

TIME TRAVEL EGYPTIAN STYLE

By Brad Bowins
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A TRAVEL DESTINATION THAT ENDURES:

The pharaohs of Egypt were consumed by the notion of immortality, ensuring that their mortuary temples would last, paying tribute to all the necessary gods, and finally being mummified. Whether they achieved their goal of immortality is questionable, but what they inadvertently accomplished was creating a travel destination that endures. Ancient Greek and Roman vacationers ventured to see the marvels of Egypt, much as modern day travelers love to. Recent times have seen some unrest in Egypt, but with a return to stability the immortal magic of the country can once again be experienced, and in many instances for a more affordable cost to lure travelers back. The humor of many Egyptians and their coping ability is impressive.



Sphinx and Pyramids of Giza

A visit to the Great Pyramids of Giza would not be complete without seeing the Sphinx consisting of the Khafre's head and a lion's body. This structure is striking for both its size, position by the Great

Pyramids, and combination of man and beast so to speak.



Old Cataract Hotel built in 1902, portrayed in Agatha Christie's *Death on the Nile*.



White-sail feluccas, ancient in design, ferry people back and forth to Elephantine Island.




The Temple of Philae on Elephantine Island from the Old Cataract Hotel terrace.

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In planning a vacation to Egypt, the most important thing to consider is that Egypt really is the Nile River, both for citizens and visitors. Although this is well known, the significance is not fully appreciated until one arrives and sees that the country is really a fertile strip along this life-giving river, bordered on both sides by a vast desert. From the earliest days, life has literally revolved around the Nile, and its seasonal flooding of adjacent lands. A tour best starts either at the northern end by Cairo and the very ancient Pyramids of Giza and Djoser, or to the south by Aswan where temples from the Greek and Roman periods dominate. Do you prefer to start with earlier or later Egyptian history, and in what direction

ASWAN



The old and the new, so typical of Egypt.

** Temple of Philae characteristic of the Greco-Roman period.*



do you prefer your time travel? The choice is yours.

2,000 YEAR TIME TRAVEL:

Starting with more recent history, although still 2,000 years back in time, takes you to the city of Aswan to the south

where a very unique mixture of the old and new is to be found. Stepping back in time a mere 100 years is the Old Cataract Hotel built in 1902, portrayed in Agatha Christie's *Death on the Nile*. With a little imagination, you can transport yourself to those times by

SOUTHERN EGYPT



To ensure support from the people they built temples dedicated to the various gods of ancient Egypt, with wall carvings depicting stories.



The Temple of Philae was relocated as it would have been flooded by the High Aswan Dam.

One of the most significant stories is how Seth, represented by a crocodile, killed Osiris. This horrific murder was avenged when Osiris's wife, Isis, was able to briefly resurrect her husband and have a son Horus, the falcon-headed God, who avenged his father's murder by killing Seth.

Three temples all of the Greco-Roman period are featured—Kom Ombo, Edfu, and Esna.

observing the exterior with pastel, white, and black colors perfectly blended, and the interior with expansive arches, ornate wall lights, and wooden fixtures. The outside patio is perfect for afternoon tea, or something more intoxicating if desired, although the stunning views of the Nile are intoxicating on their own.

White-sail feluccas, ancient in design, ferry people back and forth to Elephantine Island, site of your first destination—The Temple of Philae. A nice sail on a felucca can be easily arranged when you arrive or as part of your tour, with a stop to see this temple characteristic of the Greco-Roman period. Particularly striking is the Roman section with fully intact columns supporting sides to a long absent roof. The Greeks and Romans ruled Egypt after the glory of the pharaohs passed into history. To ensure support from the people they built temples dedicated to the various gods of ancient Egypt, with wall carvings depicting some of the most popular stories. One of the most significant is how Seth, represented by a crocodile,

killed Osiris. This horrific murder was avenged when Osiris's wife, Isis, was able to briefly resurrect her husband and have a son Horus, the falcon-headed God, who avenged his father's murder by killing Seth. This "eye-for-an-eye" revenge theme is present in many cultures, reflecting how before modern policing and judicial systems revenge by family members was a social norm. Wall carvings of Isis and her son Horus, adorn the temple of Philae paying homage to these gods.

Returning to the city of Aswan and the more modern world, a visit to the joint Egyptian-Russian High Aswan dam is a very striking contrast. This dam has tamed the wilder cataracts of the Nile near Aswan and created Lake Nasser. The Temple of Philae would be an underwater attraction for divers if not for painstaking block-by-block removal and reassembly on the higher ground of Elephantine Island. Another near victim of the dam is Abu Simbel the temple of Ramses II, also immortalized by countless statues of himself throughout Egypt and hundreds of offspring. To reach this remote temple requires either a flight or vehicle transportation, but is worth it for those not bothered by the realization that the entire temple has been moved, a feat Ramses II himself would respect and undoubtedly

feel he deserved. Giant statues of you guessed it, Ramses II, are to be found at this site.

CRUISING THE NILE IN STYLE:

Now for what might be the most romantic part of the trip, a Nile boat cruise like that featured in *Death on the Nile*. These cruises take place on large and very comfortably attired boats, traveling from Aswan to ancient Thebes (Luxor & Karnak) over 3-4 days, or in the reverse direction for those wishing to proceed from the most ancient to more recent. Three temples all of the Greco-Roman period are featured—Kom Ombo, Edfu, and Esna—each with very unique features.

Kom Ombo is the first stop heading north, and is distinguished by being the only temple dedicated to two gods, and enemies at that—Seth and Horus. A beautiful block carving shows both of these gods honoring one another in reconciliation. A carving of Horus with an enlarged eye highlights the eye-for-an-eye theme. Very interesting for anyone in the medical professions are incredibly intact and exacting carvings of a birthing chair and medical instruments, so realistic that it is easy to image the latter being applied in either treatment or embalming. Proving that the only thing guaranteed in actual

The higher the water level due to better Nile flooding, the more productive the crop yield and the higher taxes.

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life is taxes, even for ancient Egyptians, is a tax calculation flood pit: the higher the water level due to better Nile flooding, the more productive the crop yield and the higher taxes. Quite sophisticated and fair all things considered.

Known as the most well preserved temple of Egypt is Edfu, dedicated to Horus. Wall carvings and statues of the falcon-headed God make this dedication clear. Approaching from the exterior courtyard side are two large statues of Horus positioned by the entrance. Egyptian temples were built from high to low with the higher side accessible to the common person, such as the large exterior and interior courtyards. The lowest side was only for the pharaoh and high priests, and in Edfu's inner

sanctuary is to be found a symbolic sacred barque carrying the pharaoh to the afterlife along the Nile. Esna the next temple to the north is interesting because it is built in the middle of a town that almost seems to engulf it. Egyptian cities are built on top

of more ancient structures, given how the limitations imposed by the surrounding desert make sprawl development too challenging, at least until recent times.

KOM OMBO



* *Horus and Seth honoring each other.*



The temple is from the Greco-Roman period.

EDFU-THE BEST PRESERVED TEMPLE



Entrance pylon, the tallest part accessible by the common person.



Horus the falcon-headed God who the temple is dedicated to.

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The Heart Of Egypt:

The last stop on the south to north trip is the most impressive and in many ways the center of all things Egyptian—Ancient Thebes and the Valley of the Kings. These sites are so extensive that a minimum of two days is required to take it all in. On the east side of the Nile (Thebes) lie Karnak and Luxor, temples connected by the Avenue of Sphinxes. Both temples arose in the Middle Period, approximately 2,000 B.C., with Karnak being the most extensive in Egypt. Successive rulers added to the temple complex attempting to maximize their own popularity, and achieve a form of immortality via statues, obelisks, buildings, and wall drawings. Ram-headed

KARNAK



* *Ram-headed sphinxes line the entrance.*



Successive rulers added to the temple complex.

sphinxes line the entrance, and although much of the original structures have collapsed the progression from higher to lower is evident. The famous Grand Hypostyle Hall contains 134 giant columns in 16 rows. Try and tune out the crowds for a moment and image what this

hall must have looked like in the days when it was fully intact and covered by a roof. Other impressive structures at Karnak include an obelisk for Queen Hatshepsut partially walled off by a successor, a mud-brick wall indicating how blocks were added, and not surprisingly a

THE AVENUE OF SPHINXES TO LUXOR



Avenue of Sphinxes connect Karnak and Luxor temples.



Courtyard of Luxor with statues of Ramses II.

Down the Avenue of Sphinxes lies Luxor, the temple entrance adorned with statues of Egypt's greatest narcissist, Ramses II. The interior reveals well-preserved columns and interestingly a mosque on the remains of Luxor, demonstrating both the blending of cultures and how the new is built over the old.

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very intact statue of Ramses II.

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Streets Of Tombs:

Lacking the immense wealth of Old Kingdom pharaohs able to construct pyramids, Middle

VALLEY OF THE KINGS



* *Street signs to the tombs for Middle Kingdom rulers.*



Thutmosis III tomb with its difficult to access entrance.

Kingdom rulers had to settle for tombs built into cliff walls in the Valley of the Kings. Entering the valley is an eerie and exhilarating experience at the same time as there are signs, much like street signs, indicating the deceased who resides in the given tomb along

with address numbers. The wealthier the pharaoh, the more elaborate the tomb with long passageways, fake crypts, concealed burial site, and extensive murals assisting in passage to the afterlife. The tomb of Thutmosis III for example is very impressive,

QUEEN HATSHEPSUT



A striking image of the ultimate female ruler of Egypt.



Her temple seems to flow out of the cliff face, ascending or descending three levels.

From a distance the multiple spaces between the supporting columns create an open and inviting feel, in contrast to many of the other temples where majesty and privilege seem paramount. Statues and reliefs with the color still intact of Queen Hatshepsut are located throughout the temple.

Tut Ankh Amun, roughly translating into "I worship the God Amun."

with a high entrance accessed by a ladder, tunnels, columns, stairs into the burial chamber, and murals such as those portraying the embalming God Anubis.

The most basic tomb reflecting his minor status at the time is that of Tut Ankh Amun, roughly translating into "I worship the God Amun." A very short passageway leads to the crypt where the sarcophagus lies, and wall drawing vignettes from the Book of the Dead remain crystal clear. Despite the modesty of his tomb and lower status during his life, King Tut has clearly surpassed Ramses II in the immortality department, being the most famous of Egyptian males. Another interesting site to the west of the Nile is the Colossi of Memnon, 21 meter statues sitting on their own, reportedly very popular with ancient Greek and Roman travelers.

Queen Of Queens:

The most famous of pure Egyptian female rulers is Queen Hatshepsut, her temple being highly symmetrical and pleasing to the eye on approach. It literally seems to flow out of

the cliff face it is built into, stepping up three levels, or descending depending on your perspective. From a distance the multiple spaces between the supporting columns create an open and inviting feel, in contrast to many of the other temples where majesty and privilege seem paramount. Statues and reliefs with the color still intact of Queen Hatshepsut are located throughout the temple. Despite their grandeur, they display a modesty and understatement consistent with the temple itself.

TIME TRAVEL TO THE PYRAMIDS OF EGYPT:

A flight back to Cairo and the most ancient segment of the Egyptian time travel itinerary is next on the agenda. Despite their majesty, the Pyramids of Giza were almost consumed by Cairo sprawl development. Last minute legislation limited how close new development can come but billboards are still very close, and photos can be taken of a pyramid from the ancient past behind a modern advertisement for a soft drink. To shake the present and enter the past nothing beats a camel ride to the pyramids themselves. Reaching to the heavens, the Great Pyramids of Khufu, Khafre, and Menkaure seem an appropriate resting place for pharaohs who viewed themselves as god-kings. Their

control of massive wealth enabled the construction of these incredible mortuary temples, as mostly paid workers and not slaves were recruited.

The Great Pyramids were built in the Old Kingdom of Egypt around 2,500 BC, and Khufu's pyramid remained the tallest man-made structure for 3,800 years! Time has taken its toll on these incredible structures, and a little imagination is required to picture them with smooth sides and gold caps at the apex reflecting the sun. The brightness must have made it seem that the sun and pyramids were connected. In contrast to the exterior grandeur, the passages within the pyramids are simpler than many of those at the Valley of the Kings, and lack the exquisite murals of the latter. Buried near to Khufu's pyramid and now on display at an enclosed museum, is a massive Sacred Barque designed to carry the pharaoh to his afterlife.

A visit to the Great Pyramids of Giza would not be complete without seeing the Sphinx consisting of the Khafre's head and a lion's body. This structure is striking for both its size, position by the Great Pyramids, and combination of man and beast so to speak. It was sculpted from lesser grade rock than the pyramids and hence shows significant wearing, but

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it does constitute one of the largest sculptures in the world even today. At one point in Egypt's history desert sands covered it entirely and it had to be unearthed.

Another structure showing great wear, is the most ancient stop of the tour, the Step Pyramid of Djoser located at Saqqara. Designed by the pharaoh Djoser's architect, Imhotep, this magnificent step pyramid is based on the old mastaba tomb design. It is said the pharaoh participated in races held in the courtyard fronting the pyramid, and by virtue of his grandeur and ego he had to win. Hence, as he aged the pace of the racers necessarily slowed so that no one would finish ahead of him,

the possibility of premature entombment providing sufficient motivation for losing the race. Located nearby are some of the oldest tombs in Egypt.

Egyptian Time Travel
Condensed:

The Egyptian style time travel tour is not complete without a visit to the Egyptian Museum, widely known as the Cairo Museum. Artifacts covering the entire span of Egyptian history

PYRAMIDS OF GIZA



* *Khufu's pyramid, tallest structure for 3,800 years!*



Khafre's pyramid, slightly smaller than that of his father.

OLD KINGDOM EGYPT



Sacred Barque designed to carry Khufu to his afterlife.



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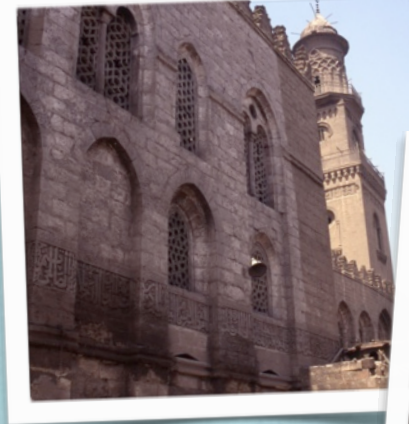
Many of Egypt's most famous and successful pharaohs can be visited in this room in their mummified state.

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are on display, such as the innermost gold coffin of King Tut and the God Anubis on a gilded shrine. Very impressive is the mummy room that is carefully temperature and climate controlled. Many of Egypt's most famous and successful pharaohs can be visited in this room in their mummified state.

Cairo itself is an interesting city and it is worth visiting the Khan El Khalili Bazaar operating since 1382. Narrow streets packed with interesting shops sell a range of goods you are unlikely to find in any North American mall. For something a little different, Turkish coffee and water pipes can be tried at outdoor cafes. Renting a car is not recommended in Cairo as it is said that absolutely nothing stops the traffic here, even

AROUND CAIRO



* **Khan El Khalili Bazaar since 1382.**



Exotic and colorful spices for sale at the market.

MOHAMMED ALI MOSQUE



The Islamic monotheistic religion replaced the polytheistic beliefs.



Inner courtyard of this spectacular mosque.

An important aspect of Egypt's history is that of Islam and to sample that part of its history a visit to the nearby magnificent Mohammed Ali Mosque is a must.

RED SEA DESTINATIONS



Take a break from time travel, is to visit the Red Sea destinations of Sharm El Sheik located on the southern Sinai Peninsula, or Hurghada on the mainland side. The modern nature of these resorts and recreational activities stand in marked contrast to the rest of Egypt other than for the crowds. These destinations are understandably very popular with European vacationers, and this translates into a very well developed tourist infrastructure. Red Sea scuba diving is spectacular, although the crowds are somewhat disconcerting. I took a live-aboard dive boat out for a week and it was routine to have three or four other boats at a site. On one occasion, I witnessed a dive boat run into another one. The only times when the sites are quieter is early morning and

later afternoon when the dive boats from shore have retired for the day. Stunning underwater sights, including beautiful fish such as Twoband anemonefish, green sea turtles, hard and soft corals, and wrecks, make the visit worthwhile. Conceptualizing and planning your Egypt vacation as time travel taken either from more recent to ancient or the reverse, with a seaside break in Sharm or Hurghada, will ensure that you have a very satisfying and informative trip.

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TIME TRAVEL

Do you prefer to start with earlier or later Egyptian history, and in what direction do you prefer your time travel? The choice is yours.

DESTINATIONS

Aswan
Luxor
Cairo
Red Sea

FOR INFORMATION
www.egypt.travel

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