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CULTURAL JOURNEYS

Vibrant Traditions & Personal Connections



The Essence of Egypt

Sail the Nile & Journey Overland on an Intimate Adventure Across Time

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Trip Details:

Days
12 Days / Jan–Mar, Jul, Oct–Nov

Price
From $16995

The Essence of Egypt

Sail the Nile & Journey Overland on an Intimate Adventure Across Time

Egypt: Ancient, contemporary, eternal. One of the world's most storied destinations, Egypt draws travelers mesmerized by its landmarks of antiquity—grand temples and tombs, pyramids and colonnades, layers of history stretching back millennia into the realm of myth and wonder. Yet the magic of Egypt is more than these enduring monuments. We also find it in the Egyptian people whose daily lives we encounter through our personal relationships—farmers, fishers, potters, purveyors—living in villages linked by the Nile, the lifeblood threading the country together then and now. On a journey through time, travel from the metropolis of Cairo south to Luxor and Aswan—sailing the fabled river on a private luxury voyage for just 12 guests—then head overland to explore little-known archaeological sites and desert landscapes of the Sahara.

Trip Highlights

Cruise the Nile Aboard a Luxury Dahabiya for 12 Guests

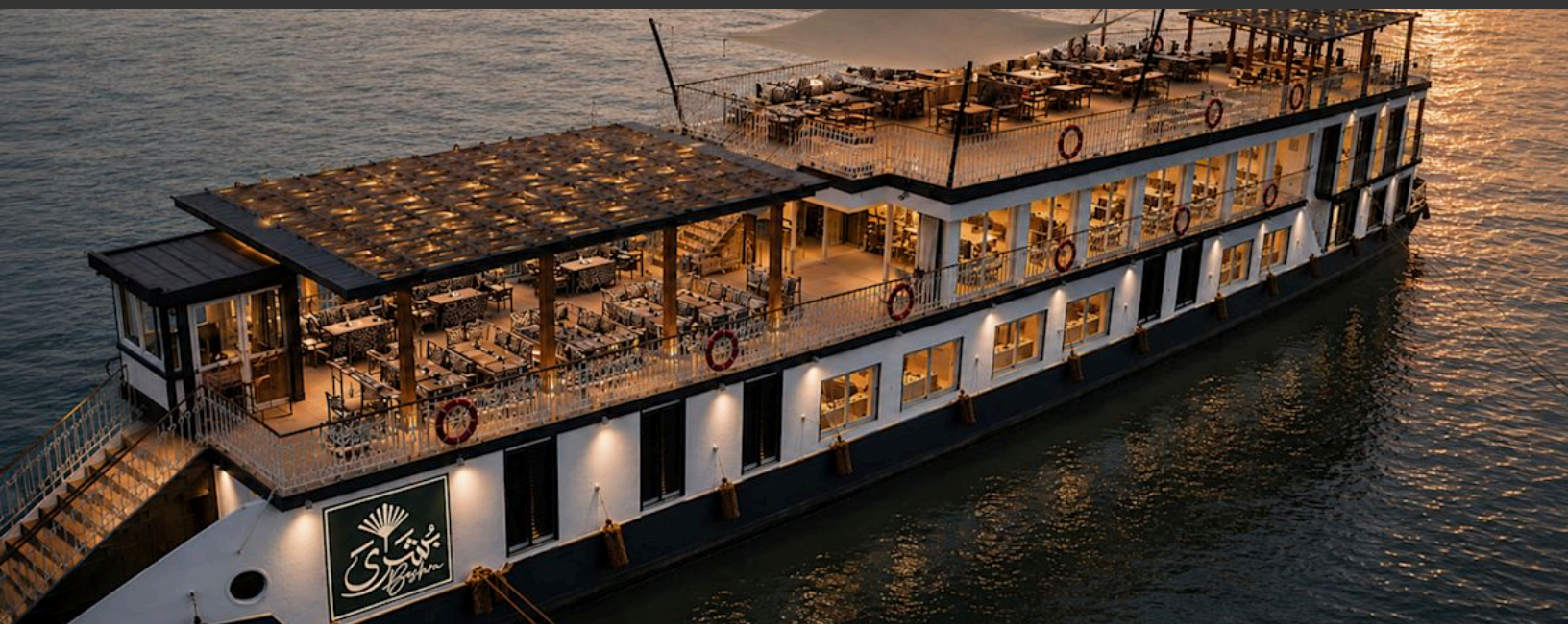
Spend four nights aboard a new yet traditional wind-powered sailing vessel offering a slower, more intimate perspective on life along the Nile—private for our guests alone

Make Personal Connections with Local People

Join families for home-cooked meals, visit our friend Asma in her mud-brick home on El Hegz Island, and meet farmers, fishermen and artisans through our local relationships

VIP Access to the Pyramids, Sphinx & More

Avoid the crowds on carefully curated visits with our expert Egyptologist guide—explore Karnak, Luxor, Valley of the Kings, and lesser-known sites of special significance



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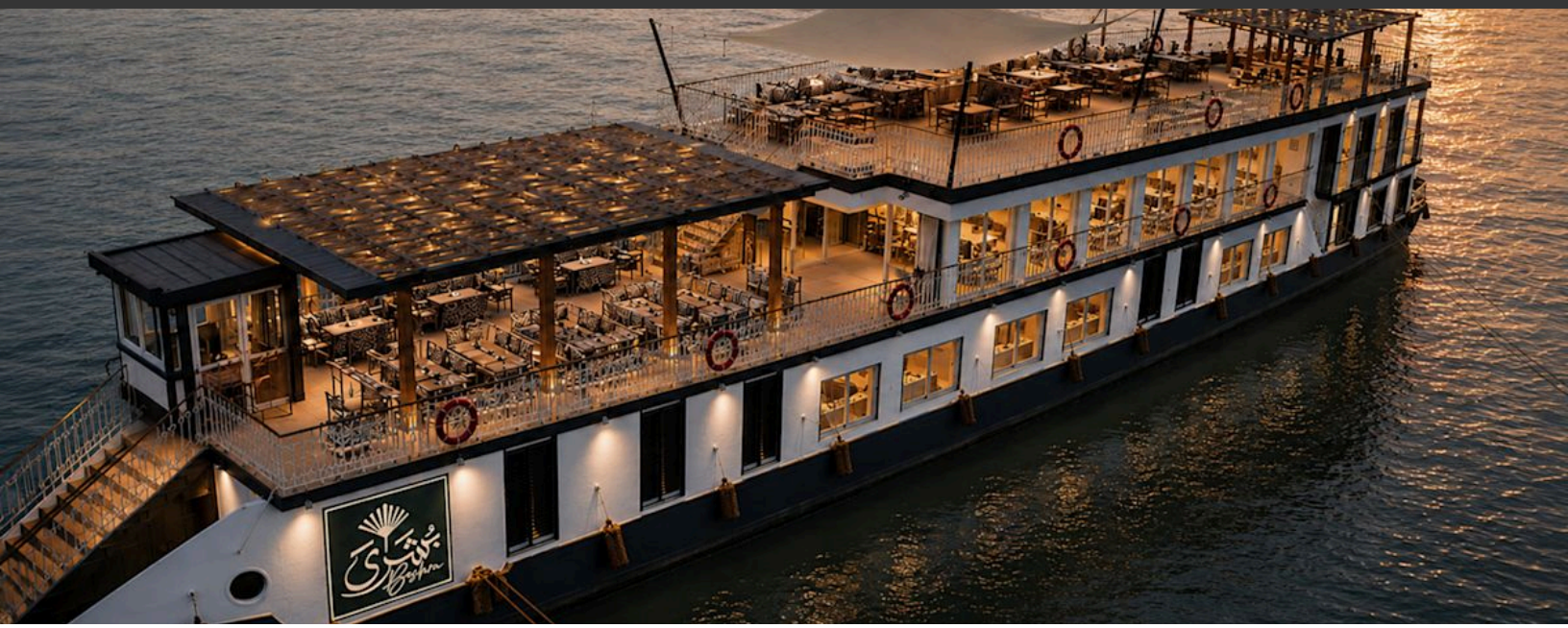
The Essence of Egypt Itineraries

Sail the Nile & Journey Overland on an Intimate Adventure Across Time



Itinerary

The Essence of Egypt

Itinerary at a Glance

Day 1	Cairo
Day 2	Giza / Historic Cairo
Day 3	Luxor / Valley of the Kings
Day 4	Karnak Temple / Luxor Temple
Day 5	Esna / El Hegz Island
Day 6	Edfu / Sailing the Nile
Day 7	Besaw Island / Gebel el-Silsila
Day 8	Kom Ombo / Daraw
Day 9	Aswan
Day 10	Fayoum / Tunis
Day 11	Wadi El-Rayan / Wadi El-Hitan
Day 12	Fayoum / Cairo



Day 1

Cairo

Arrive in Cairo, where the Nile meets the Sahara

- Arrive in Cairo, where the Nile weaves through a vast and ancient metropolis
- Join your Expedition Leader and fellow travelers for a welcome dinner

Our journey begins in Cairo, where you are met at the airport and transferred to your hotel. In Egypt's sprawling capital of Cairo, the Nile weaves its way through an urban montage of minarets, high-rises, markets and bridges before fanning out into a broad delta emptying into the Mediterranean Sea. The Sahara Desert rises on its western edge, an abrupt contrast to the metropolis it borders. We'll explore more of this dynamic city tomorrow, but this evening, it's time to meet your Expedition Leader and fellow guests at a welcome dinner, including an overview of all the exciting experiences to come.

Day 2

Giza / Historic Cairo

Giza's ancient wonders and medieval Cairo up close

- Approach the Great Sphinx closer than public viewing allows through a private access gate
- Explore the Grand Egyptian Museum's royal treasures and everyday objects of ancient life
- Walk among the mosques, madrasas and fountains of Historic Cairo, a UNESCO World Heritage Site

This morning, head to Egypt's most famous archaeological site, the Giza necropolis complex with its famous pyramids and Great Sphinx. Atop the limestone Giza plateau, the three main pyramids, built more than 4,000 years ago, rise out of the desert on the western edge of Cairo. Entering through a special access gate, we travel by private golf cart, moving comfortably while avoiding crowds. Our special permission allows us to approach the Sphinx up close, in an area off-limits to standard public viewing. Standing near its massive paws, you'll appreciate the scale of one of the world's most recognizable archaeological treasures.

After lunch, continue to the Grand Egyptian Museum, where royal treasures, ceremonial objects, tools and everyday belongings offer a closer look at how ancient Egyptians lived, worked and worshipped from prehistory to the end of the Greek and Roman periods. One of the largest and most spectacular collections in the world, the Grand Egyptian Museum bridges the grandeur of ancient Egyptian civilization with state-of-the-art digital interactivity.

This evening, take a walking tour through the historic heart of Cairo, containing one of the densest and oldest concentrations of medieval Islamic architecture in the world. A UNESCO World Heritage Site, Historic Cairo encompasses the sector of the city built after the Muslim conquest in 641 through its modern expansion in the 19th century. Spanning a full millennium, the zone contains more than 600 classified monuments, including mosques, madrasas, fortifications, hammams and fountains. Cairo in the Middle Ages became the new center of the Islamic world, reaching its golden age in the 14th century. As the call to prayer echoes across the rooftops, our group gathers for dinner at a local restaurant overlooking Cairo's most evocative neighborhood.

Day 3

Luxor / Valley of the Kings

Into the pharaohs' hidden tombs at ancient Thebes

- Descend into painted tombs of New Kingdom pharaohs, including King Tut and Seti I
- Cross the Nile by motorboat to explore the concealed Valley of the Kings
- Visit Deir el-Medina, where the artisans who built the royal tombs lived

Fly south this morning to Luxor, the modern name for ancient Thebes, the magnificent capital of Egypt during its Middle and New Kingdoms. The Nile bisects the city, lined on either side with temples and monuments. Highlights of Luxor include the Karnak temple complex, the Avenue of Sphinxes, and the Colossi of Memnon. Crossing the Nile by motorboat, continue to the Valley of the Kings. Concealed in a remote desert valley, this is the burial site of New Kingdom pharaohs, including Tutankhamun (King Tut). Limestone corridors descend into burial chambers with walls and ceilings covered in vivid painted scenes and hieroglyphs. Visit the tomb of Tutankhamun, discovered by Howard Carter in 1922, and the remarkable tomb of Seti I, with chambers extending deep into the mountainside. Lunch is served at Howard Carter's House, the former residence of the famed archaeologist.

Later, visit Deir el-Medina, home to the artisans who built and decorated the royal tombs. For 400 years, artisans and their families lived in this community, hidden from the public behind guarded walls so outsiders would not stumble upon the sensitive work being done on the pharaohs' underground tombs. Their houses, workshops and painted burial places offer a rare glimpse into the lives of the skilled craftsmen behind Egypt's most famous monuments. Late this afternoon, arrive at our hotel on Luxor's West Bank to spend two nights.

Day 4

Karnak Temple / Luxor Temple

Karnak at dawn, Luxor Temple illuminated after dark

- Enter Karnak's Hypostyle Hall at dawn, admiring its 134 towering columns in the cool quiet
- Cross the Nile for a private dinner in a Luxor family's home
- View Luxor Temple lit up at night, its columns and carvings glowing

Rise very early to explore Karnak, the massive temple-city complex built over 2,000 years, starting in about 2055 BC. Sometimes referred to as "an encyclopedia of ancient Thebes," Karnak is one of the world's greatest archaeological destinations and the second-largest religious site worldwide (only Angkor Wat in Cambodia is bigger), covering 200 acres. The Great Temple at the heart of Karnak is so big that St. Peter's, Milan and Notre Dame cathedrals would fit within its walls. We arrive while the air is still cool and the site remains relatively quiet. Pass through monumental gateways and courtyards into the vast Hypostyle Hall within the Great Temple, where 134 towering columns covered in hieroglyphs create one of the most stunning spaces of ancient Egypt.

Return to our hotel for breakfast and time to relax, then head out this afternoon to meet a local artist whose murals draw inspiration from village life, animals and Egypt's enduring artistic traditions. This evening, cross the Nile for a private dinner in a local home. Over a meal with our hosts, enjoy conversation about daily life in modern Luxor, family traditions and celebrations, and the impact tourism has brought to the city over the years.

After dinner, we visit Luxor Temple, illuminated after dark. Its glowing columns, statues and bas-relief carvings offer a mesmerizing encounter with the civilization that flourished here more than 3,000 years ago. Thousands of sandstone fragments scattered across the site contain hieroglyphic texts and paintings of temple rituals, offering insight into this major religious center that was once the capital of ancient Egypt, with Amenhotep III, Ramses II, Tutankhamun and other pharaohs adding to the sprawling complex over hundreds of years. As we wander among the pillars, colonnades and colossal statues, bathed in light and shadow, distant sounds of the modern city are discernible across the river, creating a potent contrast between the millennia-old stones and contemporary life.

Day 5

Esna / El Hegz Island

Board a private luxury dahabiya to cruise the Nile

- Wander Esna's covered Qisariyya market, famous for its handwoven textiles
- Sleep aboard our private dahabiya, an elegant Nile sailing ship for just 12 guests
- Visit our friend Asma in her mud-brick home and garden on El Hegz Island

Depart Luxor this morning and drive south to Esna, one of the most important *caravanserais*—a way station for travelers along a trade route—in southern Egypt in the 18th century, with traders from all over Africa coming via the western desert and Red Sea. We stop to marvel at the Temple of Esna, with its massive red sandstone entrance hall, standing opposite the Qisariyya Heritage Street Market. This traditional two-story wooden covered market has been a site of commerce for centuries, and we navigate its narrow lanes, admiring the handwoven textiles for which it is famous, while merchants also sell produce, spices and other wares.

Soon, it's time to board our luxurious *dahabiya*, the classic Nile sailing vessel that will be our home for the next four nights. Accommodating just 12 guests, this brand-new ship offers a quieter and more personal way to experience the Nile versus typical ships. With its shallow draft, the dahabiya can tie up beside islands, villages and peaceful stretches of shoreline often bypassed by larger vessels. Once we're underway, our first stop is El Hegz Island, where small agricultural plots and fields and modest houses sit close to the river's edge. We go ashore to visit our friend Asma in her traditional mud-brick home, joining her in the garden, surrounded by herbs, flowers and cultivated plants, she shares stories about family customs, village celebrations and daily life along the Nile. Then return to our dahabiya and continue sailing toward Edfu, with dinner served aboard.

Day 6

Edfu / Sailing the Nile

Visit the Temple of Edfu, and watch life unfold along the Nile's banks

- Explore the Temple of Edfu, one of ancient Egypt's best-preserved temples
- Sail slowly upriver, passing date palms and desert escarpments
- Watch fishermen work from small boats and observe riverside village life

At Edfu, we go ashore this morning to visit its famous temple, one of the best-preserved in ancient Egypt. Completed in 57 BC and dedicated to Horus, the falcon-headed god, the Temple of Edfu offers an intricate look at the architecture and decoration of the Ptolemaic period. Reliefs cover the temple walls, depicting ceremonies, offerings and the enduring struggle between Horus and rival god Seth. The temple remained buried under layers of debris for millennia, which is why it has survived in such precise detail, uncovered in 1860 by French archaeologist Auguste Mariette.

Return to the dahabiya for lunch, with the remainder of the day spent sailing languidly up the Nile. From the shaded deck, watch the riverbanks as we pass date palms, cultivated fields and desert escarpments. Fishermen work from small boats, waterbirds move among reeds and irrigation channels, and the daily rhythms of village life are on display along the shoreline. By evening, we moor in a quiet stretch of river away from the busy docks used by larger ships.

Ready to Book? Call an Adventure Specialist at 800-543-8917

Day 7

Besaw Island / Gebel el-Silsila

Life along the Nile: farming, quarries and craftsmanship

- Join a farmer on Besaw Island to see how the Nile feeds his fields
- Sail to Gebel el-Silsila, where quarries supplied stone for Egypt's temples
- Meet a Faris artisan who weaves palm fronds into furniture and household goods

Begin the day on Besaw Island, where we're welcomed into the home of a local family for breakfast. Until the construction of the Aswan High Dam tamed the river's floods, the island was completely uninhabitable. Today, it is a lush, thriving agricultural area. As second-generation settlers with roots tracing back to the first seeds planted, our host family participates in the living history of Besaw Island, both as small-scale farmers and fishers. On a walk with our farmer host, observe how water is directed from the Nile into the fields, learn which crops are grown and rotated throughout the year, and hear how families adapt to changing river conditions and seasonal growing cycles. We also gain a close-up view on subsistence fishing, observing how families continue to depend on the river using techniques and knowledge passed down through generations.

Return to our dahabiya and sail to Gebel el-Silsila, where sandstone cliffs rise directly from the riverbank. Much of the stone used to build Egypt's great temples and monuments came from these quarries, and traces of that history remain in the shrines, inscriptions and carvings in the rock walls. Continue sailing toward Faris, with lunch along the way. In the late afternoon, take a short walk through the village to meet an artisan who transforms palm fronds into furniture and household items. Using materials gathered from the surrounding groves, he continues a craft that remains integral to Nile communities, creating practical pieces for everyday use. Back aboard the dahabiya, another peaceful evening on the river awaits.

Day 8

Kom Ombo / Daraw

Nubian heritage, old caravan trails and beach time on the Nile

- Explore the double Temple of Kom Ombo, built for the crocodile and falcon gods
- Visit a Daraw camel barn on the historic 40 Days Road caravan route
- Swim or kayak from Herbiab Island, fringed by mango and citrus trees

This morning, step ashore at Kom Ombo, a small town on the Nile in the heart of a fertile agricultural region, surrounded by vast fields of sugarcane and corn. The village is home to a large Nubian population, many of whom were displaced when their homes were submerged by construction of the Aswan High Dam and the creation of Lake Nasser, completed in 1970. Our focus is the town’s namesake temple, set on a low hill overlooking the river. Construction was started by an Egyptian pharaoh in the 2nd century BC and completed by a Roman emperor around 30 BC. The building is unique because of its “double” design, with two sets of courts, halls, sanctuaries and rooms duplicated for two different gods, the crocodile god Sobek and the falcon god Horus.

Back aboard the dahabiya, sail on to Daraw, a market town with longstanding connections to historic trans-Saharan caravan routes linking Egypt and Sudan, including the 1,110-mile-long Darb El Arba'in, known as the “40 Days Road” for the length of time it took to cover it in antiquity. Camels were the dominant mode of transport for centuries, and we visit a local camel barn to learn about their care and the role they continue to play in regional trade and transportation. Continue to Herbiab Island, where the Nile broadens to flow over sand bars and among granite outcrops. The small island, covered with mango, orange, and lemon trees, is fringed by a sandy beach, and there may be time to swim or kayak before we continue toward Aswan. Our final evening aboard the dahabiya offers one last chance to survey the sunset over the Nile.

Day 9

Aswan

Felucca sailing on the Nile and the rescued Temple of Isis

- Sail the Nile by felucca, gliding past islands and palm-lined banks
- Explore the Temple of Isis, moved stone by stone to save it from rising waters
- Disembark in Aswan, long a Nubian trading hub on the Nile

Say farewell to the crew as we disembark the dahabiya this morning in Aswan, a city long central to trade along the Nile and known for its Nubian heritage. Nubia, home to some of Africa's earliest kingdoms and renowned for its rich deposits of gold, was also the gateway through which luxury products like incense, ivory and ebony traveled from their source in sub-Saharan Africa to the civilizations of Egypt and the Mediterranean. Aswan is better known today for its High Dam, built over a decade in the 1960s. Generating massive amounts of hydroelectric power, the dam also allows control of the Nile's seasonal flooding. While the dam has kept crocodiles out of the river to the north—allowing us to safely swim in the river—they are still found below the dam and even kept as pets in some Nubian households.

Take a morning sail on a felucca, a traditional wooden boat driven by wind and guided by a single sail, gliding across the Nile as such boats have done for centuries. Sail past islands, riverside villages and palm-lined banks while enjoying a quiet perspective on the river, then arrive at our stunning island hotel in time for lunch. The terraced property, built in a modern Nubian style, is only accessible by boat and offers magnificent views over the Nile and Philae Temple (the Temple of Isis). This afternoon, visit the temple, which was originally built on Philae Island. Rescued from rising waters during construction of the Aswan High Dam, which submerged the island, the temple complex was carefully dismantled and rebuilt stone by stone on Agilkia Island nearby. Explore its courtyards, colonnades and sanctuaries while learning about the enduring importance of Isis, the goddess of love, motherhood and magic. This important temple was one of Egypt's last sites of pagan worship, where Isis and Osiris were venerated for nearly 500 years after the Roman conquest of Egypt in 30 BC and the ensuing spread of Christianity in later centuries. Later this afternoon, arrive at our hotel in Aswan.

Day 10

Fayoum / Tunis

Cheesemaking and hands-on ceramic artistry in fertile Fayoum

- Learn traditional cheesemaking, one of Fayoum's longstanding culinary pursuits
- Wander among the pottery studios and kilns of Tunis village overlooking Lake Qaroun
- Try your hand at the potter's wheel after a private studio demonstration

Fly from Aswan to Cairo this morning, then continue southwest to Fayoum, a fertile basin fed by canals and Lake Qaroun. Long cultivated yet bordered by desert, the region offers another perspective on Egypt, where farming villages, pottery workshops and fossil-rich landscapes exist side by side. After getting settled into our hotel, followed by lunch, enjoy an introduction to one of Fayoum's traditional pursuits as we visit a local cheesemaker. Later, explore Tunis village overlooking Lake Qaroun, famous for its pottery studios. Walk among workshops and kilns where artisans continue a craft that has become closely associated with the village. Visit a local pottery studio for a private demonstration, then try your hand at working with clay, finding a new appreciation for the artistry of these master potters.

Day 11

Wadi El-Rayan / Wadi El-Hitan

Extraordinary fossil remains in the Valley of the Whales

- Explore Wadi El-Rayan's sculpted dunes, desert lakes and waterfalls
- Walk among fossilized whale skeletons at Wadi El-Hitan, a UNESCO World Heritage Site
- Enjoy lunch served in the desert amid the dunes

The contrasting features of the desert landscape around Fayoum—a setting unique in Egypt—are fascinating. Begin the day in the valley oasis of Wadi El-Rayan, a protected natural area of sculpted sand dunes, waterfalls and desert lakes that is home to rare species such as the slender-horned gazelle and fennec fox. Continue to Wadi El-Hitan, the Valley of the Whales, a UNESCO World Heritage Site that is one of the world's most important fossil locations. Walk among exposed vertebrae, skulls and fossilized remains of the earliest, and now extinct, suborder of whales, *Archaeoceti,* revealing a time when this now-arid landscape lay beneath an ancient sea. These fossils represent one of the major stories of evolution: the emergence of the whale as an ocean-going mammal from a previous life as a land-based animal.

Break the day with a memorable lunch served in the desert, then choose between a quad-bike excursion among the dunes or leisure time back at our hotel. This evening, gather for a farewell dinner as we reflect on our wondrous journey, a passage through time that has connected Egypt's great monuments of antiquity with the communities and traditions that define life along the Nile today.

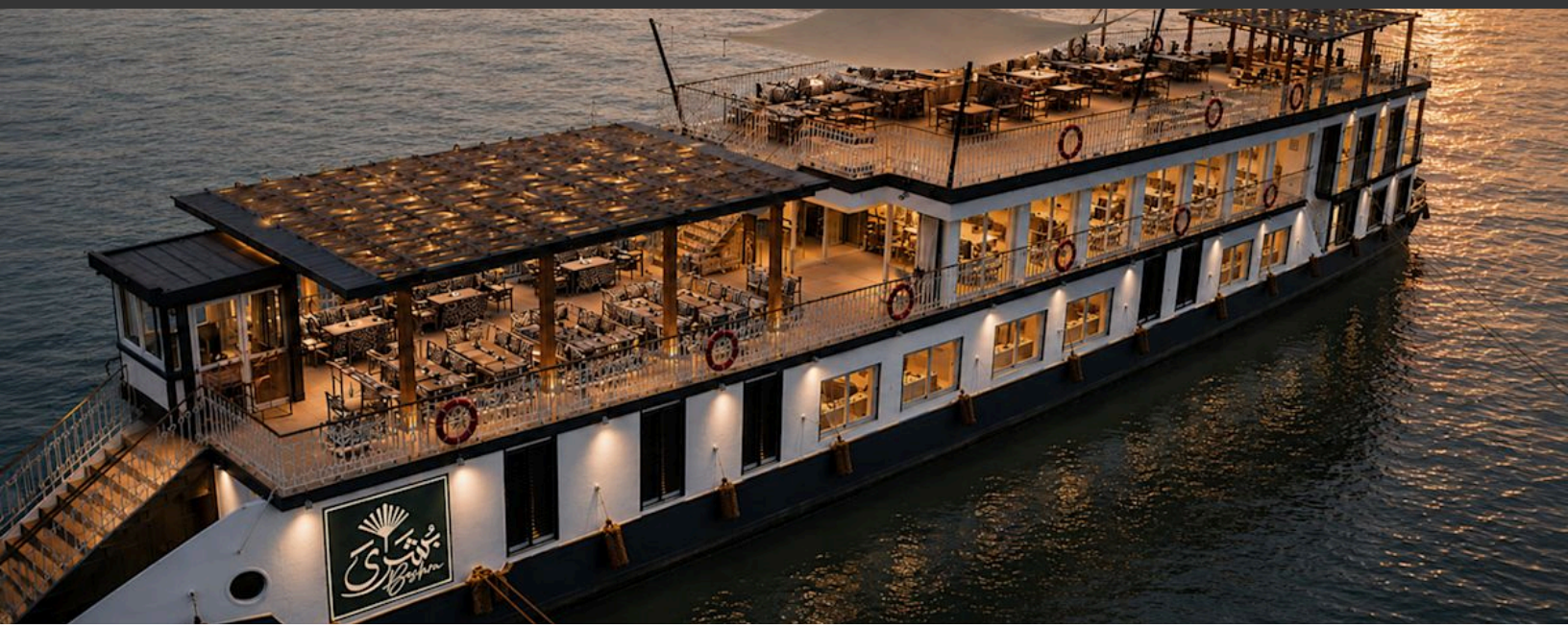
Day 12

Fayoum / Cairo

A final lunch in Cairo before homeward flights

- Gather for a farewell lunch together before flights home from Cairo
- Before late-night departures, relax in a day room connected to the airport by a walkway

After breakfast, depart Fayoum and drive to our 5-star airport hotel in Cairo, where we have a farewell lunch together. Since most North America-bound flights won't depart until late tonight or in the early hours of the morning, we've booked day rooms for relaxation, refreshment and access to the hotel's full slate of amenities. When it's time to head over for your flight, the hotel is connected to the airport by a convenient walkway.



Itinerary

The Essence of Egypt

Itinerary at a Glance

Day 1	Cairo
Day 2	Giza / Historic Cairo
Days 3–4	Cairo / Sohag / Eclipse Viewing
Day 5	Abydos / Luxor
Day 6	Luxor / Valley of the Kings
Day 7	Karnak / Esna / El Hegz Island
Day 8	Edfu / Nile River
Day 9	Besaw Island / Gebel el-Silsila / Faris
Day 10	Kom Ombo / Daraw / Herbiab Island
Day 11	Aswan / Philae Temple
Day 12	Aswan / Cairo / Depart



Day 1

Cairo

Arrive in Cairo, where the Saraha meets the Nile

- Arrive in Egypt's capital, where the Nile River weaves through a vast and ancient metropolis
- Join your Expedition Leader and fellow travelers for a welcome dinner

Our journey begins in Cairo, where you are be met at the airport and transferred to your hotel. In Egypt's sprawling capital of Cairo, the Nile weaves its way through an urban collage of minarets, high-rises, markets and bridges before fanning out into a broad delta emptying into the Mediterranean Sea. The Sahara Desert rises on its western edge, an abrupt contrast to the metropolis it borders. We'll explore more of this dynamic city tomorrow, but this evening, it's time to meet your Expedition Leader and fellow guests at a welcome dinner, including an overview of all the exciting experiences to come—not least the total solar eclipse on August 2!

Day 2

Giza / Historic Cairo

Pyramids and ancient wonders of Giza up close, plus medieval Cairo

- Approach the Great Sphinx closer than public viewing allows through a private access gate
- Explore the Grand Egyptian Museum's royal treasures and everyday objects of ancient life
- Walk the mosques, madrasas and fountains of Historic Cairo, a UNESCO World Heritage Site

This morning, head to Egypt's most famous archaeological site, the Giza necropolis complex with its famous pyramids and Great Sphinx. Atop the limestone Giza plateau, the three main pyramids, built more than 4,000 years ago, rise out of the desert on the western edge of Cairo. Entering through a special access gate, we travel by private golf cart, moving comfortably while avoiding crowds. Our special permission allows us to approach the Sphinx up close, in an area off-limits to standard public viewing. Standing near its massive paws, you'll appreciate the scale of one of the world's most recognizable archaeological treasures.

After lunch, continue to the Grand Egyptian Museum, where royal treasures, ceremonial objects, tools and everyday belongings offer a closer look at how ancient Egyptians lived, worked and worshipped from prehistory to the end of the Greek and Roman periods. One of the largest and most spectacular collections in the world, the Grand Egyptian Museum bridges the grandeur of ancient Egyptian civilization with state-of-the-art digital interactivity.

This evening, take a walking tour through the historic heart of Cairo, containing one of the densest and oldest concentrations of medieval Islamic architecture in the world. A UNESCO World Heritage Site, Historic Cairo encompasses the sector of the city built after the Muslim conquest in 641 through its modern expansion in the 19th century. Spanning a full millennium, the zone contains more than 600 classified monuments, including mosques, madrasas, fortifications, hammams and fountains. Cairo in the Middle Ages became the new center of the Islamic world, reaching its golden age in the 14th century. As the call to prayer echoes across the rooftops, our group gathers for dinner at a local restaurant overlooking Cairo's most evocative neighborhood.

Days
3–4

Cairo / Sohag / Eclipse Viewing

Witness a total solar eclipse on the Nile, with six minutes of totality

- Experience the wonder of a solar eclipse from Sohag under clear desert skies
- Visit the White and Red monasteries, renowned for their ancient Coptic architecture and frescoes
- Learn how ancient Egyptians understood eclipses through the myth of the sun god Ra

Depart Cairo on an all-day drive south to Sohag on the Nile River, where we will view the eclipse on Day 4. Our private air-conditioned bus follows the Western Desert Road, a wide, open highway with long horizons, uninterrupted views and occasional low rocky rises, with scattered settlements along the way. As we near Sohag, we enter the cultivated Nile Valley, where green farms along the river meet the dry hills of the Sahara Desert to the west.

During our time in the region, we explore some of Sohag's considerable archaeological heritage, with finds from the Pharaonic era, plus Ptolemaic and Roman temples and tombs. Sohag is especially renowned for some of the world's richest surviving Coptic archaeological sites. The Copts are members of Egypt's historic Christian community, whose roots date to the 1st century. Their name comes from an ancient Greek term meaning "Egyptian," and Egypt is considered the birthplace of Christian monasticism. We visit the White and Red Monasteries, Coptic architectural marvels famed for their intricate stonework and vibrant frescoes.

The solar eclipse is, of course, our main focus, and over these two days, we'll marvel at the phenomenon as we learn about how it has been understood in history, mythology and science. Ancient Egyptians believed solar eclipses marked a disruption in the daily voyage of the sun god Ra. They interpreted the sudden darkness as a moment when the serpent Apep, bringer of chaos, attacked Ra's solar boat. Because Ra was the supreme giver of life, a sudden midday darkening of the sun was generally viewed with anxiety, fear or as a dark omen regarding a pharaoh's reign. Priests would perform rituals to help Ra defeat the serpent and restore light.

While we understand the eclipse through the lens of modern astronomy, we are no less awestruck by it. Here, totality—the length of time the sun is wholly covered by the moon's shadow—is an astounding six minutes, long enough for us to be utterly transfixed by this rare and wondrous event. Skies in this desert environment are almost always perfectly clear, and with the eclipse darkening our surroundings right at midday, the experience is sure to be phenomenal.

Day
5

Abydos / Luxor

Drive from Sohag to Luxor to experience Luxor Temple after dark

- On our journey south, stop at the less-visited Temple of Abydos, nearly 6,000 years old
- Once darkness falls, visit illuminated Luxor Temple, with its glowing columns and carvings

Depart Sohag this morning to continue our journey south to Luxor, the modern name for ancient Thebes, the magnificent capital of Egypt during its Middle and New Kingdoms. Along the way, we visit the Temple of Abydos, a sacred center from at least 4000–3500 BC, associated with Egypt's earliest kings and the cult of Osiris. It offers a starkly different experience from the crowded monuments of Luxor or Giza, in an atmosphere that feels quiet, set apart and deeply spiritual.

Arrive late this afternoon in Luxor, where the Nile is lined on either side with pharaonic temples, monuments and royal tombs, including the Karnak temple complex and the Colossi of Memnon. Check in to our hotel on Luxor's East Bank for the next two nights. After dinner, once the fierce daytime heat dissipates, we head to Luxor Temple, illuminated after dark. Its glowing columns, statues and bas-relief carvings offer a mesmerizing encounter with the civilization that flourished here more than 3,000 years ago. Thousands of sandstone fragments scattered across the site contain hieroglyphic texts and paintings of temple rituals, offering insight into this major religious center that was once the capital of ancient Egypt, with Amenhotep III, Ramses II, Tutankhamun and other pharaohs adding to the sprawling complex over hundreds of years. As we wander among the pillars, colonnades and colossal statues, bathed in light and shadow, distant sounds of the modern city are discernible across the river, creating a potent contrast between the millennia-old stones and contemporary life.

Day 6

Luxor / Valley of the Kings

Explore the pharaohs' hidden tombs at ancient Thebes

- In the Valley of the Kings, descend into painted tombs of pharaohs, including Tutankhamun—King Tut
- Visit Deir el-Medina, where the artisans who built the royal tombs lived
- Enjoy a private dinner in a Luxor home, sharing traditional Egyptian cuisine with your local hosts

Cross the Nile by motorboat this morning to explore the Valley of the Kings. Concealed in a remote desert valley, this is the burial site of New Kingdom pharaohs, including Tutankhamun (King Tut). Limestone corridors descend into burial chambers with walls and ceilings covered in vivid painted scenes and hieroglyphs. We visit the tomb of Tutankhamun, discovered by Howard Carter in 1922, and the remarkable tomb of Seti I, with chambers extending deep into the mountainside. Lunch is served at Howard Carter's House, the former residence of the famed archaeologist.

This afternoon, visit Deir el-Medina, home to the artisans who built and decorated the royal tombs. For 400 years, artisans and their families lived in this community, hidden from the public behind guarded walls so outsiders would not stumble upon the sensitive work being done on the pharaohs' underground tombs. Their houses, workshops and painted burial places offer a rare glimpse into the lives of the skilled craftsmen behind Egypt's most famous monuments. Later, meet a local artist whose murals draw inspiration from village life, animals and Egypt's enduring artistic traditions. This evening, enjoy a private dinner in a local home. Over a meal with our hosts, converse about daily life in modern Luxor, family traditions and celebrations, and the impact tourism has had on the city over the years.

Day 7

Karnak / Esna / El Hegz Island

Ancient Karnak, Esna, and a private sailing journey on the Nile

- Enter Karnak's Hypostyle Hall, with its 134 towering columns, in the quiet of dawn
- Sleep aboard our private luxury dahabiya, a classic Nile sailing ship for just 12 guests
- Visit our friend Asma in her mud-brick home and garden on El Hegz Island

Rise very early to explore Karnak, the massive temple-city complex built over 2,000 years, starting in about 2055 BC. Sometimes referred to as "an encyclopedia of ancient Thebes," Karnak is one of the world's greatest archaeological destinations and the second-largest religious site worldwide, covering 200 acres (only Angkor Wat in Cambodia is bigger). The Great Temple at the heart of Karnak is so large that St. Peter's Basilica, Milan Cathedral and Notre Dame Cathedral would fit within its walls. We arrive while the air is still cool and the site remains relatively quiet. Pass through monumental gateways and courtyards into the vast Hypostyle Hall within the Great Temple, where 134 towering columns covered in hieroglyphs create one of the most stunning spaces of ancient Egypt.

Return to our hotel for breakfast and time to relax before our departure. Soon, we're headed south to Esna, one of the most important *caravanserais*—a way station for travelers along a trade route—in southern Egypt in the 18th century, with traders from all over Africa coming via the Western Desert and Red Sea. We stop to marvel at the Temple of Esna, with its massive red sandstone entrance hall, standing opposite the Qisariyya Heritage Street Market. Navigating the narrow lanes of this traditional two-story wooden covered market, ta site of commerce for centuries, we admire its famous handwoven textiles, along with colorful produce, spices and other wares.

At Esna, we board our *dahabiya*, the classic Nile sailing vessel that will be our home for the next four nights. Accommodating just 12 guests, this elegant, brand-new ship offers a quieter and more personal way to experience the Nile versus typical ships. With its shallow draft, the dahabiya can tie up beside islands, villages and peaceful stretches of shoreline often bypassed by larger vessels. Once we're underway, our first stop is El Hegz Island, where small agricultural plots, fields and modest houses sit close to the river's edge. We go ashore to visit our friend Asma in her traditional mud-brick home. Joining her in the garden, surrounded by herbs, flowers and cultivated plants, we listen as she shares stories about family customs, village celebrations and daily life along the Nile. Then return to our dahabiya and continue sailing toward Edfu, with dinner served aboard.

Day 8

Edfu / Nile River

The Temple of Edfu and rural life along the Nile's banks

- Explore the Temple of Edfu, one of ancient Egypt's best-preserved temples
- Sail slowly upriver, passing date palms and desert escarpments
- Watch fishermen work from small boats and observe village life along the shoreline

At Edfu, we go ashore this morning to visit its famous temple, one of the best-preserved in ancient Egypt. Completed in 57 BC and dedicated to Horus, the falcon-headed god, the Temple of Edfu offers an intricate look at the architecture and decoration of the Ptolemaic period. Reliefs cover the temple walls, depicting ceremonies, offerings and the enduring struggle between Horus and rival god Seth. The temple remained buried under layers of debris for millennia, which is why it has survived in such precise detail, uncovered in 1860 by French archaeologist Auguste Mariette.

Return to the dahabiya for lunch, with the remainder of the day spent sailing languidly up the Nile. From the shaded deck, observe date palms, cultivated fields and desert escarpments along the riverbanks. Fishermen work from small boats, waterbirds move among reeds and irrigation channels, and village life is visible along the shoreline. By evening, we moor in a quiet stretch of river away from the busy docks used by larger ships.

Day 9

Besaw Island / Gebel el-Silsila / Faris

Farming, fishing, quarrying and craftsmanship along the Nile

- Join a farmer on Besaw Island to see how the Nile feeds his fields
- Visit Gebel el-Silsila, where quarries supplied stone for Egypt's temples
- Meet a Faris artisan who weaves palm fronds into furniture and household goods

Begin the day on Besaw Island, where we're welcomed into the home of a local family for breakfast. Until the construction of the Aswan High Dam tamed the river's floods, the island was completely uninhabitable. Today, it is a lush, thriving agricultural area. As second-generation settlers with roots tracing back to the first seeds planted, our host family participates in the living history of Besaw Island, both as small-scale farmers and fishers. On a walk with our farmer host, observe how water is directed from the Nile into the fields, learn which crops are grown and rotated throughout the year, and hear how families adapt to changing river conditions and seasonal growing cycles. We also gain a close-up view of subsistence fishing, observing how families continue to depend on the river using techniques and knowledge passed down through generations.

Return to our dahabiya and sail to Gebel el-Silsila, where sandstone cliffs rise directly from the riverbank. Much of the stone used to build Egypt's great temples and monuments came from these quarries, and traces of that history remain in the shrines, inscriptions and carvings in the rock walls. Continue sailing toward Faris, with lunch along the way. In the late afternoon, take a short walk through the village to meet an artisan who transforms palm fronds into furniture and household items. Using materials gathered from the surrounding groves, he continues a craft that remains integral to Nile communities, creating practical pieces for everyday use. Back aboard the dahabiya, another peaceful evening on the river awaits.

Day 10

Kom Ombo / Daraw / Herbiab Island

A fascinating temple, old caravan trails to Aswan, and beach time

- Explore the double Temple of Kom Ombo, built for the crocodile and falcon gods
- Visit a Daraw camel barn on the historic 40 Days Road caravan route
- Swim or kayak from Herbiab Island, fringed with mango and citrus trees

This morning, step ashore at Kom Ombo, a small town on the Nile in the heart of a fertile agricultural region, surrounded by vast fields of sugarcane and corn. The town is home to a large Nubian population, many of whom were displaced when their homes were submerged by construction of the Aswan High Dam and the creation of Lake Nasser, completed in 1970. Our focus is the town's namesake temple, set on a low hill overlooking the river. Construction was started by an Egyptian pharaoh in the 2nd century BC and completed by a Roman emperor around 30 BC. The building is unique because of its "double" design, with two sets of courts, halls, sanctuaries and rooms duplicated for two different gods, the crocodile god Sobek and the falcon god Horus.

Back aboard the dahabiya, sail on to Daraw, a market town with longstanding connections to historic trans-Saharan caravan routes linking Egypt and Sudan, including the 1,110-mile-long Darb El Arba'in, known as the "40 Days Road" for the length of time it took to cover it in antiquity. Camels were the dominant mode of transport for centuries, and we visit a local camel barn to learn about their care and the role they continue to play in regional trade and transportation. Continue to Herbiab Island, where the Nile broadens to flow over sandbars and among granite outcrops. The small island, covered with mango, orange and lemon trees, is fringed by a sandy beach, and we have time to relax, with optional swimming and kayaking, before continuing toward Aswan. Our final evening aboard the dahabiya offers one last chance to marvel at the sunset over the Nile.

Day 11

Aswan / Philae Temple

Felucca sailing on the Nile and the rescued Temple of Isis

- Sail the Nile in a classic felucca, gliding past islands and palm-lined banks
- Disembark in Aswan, long a Nubian trading hub on the Nile
- Explore the Temple of Isis, moved stone by stone to save it from rising waters after the construction of Aswan Dam

Say farewell to the crew as we disembark the dahabiya this morning in Aswan, a city long central to trade along the Nile and known for its Nubian heritage. Nubia, home to some of Africa's earliest kingdoms and renowned for its rich deposits of gold, was also the gateway through which luxury products like incense, ivory and ebony traveled from their source in sub-Saharan Africa to the civilizations of Egypt and the Mediterranean. Aswan is better known today for its High Dam, built over a decade in the 1960s. Generating massive amounts of hydroelectric power, the dam also allows control of the Nile's seasonal flooding. While the dam has kept crocodiles out of the river to the north—allowing us to safely swim in the river—they are still found below the dam and even kept as pets in some Nubian households.

Take a morning sail on a felucca, a traditional wooden boat driven by wind and guided by a single sail, gliding across the Nile as such boats have done for centuries. Sail past islands, riverside villages and palm-lined banks while enjoying a quiet perspective on the river, then arrive at our stunning island hotel in time for lunch. The terraced property, built in a modern Nubian style, is only accessible by boat and offers magnificent views over the Nile and Philae Temple (the Temple of Isis). This afternoon, visit the temple, which was originally built on Philae Island. Rescued from rising waters during construction of the Aswan High Dam, which submerged the island, the temple complex was carefully dismantled and rebuilt stone by stone on Agilkia Island nearby. Explore its courtyards, colonnades and sanctuaries while learning about the enduring importance of Isis, the goddess of love, motherhood and magic. This important temple was one of Egypt's last sites of pagan worship, where Isis and Osiris were venerated for nearly 500 years after the Roman conquest of Egypt in 30 BC and the ensuing spread of Christianity in later centuries.

Day
12

Aswan / Cairo / Depart

Fly from Aswan to Cairo & say farewell to Egypt

- Fly from Aswan to Cairo to connect with your homeward flight

Our incredible Egypt adventure comes to a close today, leaving you with memories of ancient temples, richly decorated pharaohs' tombs, a private sailing journey on the Nile, and the unforgettable spectacle of a total solar eclipse. After breakfast, transfer to the airport in Aswan for your flight to Cairo, where you'll connect with onward travel. Please book flights departing Cairo no earlier than 1:30 pm.



The Essence of Egypt Accommodations

Sail the Nile & Journey Overland on an Intimate Adventure Across Time



The Nile Kempinski

Set on the Nile in Cairo's Garden City quarter, this refined city hotel offers rooftop views, distinctive dining and easy access to central cultural landmarks.



Hotel Al Moudira

Surrounded by palm groves and gardens near Luxor, this Relais & Chateaux property blends Egyptian artistry, antique-filled interiors and memorable dining into an elegant retreat.



The Boshra

Experience the Nile aboard an intimate eight-cabin dahabiya, where unhurried river travel, locally inspired design and ever-changing views create one of Egypt's most memorable journeys.



BenBen Hotel

Perched on a historic Nubian island in the Nile, this boutique hotel pairs traditional architecture with sweeping river views, creating a peaceful retreat in the heart of Aswan.



Lazib Inn

Overlooking Lake Qarun in Fayoum's Tunis Village, this boutique hotel reflects the region's architectural heritage while offering locally inspired cuisine, peaceful gardens and oasis views.



Al Fanar Azur Hotel

Overlooking the Nile River in Sohag, this contemporary hotel offers spacious rooms with private balconies, river views, Egyptian breakfast specialties and easy access to Upper Egypt's archaeological sites.



Sonesta St. George Hotel Luxor

Overlooking the Nile River in historic Luxor, this opulent hotel features marble interiors, elegant guest rooms, riverside dining and a sprawling outdoor pool with spectacular sunset views.

For detailed descriptions, visit nathab.com/cultural-journeys/egypt-cultural-adventure/accommodations.

What Makes Cultural Journeys Different?

The Essence of Egypt

When you're looking for a trip to Egypt, the options are myriad. But none are quite like Nat Hab Cultural Journeys's, a special blend of epic sights and quiet, behind-the-scenes experiences that reveal a side of Egyptian life and culture you won't find elsewhere. We take you down the Nile, of course, to the astounding sites that draw visitors to Egypt—but also into more distant hinterlands off the standard tourist circuit, for a river-and-land journey you won't find elsewhere. See what makes our adventure so special:

1 **Egypt's Monuments—and Much More!**

The pyramids, the Sphinx, Karnak, Luxor Temple and the Valley of the Kings are all here. But alongside Egypt's best-known archaeological sites, we spend time in homes, gardens, workshops, markets and farming villages, meeting the people whose lives remain closely tied to the Nile. We also visit lesser-known archaeological ruins and natural desert landscapes few experience.

2 **Four Nights on the Nile in a Privately Chartered Dahabiya for 12 Guests**

The way you travel the Nile totally defines your experience of Egypt. Accommodating just 12 guests, our private sailing vessel offers a more leisurely and personal alternative to the large cruise ships that dominate the river. Because of its smaller size, the vessel can moor beside islands, villages and quiet stretches of shoreline often bypassed by larger ships. Mornings begin with views of the river rather than crowded docks. Time on deck allows unhurried observation, passing palm groves, cultivated fields, waterbirds and sandstone cliffs. Along the way, visits with farmers, fishermen and artisans reveal a side of the Nile that many travelers never encounter.

3 **Explore Beyond the River, off the Standard Track**

Once our cruise concludes, our journey doesn't—continue by land to Fayoum, Lake Qaroun and Tunis, and meet local artisans keeping traditional pursuits alive. Fayoum is an important center for traditional pottery, and we step inside a workshop to learn the artistry behind these practical wares. Desert lakes fill the basin at Wadi El-Rayan, and fossilized whale skeletons lie exposed at Wadi El-Hitan, offering a vivid record of evolutionary transition. This little-visited region reveals a lesser-known side of Egypt, beyond the history of the pharaohs, where we learn about fascinating geology, enduring craftsmanship, and daily life in an oasis.

4 **Meaningful Personal Encounters**

In El Hegz, our friend Asma welcomes us into her mud-brick home and garden. On Besaw Island, a farming family hosts us for breakfast. In Luxor, we join local residents in their home for dinner. In Faris, an artisan demonstrates traditional palm-frond weaving. In Fayoum, a potter opens his studio and workshop, and invites us to try our hand with the clay. These visits offer a closer look at life along the Nile, from farming and fishing to craftsmanship and hospitality, adding a contemporary human dimension beyond the temples and tombs.

5

Luxor Beyond the Famous Sites

The Valley of the Kings, Karnak and Luxor Temple are among Egypt's greatest archaeological treasures. But we also visit Deir el-Medina, where the artisans who built the royal tombs lived and worked. Their homes and painted burial places offer a different perspective on ancient Egypt, focusing on the skilled craftsmen behind the monuments, not only the rulers they served.

Ready to Book? Call an Adventure Specialist at 800-543-8917



Dates & Pricing Summary:

Price
From $16995

Group Size
Limited to 12 Travelers

The Essence of Egypt Dates, Pricing & Info

Sail the Nile & Journey Overland on an Intimate Adventure Across Time

2027 Departures

Departure – Return	Pricing	Notes
Jul 30 - Aug 10, 2027	**$22395** +internal air	Eclipse Departure
Oct 16 - Oct 27, 2027	**$16995** +internal air	
Oct 23 - Nov 3, 2027	**$16995** +internal air	
Nov 6 - Nov 17, 2027	**$16995** +internal air	

2028 Departures

Departure – Return	Pricing	Notes
Jan 8 - Jan 19, 2028	**$16995** +internal air	
Jan 22 - Feb 2, 2028	**$16995** +internal air	
Mar 4 - Mar 15, 2028	**$16995** +internal air	

Departure – Return	Pricing	Notes
Mar 18 - Mar 29, 2028	**$16995** +internal air	
Oct 7 - Oct 18, 2028	**From $16995** +internal air	Price & Date Not Confirmed
Oct 21 - Nov 1, 2028	**From $16995** +internal air	Price & Date Not Confirmed
Nov 4 - Nov 15, 2028	**From $16995** +internal air	Price & Date Not Confirmed
Nov 18 - Nov 29, 2028	**From $16995** +internal air	Price & Date Not Confirmed

2029 Departures

Departure – Return	Pricing	Notes
Prices and dates not confirmed for 2029		
Jan 6 - Jan 17, 2029	**From $16995** +internal air	
Jan 20 - Jan 31, 2029	**From $16995** +internal air	
Feb 3 - Feb 14, 2029	**From $16995** +internal air	
Feb 17 - Feb 28, 2029	**From $16995** +internal air	
Mar 3 - Mar 14, 2029	**From $16995** +internal air	
Mar 17 - Mar 28, 2029	**From $16995** +internal air	

See https://www.nathab.com/cultural-journeys/egypt-cultural-adventure/dates-fees for the latest pricing details.

Included

Accommodations throughout, services of Nat Hab's professional Expedition Leader(s), local guides and staff, Egypt Tourist Visa, private Nile cruise, all meals from dinner on Day 1 through lunch on final day, some alcoholic beverages, some gratuities, airport transfers on Day 1 and final day, all activities and entrance fees, all taxes, permits and service fees.

Not Included

Travel to and from the start and end point of your trip, some alcoholic beverages, some gratuities, passport and additional visa fees (if any), optional activities, items of a personal nature (phone calls, laundry and internet, etc.), airline baggage fees, airport and departure taxes (if any), required medical evacuation insurance, optional travel protection insurance.

Mandatory Insurance

Since the areas we travel to are remote and wild (that's why we go there!), we require that all guests have, at minimum, medical evacuation insurance for this program. This is for the safety of all guests. We require that your chosen independent insurance plan includes at least $250,000 in medical evacuation coverage.

To protect your investment and to provide peace of mind while you travel, we also strongly recommend purchasing comprehensive travel insurance. Plans may cover everything from medical treatment to trip cancellations and delays and lost luggage. Please contact our office if you would like more information about the medical evacuation and comprehensive travel insurance policies we offer by calling 800-543-8917.

Getting There & Getting Home

Your expedition begins and ends in **Cairo, Egypt**.

Arrival

- We recommend arriving **one night before Day 1** to rest from your travels and begin your expedition refreshed.
- You must arrive in **Cairo by 3:30 pm on Day 1**.
- Join your Expedition Leader, Egyptologist and fellow travelers at the group hotel for a **6:00 pm Welcome Dinner**.

Departure

- You may depart **Cairo anytime after 4:30 pm on the final day**.
- Complimentary **day rooms at an airport hotel** are included on the final day, allowing you to relax, refresh and enjoy the hotel's amenities before your flight.

Booking Your Flights

Our Natural Habitat Adventures Travel Desk can best assist with your travel reservations, as our staff is familiar with the specific requirements of this program and can help arrange the most efficient itinerary. Please call us at **800-543-8917**. While we offer the best available rates on airfare and additional nights' accommodations, you may occasionally find special web rates or lower fares online.

NAT HAB
CULTURAL JOURNEYS

Natural Habitat Adventures · PO Box 3065 · Boulder, CO USA 80307

US & Canada: 800-543-8917 · International: 303-449-3711

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