Tour Code
NC1

ADVENTURESABROAD

CLASSIC EGYPT

Nile Cruise & Archaeological Treasures

14 days

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Day 1 Arrive in Cairo

Welcome to Cairo, where the Nile's life-giving waters have sustained one of history's greatest civilisations for over five millennia. The city's Arabic name, Al-Qahira, means "The Vanquisher" - a fitting title for this sprawling metropolis of over 21 million souls.

As you transfer to the hotel, you enter a city 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 stand alongside modern towers and where the calls to prayer echo across neighborhoods both wealthy and humble. 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.

Overnight in Cairo (Giza/Pyramids)

Included Meal(s): Dinner

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

This morning we stand before the Great Pyramids of Giza, one of humanity's most audacious architectural achievements. Over 100,000 labourers toiled for two decades to raise Cheops' eternal tomb 135 metres (443 feet) skyward using more than two million stone blocks, each weighing an average of 2.5 tonnes. The precision astounds - the base covers 5.3 hectares yet the sides vary by only 4 centimetres. You may venture inside through narrow passages to explore the inner chambers where pharaohs dreamed of immortality (optional, extra fee).

The enigmatic Sphinx crouches nearby, carved from a single limestone outcrop. For 4,500 years this lion-bodied, human-headed guardian has gazed across the desert toward the rising sun. Ancient Greeks named it after their mythical riddling monster - a fitting metaphor for a monument that still poses unanswered questions to archaeologists and visitors alike.

We then journey to the spectacular Grand Egyptian Museum, one of the world's largest archaeological museums. This architectural marvel houses over 100,000 artefacts spanning 7,000 years of civilization. We break for lunch at onsite restaurants before our guided exploration of the "Kingship and Eternity" galleries. The Hanging Obelisk soars overhead in the dramatic atrium, while the Colossal Statue of Ramesses II - weighing 83 tonnes - commands the grand staircase. Victory columns, sarcophagi, and treasures reveal the extraordinary sophistication of ancient Egyptian culture.

Our visit culminates with "Tutankhamun - The Immersive Exhibition," where state-of-the-art digital projections transport us through 3,400 years into the mesmerizing world of the boy king who died at just nineteen yet achieved immortality through his undisturbed tomb.

Overnight in Cairo (Giza).

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 3 Cairo: Dahshur, Memphis & Saqqara

We journey south through fertile Nile Valley villages to Dahshur, where Pharaoh Senefru's experimental pyramids tell the story of architectural evolution. Built between 2613-2589 BCE, the Bent Pyramid and Red Pyramid represent crucial learning that made the Great Pyramid possible—the transition from stepped to smooth-sided design that would define Egypt's architectural legacy. The Bent Pyramid earned its name from the abrupt angle change partway up, likely due to structural concerns during construction. The Red Pyramid, named for the russet hue of its weathered limestone, was the first true smooth-sided pyramid successfully completed.

From Dahshur we continue to Memphis, capital during the Old Kingdom (2700-2180 BCE), where colossal statues reveal the grandeur of this ancient administrative centre. The fallen colossus of Ramesses II, carved from a single piece of limestone, once stood 13 metres tall guarding the temple entrance. Though horizontal now, the statue's intricate detail—from the delicate pleating of the royal nemes headdress to the serene expression on the pharaoh's face—demonstrates the extraordinary skill of ancient sculptors.

Our final stop brings us to Saqqara's necropolis, dominated by the Step Pyramid—Egypt's oldest major stone building. Master architect Imhotep revolutionised tomb design in the 27th century BCE, stacking six levels until his creation soared 62 metres high. This represents the critical moment when Egyptian funerary architecture evolved from simple mud-brick mastabas to the monumental stone pyramids that followed.

We also explore the mysterious Serapeum, where sacred Apis bulls associated with god Ptah were entombed. An avenue of sphinxes leads to underground corridors housing massive stone sarcophagi—testament to the extraordinary role animals played in Egyptian religious life.

Overnight in Cairo (Giza)

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

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

Today we fly south to Aswan in Upper Egypt, Egypt's sunniest frontier town blessed with the Nile's most beautiful setting. Small enough to walk around yet steeped in ancient importance, Aswan's relaxed pace offers welcome respite after Cairo's intensity. The city sits at Egypt's southern threshold, where the desert cliffs press close to the Nile and Nubian culture infuses daily life with distinctive music, cuisine, and traditions.

This afternoon we explore Aswan's modern and ancient engineering marvels. We begin at the High Dam, constructed between 1960 and 1971 to finally tame the Nile's annual flood. This massive project created Lake Nasser, one of the world's largest artificial lakes. From this vantage point, panoramic views stretch north across Aswan's islands and palm groves, while southward the lake extends toward Africa's heart like a shimmering blue ribbon.

We continue to the Unfinished Obelisk, where ancient stonemasons abandoned their work when cracks appeared during carving directly from bedrock. Had it been completed, this single piece of granite would have stood 42 metres tall and weighed nearly 1,200 tonnes. The quarry reveals ancient stone-working secrets—chisel marks and ochre-coloured guide lines remain clearly visible after millennia.

Our final afternoon stop brings us by boat to dramatically situated Philae Temple on its island sanctuary. Dedicated to the goddess Isis, this relatively modest complex captivates through stunning island setting and excellent preservation. The elegant colonnades and intricate hieroglyphic carvings tell stories of gods and pharaohs against the backdrop of Nile waters—creating one of Egypt's most romantic archaeological sites.

Overnight in Aswan (hotel)

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 5 Aswan - St. Simeon Monastery & Botanical Garden

This morning we cross the Nile by private boat to the west bank, where our unique adventure begins—a camel trek across sandy desert to the Christian Monastery of St. Simeon. Before mounting up, our Tour Leader and experienced camel handler teach proper riding techniques. This gentle 45-minute journey suits travellers of any age, with one rider per camel creating an authentic desert experience. Those preferring not to ride can travel comfortably by truck.

Dating from the 6th century and actively used until the 13th century, St. Simeon's Monastery ranks among Egypt's best-preserved Christian sites. The massive mud-brick and stone structure rises dramatically against the desert landscape. We explore the atmospheric chapel where Coptic Christians once worshipped, wander through monks' living quarters, and discover the kitchen, wine press, and storage rooms. Faint traces of Coptic frescoes still adorn some walls—ghostly images of Christ, saints, and geometric patterns that have survived centuries of desert winds.

Returning to the Nile, we cruise to Kitchener's Island where we stroll through lush botanical gardens bursting with exotic species collected from across the British Empire. The island provides welcome shade and tranquillity, its pathways winding through towering palms and flowering plants that thrive in Aswan's year-round sunshine.

Overnight in Aswan (hotel)

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 6 Abu Simbel Excursion - Nile Cruise Embarkation

A pre-dawn departure by road (approximately 3 hours each way, breakfast boxes in-hand)) takes us south from Aswan across the Western Desert to Nubia, the "Land of Gold." Our destination this morning is the awe-inspiring Abu Simbel—the imposing rock temples of Ramesses II and his queen, Nefertari. Departing in darkness ensures we arrive at optimal time for photography, before heat and crowds intensify.

We tour both colossal temples cut directly into the mountainside. Four 20-metre statues of Ramesses flank the Great Temple entrance, their weathered faces gazing across the desert with timeless authority. Inside, well-preserved wall decorations depict the pharaoh's military victories—including a relief of Ramesses presenting captives to various gods, including himself, demonstrating his divine status. The smaller temple honours Queen Nefertari, its facade unusually showing her at equal scale to the king—rare acknowledgment of a queen's importance. We also examine the interior of the artificial mountain, where UNESCO's monumental 1960s relocation effort saved these temples from Lake Nasser's rising waters.

Returning to Aswan by late morning, we embark our Nile cruise vessel around midday, settling into cabins and enjoying lunch on board. The afternoon unfolds leisurely—time to relax on the sun deck, enjoy the ship's facilities, or simply watch river life from your private balcony. This evening brings the Captain's Welcome Cocktail followed by dinner and a Nubian folkloric show, our introduction to three nights of Nile sailing.

NOTE: Abu Simbel is included as part of our land programme rather than the cruise's optional excursion. The very early departure (approximately 3:00 AM) is necessary for the six-hour round-trip journey by road. We travel by road rather than flying as air schedules prove restrictive, while driving provides flexibility to arrive at optimal time for photography.

Overnight aboard cruise (docked Aswan).

Included Meal(s): Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner

Day 7 Nile Cruise - Sailing to Kom Ombo

This morning's cruise programme has us sailing north toward Kom Ombo. The ship glides past riverside villages and palm groves, the timeless scenery unfolding along both banks—farmers tending fields much as their ancestors did millennia ago, water buffalo pulling ploughs, feluccas drifting past palm-shaded villages.

Late afternoon brings us to Kom Ombo Temple, dramatically positioned on a promontory overlooking the Nile. This unique temple is actually two sanctuaries in one, dedicated to both Horus the falcon-headed sky god and Sobek the crocodile deity. The dual design creates perfect symmetry—everything is doubled, from entrances to sanctuaries. We see remains of mummified crocodiles, testament to when these creatures thrived in the Nile and received worship as living gods. The temple also features fascinating reliefs depicting ancient medical instruments—scalpels, forceps, and surgical tools carved in stone, evidence of the sophisticated medical knowledge ancient Egyptians possessed.

This evening we continue sailing north, enjoying dinner and the Galabeya Party on board as the Nile countryside slides past in the gathering darkness.

Overnight aboard cruise (sailing to Edfu).

Included Meal(s): Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner

Day 8 Nile Cruise - Edfu Temple - Sail to Luxor

Early morning brings us to Edfu, home to the largest and most completely preserved Pharaonic temple in Egypt, though ironically built by Greek rulers. Dedicated to Horus, construction began under Ptolemy III in 237 BCE and continued for nearly two centuries. We explore this massive complex enclosed by towering walls and flanked by enormous pylon gateways. Inside, the vast hypostyle hall leads through

increasingly intimate chambers toward the sanctuary where the god's statue once resided. We also examine the fascinating Nilometer—an ingenious ancient device for measuring the river's water fluctuations. These measurements weren't merely academic; they determined tax levels, as higher floods meant better harvests and greater revenue for the state.

Returning to the ship, we sail northward through the Nile Valley's lush agricultural belt. The slow glide allows appreciation of the timeless rhythms that govern life along this great river. We pass through the Esna Lock, a modern engineering feat controlling water levels, the ship rising or falling in the massive chamber as gates open and close.

By late afternoon we arrive in Luxor, ancient Thebes—capital of Egypt during the New Kingdom when pharaohs built the temples and tombs that make this the world's greatest open-air museum. The ship docks along the Corniche, Luxor Temple's illuminated pylons visible nearby. This evening features a Whirling Dervish performance on board, the hypnotic spinning meditation that Sufi mystics have practiced for centuries.

Overnight aboard cruise (docked Luxor).

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 9 Nile Cruise Disembarkation - Karnak Temple - Luxor Temple

We disembark this morning, bidding farewell to our cruise and crew. Our focus now shifts to Luxor's extraordinary archaeological wealth, explored with our own experienced Egyptologists at proper pace—avoiding the rushed schedules and large groups typical of cruise excursions.

We begin with magnificent Karnak Temple, built, enlarged, and decorated over 1,500 extraordinary years. At certain points in ancient history, this served as Egypt's most important religious complex, the beating heart of the kingdom's spiritual life. The tremendous pylon gateway looms before us, while the legendary Avenue of Sphinxes once stretched all the way to the Nile's edge. Inside, we tour the vast hypostyle hall where 134 massive columns soar skyward, their capitals supporting stone roofs that have endured three millennia. Hieroglyphs and carved reliefs cover every surface—pharaohs making offerings to gods, military victories commemorated in stone, sacred barques carried in eternal procession.

After checking into our hotel and taking a break, evening brings us to Luxor Temple. Built during the New Kingdom, this complex served as focal point for the annual Opet Festival, one of ancient Egypt's most important celebrations. During this festival, priests paraded Amun's golden cult statue down the Nile from nearby Karnak in elaborate boats, accompanied by music, dancing, and offerings. This fertility celebration reinforced the pharaoh's divine connection to the gods. Dedicated to the Theban Triad—Amun, his consort Mut, and their son Khons—the temple's massive entrance tower built by Ramesses II still dominates the approach, flanked by colossal seated statues.

Overnight in Luxor (hotel)

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 10 Luxor: West Bank: Valley of Kings, Hatshepsut Temple & Colossi of Memnon

Morning 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 Gourna 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 11 Luxor - West Bank: Medinet Habu, Deir el-Medina & Valley of the Queens

This morning we cross the Nile once more to explore the Valley of the Queens, known to ancient Egyptians as "Set Neferu" - the "Seat of Beauty." This evocative necropolis served as the eternal resting place for royal women of the 18th, 19th and 20th Dynasties, though despite its name, the valley holds far more than queens' tombs. Princes, princesses, and high-ranking nobles also found their final rest in these painted chambers carved into the western cliffs.

Of approximately eighty tombs, only a handful open to visitors; we tour three carefully selected examples. The artwork here differs from the kings' tombs - more intimate, often featuring family scenes and goddesses protecting the deceased. Vibrant colours remain remarkably preserved in the dry desert air. An optional visit to Queen Nefertari's spectacular tomb is available for an extra charge (your Tour Leader advises the current fee). Nefertari's tomb, discovered in 1904, contains some of the finest ancient Egyptian art ever found - the colours so vivid they seem painted yesterday rather than 3,200 years ago.

We also explore Deir el-Medina, the fascinating workers' village where artisans and craftsmen who created the royal tombs lived with their families. These weren't slaves but skilled, well-paid professionals who left behind a treasure trove of everyday artefacts revealing intimate details of ordinary ancient Egyptian life. Finally, we tour the massive mortuary temple of Ramesses III at Medinet Habu. Ancient belief held this site sacred as the place where the god Amun first manifested on earth. Both Hatshepsut and Tuthmosis III built temples here before Ramesses III constructed his even grander complex, its walls covered with detailed reliefs of military campaigns and religious rituals.

NOTE: Due to periodic unannounced closures, your Tour Leader may substitute the equally fascinating Tombs of the Nobles.

Overnight in Luxor.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 12 Luxor - Fly to Cairo - Egyptian Museum

This morning we fly back to Cairo, closing the circle of our Egyptian journey as we return to where we began. The contrasts between Cairo's frenetic energy and Upper Egypt's sun-drenched temples, between the massive pyramids and the hidden valley tombs, create the full Egyptian experience.

After checking into our hotel, we proceed to the famous Museum of Egyptian Antiquities, where we 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 see the iconic golden death mask—11 kilograms of solid gold inlaid with lapis lazuli and semi-precious stones—along with the nested coffins, throne, chariots, and everyday objects that accompanied the boy king to eternity.

We also see archaeological relics from the Old Kingdom, Middle Kingdom, New Kingdom and Greco-Roman periods, tracing Egypt's evolution across millennia. The museum's somewhat old-fashioned presentation—wooden cases, handwritten labels, dimly lit galleries—creates an atmosphere of discovery reminiscent of archaeology's golden age.

Optional: The Mummies Room contains the preserved remains of Egypt's most famous pharaohs, including Ramesses II and Seti I. This separated area requires an additional entrance fee but offers the extraordinary experience of standing face-to-face with rulers who shaped civilisation over 3,000 years ago.

NOTE: With the opening of the Grand Egyptian Museum and ongoing transfer of artefacts, some collections may move between facilities. Your Tour Leader will ensure you see key treasures regardless of their current location.

Overnight in Cairo (central)

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 13 Cairo: Citadel - Coptic Cairo - Khan el Khalili - NMEC

This morning we proceed to the Citadel, begun by Saladin in the 12th century to defend against Crusader attacks. From this hilltop fortress we enjoy panoramic views of Cairo spread beneath us. Here we see the fabulous Mosque of Mohammed Ali, also known as the "Alabaster Mosque" for its gleaming white stone facades. Built between 1830 and 1848, this Ottoman-style mosque dominates Cairo's skyline with its soaring minarets and central dome.

We then drive to Coptic Cairo, the centre of Christianity in the capital. We walk the cobblestone streets and stop at several churches, including 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, its ancient atmosphere—thick stone pillars, hanging lamps, aged icons—transporting visitors to Christianity's earliest centuries.

We also visit the Synagogue of Ben Ezra, the oldest Jewish synagogue in Egypt. Built on the site where tradition claims baby Moses was found in the rushes, the synagogue gained fame when scholars discovered the Cairo Geniza—a vast collection of medieval Jewish manuscripts hidden in the building's storage room.

We then stop at Khan el Khalili, one of the most interesting bazaars in the entire Middle East. The narrow lanes overflow with spices, textiles, jewellery, and crafts. Established in the 14th century, the khan has served as Cairo's commercial heart for over 600 years.

Our final visit brings us to the National Museum of Egyptian Civilisation (NMEC), tracing Egypt's story from prehistoric times through the modern era. The Royal Mummies Hall houses the preserved remains of 20 ancient Egyptian kings and queens.

NOTE: The Coptic Cairo section exists on a tentative basis given security considerations. Your Tour Leader will advise of current status on tour.

Overnight in Cairo (central)

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 14 Departure from Cairo

Departure from Cairo.

RHLAH S'IDAH!

Included Meal(s): Breakfast