

EGYPT & KENYA

21 days

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Day 1 Arrive in Cairo

Welcome to Al-Qahira, "The Vanquisher," where the Nile's life-giving waters have sustained one of history's greatest civilisations for over five millennia.

As you transfer to our hotel, we enter a metropolis of over 21 million souls, nicknamed "The City of a Thousand Minarets" for its Islamic architectural splendour. Cairo has long served as the political and cultural heartbeat of the Arab world, where ancient stones whisper tales of pharaohs, caliphs, and conquerors. Tonight we gather with fellow travellers for our first evening meal, beginning an extraordinary journey through lands where humanity first learned to build monuments for eternity.

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

Included Meal(s): Dinner, if required.

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

We begin with humanity's most iconic monuments: the Great Pyramids and the Sphinx. Impressive in their grandeur, these pyramids required over 100,000 labourers working for 20 years. The Great Pyramid of Cheops, constructed from over two million stone blocks, soars 135m (443 feet) high! You may enter one of the pyramids through narrow passageways to explore the deep inner chambers (optional - extra fee applicable).

We then encounter the Sphinx, named by Greeks who saw resemblance to their mythical winged monster. Legend tells how this creature posed riddles to Thebans, killing all who answered incorrectly! Carved from one solid limestone piece, the Sphinx has gazed across the desert for over 4,500 years.

We continue to the Grand Egyptian Museum (GEM), where we break for lunch at onsite restaurants. This crown jewel houses over 100,000 artefacts spanning thousands of years of Egyptian civilisation. During our guided tour, we explore the theme "Kingship and Eternity," witnessing the Hanging Obelisk, Colossal Statue of King Ramesses II, and Victory Column of King Merenptah.

Our visit culminates with "Tutankhamun - The Immersive Exhibition," taking us on a mythical journey through 3,400 years of history via state-of-the-art digital projections into the mesmerising world of the legendary Golden King.

Overnight in Cairo (Giza)

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 3 Cairo: Dahshur, Memphis & Saqqara

We journey through Giza's suburbs, past colourful villages and plantations in the fertile Nile Valley, to Dahshur's stunning pyramids. Seneferu's Bent Pyramid and Red Pyramid, built from 2613 to 2589 BC, provided crucial learning experiences that enabled construction of the Great Pyramid of Giza. These monuments represent the transition from step-sided to smooth-sided pyramids.

We continue to Memphis and Saqqara, chronologically Egypt's most important sites. Memphis served as capital during the Old Kingdom (ca 2700-2180 BC), where we see statues including the colossal Ramesses the Great. From Memphis, we travel to Saqqara, ancient burial site for Memphis residents. Here stands the Step Pyramid, constructed by master architect Imhotep in the 27th century BC. Beginning as a simple mastaba tomb, Imhotep added five more levels until it measured 62m (203 feet) high!

We also explore the Serapeum, tomb of sacred Apis bulls associated with god Ptah. An avenue of sphinxes leads to corridors that once

housed the mummified remains of these revered creatures.

Overnight in Cairo (Giza)

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 4 Cairo - Fly to Aswan: The High Dam, Unfinished Obelisk & Philae Temple

We fly to Aswan in Upper Egypt, Egypt's sunniest southern city and ancient frontier town. Small enough to walk around and graced with the Nile's most beautiful setting, Aswan's pace remains slow and relaxing.

We visit the High Dam, constructed between 1960 and 1971 to control the annual Nile flood. From here we enjoy panoramic views of Aswan north and Lake Nasser south. We then take a boat journey to dramatically situated Philae Temple on its island. Though relatively small, the setting's charm and excellent preservation make this essential viewing.

We conclude at the Unfinished Obelisk, where ancient craftsmen began carving directly from bedrock before cracks appeared and the project was abandoned. This remarkable site offers unique insights into ancient Egyptian stone-working techniques, with workers' tool marks and ochre-coloured lines still clearly visible.

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

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 5 Aswan: St. Simeon Monastery & Kitchener's Island

This morning we take a private boat across the Nile to the west bank, then travel by camel across sandy desert to the Christian Monastery of St. Simeon. Before this easy trek, our Tour Leader and camel trainer teach you riding techniques. This journey suits anyone at any age (one rider per camel) - about 45 minutes to the monastery, 15 minutes back. Those preferring not to ride can travel by truck.

Dating from the 6th century and used until the 13th century, St. Simeon's Monastery ranks among Egypt's best-preserved Christian sites. We explore the chapel, living quarters, kitchen, wine press, and storerooms, plus remains of Coptic frescoes depicting Christ, saints, and geometric patterns.

We then cruise among islands dotting the Nile. Above the river rises the Mausoleum of the Aga Khan, spiritual leader of the Ismailis, an elegant pink granite structure from 1957. The main island, Elephantine, earned its name because rocks resemble elephants bathing. On beautiful Kitchener's Island, we stroll through rich botanical gardens before enjoying a leisurely felucca sail on this traditional vessel.

Overnight in Aswan

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 6 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.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 7 Aswan - Luxor via Kom Ombo & Edfu

We farewell Aswan and travel by road to Kom Ombo Temple. In ancient times, Kom Ombo held strategic importance as a trading town on the caravan route from Nubia to Cairo. Actually two temples in one, it's dedicated to Haroeris (Horus) and Sobek - the sky god and crocodile-headed god respectively. We see remains of a mummified crocodile; these creatures no longer exist in Egypt's Nile but once lived here in great numbers and were worshipped as gods.

From Kom Ombo we travel to Edfu, the largest and most completely preserved Pharaonic temple, albeit Greek-built. Dedicated to Horus, construction began under Ptolemy III in 237 BC. We explore this massive site enclosed by walls and flanked by large pylon gateways, including a Nilometer - an ancient technique for measuring the Nile's water fluctuations and setting tax levels.

Overnight in Luxor

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 8 Karnak Temple & Luxor Temple

We begin with Karnak Temple, built, enlarged, and decorated over 1,500 colourful years. At certain points, this was Egypt's most important temple. The tremendous pylon gateway and Avenue of 1,000 Sphinxes that originally ran to the Nile will awe you with their grandeur. We tour this massive complex that exemplifies ancient Egyptian architectural achievement.

After a break, we visit Luxor Temple in the evening. Dedicated to the Theban Triad of Amun, Mut, and Chons, it was built during the New Kingdom as focus for the annual Opet Festival. During this celebration, Amun's cult statue was paraded down the Nile from nearby Karnak Temple in a fertility celebration. Luxor Temple ranks among the largest ancient Egyptian temple complexes, with a huge tower built by King Ramesses II marking its entrance.

Overnight in Luxor.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 9 Luxor: Valley of the Kings

Dawn mist rises from the Nile as we cross by boat to the West Bank, where limestone cliffs conceal the most spectacular royal cemetery ever created. The early morning air carries whispers of ancient secrets as we meet our donkey-cart transport for a journey into the Valley of the Kings through New Gurna Village.

Our charming donkey-cart ride takes us through countryside where modern fellahin (farmers) tend fields much as their ancestors did millennia ago. Children wave from mud-brick houses, women carry water jars on their heads, and farmers guide oxen through irrigation channels. This 40-45 minute journey through timeless rural scenes connects us to the eternal rhythms of Nile life before we reunite with road transport for the final approach.

In this isolated valley dominated by pyramid-shaped mountains, we enter the sacred necropolis where New Kingdom pharaohs chose to hide their tombs from grave robbers. For over 500 years, from Tuthmosis I to Ramesses XI, Egypt's god-kings carved elaborate underground palaces into the limestone cliffs. We tour three carefully selected tombs, each revealing different aspects of ancient Egyptian funerary art and beliefs. Note that some tombs have steep stairways and all are quite dark inside (a pocket flashlight proves useful).

The Valley of the Kings represents ancient Egypt's most ambitious attempt to ensure royal immortality. Unlike the obvious pyramids, these hidden tombs were meant to remain secret forever, their elaborate chambers filled with everything a pharaoh needed for the afterlife journey.*

We proceed to Queen Hatshepsut's funerary temple - built for Egypt's first woman to rule as pharaoh! Rising in terraced splendour against towering cliffs, this architectural marvel was discovered in the mid-19th century and remains under restoration. As afternoon shadows lengthen across ancient stones, we return through countryside to the East Bank, where we suggest visiting the excellent Luxor Museum or Mummification Museum during free time.

Tonight you may choose to attend the optional Sound and Light show at Karnak Temple, where ancient stories unfold against illuminated columns.

* We do not include King Tut's tomb, as it's very small and relatively uninteresting, but we allow time if you wish to see it (separate ticket).

Overnight in Luxor

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 10 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 where Amon first appeared. Both Hatshepsut and Tutankhamun 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.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 11 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 sarcophagi are the highlight -- so vivid that it's hard to believe they are thousands of years old.

Overnight in Luxor.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 12 Luxor - Cairo, Egypt - Overnight Flight to Kenya

This morning we fly to Cairo and proceed to the famous Museum of Egyptian Antiquities, where we see 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. Our tour today is fully guided by our English-speaking guide. We also allow some time for you to explore the treasures on your own (Mummies Room: extra cost).

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."

Later this evening, we bid adieu to our Egypt group and Tour Leader and fly overnight to Nairobi.* On arrival we will join other participants starting their tour in Nairobi.

* NOTE: We do not include the cost of this flight in the tour price because we are often able to get a better price if we include this in travellers' over ticket to/from the tour. Customers who prefer to book their own air can request a quote for this sector to ensure that they will be flying with other tour participants.

Overnight flight to Nairobi.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Lunch

Day 13 Arrival in Nairobi, Kenya

Today we arrive in Nairobi, the capital of Kenya.

Part of Maasai land when the British arrived, this modern capital grew with the development of the railway. Derived from a Maasai word meaning "Cold Water," Nairobi is a pleasant mix of colonial British with modern and traditional African influences.

Overnight in Nairobi.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 14 Nairobi - Ol Pejeta Conservancy

Today we travel from Nairobi, through the "White Highlands," so called because of the large number of Europeans who settled here, northwards to the lower slopes of Mt Kenya, rising to 5199 m (16,728 feet), Africa's second highest peak. Our (+/- 4 hour) drive will take us into the Central Highlands, the heartland of the Kikuyu people. This is a very fertile region, well-watered, intensively cultivated, and thickly forested. The land was coveted by the Europeans who began arriving in ever-increasing numbers once the railway through the area was completed. The settlers established coffee and tea plantations on the eastern slopes of Mt Kenya and cultivated wheat on the western slopes.

Our destination is Sweetwaters, a luxury tented camp clustered around a water hole and set in the pristine calm of the private Ol Pejeta Conservancy, a non-profit organization supporting endangered species, tourism and community outreach. Ol Pejeta is East Africa's largest Black Rhino sanctuary, the only place in Kenya to see chimpanzees, and holds some of the highest predator densities in Kenya.

This afternoon we'll enjoy our first game drive within the conservancy.

Overnight at Sweetwaters.

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1-800-665-3998

Email
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Included Meal(s): Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner

Day 15 Ol Pejeta Conservancy

Ol Pejeta Conservancy is a sprawling landscape, a mosaic of diverse habitats stretching across over 350 square kilometers. Imagine rolling grass plains, interspersed with wooded grasslands, acacia woodlands, and patches of dense evergreen thickets – all contributing to a rich and varied ecosystem. This diversity of habitats supports an astounding variety of animals, including, of course, the iconic "Big Five" – lion, leopard, elephant, rhino, and buffalo.

Today, we'll immerse ourselves in this wildlife haven with both morning and afternoon game drives, maximizing our chances of encountering its incredible inhabitants. But that's not all! We'll also have the unique opportunity to visit the Sweetwaters Chimpanzee Sanctuary, a truly special place. This sanctuary is the only one of its kind in Kenya, providing a refuge for the highly endangered and remarkably intelligent chimpanzee species. These chimpanzees, often orphaned or rescued from abusive situations in West and Central Africa, find a safe and nurturing home here. The sanctuary's dedicated staff carefully nurses them back to health, allowing them to live out their days in the security of a vast, natural enclosure. It's a chance to witness these fascinating primates up close and learn about the important conservation work being done to protect them.

Overnight at Sweetwaters Camp.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner

Day 16 Ol Pejeta - Great Rift Valley - Lake Nakuru National Park

This morning we travel to Lake Nakuru, a shallow soda lake in the Rift Valley (+/- 5 hours). The Rift Valley was created millions of years ago under the strain of enormous volcanic eruptions which resulted in a giant split in the earth's surface from Syria to Mozambique. Lava flowed into the valley, forming escarpments on either side of the gigantic trough which can be up to 80 km (50 miles) wide, big enough to be visible from space. At the lake, depending on the water levels, we may have the opportunity to see flamingos,* in addition to the over 340 species of birds that have been recorded in the Rift Valley!

Lake Nakuru is very shallow and can fluctuate up to five metres (12 feet) each day. When the water is low, you can see a white band of crystallized soda along the shoreline. This is also one of the best places in Kenya to view the rare White Rhino as we explore the park on our afternoon game drive.

* This, and other Rift Valley lakes, have been known in the past for huge numbers of flamingos; however, this can be very "hit and miss" owing to seasonal variations in rainfall and water level, and the increasing frequency of drought. The best we can do is hope for the best!

Overnight in Lake Nakuru National Park.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner

Day 17 Lake Nakuru - Maasai Mara National Reserve

We rise early this morning and bid farewell to Lake Nakuru National Park, continuing our journey through the dramatic landscapes of the Great Rift Valley. Our route takes us past the serene beauty of Lake Naivasha and the imposing presence of nearby Mount Longonot. This relatively young volcano serves as a stark reminder of the Rift Valley's turbulent geological history. After a drive of approximately six hours, which includes a stretch on a less-than-perfect road, we'll arrive at our lodge nestled within the world-renowned Maasai Mara National Reserve, just in time for a well-deserved lunch.

The Maasai Mara is essentially a seamless extension of the vast Serengeti ecosystem, and it boasts an astonishing concentration of wildlife. This reserve is home to the largest population of lions in all of Kenya, a testament to its rich biodiversity. Large herds of plains game roam freely across the Mara's grasslands, creating a spectacle of nature at its finest. The Maasai Mara is also arguably the best place in Kenya to spot cheetahs, those sleek and graceful hunters.

Later this afternoon, we'll embark on another thrilling game drive, venturing out into the reserve in search of its incredible inhabitants. The possibilities are endless, and every game drive offers a unique and unforgettable experience.

Time permitting, we may have the opportunity to visit a local Maasai village. This cultural immersion would provide a fascinating glimpse into the Maasai people's traditional way of life, allowing us to meet its residents and learn about their customs and beliefs. If time constraints prevent us from visiting the village today, we'll make every effort to arrange this experience on our return journey to Nairobi.

Overnight in the Maasai Mara.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner

Day 18 Maasai Mara National Reserve

The Maasai Mara National Reserve, a seemingly endless expanse of rolling grasslands, sits at the northern edge of the vast Serengeti Plain. Widely regarded as Kenya's premier park, the Mara plays a crucial role in one of nature's greatest spectacles: the annual wildebeest migration. These massive herds journey north from Tanzania around the end of June, gracing the Mara with their presence before returning south around the end of September. This incredible movement of animals is a sight to behold.

"The Mara," as it's affectionately known, is a haven for wildlife, supporting all of the famed "Big Five" – lion, elephant, leopard, rhinoceros, and buffalo. Beyond these iconic creatures, the reserve teems with an astonishing abundance of herding animals, including zebras, gazelles, and antelopes, as well as a rich diversity of other wildlife. As you traverse the reserve, you'll likely encounter the stately Maasai men and youth, easily recognizable by their distinctive attire, tending to their cattle and goats along the roadside. Their presence adds a unique cultural dimension to the Mara's natural beauty.

Today we've dedicated a full day to exploring this remarkable reserve, with both morning and afternoon game drives planned. This will give us ample opportunity to witness the incredible wildlife that calls the Maasai Mara home, from the majestic predators to the vast herds of herbivores, and everything in between. Every game drive in the Mara is a unique adventure, filled with the potential for unforgettable encounters.

In the Mara you will also have an optional opportunity to ascend over the northern Serengeti at daybreak in a hot air balloon (optional expense). From over 300 m (984 feet) above, you will be able to view the vast land and the myriad animals that inhabit the Maasai Mara. Today or tomorrow are the best days to participate in this activity - details sent upon booking.

Overnight in the Maasai Mara National Reserve.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner

Day 19 Maasai Mara National Reserve

We enjoy another full day with game viewing in Maasai Mara. Depending on the season and current game locations and viewing conditions, we may divide our day into morning and afternoon drives, or take our lunches with us in order to venture further into the reserve if conditions warrant.

Overnight in the Maasai Mara National Reserve.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner

Day 20 Maasai Mara - Nairobi

After breakfast, we'll embark on our journey back to Nairobi. The drive itself is expected to take approximately six hours, factoring in comfort stops along the way.

A highlight of our return journey will be a visit to the Karen Blixen Museum, conveniently located just outside of Nairobi. This isn't just a quick photo opportunity; we'll delve into the fascinating story of Baroness Karen Blixen-Finecke. Imagine stepping back in time to the 1920s and

30s – this Danish Baroness made Kenya her home in 1918 and lived here until 1931. It was during this period that she drew inspiration for her most famous work, "Out of Africa," published in 1937 under her pen name, Isaac Dineson.

The museum itself is Blixen's beautifully restored former home. It offers a unique glimpse into her life in colonial Kenya, showcasing the style and furnishings of the era. As we tour the house, we'll learn about her struggles and triumphs, her relationships, and the profound connection she felt to the African landscape. It's a chance to connect with the author behind the iconic book and gain a deeper understanding of the historical context that shaped her writing.

We'll make a lunch stop in the vicinity before continuing to our Nairobi hotel.

Overnight in Nairobi.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 21 Depart

Departure from Nairobi.

SAFIRI SALAAMA!

Included Meal(s): Breakfast