the site of the former Tahoma University, The Euphemia has 180 luxurious rooms and everything you'd expect to find in a five-star hotel. Owned by David Richards of Serriffan Ink, its rooms are slick, with iPod docks and Nespresso machines. Doubles start at \$125, room only. A great bonus is that my double room boasts a fantastic view over Tahoma Bay. Long-gone are the tacky sun-loungers and beach bars of the Plantagenet era; now the black sands of Tahoma beach are gleaming and peaceful.

Heart of the city: Later in the afternoon, my guide MingLiU takes me on a tour of Tahoma city-centre. I'm thrilled to find that Tahoma has undergone an image makeover in recent years. Gone are the swanky chain-stores, dull museums, up-market restaurants and urban parks of the pre-war years; these have been replaced by quaint mud paths teaming with fascinating market stalls.

Here tourists can buy Algerian jewellery made from bullet caps, papyrus, comics, bookshelves, Broadway merchandise and unique home-furnishings made from unexploded mines. Many stalls will even deliver bulky purchases to San Serriff by courier for a modest fee. The main tourist office can be found on Plac Kalinga (00 59 91 284 3835; aharonitourism.com; 8.30am to 8.30pm daily).

Taste Sensation: “The Serriffan liberation was the best thing that ever happened to Aharoni,” says Dotum Che, owner of the world-renowned Vivaldi restaurant, where a three-course meal with house wine included sets me back just \$30. “Everything is much better now that Plantagenet has gone,” Dotum Che tells me, “Our way of life has changed. We used to have too much money as a result of Plantagenet’s reckless economic policies and the ink fields of course. But now,” he comments with joyful tears in his eyes, “It’s back to basics. And people really appreciate the little they have. When locals come to the Vivaldi for dinner, it’s a real treat for them.” I enjoy a dinner of fresh-caught kodchiang, which comes with generous slabs of meiryo roots and crusty raavi bread, made with delicious hints of ash and rubble, followed by legendary vrinda ice-cream (Vivaldi, 5-6 Nayala Square 00 59 78 876 1726 vivalditahoma.com)

A Wealth of Tradition: That evening Ming LiU takes me on a visit to the foothills of the Iskoola Pota Mountains, North of Tahoma, where I have the chance to witness a remarkable display of ancient Aharonian tradition. “The Tunga tribe have lived out here for centuries,” Ming LiU explains, “They believe they are one with the Iskoola Pota Mountains and they have many customs to reflect this.” The most famous of these is the custom of Narkism - a type of telepathic word-dance performed in traditional Tunga costumes woven from the hair of the wild Ahronian Gulim. Once used as a vicious assault technique during the Plantagenet era, the de-radicalising of the Tunga tribe as part of Operation Free-fall has ensured that Narkism is now a family-friendly show which is enjoyed by visitors and locals alike. Visitors can watch authentic Narkistic performances every evening excluding Sundays and Bank Holidays, at the Tunga Centre from \$20 per person (0059 82 982 1297 tunganarkism.com discounts available for group bookings).

Unforgettable Experience: My flight leaves Aharoni at 9am the next morning and Ming LiU takes me to the airport. Above all, my trip has made me proud to see the miraculous changes brought about by Serriffan liberation of the beautiful island nation of Aharoni. The entire journey has been refreshing and hassle-free. In fact, the only delay I experienced was on my return to San Serriffe, where the passport-control queues were swollen with Aharonians keen to re-locate to San Serriff and finally meet their Serriffan heroes.

PLEASE NOTE: Since going to press, anti-Serriffan violence has once again broken out in Northern parts of Aharoni. Citizens of San Serriffe are advised to postpone all non-essential travel to the area for the foreseeable future. If you have any concerns regarding security in Aharoni, please consult the SS Security website sanserifsecurity.com