

Antiquities of Egypt and Jordan



Visiting Egypt and Jordan proved to be the great fulfillment of a high-priority bucket list trip for my wife and me. With a group of 30 fellow travelers in Egypt and 6 in Jordan, we toured by bus and cruise ship to immerse ourselves into these most ancient of countries.

Many of our friends and family were concerned about safety in that region of the world, but we felt safe during the entire trip. We had armed guards with us at all times in Egypt (and, at times, a police escort for our bus, complete with sirens!), and both countries took security very seriously.

Our guide for the entire Egypt portion of the trip was an Egyptian with a degree in Egyptian history, which added so much to what we learned as we visited each of the locations and excursions.



Craig at Sakkara

The day after arriving, we visited the “step” pyramid Sakkara which is believed to be the first built in ancient Egypt. In the afternoon, we visited the Great Pyramids of Khufu, Khafre and Menkaure and the nearby Great Sphinx. My wife was in Egypt heaven!



Khufu



Great Sphinx



The following day we visited the highlights of the Cairo Egyptian Museum which included the contents of King Tut's tomb and the golden mask. We learned that the beauty of King Tut's tomb would have been minor compared to what would have been found in other tombs if they had not been robbed. (But he still had a heck of a lot of gold!) King Tut was only a king for about 9 years; where as King Ramses II was king for 70+ years and his tomb was huge. It must have been magnificent with treasure before it was robbed.



Open-air Street Market

In the evening, we visited an open-air street market in one of the oldest parts of Cairo. Everywhere there were vendors holding souvenirs and saying “one dollar, one dollar”, trying to lure us into their shops; families and young people enjoying the warm evening air in the plaza; the exotic smells of Egyptian foods, coffees and tobacco of the hookahs...a glimpse into the current culture of the Egyptian people. Afterwards, we had a traditional Egyptian dinner at an open-air restaurant.



Temple of Luxor

From Cairo we flew to the city of Luxor. The city of Luxor contains 70% of the world's ancient remains, many still intact. In the city, we visited the Temples of Karnak and Luxor. The Temple City of Karnak is considered to be among the world's largest ancient temple complexes. With almost 1,300 years of construction and covering a site of almost a mile by two miles, it includes several of the finest examples of ancient Egyptian design and architecture. The Temples of Luxor and Karnak are connected by a long boulevard lined by sphinxes which is under renovation. Awe-inspiring!



Boulevard of Sphinxes



The next morning, we visited the famous Valley of the Kings, used for ritual burial for much of the Pharaonic times. The valley is known to contain 63 tombs and has been a focus of archaeological exploration since the end of the 18th century. It is one of most famous archaeological sites in the world. In modern times, the valley became famous for the discovery of the tomb of King Tutankhamen. My wife went in and saw Tut's mummy and his very small

(comparatively speaking) tomb. She was underwhelmed after seeing the other tombs; just a few Baboons carved on the walls...Ramses II tomb – awesome – she said it was huge with painted hieroglyphics and gods everywhere.



Tomb of King Ramses VI

From Luxor, we boarded our ship and traveled up the Nile for 4 days, taking various shore excursions to temple ruins each day as we traveled to Aswan (saw a Belly-dancing and Egyptian music show one evening!). At Aswan is the Aswan High Dam built across the Nile between 1960 and 1970. The High Dam has resulted in protection from floods and droughts, an increase in agricultural production and employment, electricity production, and improved navigation that also benefits tourism. Conversely, the dam flooded a large area, causing the relocation of over 100,000 people. Many archaeological sites were submerged while others were relocated.

Twenty-two monuments and architectural complexes, including the Abu Simbel temples, which were threatened by flooding from Lake Nasser were preserved by moving them to the shores of Lake Nasser under the UNESCO Nubia Campaign.



While in Aswan, we took a ride in a “felucca”, a traditional wooden sailing vessel of the Nile and learned about the Nubian culture of the region.

We debarked our ship, and flew from Aswan to Abu Simbel, the site of the Great Temple of Ramses II, Egypt's longest-ruling pharaoh. The Great Temple, carved out of a mountainside, with its huge statues of Ramses II at the entrance, was magnificent and the evening sound and light show was very well done. It was worth the extra expense!



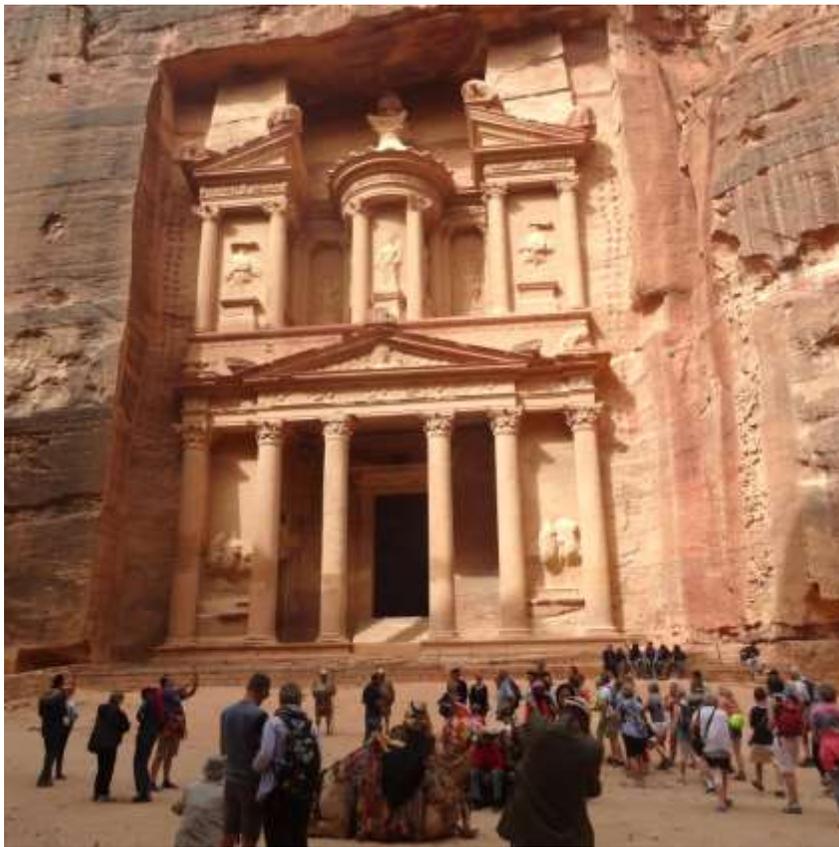
Abu Simbel at night



Abu Simbel (original/today)

From Abu Simbel, we boarded another ship and voyaged along Lake Nasser back to Aswan taking in various archaeological sites, most of which had been moved in order not to be covered by the Aswan dam water. This part of the cruise was more relaxing with time to just enjoy cruising for 3 days. From Aswan, we flew back to Cairo. This was the end of the trip for most on our river cruise, but six of us went on to Amman, Jordan. In the land of the Bedouins, the land of Moses and his followers, we spent four additional days exploring Jordan's antiquities.

In addition to the tents in which many Bedouins still live in the countryside with their herds of animals, the highlight of Jordan was the ancient city of Petra. Petra was built by the Nabataeans in the heart of the Shara Mountains. It prospered in the first centuries BC and AD and was a vital part of a major trading route connecting ancient Mesopotamia and Egypt. The Nabataeans were also famous at the time for their water management techniques in the desert. The city survived because it was well hidden, with its main access through the multi-colored sides of a



slot canyon (a 2 ½ mile walk through the canyon to get to the city). Its most famous artifact is a temple called "The Treasury", with beautiful columns carved into the pink rocks. Today, intricate facades sculpted into the sandstone cliffs of the area can still be seen, along with other remarkably preserved structures, tombs, and monuments of the fascinating civilization.

Petra

Ahh...and then to a gorgeous resort on the Dead Sea to relax, unwind and for some, float in the sea. Salt cakes the rocks and shore, as it contains 34% salt (Atlantic Ocean is 3.5%), beautiful and clear. We also visited the Dead Sea Museum. We definitely could have stayed another day!



Another interesting ruin we visited was the Jerash ruins which are said to be the best-preserved Roman ruins outside of Italy. Jerash featured extensive Greek and Roman ruins. The ancient Roman city enjoyed great wealth and importance largely due to the area's fertile lands and year-round fresh water supply. An earthquake hit the region in 749 AD destroying huge areas of the city and leaving the ruins buried in soil for hundreds of years. It was in 1806 that a German explorer discovered them.



Jerash

This was a trip well worth taking and my wife and I always felt safe. Our guides knew everything and seemingly knew everyone wherever we traveled. We gorged on buffets every day, walked many miles, and saw incredible sights. Our fellow travelers were wonderful, gung-ho (even those with disabilities), and we made several new acquaintances. I encourage anyone interested in antiquities of the Middle East, to take a trip as we did and use Viking River Cruises. It is a company we certainly recommend.