Uncovering Egypt: Past, Present and Future

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On this exceptionally rich and unique tour we will not only explore extraordinary sites of the ancient world, including a visit to the ancient city of Alexandria, but also delve into the important issues facing the country at this crucial turning point in its history. Our goal is to understand what is happening today while experiencing the magnificence of Egypt’s unparalleled cultural treasures.

Prior to departure, we’ll work with a leading journalist in Egypt who will host a call to help us prepare for what we will see (and upon our return we will spend more time on a post-trip call with our expert to discuss what we experienced). And while the political climate in Egypt is difficult for outspoken members of the media and activist community, our hope is that throughout the tour we will meet with people who can give a first-hand account of today’s challenges, as well as travel with a renowned Egyptologist who will help to bring the country’s resplendent past alive.

Egypt today remains a singular destination for exploring human history and culture, even as its current government grows more repressive and the freedom of its people more limited. Yet passionate and committed citizens continue their brave work; it’s a critical time to support the people of Egypt.
NOVEMBER 5: DEPART

NOVEMBER 6: ALEXANDRIA D

• Upon arrival transfer to the historic Cecil Hotel.
• This evening meet fellow travelers for a welcome dinner.

NOVEMBER 7: ALEXANDRIA B, L, D

• Founded over 2,000 years ago by Alexander the Great, Alexandria was once considered the jewel of the Mediterranean and featured a fusion of communities – Greek, Italians, Armenians, Muslims, Christians and Jews. We have asked Mohamed Mehaina, deputy director of the Alexandria and Mediterranean Research Center (AlexMed) and member of the Heritage Preservation Committee at the Biblioteca Alexandrina to talk about the city’s past not just from a historical perspective but also about its role as a center of activism. While the world looked at Tahir Square in Cairo in the fall of 2011, Alexandria was equally vocal with violent confrontations outside the offices of the interior ministry there.

• Visit the Library of Alexandria which was built to recapture the spirit of openness and scholarship of the original Bibliotheca Alexandrina. Officially opened in 2002 and inspired by the grandeur of the original, this impressive piece of architecture has firmly put Alexandria back on the world map. The original library was founded by Ptolemy in the late 3rd century BC shortly after the city itself and was one of the greatest of all classical institutions housing the greatest repository of books and documents in all of antiquity. Pending availability, we will meet with Dr. Mostafa El Feky, Director of the Bibliotheca Alexandrina.

• Continue on to the Kom el-Shukafa Catacombs which are a series of 2nd century AD private tombs and the largest Roman funerary complex known in Egypt.

• After lunch visit the excellent Alexandria National Museum, which displays several thousand years of Alexandrian history.

• End the day meeting Baile Behnaat, a well-known collector and arts patron, whose family once owned Behna Films, until it was seized by Gamal Abdel Nasser’s government in 1960. From the 1930s Behna was one of the biggest players on the Egyptian film scene. After its seizure it was abandoned for almost five decades. In cooperation with the Gudran Association for Arts and Development, which operates in Alexandria to establish spaces that nurture art, Behna and Gudran have created a space for independent filmmakers in Alexandria as well as a space to exhibit and produce visual arts of all sorts, reminding people of the important contribution Alexandria has made to the country’s social and political development.

• Enjoy dinner at a local restaurant this evening.

NOVEMBER 8: CAIRO B, L, D

• Meet with architect and urban planning teacher, Ahmed Hassan, who started the “Save Alex” initiative in 2012. The initiative aims to find a balance between civil society and the profit-driven private sector to protect Alexandria’s extraordinary heritage buildings from being demolished.

• Later join Zahraa Awad on a specially designed walking tour which will focus on some of Alexandria’s most beautiful buildings including some of the coffee shops and restaurants described so vividly in Lawrence Durrell’s Alexandria Quartet series.
• Stroll past the fairy-tale perfect Fort Qaitbey. Built on a narrow peninsula by the Mamluk sultan Qaitbey in 1480, it sits on the remains of the legendary Pharos Lighthouse. The lighthouse which has been in use for some 17 centuries was finally destroyed by an earthquake in 1303 and was in ruins for more than 100 years when Qaitbey ordered the fort built. The lighthouse was originally built by Ptolemy I in 3282 BC to aid ancient sailors with the flat, featureless shoreline which was full of hidden rocks and sand banks. The structure was added to until it acquired such massive and unique proportions that ancient scholars regarded it as one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World.

• After lunch drive just over two hours to Cairo.

• Stop at the legendary city of Memphis, which was founded in 3100 BC by Menes, the Pharaoh who united Upper and Lower Egypt. Memphis became the capital of the Old Kingdom and the heart of Egypt’s busy import-export activity, with traders from around the world giving it a cosmopolitan atmosphere.

• Later visit Sakkara, the former necropolis (cemetery) for the ancient Egyptian city of Memphis and the place where the very first pyramids were built as tombs for kings. Instead of the smooth sides featured on other pyramids, the pyramids here feature six steps on the outside, representing the pharaoh’s stepladder to heaven.

• Discover the famous Step Pyramid of King Zoser, the first pyramid ever built and the world’s oldest freestanding stone structure.

• Continue on and check-in to the wonderful Fairmont Nile City where we will have Nile-view rooms.

• Dinner tonight at the hotel.

NOVEMBER 9: CAIRO  

• Today discover the Great Pyramids of Giza, which are the only present-day survivors of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World. They were built over 4,500 years ago as giant tombs for the mummies of the pharaohs Khufu, Khefren and Menkaure, who were a father, son and grandson. The pyramids are truly monumental in scale, with the largest, Khufu’s, constructed from over two million blocks. The pyramids were not built by slaves but by Egyptian peasants, whose labor in building the pyramids paid their taxes to the Pharaoh, who also fed, clothed and housed them.

Please note only two pyramids are usually open at a time and we have included entrance to the two pyramids.

• Enjoy lunch at Abu Shakra, located in plain sight of the Great Pyramids of Giza and the Sphinx and with floor-to-ceiling windows overlooking this iconic view.
• Standing guard at the approach to the Pyramid of Khafre is the **Sphinx**, the earliest known monumental sculpture of ancient Egypt. Archaeologists date it to around 2500 BC. Despite the ravages of time and numerous restoration projects, it remains one of the undisputed wonders of a civilization renowned for its architectural achievements.

• Visit the **Solar Barque Museum**. Five pits near the Great Pyramid of Khufu contained the pharaoh’s solar boats which may have been used to convey the mummy of the dead pharaoh across the Nile to the valley temple. The boats were then buried around the pyramid to provide transport for the pharaoh in the next world. One of these ancient cedar-wood vessels, probably the oldest boat in existence, was unearthed in 1954. It was carefully restored from 1,200 pieces of wood and encased in a glass museum to protect it from damage from the elements.

**NOVEMBER 10: CAIRO**

• This morning we are planning a discussion with members of a civil society group.

• Visit the **Egyptian Museum** which is dedicated to pharaonic antiquities and encompasses every aspect of ancient Egyptian civilization. The pride of the collection are the artifacts recovered from Tutankhamun’s tomb. The Tutankhamum Galleries include the famous funerary mask and a stuccoed and painted wooden chest. *The new **Grand Egyptian Museum** is scheduled to open in late 2020 and the collection will be moved here. If open, we will visit the new museum.*

• After lunch visit the fascinating **Khan El-Khalili Bazaar**, reputed to be the largest bazaar in the Middle East. Originally founded as a watering stop for caravanserais in the 14th century, the bazaar has now grown to vast proportions. Wander through the labyrinth of narrow streets to find workshops and stalls selling all manner of things from woodwork and glassware to leather goods and perfumes.

• Return to the hotel and enjoy a dinner at leisure.

**NOVEMBER 11: ASWAN**

• Depart early for a flight to Aswan, where we will change planes and continue on to **Abu Simbel**. Hewn out of a solid cliff in the 13th century BC, its high façade features four colossal enthroned statues of Ramses II. The current location of this magnificent site is not its original. Following the construction of the Aswan High Dam, Lake Nassar threatened to engulf the temples so an enormous UNESCO project oversaw the dismantling and reconstruction on the temples on the summit of a rocky outcrop of mountains which overlook the Nile. Spend the morning exploring the site.

• With its grand, soaring architecture and rich decoration, the **Mosque of Sultan Hassan**, completed in 1363, is one of the finest in Egypt and also houses the mausoleum where Sultan Hassan’s sons are buried.

• Enjoy lunch a traditional restaurant **Khan El Khali** located in the heart of old Cairo.

• Continue on to the **Citadel**, a medieval fortress built in 1176 to protect the city from Crusaders, which sits high above Cairo on a limestone hill. Today, the Citadel complex houses mosques and museums, including the National Military Museum.
• After a boxed lunch return to Aswan and the Movenpick Aswan Resort which offers spectacular views over the river Nile from its unique location on Elephantine Island.

• This afternoon explore Elephantine Island, which is also home to the Aswan Museum. The beautiful gardens alongside the Aswan Museum leads visitors towards the wonderful Ruins of Abu, where archaeological excavations are still taking place headed by a Swiss/German team. Walk a few minutes to the Nile and see what is called the Nilometer. In ancient Egypt, the behavior of the Nile could mean life or death each harvest season. So, long before the Aswan Dam was constructed to manage the flooding of the great river, Egyptians invented an instrument to measure the waters in order to predict the Nile’s behavior, This is a fascinating glimpse into the highly sophisticated skills of a civilization that existed here over 3,000 years ago.

• Dinner is at leisure this evening.

**NOVEMBER 12: SONESTA ST. GEORGE NILE CRUISE  B, L, D**

• Visit the Nubia Museum. The museum, established as part of the UNESCO International Campaign, actually houses various artifacts and finds salvaged during the UNESCO salvage campaign following the construction of the high-dam. It was first opened to the public in 1997, housing over 3,000 objects, and its focal point is Nubian culture across history. It was designed by architect Mahmoud El Hakim and it was awarded the Aga Khan Award for Architecture in 2001.

• After a leisurely morning drive to the MV Sonesta St. George Nile Cruise and embark on a three night cruise on the Nile between Aswan and Luxor.

• After lunch board a motorboat for a short ride to the Island of Agilkia to visit the Temple of Isis, one of the gems of ancient Egypt.

• After visit the Granite Quarries which supplied the ancient Egyptians with most of the hard stone used in pyramids and temples, and still holds a huge unfinished obelisk.

• Weather permitting take a ride on a felucca, a typical Egyptian sail boat, around Elephantine Island, the Botanical Gardens, and the Agha Khan Mausoleum.

• Enjoy a welcome dinner on board this evening.
NOVEMBER 13:
SONESTA ST. GEORGE NILE CRUISE  B, L, D

- This morning set sail for Kom Ombo, visible for some time as a result of its location on the top of a hillock on the ancient site of Ombo. Enjoy a visit to this spectacular Greco-Roman temple.

- Return to the boat for lunch and set sail to Edfu. Edfu has always been an important site to the Egyptians because, according to ancient myth, this was where the falcon god Horus fought a fierce battle with his uncle Seth, who had cruelly murdered Horus’s father Osiris. The Temple of Horus which was buried under sand and silt for nearly two thousand years, is the largest and best-preserved Ptolemaic temple in Egypt.

- Late afternoon sail to Luxor with dinner onboard.

NOVEMBER 14:
SONESTA ST. GEORGE NILE CRUISE  B, L, D

- After breakfast on board the boat, explore the remote, barren Valley of the Kings which was the necropolis of the New Kingdom Pharaohs. By digging their tombs deep into the Theban hills, pharaohs from Tuthmosis (1500 BC) hoped to stop robbers stealing the priceless possessions buried with them. It was, sadly, an unsuccessful strategy and almost every tomb was raided except those of Yuya, Tuya and Tutankhamun. But despite the intrusions the structures themselves remain, their dramatic corridors and burial chambers stunningly adorned with symbolic accounts of the journey through the underworld and ritual paintings to assist the pharaohs in the afterlife.

- After lunch on board visit the awe-inspiring Temple of Karnak whose ancient name ‘Ipet Sut’ designates the center of the world where Amun, the creator of the universe, first created himself and then all things and living beings.

- Continue on to the Temple of Luxor, built on the site of the ancient Egyptian capital of Thebes. The temple is one of the best preserved of all of the ancient monuments with large amounts of the structure, statuary and relief carvings still intact, making it one of the most impressive visits in the Luxor area. Adding significantly to its allure is the juxtaposition that its setting provides. The modern city begins on one side and the Nile drifts by on the other. There are few places in Egypt where one is put so immediately and clearly in touch with extraordinary length of Egypt’s history.

- Captain’s farewell dinner this evening.

NOVEMBER 15: LUXOR  B, L

- After disembarking the boat return to the West Bank. We will begin at the Deir el Medina and Medinat Habu. Deir el Medina is the relatively well-preserved village where the workmen who built the tombs of the Valley of the Kings lived. The remains of this modest village once housed about 68 households, the inhabitants of which were a mixed community of Egyptians, Nubians and Asians.

- Continue on to the Tombs of the Nobles, which are some of the best but least visited in the area and are nestled in the foothills opposite the Ramesseum. There are more than 400 tombs here belonging to nobles from the 6th dynasty to the Greco-Roman period.

- Later transfer to the wonderful Al Moudira hotel.

- Dinner tonight is at leisure.
NOVEMBER 16: CAIRO  

B, L, D

- Take a morning flight to Cairo.
- Upon arrival drive to the quirky but fascinating Agricultural Museum of Egypt. Once the breadbasket of the Roman Empire, Egypt has a long agricultural history and this museum is dedicated to Egypt’s farming past.
- Later today, our plan is to visit with independent journalists working on press freedom issues during this fraught political period, followed by some free time to explore on your own.
- Check into the Fairmont Nile City Hotel.
- Join fellow travelers for a farewell dinner this evening.

TRIP PRICE

Ground Package Pricing*
Per person double occupancy: $7,580
Single supplement: $1,890
Egyptian domestic airfare: $580

Economy class flights: Cairo to Aswan; Aswan - Abu Simbel - Aswan (round-trip); Luxor - Cairo

*Rates are based on standard accommodations. Suites, superior rooms and other upgrades carry an additional fee.

INCLUDES

- Accommodation based on double occupancy as listed
- Meals as listed in the program with bottled water. Wine at welcome and farewell dinners
- All sightseeing and activities listed with a private air-conditioned bus
- Airport transfers for those arriving and departing on group tour dates
- A private Egyptologist who will accompany the group throughout
- Services of a tour manager
- Water on the bus and at local sites
- Porterage at hotels
- Basic gratuity to tour manager, Egyptologist and drivers
- “Whisper” devices that allow for ease of hearing guides at sites.

NOT INCLUDED

- International airfare to Alexandria and from Cairo
- 4 Economy class flights within Egypt ($580): Cairo to Aswan; Aswan - Abu Simbel - Aswan (round-trip); Luxor - Cairo
- Visa fees of $25
- Passport fees
- Any meals not listed as included
- Drinks with meals except those listed
- Anything not specifically mentioned as included