

EGYPT



• 2026 •

## Egypt Itinerary

- ~~1 Jan 31 Arrive Cairo ~ 16.00~~
- ~~2 Feb 1 Cairo on our own~~
- ~~3 Feb 2 AM tour: Sultan Hassan Mosque, Museum of Islamic Art~~  
Arrive Cairo ~ 17.00
- 4 Feb 3 Sakkara Step Pyramids, Citadel / Khan el-Khalili Mkt, dinner
- 5 Feb 4 Giza Pyramids, GEM
- 6 Feb 5 Karnak Temple, Luxor Library / Luxor Temple
- 7 Feb 6 Dendra Temple,
- 8 Feb 7 Valley of the Kings, Hatshepsut & Seti I Tomb
- 9 Feb 8 Esna Temple; Esna Village " " "
- 10 Feb 9 Aswan / Abu Simbel (steve)
- 11 Feb 10 Nubian Village, Kom Ombo, Philae Temple
- 12 Feb 11 Edfu
- 13 Feb 12 Old Cairo, Nat' Museum
- 14 Feb 13 Fly home

○ OFF THE RAILS. A huge snowstorm caused our flight to Charlotte airport to be delayed and then for the airport to be closed, trapping us there for 48 hours. Then, once we did catch a flight to London, our bags went to Boston!

As a result we got to Cairo two days late, losing for me a day I had planned to spend in the newly opened Grand Egyptian Museum, as well as the first day of Viking Cruises' tour of Cairo. Then, though the tour's director assured us our luggage would arrive the next day - just buy yourself a few clothes to tide you over - my suitcase took two more days to arrive; my Mary was without her luggage for eight days!

A van driving through snow to Charlotte Airport



Our first outing with Viking, on day 2 of their itinerary, was to Saggara, on the outskirts of Cairo. We were taken to a town where the Egyptian government built trade schools to help the area bootstrap their economy. We visited a school for teaching carpet weaving - one of many. This one just happened to have a shop where we could buy professionally made finished goods (wink wink).

Our fellow passengers did their part to boost the economy.

The rug-weaving school



Saqqara street scene



Next stop, the Pyramid of Djoser, aka the Stepped Pyramid,  
the oldest complete stone building complex, from around 2345 BC.  
In addition to visiting the pyramid itself we toured the tomb  
of King Teti and of his vizier, Kagemni.

The Pyramid of Djoser



The walls of Kagemni's tomb were decorated (No. That's not the right word. What's on the walls is much more important.) graced with beautiful shallow bas-reliefs, likely painted at one time as one of the figures is red. This is the first time I've seen Egyptian hieroglyphs and art outside New York and London. Just thrilled. I'm surprised at the level of anatomical accuracy. Feet, for example, are not just triangles flat on the ground, but angled and sculpted.

Shallow bas-relief in Kagemni's tomb

missing portion



That evening we walked with the group through Cairo's bustling Khan el-Khalili Market and ate a sumptuous Egyptian dinner there. On the way we passed a large mosque, spectacularly lit.

A large Cairo Mosque at night



Our group's visit to the Grand Egyptian Museum was led by our very knowledgeable guide, Nabil. He had a finely honed approach, leading us first to the Khufu Ship Gallery (see p. 21). The Solar Barque of Khufu dates from around 2500 BC, making it the oldest wooden boat — it does show evidence of having been used on the water. It is 142 ft (43.4 m) long, and was buried in King Khufu's tomb complex, dismantled into 1224 pieces, which archeologists decades to reassemble. To see it whole was amazing and its Gallery is beautiful as well.

Statue of Ramses II in the entrance to the GEM



Nabil guided us by his carefully planned path through the galleries of the main building that chronologically follow the development of ancient Egypt culture, society, and religion. He then left us to explore the other half, dedicated to the findings in King Tutankamen's tomb. This is a vast treasure, yet Nabil impressed on us that this was the tomb of a relatively insignificant pharaoh with a very short reign. So much is here simply because it was overlooked by grave robbers. Imagine what the tomb of a long-reigning and important pharaoh would have held.

The most famous mask in the world



My Mary and I found a nice, affordable café for lunch then wandered on our own, finally meeting the group at the enormous statue of Ramses II (p. 19) We then boarded the tour bus to visit the great pyramids. On the way I captured a good view of all three (pp 22/23) In the foreground, strung along the dunes, are scores of people paying for camel or horseback rides. Mary commented that this is likely the world's oldest tourist trap. But we succumbed — just because Viking had already paid for our camel rides.





So many jaw-dropping sights! The Pyramids, the wonders of the GEM, and now the Great Sphinx! It is simply mind-numbingly huge, so big, so long, the laws of perspective make the side of it seem to curve.

The Great Sphinx



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From Cairo we flew to Luxor in the south, where we boarded Viking's riverboat, the Amun. It is quite new and modern, very pleasant to cruise on.

The Viking riverboat Amun



The same day we were bussed to the temple of Karnak,  
with its impossibly huge colonnade. A small amount of  
paint still adheres to some of the protected surfaces  
of the structure, ...

Entering the Temple of Karnak



... making you imagine how dizzyingly spectacular  
it once was. Attempting to capture the crazy perspective  
caused by the hugeness of Karnak is a challenge.

Karnak, architectural detail



The temples of Karnak and Luxor are connected by the Avenue of Sphinxes which is 1.7 miles (2.7 km) long, and once was lined on both sides by 1350 sphinxes, some of which have ram's heads instead of human heads on their lion bodies. Some of those ram-headed sphinxes can be seen behind the young Egyptian family that let me take their photo.

A young Egyptian family on the Avenue of Sphinxes

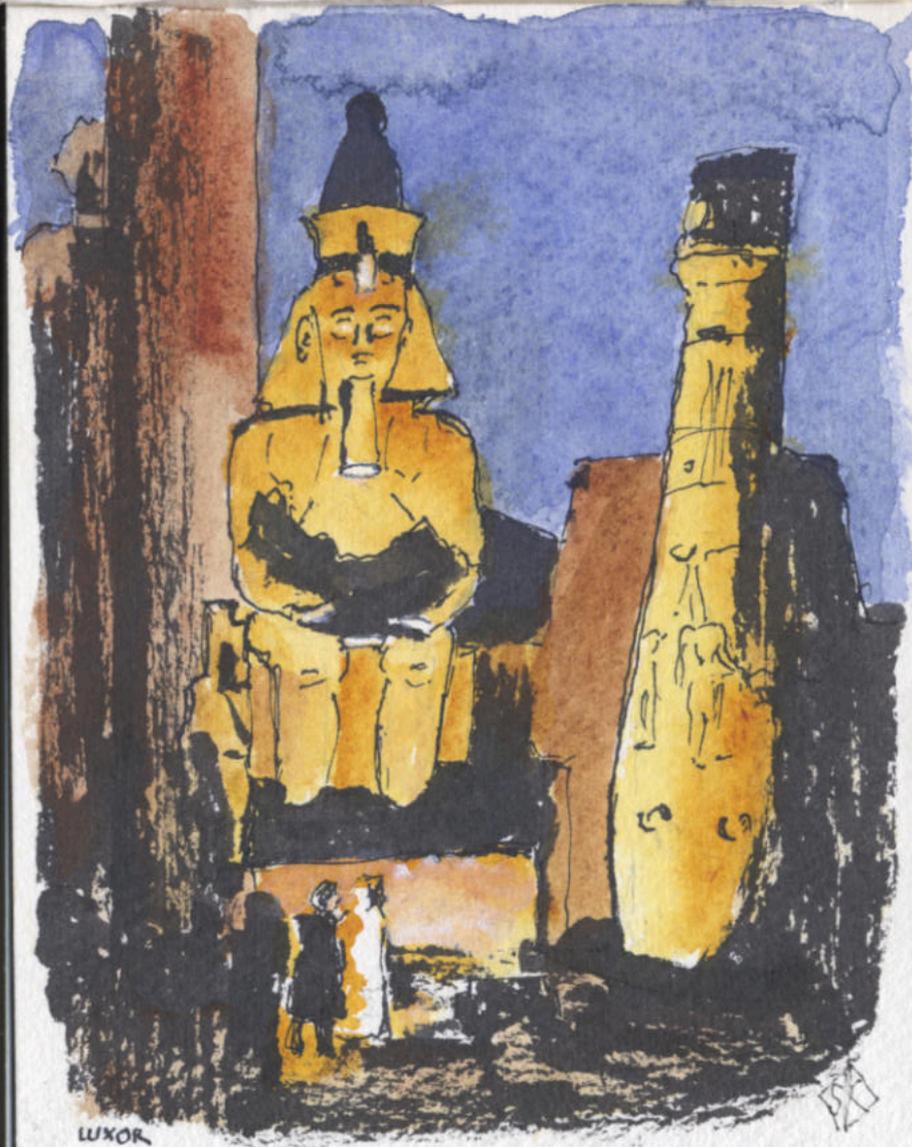


That evening we toured Luxor Temple. It was brilliantly lit, complementing the gorgeous sunset. Within the temple there is a mosque which was colorfully lit as well.



The columns and statues inside the temple were illuminated from below, accenting the carvings on the walls and highlighting the majesty of the statues — as if they needed it!

Inside the Luxor Temple at night



The Dendera Temple, or Temple of Hathor, dating from ca 54 BC, was part of a complex that was constructed over many eras. A hole made in the floor of a side chapel reveals part of a temple dating from 2,000 years earlier.

Dendera Temple was surrounded by a protective wall at one time; high and thick, made of mud brick. In the early Christian Era monks reportedly dug themselves hiding places to evade persecution, later living spaces in those walls. Part of that now eroded wall is depicted in the left of the foreground of this picture.

The Temple of Hathor



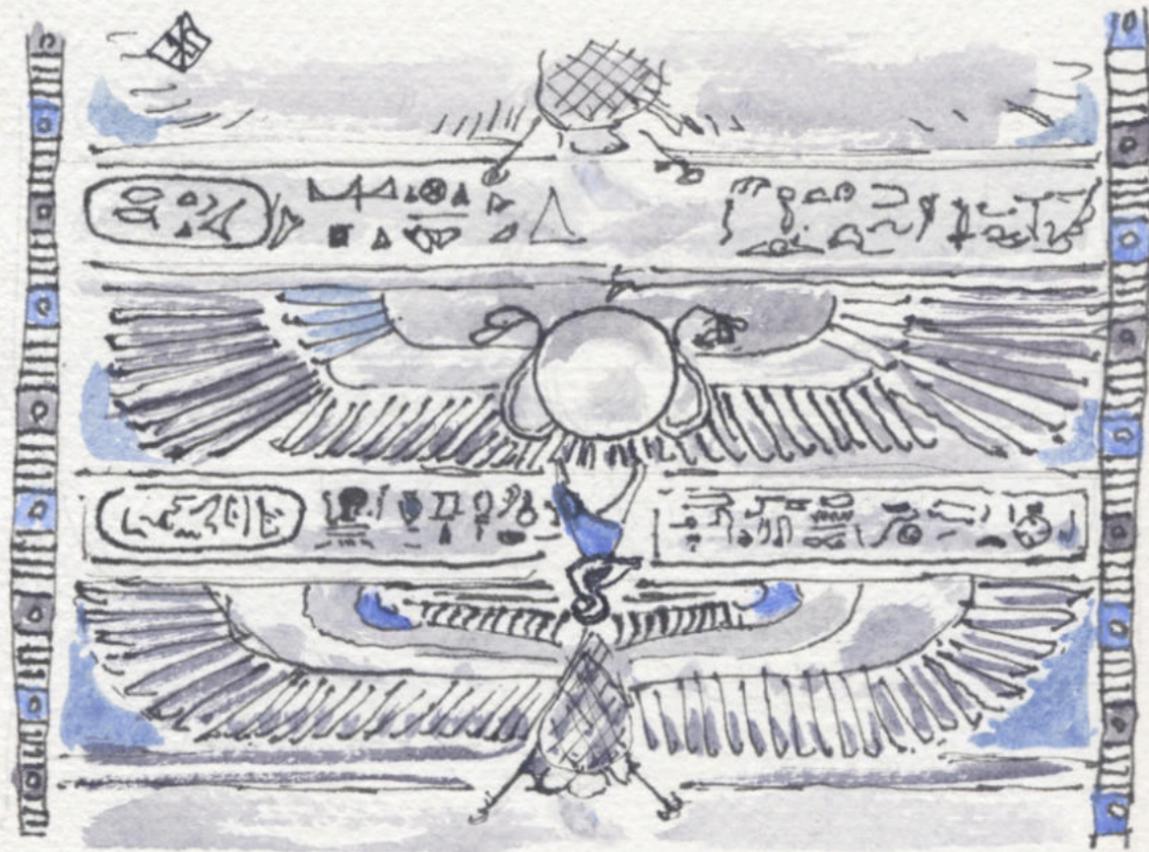
This temple is dedicated to Hathor, a mother deity generally depicted as a woman with cow's ears. Her face topped every column, in the front and in the hypostyle hall. But once the Christians won ascendancy they chiseled off the faces.

Defaced columns in the hypostyle



Dendera Temple contains many wonders: the elaborate ceiling panels, alternating sun gods and vultures wearing a pharaoh's crown (and which I mistakenly drew upside down. Sorry!); a famous "melting" staircase; and "The Light of Dendera," a depiction of the birth of the god Horus, but which Elon Musk famously offered the Egyptian government an obscene amount of money for, because he thinks it represents an Edison-style lightbulb and so is proof that extraterrestrial aliens influenced the ancient Egyptians.

Fixed Now →



The back wall of the Dendera Temple contains a portrait of Cleopatra VII, the one we all know, and her son Caesarion, who was fathered by Julius Caesar. (To me this was more important to include in the journal than a picture of a "lightbulb.")

In all, I think the Temple of Dendera was the most underrated one on our trip.



The Valley of the Kings, the remote, forbidding  
landscape and location of so many noble tombs.  
No our group is not joining that long line to see  
the first of the tombs. Nibel would guide us up the  
hill to less crowded and more important ones.

Entering the Valley of Kings



On the way we saw that excavations were still  
ongoing.

On the way back, once the lines got shorter, we  
visited Tutankhamen's. Surprisingly modest.

Continuing excavations



The tomb of Siptah (Dynasty 19) was filled with art,  
like this depiction of a king's mummification, part  
of The Book of the Dead.

A scene from the Book of the Dead in Siptah's tomb

Siptah



The tomb's artwork covered what seemed like acres of space, wall to wall, floor to ceiling, but there were unfinished areas as well. They give us an insight into the process of creating that artwork. Here is what latter-day fresco artists would call "the cartoon," a highly accurate drawing in some neutral color that the painters would follow. Note the plumb-line, the vertical line that anchors this figure's form, a technique still used today.



The Colossi of Memnon comprised the last stop on the day's excursion. They were built identical, made in the image of King Amenhotep III. In the years since, they have become quite damaged. At 60 feet (18m) high, they can be seen from over ten miles away.

In the distance, on the hillside is a cluster of abandoned buildings (the squared-off shapes beyond the distant trees), former homes of grave robbers. We're told that robbers, on having located a tomb, would build their home above it, with a convenient tunnel under the basement.

The Colossi of Memnon



Approaching the river's locks, our riverboat had to stop and wait in line. This allowed local merchants to pull up alongside to sell their wares. Tablecloths were the item of the day.

Smaller boats whose passengers ride near water level are often approached by "sand surfers," boys with surfboards who paddle up to the boats and sing songs in different languages according to the nationalities of the boat's passengers, for money. It is an endemic problem in tourist areas, that school kids skip school to earn more money for their families.



The city of Esna, famous for its historic market, contains an Egyptian temple dedicated to Khnum, the god credited with making the human race on his pottery wheel. It was built starting in the first century AD and contains items up until the 200's. It sits at the bottom of an excavation, Esna's ground level is some 30 feet higher now. The temple is impressive and beautiful, with much of its outdoor paintwork still visible, but two things in particular caught my eye on the grounds outside the temple: two very similar altars, one for Egyptian/Roman worship, the other for Christian worship.

Esna: 3 Roman/Egyptian altar top, and a Christian one



Inside, one hieroglyph that is in exceptionally good shape except for its very top edge demonstrates the regard Egyptians had for crocodiles.

Temple of Khnum: hieroglyph with crocodile



The story of Abu Simbel, an historic site consisting of two massive temples carved into the face of the mountain, is famous. They were cut up and moved to higher ground just as the waters behind the Aswan High Dam were threatening them.

Here is not perhaps the best angle to show the temple of Ramses II, but it's of my first glimpse of it, and is the most memorable.

Abu Simbel, Ramses II temple



Philae Temple was originally located on an island just upstream of the Aswan Low Dam, and similarly threatened by rising water levels. The addition of the High Dam only made matters worse. The situation became so bad that, like with Abu Simbel, the Philae temple complex was dismantled → often cut up → and reassembled on an island that was not in harm's way.

I was impressed at how Philae looked from the water — so modern-looking!

Philae Temple



The temple of Kom Ombo, constructed between 180 and 47 BC, is highly unique in that it is perfectly symmetrical and serves two gods, the crocodile god Sobek in the southern half and the falcon god Horus in the northern half.

As we were leaving Kom Ombo the sun was lowering in the sky, giving it a golden glow I had to stop and try to capture.

Kom Ombo



Inside Kom Ombo the image that impressed me the most was what I call The Holy of Holies. In the exact center of a back wall, marked now by a vertical gouge, was a small icon in a niche, since obliterated. This was the embodiment of a god who could hear and see you, signified by the ears and eyes on each side of the niche. According to our guide this was all hidden from view by a curtain. Pay the priest in charge and he would raise the curtain for you see the deity, who would then hear your entreaties.

Kom Ombo: Holy of Holies





And last, a commanding statue of Horus, my  
personal favorite, wearing the crown of United  
Egypt, carved from some dark, hard stone.

Edf: statue of Horus

