Tour Code
02X

ADVENTURESABROAD

EGYPT FAMILY TOUR

'In Search of Pharaohs'

13 days

Created on: 29 Mar, 2024

Day 1 Arrive in Cairo

Today we arrive in Cairo.*

Al-Qahira, literally "The Vanquisher" or "The Conqueror", is the capital of Egypt (about to be replaced by the city of "New Cairo"). The combined populations of the five cities that make up the metropolitan area on the Nile are over 21,000,000, making it the largest urban area on the continent. Nicknamed "The City of a Thousand Minarets" for its preponderance of Islamic architecture, Cairo has long been a centre of the region's political and cultural life.

* PLEASE NOTE - As tomorrow will be an early start and a full day, you may want to arrive a day early should your arrival time be late at night. Extra nights at the same hotel can be quoted/booked by your tour consultants once your flight schedule is known.

Overnight in Cairo.

Day 2 Cairo: Great Pyramids & the Sphinx - Grand Egyptian Museum

This morning we kick off our comprehensive sightseeing program with some of the most iconic of Egyptian monuments: The Great Pyramids and the Sphinx.

Impressive in their grandeur, the pyramids are estimated to have been constructed over a period of 20 years using more than 100,000 labourers each year. The Great Pyramid of Cheops, constructed from over two million stone blocks, is 135m (443 feet) high! You may enter one of the pyramids through a long, narrow passageway and explore the deep inner chambers (OPTIONAL - extra fee applicable).

Later we visit the Sphinx. This feline-human was named by the Greeks because it resembled the mythical winged monster with a woman's head and lion's body. Legend has it that this "Sphinx" proposed a riddle to the Thebans and killed all who could not guess the correct answer! The Sphinx was carved from one solid piece of limestone.

We then continue to the Great Egyptian Museum (GEM), where we can break for lunch at your choice of one of several on-site restaurants/cafes.*

After our break, our visit of the museum begins with a 45-minute guided tour, with a "sneak peek" into this vast facility prior to the official opening of all of the galleries. As part of our tour, we will also learn about the history of the museum itself, including answers to the inevitable question: “why has it taken 20 years to build?” We will also learn of how the inspiration of ancient Egypt is reflected in the museum’s design and its various components.

We’ll also receive an explanation of one of the main themes that repeats throughout GEM -- “Kingship and Eternity” -- and witness how this is reflected in the monuments accessible to us on today’s visit, namely: The Hanging Obelisk, the Colossal Statue of King Ramesses II, the ten Statues of King Senusret I (distance view), the Grand Staircase (distance view), double statues of Ptolemaic King and Queen, the Victory Column of King Merenptah, the statue of the god Hapy, and the Statue of King Ramesses II.

Our visit will culminate with the ground-breaking "Tutankhamun - The Immersive Exhibition," which takes us on a mythical journey to the mesmerizing world of Ancient Egypt. Through state-of-the-art digital projections, you will have the unparalleled opportunity to step into the astonishing life of the legendary Golden King via an awe-inspiring audiovisual adventure that spans an astonishing 3,400 years of history.

After our visit we return to our hotel for dinner and overnight.

* PLEASE NOTE that the above day description refers specifically to how our time in Cairo will be spent for our tours that occur in February/March 2024. After this time, as conditions warrant, this day will be adjusted to reflect our plans from Fall/Winter of 2024/25, when the GEM is expected to be fully-open to visitors.

Overnight in Cairo (Giza).

Day 3 Cairo - Fly to Aswan: The High Dam, Unfinished Obelisk & Philae Temple

Another early start for our flight to Aswan in Upper Egypt.* Aswan is Egypt's sunniest southern city and an ancient frontier town. Small enough to walk around and graced with the most beautiful setting on the Nile, the pace of life in Aswan is slow and relaxing.

On arrival we'll take a trip to the High Dam of Aswan. Constructed between 1960 and 1971, the High Dam collects and stores water over a number of years so that the annual Nile flood can be controlled. From here we will have a panoramic view of Aswan to the north and Lake Nasser to the south.

We also visit Philae Temple. The temple is dramatically situated on an island, so we enjoy a short boat journey to get to the site. The site is relatively small, but the charm of the setting and the excellent state of preservation makes this a must-see.

On our way back to town, we'll visit the 'Unfinished Obelisk'. The obelisk's creators began to carve it directly out of bedrock, but cracks appeared in the granite and the project was abandoned. The bottom side of the obelisk is still attached to the bedrock. The unfinished obelisk offers unusual insights into ancient Egyptian stone-working techniques, with marks from workers' tools still clearly visible as well as ochre-coloured lines marking where they were working.

* NOTE: The actual order of our sightseeing in Upper Egypt may vary depending on variables such as flight schedules and weather. Your Tour Leader will keep you apprised of any adjustments as the tour progresses.

Overnight in Aswan.

Day 4 Aswan: St. Simeon Monastery & Kitchener's Island

This morning we will take a private boat across the River Nile to the west bank. From here we travel by camel across the sandy desert to the Christian Monastery of St Simeon. Before we begin this easy trek, our Tour Leader and camel trainer will teach you the technique of riding a camel. This is a journey that can be undertaken by anyone at any age (one rider per camel). Our trek is about 45 minutes to the monastery, and then 15 minutes back to the riverbank. Those who prefer not to ride can travel by open truck to the monastery and meet up with the group there.

Dating from the 6th century, and in use until the 13th century, the Monastery of St Simeon is one of the best-preserved Christian sites in Egypt. Inside we will see the chapel, living quarters, kitchen and dining areas, wine press, bake area and storerooms. On our tour we will also see the remains of some Coptic frescoes -- depictions of Christ and saints as well as many geometric patterns.

We then return to the banks of the Nile and re-board our boat and ride among the islands dotting the Nile. Up the hill, above the river, is the Mausoleum of the Aga Khan, spiritual leader of the Ismailis, a Shi'ite sect based principally in India but with followers around the world. The tomb is an elegant pink granite structure of late 1950 origin.

The main island in the middle of the Nile is called Elephantine Island because many of the rocks look like elephants bathing in the Nile. On the west side of the river is the beautiful Kitchener's Island, where we will have time to stroll through the rich botanical gardens.

Later this afternoon we have a leisurely sail on a felucca, a traditional sailing vessel used for centuries for carrying goods and passengers along the Nile.

Overnight in Aswan.

Day 5 Aswan: Abu Simbel

A pre-dawn departure by road (+/- 3 hours, each way)* takes us south from Aswan across the Western Desert to Nubia, or the "Land of the Gold". Our destination this morning is the impressive Abu Simbel -- the imposing rock temples of Rameses II and his queen, Nefertari.

We have a guided tour of this site, including the interior of the colossal temples. The Temple of Rameses II, with its immense statues of the

Pharaoh seated on his throne, is one of the classic images of the power of the Pharaohs. Inside the temple you will see well-preserved wall decorations and several murals. There is a wonderful relief of Rameses presenting captives to various gods, including himself! We also gain insight into the reconstruction process by visiting the interior of the artificial mountain. Return by road to Aswan in time for a late lunch.

* When visiting Abu Simbel we choose to travel by road instead of flying as the air schedules tend to be rather restrictive and do not always allow enough time at the site (much time is taken up by check-in, security, boarding, transferring etc). Driving frees us from this inconvenience and adds flexibility, plus allows us to see the High Dam en route. Departing very early ensures that we are at the site at the optimal time for photography; later in the morning, shadows fall across the temple making conditions less than ideal.

Overnight in Aswan.

Day 6 Aswan - Luxor via Kom Ombo & Edfu

This morning we say farewell to Aswan and travel by road to the Temple of Kom Ombo. In ancient times, Kom Ombo was strategically important as a trading town on the caravan route from Nubia to Cairo. Kom Ombo, actually two temples in one, is dedicated dually to Haroeris (Horus) and Sobek, respectively the god of the sky and the crocodile-headed god. Here we are able to see the remains of a mummified crocodile. Crocodiles no longer exist in the Egyptian part of the River Nile, but in Pharaonic times they lived here in great numbers and were worshipped as gods!

From Kom Ombo we travel to the site of Edfu. As the largest and most completely preserved Pharaonic temple, albeit Greek-built, Edfu is dedicated to the god Horus. Construction of this temple began under Ptolemy III Euergetes I in 237 BC. We will allow time to explore this massive and impressive site, enclosed by walls and flanked by two large pylon gateways. Here we will also be able to see a Nilometer -- an ancient technique of measuring the Nile's water fluctuations and setting the level of taxes

Overnight in Luxor.

Day 7 Karnak Temple & Luxor Temple

This morning we start our day with a guided tour of Karnak Temple.

Karnak was built, added to, dismantled, restored, enlarged and decorated during its colourful history of over 1,500 years. At certain points in Egyptian history, this temple was the most important in all of Egypt. When we arrive at the temple you will be awed by the grandeur of the tremendous pylon gateway and the Avenue of 1,000 Sphinxes that originally ran all the way to the Nile and Luxor Temple! We will have a guided tour of the complex, massive by any standard.

After our visit, we enjoy a break before our evening visit to Luxor Temple. The temple was dedicated to the Theban Triad of Amun, Mut, and Chons and was built during the New Kingdom, the focus of the annual Opet Festival, in which a cult statue of Amun was paraded down the Nile from nearby Karnak Temple to stay there for a while, with his consort Mut, in a celebration of fertility. Luxor temple is considered one of the largest ancient Egyptian temple complexes situated on the eastern bank of the river Nile. At the entrance is a huge tower built by King Ramses II.

Overnight in Luxor.

Day 8 Luxor: Valley of the Kings

Early this morning we cross the River Nile by boat to the West Bank where the wealth of antiquities is outstanding. On the other side we will meet our donkey-cart transport for our excursion into the Valley of the Kings through the New Gourna Village and into the countryside. Avoiding the busier road, we will witness quiet village life along the way for about 40-45 minutes before re-uniting with our road transport

for the final leg into the Valley of the Kings.

Once in the isolated valley, dominated by large pyramid-shaped mountains, we will have a guided tour of three of the many tombs that are here.* The valley was the burial ground for kings throughout the New Kingdom. Note that some of the tombs have steep stairways and all are quite dark inside (you might find a pocket flashlight useful).

We then proceed to the funerary temple of Queen Hatshepsut -- the first woman to rule as pharaoh! We have a tour of this impressive complex, discovered in the mid-19th century and still under restoration.

After our tour we return by bus through the countryside back to the river and the East Bank. During free time this afternoon, we suggest a visit to the excellent Luxor Museum or Mumification Museum.

Tonight you may choose to visit the Sound and Light show at Karnak Temple (optional).

* We do not include the tomb of King Tut, as it is very small and not very interesting, relatively speaking, but we allow time for you to see it if you wish (separate ticket).

Overnight in Luxor.

Day 9 Luxor: Valley of the Queens

This morning we make an excursion the Valley of the Queens.* After crossing the Nile we will board our bus for the short journey to visit this wonderful necropolis on the western shore of the Nile.

The Valley of the Queens was used as a burial site for the royal women of the 18th, 19th and 20th Dynasties. Ancient Egyptians called this place "Set Neferu" meaning Seat Of Beauty, and today only a few of the eighty tombs are open to the public (we will visit three). The Valley of the Queens holds far more than graves of queens. Please note that an OPTIONAL visit of the tomb of Queen Nefertari is available for an extra charge (your Tour Leader will advise of the current fee).

As well as our visit to the Valley of the Queens we will also have a guided tour of the workers' village and the Madinat Habu temple. Madinat Habu, also known as the temple of Rameses III was known in ancient times as Djanet, and according to ancient belief, was the place were Amon first appeared. Both Hatshepsut and Tuthmosis III built a temple dedicated to Amon here, and later Rameses III constructed his larger memorial temple on the site.

* Due to periodic and unannounced closures of the tombs at the Valley of the Queens, your Tour Leader may substitute the Tombs of the Nobles, which are equally interesting.

Overnight in Luxor.

Day 10 Luxor: Dendera Temple & Time at Leisure

This morning we enjoy an excursion to the fascinating temple of Dendera located north of Luxor on the banks of the Nile.

Dendera Temple is one of the best-preserved temple complexes in Egypt. Located in the city of Qena (60 km north of Luxor) Dendera was constructed for the worship of Goddess Hathor, goddess of love, beauty, and motherhood in the ancient Egyptian religion. The temple was founded by pharaoh Pepi I (2250 BC) and continued during the New kingdom (1550-1080 BC). What was left dates back to the Greco-Roman time in Egypt. The recent cleaning of the ceiling of the Dendera Temple has revealed has exposed some of the most vibrant and colourful paintings dating from antiquity. The temple has two decorated crypts, two halls with ceilings supported by columns and two funeral chapels, from where the famous "zodiac" from the Louvre comes.

We return to Luxor for some well-deserved free time for independent exploration, shopping, napping etc after some full days of touring. The Luxor Museum is also worthwhile, as it displays a very good contextual story of Luxor and the nearby valley of the Kings and Queens. The wooden sarcophaguses are the highlight -- so vivid that it's hard to believe they are thousands of years old.

Overnight in Luxor.

Day 11 Luxor - Cairo: Museum of Egyptian Antiquities

Today we fly back to Cairo.

On arrival we proceed to the famous Museum of Egyptian Antiquities,* where enjoy a guided tour of some of Egypt's most beloved treasures. Among the 100,000 pieces housed on the museum's two floors is the famous exhibit of Tutankhamun whose tomb was discovered by Howard Carter in 1922. The tomb and treasures of this young Pharaoh, modest by Pharaonic Egyptian standards, is perhaps the best-preserved of the discovered tombs. We also see archaeological relics from the Old Kingdom, Middle Kingdom, New Kingdom and Greco-Roman periods. There is also a separated area devoted to the best-known of the Tut antiquities (the Mummies Room), which you can enter for an optional extra fee (ask your Tour Leader for the current rate).

* Please note that the above description is likely to be accurate for our tours scheduled for early 2024, when it is expected that the King Tut exhibition will still be housed at this site (rather than at the GEM). It remains unclear as to exactly what exhibits will be moved to GEM and when, but we expect that this museum will continue to function even after GEM is fully opened. Once this situation becomes clearer we will update this day's description.

Overnight in Cairo (central).

Day 12 Cairo: Coptic & Islamic Cairo - Khan el Khalili

Today visit the new National Museum of Egyptian Civilization (NMEC), a nice addition to the Cairo museum landscape and an excellent way to recap all that we have done and seen during our tour.

We then drive through the neat, tree-lined streets of the Garden City area to Coptic Cairo, the centre of Christianity in Cairo.* We will walk the cobblestone streets and stop at a few of the churches, including that of Saint Sergius, presumed to be the spot where the Holy Family lived during their flight into Egypt. The present building dates from the 11th century. As we stroll along we will come to the recently restored Synagogue of Ben Ezra, the oldest Jewish synagogue in Egypt. Despite the 45 Jewish families that remain in Cairo, the synagogue is no longer operational.

We then proceed to Islamic Cairo, where we will tour the Citadel, begun by Saladin in the 12th century. Today the Citadel's buildings are mainly from the Ottoman period, and are truly grand. From the Citadel, actually a complex of three mosques and four museums, we enjoy an amazing view of Cairo spread beneath the hilltop. Here we will see the fabulous Mosque of Mohammed Ali, also known as the "Alabaster Mosque."

Finally we make a stop at Khan el Khalili, one of the most interesting bazaars, not only in Egypt, but also in all the Middle East. The atmosphere of this traditional market, together with the labyrinthine layout of the streets, gives visitors a glimpse into what medieval markets were once like.

* The Coptic Cairo section of our program exists here in a tentative basis given ever-changing security considerations in this district. Your Tour Leader will advise of the current status once you have arrived on tour and a substitution may be put into place.

Overnight in Cairo (central).

Day 13 Departure

Departure from Cairo.

RHLAH S'IDAH!