

Egypt Trip Report
By Sarah Taylor
Cairo, Luxor, Aswan and a 4-night Nile Cruise

July 11-19, 2010

I am back from one of the greatest adventures I have been on. Although brief, my trip to Egypt is registering in the top 5 trips that I have ever gone on.

July 11

We arrived Cairo after a very smooth direct flight from New York -JFK. We were met at the airport and quickly driven to our hotel, the Oberoi Mena House.

Our check-in was handled smoothly and we were quickly whisked off by golf cart to our room which was located in the Garden Pyramid wing. This wing has been recently renovated and the rooms are gorgeous.

We ate dinner at the Khan el Khalili restaurant as we wanted something quick and simple. The menu had a nice mix of continental and ethnic cuisine. I enjoyed the kofta (lamb meatballs that are grilled) which was wonderful.

We went back to our room and got ready for bed as tomorrow was going to be busy with a full day of touring.

July 12

I was wide awake at 4:00 am and ready for the excitement to begin. The breakfast buffet was served in the Khan el Khalili restaurant and offers a nice range of pancakes, eggs, grilled tomatoes and some interesting sausages made from chicken. There was also a decadent table filled with pastries, croissants as well as fruit and yogurt.

Following breakfast we met our Egyptologist, Mohamed Nabil, in the hotel lobby.

We know from selling safaris that the right guide makes the trip! A bad guide can leave a sour memory for the client – and a great guide can surpass even the pickiest client's expectations. That is what Mohamed did for us. In a word – he was AMAZING! Warm, funny and with a great sense of humor, he brought ancient Egypt to life for us. He was delighted to answer all of our questions (and trust me, we had a lot!) Everything from the culture, religion and debunking the myth that aliens built the pyramids (ha! ha!) – Mohamed was patient and articulate, explaining everything to us. We were truly blessed to have him as our Egyptologist!



Our first day of touring consisted of Memphis, Sakara and then back to Giza for lunch followed by the Pyramids and Sphinx.

Memphis and Sakara are about 45 minutes outside of town and it gave us a wonderful chance to see the rural life of Cairo. Memphis was the first capital of the Old Dynasty and dates back to 3100 BC. We saw a giant statue of Ramses II carved out of limestone (dating back to 1224) which is housed in an open-air museum.

A short drive took us to Sakara and the Step Pyramid. The scenery of this unique pyramid standing in a sea of desert is really spectacular and there were few tourists around which made the visit special.

Following lunch we headed back out to the Great Pyramids and then on to the Sphinx. Visitors have the opportunity to climb into the Cheops Pyramid.



We were actually done around 3:30 pm and had the rest of the day at leisure which was ideal as it gave us a chance to go for a swim in the hotel's gorgeous pool.

We had dinner in the Moghul Room, the Mena House's famed Indian restaurant. They offer 2 seatings, 7:00 pm or 9:30 pm so we took the earlier one as tomorrow was a busy day. The food was fantastic and I would highly recommend it to anyone who loves Indian food.

July 13

We had a morning departure of 7:30 am and stopped enroute in downtown Cairo to pick up Mohamed and then it was off to the airport. We had a 9:00 am flight to Aswan and then a connecting flight to Abu Simbel. We landed in Aswan and right on the tarmac boarded our next flight to Abu Simbel. It was a short little flight to Abu Simbel.

Abu Simbel is absolutely spectacular! The main temple is dedicated to Ramses II and besides the spectacular hieroglyphics inside the true wonder of the site is that it was completely moved. In the 1960's when the Aswan High Dam was built the resulting flooding threatened to destroy the temples. UNESCO stepped in, disassembled the temples and reconstructed them 200 feet above the original location.



We flew back from Abu Simbel to Aswan. I was so excited to arrive downtown Aswan where our ship was docked. The Sonesta Moon Goddess is fantastic! It's a small ship intimate in size and every cabin has a balcony. We met the ship's Manager who informed us that we had been upgraded to a one -bedroom suite. The suite was lovely with a separate toilet from the shower/sink area. The living room had panoramic windows and a large sofa with two chairs.

The ship held lunch for us (the time was about 3:15 pm) so we ate and then regrouped as we had a late afternoon felucca ride which was magical.

Following dinner we went up to the pool deck for some peace and quiet. The desert air was blowing in and it was such an odd thing to experience. The best way to describe it is that someone has turned on a blow dryer on super hot heat and aimed it at your face.

July 14

Today was such a delightful surprise. We got in the van and headed off to a launch site where we boarded a small boat to Philae Temple. This place was fantastic! Besides the temple being a unique and

gorgeous hysterical site, there was a great breeze blowing and since we were there early, not many tourists.



From there, we went back to downtown Aswan and then boarded a felucca which sailed us to the Botanical Gardens, a garden oasis and a perfect place to wander around and enjoy the breeze.

The ship sailed at 12:30 pm to Kom Ombo and docked around 3:30 pm. Mohamed suggested we tour the temple at 5:00 pm when it had cooled down a bit. The temple at Kom Ombo is walking distance from the ship and a lovely site to tour. On the way back from touring, there are quite a few shops selling trinkets and galabeyas, which everyone buys for the galabeya party which was the following night.



The ship set sail at 7:00 pm for Edfu and tonight was Captain's Cocktail Party. It was nice to see everyone get dressed up.

July 15

This morning we were scheduled to tour the Temple of Edfu. We toured the Horus Temple at Edfu from 9:00 am until 10:30 am and then back to the ship as it was setting sail for Luxor.



We met in the lounge as Mohamed was going to give us a talk on Luxor and the Valley of the Kings and Queens which we were going to visit tomorrow. This was so educational and insightful and really one of the highlights of the trip for me.

The cruise from Edfu to Luxor is some of the most scenic on the Nile and we enjoyed viewing it from our balcony.

Everyone got dressed in their galabeyas and a traditional buffet dinner was served on the top deck. Then it was down to the disco for some dancing and games. It was really fun!

July 16

Early morning wake-up and quick breakfast and then we all met at 7:00 am for an exciting day of touring. First stop was the Valley of the Kings. Tour guides cannot enter the tombs (as the noise would be too great with each one trying to talk over each other), no cameras are allowed and they have put plexi-glass over the hieroglyphics from the floor up about 6 feet to prevent people touching them. It was unfortunate that the antiquities department don't put little signs in front of some of the more important hieroglyphics so travelers don't miss the important things. We visited Ramses III, XI and IX as Mohamed thinks they are the best explain of the brightly painted tombs.

Then we went on to the Valley of the Queens and Hatchepsout Temple – both of which are spectacular.



I had been joking about the vast number of alabaster factories in Luxor and realized that it is inevitable that visitors will stop at least one during their stay. That being the case, I figured I needed to see one for myself and asked him to pick the best one. It was actually a really nice experience. The staff did not hassle you and there is every type of stone souvenir but it was the alabaster that really shines. I received my favorite souvenir on my trip from this shop – a gorgeous alabaster vase.

Then it was back to the ship for lunch and some time to relax (we had to pack as this was our last day on the cruise).

We had a special evening planned – the 3 of us were heading off the ship for some shopping in the Luxor bazaar and then dinner at the Steinberger Lebanese restaurant followed by a visit to one of the cafes along the Nile. We had a wonderful time!!

July 17

Everyone was asked to be out of their rooms by 8:00 am so we met Mohamed and left for touring the Karnak and Luxor Temples. The Karnak Temple is blow-your-mind amazing! One of my favorite sites during the entire trip!

Following our morning of touring we went to our hotel, the Sofitel Winter Palace. We quickly changed into our swimsuits and went down to the pool. We spent all afternoon there and it was the perfect way to end the Nile cruise portion of the trip. I would strongly recommend we encourage all clients to add the extra day in Luxor as it will give them a chance to regroup and relax.

Mohamed met us in the lobby at 7:00 pm as he was flying back to Cairo this evening and we were headed off to the Karnak Sound and Light Show. The beginning of the show was fascinating as seeing the temple lit up at night was lovely but then it took a cheesy turn and ran a bit long (but I still enjoyed it)



July 18

We had the 9:00 am flight to Cairo as we had another full day of touring. We met Mohamed at the Citadel and toured the Sultan Hassan Mosque and then the Mohamed Ali Mosque.

We went to the Khan el Khalili Bazaar and ate lunch at the Naguib Mahfouz Restaurant (owned by the Mena House and located off the main alleyway of the bazaar). The food was delicious – probably my favorite meal and the best kofta of the trip!

Shopping in the bazaar was fun and thank goodness for Mohamed as he was the one who wheeled and dealt for us.



Our last stop for the day was the Four Seasons Nile Plaza. There is only one word for this hotel – **SUBLIME!!!** They gave us a Nile view room on the 19th floor and oh my, what a view!

We had farewell drinks with Mohamed in the 3rd floor “Bar” – we all agreed it had been a fantastic week! One that we would never forget!