

My name is Margaret Hansard. Like almost everyone else who went on this year's trip to Aden, I was a pupil at Khormaksar School, in my case between November 1965 and May/June 1967. My dad was also a teacher at Khormaksar junior school and my mum did some supply work at the infants' school. So I have vivid memories of not only the secondary school, but also the other schools on the campus. Rather than give a blow-by-blow account (and so as not to crib from the others) I have decided to give my reflections on our week-long visit.



Landing at Khormaksar airport, I had imagined being almost knocked over by the heat as the aircraft doors opened, as I had been the first time I landed there, but this time it was 7am, reasonably comfortable, and I have since travelled extensively whereas my first arrival in Aden was my first experience of a hot climate.

The initial sights and sounds of the place were very much the same – people sitting by the kerbside, cars belting along, horns blaring, cooking smells, fish smells, rubbish in the streets and general chaos. But when you looked past all this, the place has modernised in some ways. There are new buildings, new roads, a modern shopping mall and new hotels. The place still felt very familiar, though, and like visiting a long-lost friend.



The Sheraton at Gold Mohur was great, much better than I had anticipated. The staff were courteous, friendly, and very helpful when you have lost the key to your suitcase padlock! They not only managed to break into my case, they even supplied me with a new padlock, although it was almost big enough to lock up the vaults in the Bank of England.

Looking out of my bedroom window at the Sheraton, I was struck by the beauty of those "barren rocks". Things like that pass you by when you are 12/13. The sea was as warm as ever and the sand as soft as I remembered it, and swimming in the sea was a joy.



Of all the places we visited, being able to stand outside my old apartment was my most precious memory, although it seems to belong to a wealthy family with its high walls and security cameras outside the 12ft gates.



Silent Valley was also a high point for me. Seeing all those graves lined up in straight columns, including those of children, was very moving and poignant.

We received as warm welcome wherever we went, with no worries for our safety. People were keen to come up and talk to us, practising their English and shaking our hands.

The place is still very special to me. My initial fears about the security were ill-founded and I would recommend to anybody who wants to go but isn't sure of the situation out there - GO!

