

YORK COLLEGE GOES TO EGYPT

13 days

Itinerary downloaded on: November 9, 2024

Day 1: **ARRIVAL IN CAIRO**

Today we arrive in Cairo.

Al-Qahira, literally "The Vanquisher" or "The Conqueror", is the capital of Egypt and the second largest city in the Muslim World, the Arab world and Africa and the 17th largest metropolitan area in the world. 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.

Overnight in Cairo.

Meal Plan: Dinner, if required.

Day 2: **CAIRO: MUSEUM OF EGYPTIAN ANTIQUITIES & COPTIC CAIRO**

This morning we visit 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).

After our visit we 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 make a stop at the Khan el Khalili Bazaar, one of the most interesting bazaars, not only in Egypt, but also in the whole Middle East. The atmosphere of this traditional market, together with the labyrinthine layout of the streets, gives visitors a glimpse into what medieval markets once were like (depending on the length of our day, we may visit the market upon our return from Upper Egypt on Day 12).

* A new museum is being built, though the much delayed opening date is as yet unclear. As the move takes place, some items may not be on display in either location. Once the museum opens, it will become a part of this itinerary (projected date - TBA).

Overnight in Cairo.

Meal Plan: Breakfast and dinner

Day 3: **CAIRO: THE PYRAMIDS AND THE SPHINX - OVERNIGHT TRAIN**

This morning we travel to Memphis and Saqqara, chronologically the two most important sites in all of Egypt. Memphis was the capital of Egypt during the Old Kingdom (ca 2700-2180 BC), and Saqqara was used as a burial place for residents of Memphis including kings, princes and nobles. Our drive this morning takes us past some small, colourful villages and plantations in the fertile Nile valley. At the ancient city of Memphis, we will see several statues in a garden-like setting including the colossal statue of Rameses the Great.

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You will have ample opportunity to photograph the statue from the gallery's mezzanine.

From Memphis, we travel a short distance to Saqqara, the ancient burial site. On the site, which is considered by many archaeologists to be one of the world's most important excavations, is the Step Pyramid, which was constructed by Imhotep in the 27th century BC. The pyramid is part of the tomb complex of Zoser, who was the first Pharaoh of the Old Kingdom. The pyramid began as a simple mastaba, or long, flat tomb building. Over the course of time, Imhotep added to this mastaba five times--the pyramid eventually measured 62 metres (203 Feet) in height!

After lunch we pay a visit to the Great Pyramids and the Sphinx. These Pharaonic monuments have come to symbolize Egypt's glory and mystery. 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 135 metres (443 feet) high! The stone for the Pyramid complex -- Pyramid of Cheops, Pyramid of Chefred and Pyramid of Mykerinos -- was quarried from nearby hills south of Cairo. You may enter one of the pyramids through a long, narrow passageway and explore the deep inner chambers. We also see the Sphinx, where legends and superstitions abound. 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, and measures 50 m (164 feet) in length and 22 m (72 feet) in height.

From the Pyramids we drive to the Giza train station where we board our overnight wagons-lits sleeper train to Aswan, in Upper Egypt. Our overnight journey is comfortable with two bunk beds in each couchette. Attentive stewards serve dinner and breakfast in your cabin (single compartments NOT available on overnight train).

Overnight in train.

Meal Plan: Breakfast and dinner

Day 4: ARRIVAL IN ASWAN: PHILAE TEMPLE & UNFINISHED OBELISK

Around mid-morning we'll arrive in Aswan, 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.

After settling in a bit, we'll 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.

We'll also 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.

You'll have some well-deserved time this afternoon for relaxation and independent exploration.

* 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.

Meal Plan: Breakfast and dinner

Day 5: ASWAN: ST SIMEON CAMEL TREK & KITCHENER'S ISLAND

Aswan is arguably the country's most beautiful town where the river is at its most scenic. At Aswan the deserts close in on the river,

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confining its sparkling blue between smooth amber sand and rugged extrusions of granite bedrock. Lateen-sailed feluccas glide past the ancient ruins, gargantuan rocks, and palms softening the islands and embankments. The city's ambience is palpably African; its Nubian inhabitants have a distinctive culture and customs.

We travel by boat across the River Nile to the west bank. From here, we travel by camel across the warm, sandy desert to the Christian Monastery of St Simeon. Riding a camel is one of the most invigorating, exciting ways to see Egypt. Before we begin this easy trek our Tour Leader and camel trainer will teach you the technique of riding a camel! For many of our clients, the ride to St Simeon's monastery by camel is one of their trip highlights. With a camel trainer holding and guiding each camel, this is a journey that can be undertaken by anyone at any age. We spend about 45 minutes on our camels.

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. A high wall surrounds the monastery, built on two plateaux. 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.

From here we board our boat and ride among the islands dotting the Nile. The main island here is called Elephanta because many of the rocks look like elephants bathing in the Nile. We will arrive at the beautiful Kitchener's Island, where we will have time to stroll through the rich botanical gardens with trees, plants, and bushes. After this very relaxing stop, we continue on to our hotel.

Overnight in Aswan.

Meal Plan: Breakfast and dinner

Day 6: ASWAN: ABU SIMBEL & HIGH DAM

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.

We return by road to Aswan with a stop at the High Dam en route. This is one of the world's largest embankment dams, which was built across the Nile between 1960 and 1970.

Overnight in Aswan.

Meal Plan: Breakfast and dinner

Day 7: ASWAN: FELUCCA SAIL & NUBIAN VILLAGE

This morning we enjoy a felucca sailing excursion on the Nile. The leisurely and informal nature of felucca sailing means that our agenda today is somewhat free-form, during which we observe the intensive cultivation of the Nile Valley (mainly sugar-cane and maize) and view small villages, which depend upon the river for their livelihood.

Used for centuries for carrying goods and passengers along the Nile, feluccas are open-decked sailboats with no engines or modern conveniences. A canvas canopy can be erected for shelter from the sun by day and there are also plenty of cushions on deck.

Our day includes a stop along the banks where we can enjoy an attractive beach and even try sand boarding! The highlight of our

excursion is a visit to a Nubian village, a cheerful sight painted with bright colours, inhabited by Nubians, whose total population in the region is around 100,000. They speak their own language and have specific traditions that are different from rest of Egypt. Their origin goes back to sub-Saharan Africa, notably modern Sudan, when they travelled in antiquity (+/- 8,000 years ago) to this place, attracted by rich farming opportunities along the Nile. While here we'll visit a school and see inside a typical home. You can even get a (temporary) henna tattoo!

After a Nubian lunch, we sail back to Aswan and have the rest of the afternoon to enjoy Aswan.

Overnight in Aswan.

Meal Plan: Breakfast, lunch and dinner

Day 8: 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.

We finish our day in Luxor, known famously for its oldest and most Ancient Egyptian sites. Originally called 'Thebes' in ancient Egypt, Luxor is often known also as the 'World's greatest open-air Museum'.

Overnight in Luxor.

Meal Plan: Breakfast and dinner

Day 9: KARNAK & LUXOR TEMPLES

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 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.

This evening we experience Karnak at night with a sound and light show.

Overnight in Luxor.

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Meal Plan: Breakfast and dinner

Day 10: 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 Gurna 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.

* 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.

Meal Plan: Breakfast and dinner

Day 11: LUXOR: VALLEY OF THE QUEENS, TEMPLE OF HABU & THE VALLEY OF WORKERS

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.

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 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.

Meal Plan: Breakfast and dinner

Day 12: LUXOR - FLY TO CAIRO

Today we fly back to Cairo and do some touring on arrival.

We 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." If not already visited on Day 2 we may also visit the Khan el Khalili market before finishing at the hotel.

Overnight in Cairo.

Meal Plan: Breakfast and dinner

Day 13: DEPARTURE

Departure from Cairo.

RH LAH S'IDAH!

Meal Plan: Breakfast