

Egypt—Cradle of civilization lures travelers to its tranquil borders

Story and photos:
By IRIS SANDERSON JONES

Egypt—Everywhere I go, the scene is repeated. It happened first in Cairo and now it is repeated in a small desert village, where a young boy in a striped robe stops to talk.

"American? he asks.
"Yes.
"Welcome!"
Sometimes two other words are added to the dialogue. "American? Jimmy Carter! Welcome!" Anwar Sadat is the hero of Egypt and Carter is not far behind. The people have been at war for 30 years and they are eager for peace.

In a village full of weavers, there is a radio in every shop tuned to the voices of Sadat and Begin. When we ask Egyptians about the allies that have abandoned them they shrug and say, "They will come around in time. We must have peace."

One of their goals for peace, according to officials of the Ministry of Tourism, is to increase the number of tourists from one to two million by 1983.

To do this, they are promoting private and public development of hotels and other tourist facilities in existing tourist sites as well as in new resort areas along the Mediterranean and the Red Sea.

The Nile, squeezed between two huge deserts, has been the essence of Egypt—the cradle of civilization for 6,000 years—its survival dependent upon flood times and fate.

Now, for the first time, Egyptians are trying to control their own fate. They have dammed the Nile and are trying to reclaim the desert.



Bedouins still buy and sell camels and cattle at the weekly camel market, a 20-minute taxi ride down a dusty road from downtown Luxor.

Half-remembered geography lessons become as real as a scene from "Lawrence of Arabia" as we approach Cairo by air. Below is endless desert broken by the single black line of a road.

THIS IS THE land of the pharaohs and the alphabet, a single strip of green valley, 12 miles wide at the most, running 600 miles to the Sudanese border. The lush delta from Cairo to the Mediterranean is the Lower Nile. This stem of green is the Upper Nile. The other 750 miles of Egypt from east to west is sand.

Down that narrow strip of green, unseen from the air, is every antiquity you have ever seen pictured from Egypt: the pyramids near Cairo; the City of Karnak and the Valley of the

Kings 450 miles upriver at Luxor; the Temple of Philae 145 miles beyond that, near the Aswan Dam; and the colossal seated figures of Abu Simbel, rescued from the dam waters another 200 miles south towards the Sudan.

The desert blows to the very edge of the expressway into Cairo, and forms the permanent brown hills behind the mosques and temples of the city. At the Nile, it is a contemporary high rise city of hotels and office buildings, with Ramesses II starting in stone across the square as we near the bridge.

The highlight of Cairo for most travelers is at the pyramids in the nearby cities of Giza, Memphis and Saqqara. You may not expect to see the famous pyramid of Cheops surrounded by a city, with a tent nightclub on one side and lots of eager camel drivers selling rides on the other.

A new antiquity, expected to open this year, is the Cheops funeral barge, which was excavated near the pyramids and now occupies an almost finished museum on the same landscape.

The briefest visit to Cairo should include the Khan el Khalili bazaar, which looks 1,000 years old, and the casinos and nightclubs of the downtown hotels, which are as modern as ear-splitting music.

THE ANCIENT CITY of Thebes, 450 miles upriver, now called Luxor, was the place from which the kings of Egypt ruled the Upper and Lower Kingdom 2,000 years before Christ. If you must choose one city as a looking glass at ancient Egypt, this is it.

Here, within an easy carriage ride of downtown hotels and shops, is an endless feast of hieroglyphics and stone.

The ruins of the city of Karnak are approached by an avenue of stone sphinxes that once ran from the city to this incredible complex of temples.

A sound and light show will tell you all you need to know about the history here, as well as at the Temple of Luxor which sits in ruined splendor in the middle of town.

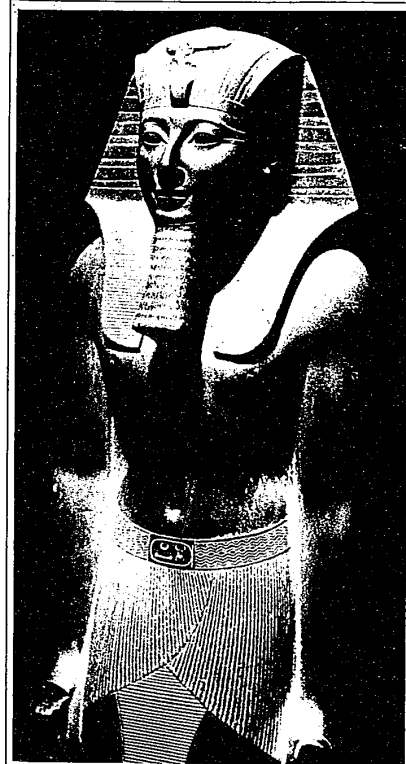
The exquisite Luxor Museum is nearby. It often is missed by tourists, as is the smell and chaos of the camel market, 20 minutes taxi ride away. The camel market, approached by old city streets and country scenes, is where Bedouins still buy and sell the camels, cattle and burros that support daily life in the country.

On the east side of the Nile here is the city of the living. On the west side is the city of the dead, best known for the Valley of the Kings.

The most important piece of information for tourists is that temples and burial sculpture were never built on arable land.

Whenever you visit a stone antiquity you will walk on land that feels and looks like either a gravel pit or a sandstone desert mountain. Wear comfortable shoes. Dress cool. Wear a hat. You can be sure it won't rain.

IN THE MIDDLE of a grassy field on the west bank, the huge stone figures of the Colossi of Memnon are all that are left of an ancient temple. Beyond, where the road leads up to a rubble stone mountain, you walk out of desolation into long narrow tombs in the Valley of the Queens. The vivid underground paintings on the tomb walls are a startling contrast to the sandstone desert outside.



Statue of King Tutmosis III, who died in 1436 B.C., was excavated from the ruins of Karnak outside Luxor and stands now in the Luxor Museum. It is 90.5 cm high and made of green graywacke stone.

On all the slopes of these desert mountains the ancient Egyptians buried their royal dead in splendor. The tombs have been robbed of their valuables, but the carved and painted figures remain on the walls and ceilings.

The newest in the tombste open in the Valley of the Kings is the wonderfully intact sarcophagus of King Tut, in a tiny painted room. You cannot take cameras inside.

AT ASWAN, within sight of the first Aswan Dam, locally known as the Brit-

ish Dam, is the newly rebuilt Temple of Philae.

The temple, recently moved to higher ground, will be opened to the public for the first time this fall. You should also see the new high dam with its adjacent Russian Monument, although you cannot take pictures from the top of the dam because it is a military zone.

Next week: Egypt builds new tourist resorts by the Red Sea.

TRAVEL LOG of Iris Jones



Salaam. Shalom. Peace.

I was in Egypt when Anwar Sadat and Menachem Begin began to put the Mideast peace treaty into effect by transferring the western half of the Sinai back to Egypt.

Every person I talked to in Egypt was cheering them on. This was true for Egyptian men and women and among the working men in desert robes that we met along the Upper Nile.

A small incident that occurred in Aswan illustrates the feeling well enough.

Aswan is an ancient crossroads of the Middle East. It is at first cataract on the Nile, and a natural gateway to Africa. The British built the Aswan Dam here in 1902, but it is now only a reservoir. The newer High Dam, 4 1/2 miles south, recently changed the course of Egyptian history when it formed Lake Nasser by flooding the Nile south to Sudan.

FOR THOUSANDS OF YEARS the Nile flooded this 600-mile valley to the Mediterranean every year, leaving behind the silt that made Egypt a green strip of civilization in the middle of a desert. In a decade, they have changed all that by building a dam that controls the floodwater.

Egypt paid a price for it. The dam flooded ancient Nubia, forcing these black-skinned Egyptians to resettle in Aswan. Priceless antiquities were lost under the water, although a few major sites such as Abu Simbel and the Temple of Philae were moved to higher ground.

The precious silt that once settled on valley land now tends to settle to the bottom of Lake Nasser, behind the dam. Obviously the dam was a mixed blessing, but the Egyptians took that chance because they were looking ahead to a better world.

WHICH BRINGS ME back to the peace treaty. I was at the High Dam. We had viewed the river from the top and from the Russian Monument, but we couldn't take pictures because the dam is in a military zone.

We moved several hundred feet downstream, where a man in a headdress and a galabia (a long cotton robe) squatted on a low wall facing a picture of former President Nasser and the pyloned top of the dam. Below, on the Nile, a great rush of water flowed out of the dam and continued downriver towards Cairo.

It was a hot day and I was ready for a drink. I approached the single concession stand with an Egyptian pound note, worth about \$1.25, clutched in my left hand.

"Salaam," I said, giving the traditional Arab greeting. The man behind the counter smiled and queried "Shalom?"

"Shalom?" I said surprised.

"Yes, I know, but don't you say 'Salaam' in Egypt?" He smiled and shrugged. "Salaam, Shalom, Peace."

I heard this sentiment expressed in many ways throughout Egypt. For the traveler, the peace treaty will become very real when air traffic begins between Cairo and Jerusalem, as everyone in Egypt predicts it soon will do.

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