

# Our Egypt Adventure

Feb 2006

By Cindy Crane

**Saturday, Feb. 18, 2006**—Today's the day...the start of our big adventure trip to Egypt with the Marco Men's Club! We have gotten all the necessary shots and pills for malaria, packed our bags, and we're ready to roll. It is a beautiful day in paradise and Larry took us



over to the Yacht Club to meet our bus. We have a big group from the club but half of them left yesterday. We are traveling with Dennis & Lois Beyer, Joe & Mary Ann Cassidy, Bill & Liz Doyle, Phil & Marilyn Kostelnik, Bob & Sue Marks, and John & Jan Minuitti. Our trip by bus

over to Miami was uneventful and we checked in and took our flight on Lufthansa airlines to cross the big pond. The flight from Miami to Frankfurt, Germany was very long. We were on an older plane—a 747—and we were in the back of the plane in the smallest seats imaginable. Although they fed us a lot and there were lots of drinks, when the guy in front of me put his seat back (which was almost the whole trip) his head was right in my lap. We left Miami at 3:30 pm and after several hours arrived in Frankfurt at 6:50am and had a few hours layover there before boarding another Lufthansa flight to Cairo. This flight was wonderful. I had a window seat and I had excellent views of the Alps—quite spectacular! The air was crystal clear and it looked like we were flying quite low, but the fact is that the Alps are quite high! We flew over Bosnia and the Caspian Sea. This was very nice with many large islands with huge cliffs. Then we finally came to the continent of Africa as we flew over the delta of the Nile in Egypt. As we came closer to Cairo, I realized what a huge city it is. I saw some pyramids from the air, but not Cheops. We were on the wrong side of the plane to see that. The landscape is very interesting...it goes from beige desert to green instantly. Our landing was very smooth. We arrived in Cairo at 2:45 pm on **Sunday, Feb. 19<sup>th</sup>**.

# Our Egypt Adventure - February, 2006

We were met at the airport by two of our guides from Friendly Planet Travel, Haisin and Mohammed, who would be the guide for us on bus #3. They ushered us right through the process of getting our luggage, going through customs, and getting to our bus, for the first of many, many bus rides on this trip. The normal 20 minute bus ride from the airport to the



hotel took 1 hour 45 minutes. Our bus driver was Adill and our armed guard was Ali. The traffic in Cairo is unbelievable! We later found out that there are 18 million people living in Cairo with another 2 million who commute into the city to work and it seemed like they were all there today with cars. And this was a Sunday! Driving in Cairo seems to be quite an adventure! No one seems to pay any attention to being in “lanes”, everyone is constantly blowing their horns, there is no such thing as giving a turn signal, and no one paid any attention to the traffic lights. We later found out that, at night, many drivers do not turn on their headlights, since they feel that it might be offensive to oncoming traffic and the Muslim religion prohibits one from offending others.



But all things considered, all the drivers seemed relatively calm and we didn't see any traffic accidents the whole time we were there. We finally arrived at our hotel, **The Cairo Sheraton Hotel & Towers**. Check-in was relatively smooth and Eddie & I had a room on the 24<sup>th</sup> floor overlooking the Nile. We went downstairs and found a “happy hour” at the Z Bar and had a few cold Stella beers. Stella is actually a very good beer. We met up with Bud & Jane Hinman who had arrived yesterday and just finished their first day of sightseeing at the Pyramids of Giza. They said they had a great time. Our first dinner was in the Aladdin restaurant. We sat at a large table and had



several Mediterranean appetizers and barbecued meats. There was entertainment for us...a very festive band playing Egyptian music and even a belly dancer. Joe was quite happy with that!

# Our Egypt Adventure - February, 2006

We saw our first of three Egyptian wedding receptions in the hotel tonight. These are quite the affair! There was lots of loud music, bands playing, Egyptian ladies doing the very loud scream-like sound that they do at many occasions, and this was all in the hotel stairway and lobby to welcome the bride and groom. The reception hall was beautifully decorated. It looked just like a dream.

After several hours we went up to bed for a good night's sleep. It has taken 24 hours to get from Marco Island to the Sheraton Cairo, but I'm very excited to be here. So far, everyone is very, very friendly.

**Monday, Feb. 20<sup>th</sup>** - Our first wake-up call was for 8:30am. This morning we had a very nice breakfast in the hotel and then we got back onto bus #3 for our trip to the airport. The whole group is now traveling together. We are to have a short flight from Cairo to Luxor. The wait in the airport terminal to get onto that short flight was unbelievably long, however, so that when we finally got to Luxor we had to check into the boat, go down and have lunch, and leave then for the first of our big adventures of the day.



**Luxor** is a very nice small town dedicated to tourism. There are 360 boats on the Nile like our boat, the Tulip. Several boats tie up to the shore rafted together 4 deep. We had to walk across 3 other boats to get to ours. Luxor has one third of all the antiquities in the world! The temples were astonishing in size. Amun Ra was worshiped here and Luxor was once the capital of Egypt. We visit the **Temple of Karnak** first. It is a huge temple, covering over 100 acres, and the largest temple complex ever built by man. It is actually three main temples and many smaller temples. It was added to over



13 centuries by successive pharaohs and was known as "The Most Select (sacred) Place" during the Middle Kingdom when Amenophis I built a chapel around a Middle Kingdom temple to Amun. The building just kept going on and on. During the 18<sup>th</sup> dynasty,

## Our Egypt Adventure - February, 2006

Amenophis III started building the great Hypostyle Hall and the 3<sup>rd</sup> Pylon. Seti I and his son Ramses II completed the Hypostyle Hall, which was the largest of any temple in the world. Inside the Great Temple of Amun, the Second Pylon was built by Ramses II. The Ptolemies did extensive repair and some new building on the center section, but for some reason they left the columns and façade of the First Pylon unfinished and left the mud-brick ramp where it was.



The Great Hypostyle Hall was amazing with 134 huge columns, some 65 feet tall and some 40 feet tall. It looked like a giant forest of stone.

Each column was made up of blocks of stone that were then carved to make them round, and then smoothed off so that they could then be carved with hieroglyphics.

The columns are topped by big lotus flowers. The reliefs throughout the hall contain symbolism of Creation. The outer walls are covered with scenes of battle. The southern walls of Ramses II have hieroglyphic texts which record details of the Hittite king and Ramses II signing a peace treaty in the twenty-first year of Ramses II's reign. (This is the first evidence found for a formal diplomatic agreement ever in history.) It was quite impressive to finally see these columns carved out of granite, sandstone, alabaster, and other beautiful stones. And the work was done before the invention of steel, so the workers did not even have very good tools. It would take days to fully explore



this huge complex, but we only had a very short time. There are statues of human headed sphinx that run for 2 miles from the Temple of Luxor to the Temple of Karnak. The temples were very crowded with thousands of tourists and we had to rush through them. It was hard to keep up

with Mohammed-you just had to look for the yellow clipboard with the picture of King Tut that he always held aloft and listen for his voice saying "Friendly Planet, Bus Number 3".

Mohammed told us so much information about the temples and the pharaohs. For instance, Ramses II was Pharaoh for 63 years and lived to be 97 years old. He had almost 200 children. Most Egyptians of that era were very short, but Ramses II was over six feet tall, quite unusual. The people felt that their pharaohs were not just kings, but were actually gods. Since Ramses II reigned for so long, he did quite

## Our Egypt Adventure - February, 2006

a lot of temple building and there were many, many statues with his likeness.

By the time we saw some of the Temple of Karnak, it was late afternoon and the light was fading. We took a short bus ride over to the [Temple of Luxor](#). This temple was also extremely crowded. It



was built largely by Amenhotep III (the inner part) and Ramses II (the outer part) and many alterations and decorations were made over the years by Tutankhamen, Alexander the Great, and others. The current temple sits on the site of a sanctuary built by Hatshepsut which was dedicated to the Theban triad of Amun, Mut, and Khons. The purpose of the temple was to celebrate the festival of Opet, during which the king was made a god. During the 19<sup>th</sup> Dynasty the festival lasted 11 days and it grew to 27 days by the reign of Ramses II in the 20<sup>th</sup> Dynasty. The temple is well preserved, especially the pylon reliefs, because most of it was covered by sand and, until the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, by the town itself. In 1885 when excavations began, houses were slowly cleared away but the locals would not allow their mosque and tomb of Abu el-Haggag to be destroyed and it is still there, hanging above the northeast corner of the court of Ramses II. The first pylon was originally 79 feet high and 213 feet wide with reliefs exaggerating Ramses' victory in the Battle of Qaddesh. There were originally 6 large statues of Ramses in front, but now only two seated colossi and a badly damaged standing figure remain. There is a beautiful obelisk supported by dog-headed baboons in front. Originally there were 2 but one was given to Louis-Philippe of France in exchange for his gift. (We will hear more about that later in the trip when we get to the Citadel.) Once again, I felt like I was in a giant maze with thousands of other tourists. Somehow, we all managed to get through it and get back on the bus to go back to the Temple of Karnak where it was now completely dark and the



[Sound and Light Show](#) was just beginning.

We worked our way through the temple, which was beautifully lit up and around the sacred lake to the bleachers. It felt good to sit for a while and listen to the story. The show was very impressive.

## Our Egypt Adventure - February, 2006

Afterwards, we got on the bus and made our way back to our boat for a buffet dinner. We went up to the top deck where you could see the temples all lit up. The view is so amazing!

**Tuesday, Feb. 21<sup>st</sup>** - This morning we were all up at 6:00am for an early buffet breakfast. Afterwards, we boarded some small rustic boats for an early morning crossing of the Nile. We arrive on the west bank to visit the [Valley of the Kings](#). I was surprised to see so many high mountains. I thought this was supposed to be all flat deserts. We went into two tombs, Ramses III and Ramses IX. We were not allowed to take photos inside the tombs, but outside we could take photos. The walls of the tombs are all carved and decorated with pictures which were quite beautiful. In the tomb of [Ramses IX](#), you went down a long, sloping corridor to an antechamber decorated with animals, serpents, and demons, then a pillared hall and short hallway to the burial



chamber. The goddess Nut is on the ceiling surrounded by a dark blue sky and gold stars. The tomb of [Ramses III](#) was very large and had depictions of everyday life, such as baking, agricultural scenes, and hunting equipment. It is also called the “Tomb of Harpers” because in one of the side chambers there are scenes of two harpists playing for the gods. The corridor also leads to a pillared hall decorated with colorful painted sunken reliefs of the traditional ritual texts. Ramses III’s sarcophagus is now in the Louvre and his mummy, thought to be the model for Boris Karloff’s character in the 1930s film, is in the Egyptian Museum in Cairo.

It is amazing that the colors have lasted these thousands of years in the severe hot and dry weather. We learned that there are 5 main colors used in the tombs-white, black, red, blue, and green. And of course there was gold. The tomb painters got their colors from various rocks and materials they found. All the carving was done by hand with stencils. It is incredible how uniform the carvings all are. Most of the representations are done in profile. In the tombs they are

## Our Egypt Adventure - February, 2006

displaying scenes of the preparation for the afterlife of the kings, scenes of worship of the gods, usually Amun Ra, scenes of daily life, and scenes of gifts given to the Pharaoh.



Mohammed discouraged us from buying the extra ticket to go inside the tomb of Tutankhamen. He said that there was nothing to see inside and that all of the treasures were in the Egyptian Museum in Cairo. So we just went up to the entrance and took our picture.

Eddie was later sorry that he had not gone inside. I guess that Mohammed had an obligation to get us to all of the sites that were promised to us, so there was very little time to go on extra excursions.

We next went to visit the [Valley of the Queens](#), which is where queens and children of kings are buried. We visited the tomb of Amunherkhepshef, a son of Ramses III, who was about 9 or 10 years old when he died. This was a small but very nice tomb with many beautiful tomb decorations showing Amunherkhepshef with his father



Ramses III who presented him to the various gods that would help him in his journey to the afterlife. In the burial chamber we saw the stone sarcophagus of the queen as well as the mummy of her 5 month old fetus, which she miscarried when she learned of the death of her son,

Amunherkhepshef. We saw the entrance to the tomb of Queen Nefertari but we were not allowed to go inside.

Next we went to the [Mortuary Temple of Queen Hatshepsut at Deir al-Bahari](#). This was a huge temple carved into the side of a mountain-a very dramatic presentation. It was designed by the Queen's architect Senenmut, and looks a little stark now, but was once filled with perfumed gardens, exotic trees and plants, and fountains, and it was approached by a sphinx-lined causeway.



It had three levels and many stairs leading up to the terraces. It was quite impressive from a distance and more so when you are



## **Our Egypt Adventure - February, 2006**

actually there. Along the front of the upper terrace are large Osirid statues of the queen. Brightly painted reliefs decorate the walls behind. Many of the reliefs were damaged by Tuthmosis III and Akhenaton and the early Christians who took it over as a monastery and called it Deir al-Bahari. Hatshepsut was the daughter of Tuthmosis I, married to her half-brother, Tuthmosis II, and ruled as co-regent with her nephew Tuthmosis III, who was very young when his father died. She ruled Egypt for 20 peaceful years. Queen Hatshepsut was a woman who said that she was a man so that she could rule as Pharaoh instead of just as Queen. Many of her statues show her in the full regalia of a pharaoh, including a false beard. Mohammed told us to pronounce her name as “Queen Hot Chicken Soup”.

At the [Tombs of the Nobles](#) we saw the tomb of Ramose, who was a governor of Thebes during the reigns of both Amenhotep III and Akhenaton. The tomb had exquisite paintings and reliefs showing scenes with both pharaohs and the transition of power between the two forms of religious worship-Amun and Aton. There were also scenes of Ramose and his wife which were very lifelike. As usual we were told no photos inside. One of the men started to take a photo and the guard rushed to stop him. He and Mohammed and another guard argued loudly. Mohamed said that the guard wanted a bribe.

At each stop, we must run through the “gauntlet” of merchants, some more “sticky” than others who want to sell their wares. Mohammed told us to ignore these people who might cheat us and that he, Mohammed, would make sure to get us to lots of shopping. But that didn’t stop some of us, especially Liz Doyle, who became the best shopper of the bunch.

At the tomb of Ramose, there were many little girls selling their dolls-very cute and sweet. When you said “no thank you” they said “maybe later”. I didn’t do as well as I had hoped when it comes to learning much Arabic. However, I did learn one extremely useful phrase...“la shukran” which means “no thank you”. You could say “no” in English until you were blue in the face, but the merchants ignored that and kept pestering you to buy, but once you said it in Arabic, they



## Our Egypt Adventure - February, 2006

usually left you alone. We also learned that it is not proper to give the children money and then not take what they were selling. They are very insulted about this and it tends to create beggars.

We next saw the [Colossi of Memnon](#), which was named by the Greeks, but was actually 2 huge statues, 64 feet high, of Amenhotep III. They once stood guard over his mortuary temple, but now they stand peacefully amid sugarcane fields and across the street from modern storefronts. The right statue was damaged by an earthquake in 27BC, after which it made a noise at dawn, when the temperature and humidity started to rise, that sounded like singing, which the Greeks believed was Memnon singing for his mother Eos, the goddess of dawn. To be granted a song meant that you were very much in favor of the gods. Visitors came from miles around to hear the sound including Emperor Hadrian in 130AD. The Roman Emperor Septimus Severus tried to repair the statues in 199AD and inadvertently silenced them forever. One of the statues was covered with scaffolding and was being restored by French archeologists.



Right around the corner, we next went to [Medinat Habu, the mortuary temple of Ramses III](#). He modeled this extravagant temple on the Ramesseum of his ancestor, Ramses II. This was one of the first places to be closely associated with the god Amun.



There were temples, storage rooms, workshops, and accommodations for priests and officials. It was once the center of the economic life of Thebes. You can still see the mud-brick remains of the town that gave the site its name. You enter by the Syrian Gate. Ramses III is portrayed in reliefs of his victory over the Libyans and there is a scene of scribes tallying the number of enemies killed by counting severed heads.



## Our Egypt Adventure - February, 2006

The [Ramesseum, the mortuary temple of Ramses II](#), was



Unfortunately built on weak foundations is now mostly in ruins. The famous statue of Ozymandias, which was 57 feet tall and weighed 1000 tons, can be seen. The second court is lined with an Osiris colonnade.

After seeing all these antiquities on the west bank of the Nile, we boarded another bus and went by way of a bridge back over to the east bank of the Nile. While we were away, our boat had traveled up the Nile (going South) towards Edfu. On our way to the boat, we first



went back up to Luxor where we picked up the lost luggage of one of our group, and we got to stop at a nice coffee house for a very refreshing ice



cold beer. We also had a shopping stop at the [Horus Factory of Alabaster](#) where we had a chance to purchase carvings. We traveled in a caravan, the three buses, each with our own armed guard on board, and a car in front with 4 armed guards and a car in the rear with 4 armed guards. Whenever we came upon an intersection or a busy part of the road, the sirens would come on and we would be ushered through. It sort of made me feel important. I wondered however, what the Egyptians thought of this...

I have to say that never during the entire trip did I feel unsafe in any way. The people I encountered were all extremely friendly and much more polite than many other nationalities. I saw no anti-



Americanism, no hostility at all. As we got back to our boat, we had a very interesting way to board. The boat could not get up to the riverbank, so we had to walk across a plank, climb over a chair, and up onto the back of the boat. And when we got back to our room, we



found that the stewards had made nice towel animals for us.

# Our Egypt Adventure - February, 2006



We had another happy hour in the lounge with fancy drinks and hors d'oeuvres followed by a buffet dinner and entertainment by the crew with singing, drumming, and dancing.



**Wednesday, February 22<sup>nd</sup>**-This morning we are up at 9:00am for another buffet breakfast. We had some very disturbing news this morning. One of our group members, little Joe Marro, passed away during the night. It seems that he had a very bad heart and had a heart attack during the night. His wife, Pam, seemed to be handling this very well. She said that this trip had been a lifetime dream of Joe and he died doing what he wanted while on vacation. The tour leaders and Bob Marks took care of everything for her and her friends talked her into staying on the trip because Joe's body would not be shipped back to the states until the end of our trip anyway. We were afraid for her to take the long trip back home all alone.

The bus left at 10:15 for the [Temple of Edfu](#) built for the god Horus, falcon-headed son of Osiris. This is the 2<sup>nd</sup> largest temple in Egypt and was built from 237BC to 57BC during the Ptolemaic period, but it gives a clear picture of what all ancient temples must have looked like. It was believed to be built on the site where Horus fought with his uncle Seth for control of the world.



It is the best preserved temple in Egypt, built by Ptolemy IX and opened by Cleopatra. The temple was mostly filled by sand until excavation in 1860 by Auguste Marriette.

You enter through a massive pylon guarded by 2 granite falcons. The Second Hypostyle or Festival Hall is lined with side chambers, one of which is a laboratory with reliefs of flowers and recipes for medicines, and there are two staircases leading to the roof where Horus was revitalized by the sun. Behind is the



## Our Egypt Adventure - February, 2006

“holy of holies”, the sanctuary where the statue of Horus was believed to be inhabited by the living god. There was also the sacred barque (river boat). There is a depiction of Nut, the sky goddess protecting the heavens and earth.



The outer corridor is a huge wall completely covered with a carved relief of Horus' victory over Seth, depicting Seth as a hippopotamus. Seth, jealous brother to Osiris, killed Osiris by tricking him to lie inside of a coffin he had built. Once he was inside, Seth threw the coffin into the Nile to drown Osiris. Isis, sister-wife of Osiris, found his body but then Seth cut his body into 13 parts and buried them in several places. Isis turned herself into a kite and flew through the sky with her sister Nephthys to locate all 13 parts. With the help of Anubis, god of embalming, Isis created the first mummy. With her magic she then hovered over the broken body of Osiris and briefly restored him to life so that she could become impregnated with their son Horus. Horus was raised to avenge his father and he defeated Seth, becoming the first living pharaoh on earth, represented by each pharaoh, while his resurrected father Osiris ruled as Lord of the Afterlife.

We boarded our ship for lunch as we cruise up the Nile. During the cruise we encountered what are referred to as “friendly pirates”. There were lots of small boats rowing hard to keep up with us and trying to sell us various items like galabeyas, the traditional Egyptian dress that is worn by both men and women, and beautiful tablecloths. They would throw these items from their little boats up to the top deck of our boat and barter with us about the price. If you didn't want to buy the items, you would throw them back down to the



small boats. Once you had agreed upon a price, you went downstairs so someone could row up to our boat and you would pay them. Cruising up the Nile was really pleasant with interesting views from



## Our Egypt Adventure - February, 2006

both sides of the river. You could see people washing their animals in the river, small villages, cultivated fields, and mosques.



When we arrived at **Kom Ombo**, we had an interesting evening tour of the **Temple of Kom Ombo**, which is the only temple shared by two gods-Sobek, the crocodile headed god- and Horus the Elder or Haruris-the falcon headed god. The temple was quite lovely as it glowed in the golden light of the sunset. Once again the walls of the various corridors and sanctuaries are covered with carved reliefs; some very interesting ones that display medical instruments, proof that those Egyptian surgeons were quite sophisticated almost 2000 years ago. There was a huge well inside the temple as well as an interesting small Chapel of Hathor with mummified crocodiles. We went to the ruined **Temple of Khnum** in Esna, where you must first walk



through a narrow souk (market). Once again my little Arabic phrase of “la shukran” came in very handy. There were two really cute little Egyptian boys and their donkey there and we could pay them to take their picture.



After a nice buffet dinner, we enjoyed a special evening of entertainment with everyone dressed in galabeyas. There was much dancing, singing by the staff, and even another belly dancer with a



terrible green costume, and we were also treated to our first whirling dervish dancer. That was an astonishing performance!

# Our Egypt Adventure - February, 2006

**Thursday, February 23<sup>rd</sup>**-This morning after a nice buffet breakfast, we enjoyed a relaxing sail up the Nile further to **Aswan**. Aswan is Egypt's southernmost town and is totally different from the rest of the country.



There is no cultivation on either side of the river and there are now large dark granite rocks in the river. There is a distinct Nubian (or African) influence here as well.



After lunch we took a **felucca** sailboat ride. These sailboats are the way that native Egyptians traveled the river and it was a very pleasant experience. It gave some folks, like Phyllis Bator, a chance to catch a brief nap.



We sailed over to **Elephantine Island** and **Kitchener's Botanical Gardens**. This was a treat for me to view not only the beautiful



flowers but the many cats that live here. In the distance you could see the Aga Khan's Mausoleum. Aga Khan III was the spiritual leader of the



Ismailis, a Shi'ite Muslim sect originally from India. He was incredibly wealthy and evidently very heavy also. On his diamond jubilee in 1945 his weight in diamonds was distributed among his followers. Up the steep sand hill from the Mausoleum is the Monastery of St. Simeon. From the boat we could see people riding camels up to the Monastery. On the felucca ride back past Elephantine



Island we could see the Nubian towns and the incredibly strange Aswan Oberoi Hotel with the unfinished protrusion that looks like an air traffic control tower. Our captain and first mate, a young boy of around 10, entertained us on the sail with Nubian songs.

# Our Egypt Adventure - February, 2006



After lunch we disembarked and boarded our buses for a tour of the [High Dam](#) and a view of Lake Nasser. As early as the 1940s it was evident that the old Aswan Dam was unable to control the unpredictable annual flooding of the Nile. After Nasser came into power in 1952, plans were drawn up for the new dam. The new dam is 3600 meters long, 980 meters wide at the base and 111 meters high at the highest point. There were 35,000 workers involved in construction with 451 workers who died during the construction. They worked day and night for 11 years, from 1960 to 1971, to complete the dam. There was much political difficulty in building the dam and after the USA, UK, and World Bank refused their financial backing, Nasser ordered the nationalization of the Suez Canal. The Soviet Union then offered the funding to build it—\$900 million rubles given as a loan to be paid back with 2% interest. Russia also provided 2000 engineers to work on the dam.

With the new dam came the great Lake Nasser, the world's largest artificial lake. It is 5250 square km, and stretches 510 km in length and between 5km and 35km in width. It contains 135 billion cubic meters of water. It is surrounded by the desert on all sides.



The flooding of Lake Nasser threatened 35 temples behind the high dam. UNESCO helped to save 17 temples, one of which we will visit today.



We visited the [Unfinished Obelisk](#), where in an ancient granite quarry there is a huge 137 foot obelisk that is partially carved out of the rock. It was abandoned when a flaw was discovered. If it had been finished it would have been the largest piece of worked stone in history, weighing about 1,320 tons. It is just incredible to think how they could have carved these massive obelisks with no real tools. As in virtually all historic sites, we had to walk the gauntlet of “sticky” merchants to get back to the bus—not for the faint of heart!

# Our Egypt Adventure - February, 2006

Next we boarded small boats to get to [Philae Island and the Temple of Isis](#). Philae was a popular cult center and the temple was built over a period of 800 years, mainly by Ptolemaic and Roman rulers who wanted to identify themselves with Osiris and Isis.



There is a blend of Egyptian and Greco-Roman architecture. This was the most important pilgrimage center in Egypt during Roman times when the Goddess Isis was very popular and pilgrims would come from all over the Mediterranean to worship her. The temple was only closed down in 551 AD. When the temples were closed it ended 4,000 years of worship of the pagan gods. When the first Aswan Dam was first built, the temple was partly submerged and the reliefs began to erode. The new High Dam threatened to completely destroy it so an operation led by UNESCO and the Egyptian Antiquities Organization reshaped the island of Agilika to an exact replica of Philae and the Temple of Isis and the small Temple of Hathor were relocated to this higher ground. It was reopened to the public in 1980.



Of course there was the obligatory shopping both on Agilika Island at Philae Temple and on the small boat trip back.



While still in Aswan we visited Jasmian Shahinaz Scent Factory. We were given a demo of blowing the beautiful perfume bottles and were then given a short lecture on the various scents and their medicinal values. Many of us spent a lot of money here, and now have no idea what to do with the stuff we bought!

Every night on the Nile we enjoy very beautiful sunsets from our river boat, the Tulip. We enjoyed our last night on the boat.





# Our Egypt Adventure - February, 2006

Friday, February 24<sup>th</sup> -



Some of us took the optional tour to [Abu Simbel](#). This was an exceptional tour with a small plane ride south to Abu Simbel, just 25 miles from the Sudanese border, and then a visit to the two very spectacular monuments to Ramses II and his wife, Nefertari.

The great temple for [Ramses II, dedicated to Ra-Harakhte](#), has an entrance flanked by 4 huge statues of Ramses, each 65 feet high.



The smaller temple for [Queen Nefertari, dedicated to the goddess Hathor](#), has smaller statues of both Nefertari and Ramses with their children. On our short walk around the impressive area to the temples, Mohammed had us face the water and only when we were perfectly situated did he allow us to turn around for the full impact of the temple. It is quite an impressive site.

Even more impressive is the fact that these temples were cut apart and carefully moved to the present site. The temples of Abu Simbel were first reported in modern times by the Swiss explorer, J.L. Burckhardt, in 1813 when he came over the mountain and saw the façade. At the



time, only one head was completely showing above the sands, the next head was broken off, and only the crowns of the remaining two heads were visible. By 1817 enough sand had been removed by Giovanni Battista Belzoni for the temple to be entered and opened to the public. The two temples became a must see for Victorians visiting Egypt. When the site was threatened by submersion in Lake Nasser due to the construction of the High Dam, the Egyptian government got the

## Our Egypt Adventure - February, 2006

support of UNESCO and launched a world wide appeal. From 1964 to 1968 the two temples were dismantled and reconstructed.

The temples were hand-sawed into 1,050 blocks and rebuilt on the new artificial site 680 feet back and 200 feet higher than their original site. The reconstruction was nearly perfect.



Every year on February 22 and October 22 (one day later than originally planned) the dawn rays of the sun reach into the heart of the



sanctuary to revive the cult statues covered in gold of the 4 gods, Ptah, Amon-Re, Ra-Harakhte, and Ramses II. Ramses' temple was dedicated to the god Ra-Harakhte and has an entrance cornice with baboons adoring the rising sun and a niche with the falcon-headed statue of the sun god Ra-Harakhte holding a scepter and a figure of Maat. Inside the hypostyle hall there are 4 columns on either side with 33 foot high statues of Ramses. The walls are decorated with reliefs of Ramses' campaigns in Syria and Nubia as well as reliefs of the Battle of Qaddesh in 1300 BC.

The smaller temple was built for Nefertari and dedicated to Hathor, the wife of the sun god. This is the only temple where a woman was portrayed at a temple entrance. The great hall contains statues of Hathor and reliefs of Nefertari watching Ramses killing his enemies. The sanctuary contains a statue of the cow headed goddess Hathor. We were so happy that we took this extra tour!!



After an exciting morning, we boarded our plane for the flight back to Aswan where we met the rest of our group to catch our flight back to Cairo and the Cairo Sheraton Hotel & Towers.



**Saturday, February 25<sup>th</sup>**- This morning we woke up to a dust storm. We had a nice breakfast and then headed out to the Cairo Museum, built in 1901 and regarded as one of the best in the world.

This is a magnificent museum as far as its antiquities, but it is very old and dusty, especially today with the dust

## **Our Egypt Adventure - February, 2006**

storm outside. It was hard to breath sometimes. This building is huge and it would take 9 months going every day from 9:00-4:00 to see all of the exhibits. Of course, no photos or cameras were allowed inside. Mohammed took us on a whirlwind tour of the facility showing us the most important parts and giving us great details about the history. Even though he discouraged it, some of us paid for the extra tour of the “dead people, I mean mummy room”. Seems Mohammed and people of his faith don’t like mummies at all. But we were enthralled with them. Most of the Egyptian mummies were very short except for Ramses II who was 6 feet tall. His mummy was originally in upstate New York for a long time and then moved to Atlanta where the curator decided to give him back home to Egypt. His mummy was incredibly well preserved. You could even see his hair. The whole process of mummification is amazing-it took up to 70 days for the mummification process. First the brain was sucked out through the nose and stored in a canopic jar. Then the other organs were removed through a slit in the torso. The heart was usually left in place, but a stone scarab would be placed over it. The body was then washed and pickled in natron (a sodium bicarbonate compound) for over a month, after which it was dried out. Once the body was ready, it was then wrapped in bandages carefully from head to toe. Each finger and each toe was wrapped separately.

Next stop in the Museum was “Treasure of Tutankhamen” which was incredible. I had seen the treasures when they toured the US many years ago, and I also got to see them in Ft. Lauderdale after we got home from this trip, but believe me, the Egyptians only allowed some of the treasures to leave their country. There was more gold and riches than you could imagine. King Tut became king at age 8 and he only ruled for 10 years. (He may have been murdered for religious reasons, no one really knows for sure. Prior to his rule, Akhenaton ruled and forced the worship of the Aton, the one God. King Tut brought back the worship of Amun Ra.) His gold head mask is 22 pounds of pure 18 K gold and the first casket is 250 pounds of 18 K gold in 2 pieces. This was covered by another casket made of cedar, beautifully painted, then a third casket of painted cedar. These were all placed into a sarcophagus made of alabaster. The sarcophagus was then placed inside of 3 vaults, which fit into each other like Russian dolls. These had to be dismantled to get them into the tomb and then reassembled. The precision of carving was incredible. In addition to

## ***Our Egypt Adventure - February, 2006***

all the gold, there were so many precious jewels, that it was hard to imagine what the riches would have been in his tomb if he had lived and ruled for a longer time.

We saw the Rosetta Stone (actually a copy). This is such an important piece of antiquity since it was the clue to learning to interpret hieroglyphics. In the 2<sup>nd</sup> century BC a declaration from the priests of Memphis was inscribed on a basalt slab in three scripts current in Egypt-hieroglyphics, Egyptian demotic, and Greek. The stone was discovered by a French officer and later handed over to the British after the defeat of Napoleon's expedition. A copy was also sent to France, where in 1822 Jean-Francois Champollion after many years, used it to read hieroglyphics for the first time since antiquity.

There were so many other incredible statues that we saw in our short time in the museum. The largest statue was 22 feet tall and was assembled inside the lobby.

After the museum, we visited a book store then went to lunch at a local restaurant nearby. It was quite busy and service was pretty slow. We marveled at how many locals enjoyed the hookah pipes during lunch. According to Mohammed, hashish is illegal in Egypt and the water pipes actually use tobacco mixed with molasses, apples, and strawberries. He said that a common nickname for the pipes was "Hubbly Bubbly".

On the way to Old Cairo, Mohammed gave us a brief history lesson. The Pharonic era lasted around 3000 years. Then the Ptolemaic era lasted about 300 years and ended with Queen Cleopatra VIII when she was attacked by the Romans. The Holy Family came and stayed in Egypt for 3 ½ years. There is a small island in the middle of the Nile close to Cairo with lots of rushes and that is believed to be where the baby Moses was found. St. Mark died in 61AD and his body was taken from Alexandria to Italy to be placed in his cathedral there. It was later brought back. Christianity thrived in Egypt until the Christians were persecuted by the pagan Romans. Around 641 AD the Arabs brought the Islam religion and that was the first time that Arabic was spoken in Egypt. Today the Muslim religion is quite predominate. The two types-Sunni and Shi'ite-are man-made sects

## Our Egypt Adventure - February, 2006

and their differences have little to do with religion. The sects were not mentioned in the Koran. Abraham is the grandfather of the Muslim religion. The first mosque in Mecca is to honor Abraham. The prophet Mohammed was born in Mecca around 570 AD. He was a merchant shipper, and then he received the word from God to worship one god-Allah. He was persecuted but he preached for 23 years. An Angel talked to Mohammed and told him to write the Koran, the book of the Islam religion. Mohammed was buried in Medina.

We passed the [City of the Dead](#), a huge graveyard for Muslims. Each grave has a home built on top of it for visitors. It looks like a large town.



The [Cairo Tower](#) is 650 feet high and the tallest building in Cairo and is made of “pink granite” and alabaster.

Muslims and Jews are cousins, both descended from Abraham. The languages are very similar. There were no separate sects in Muslim before the death of Mohammed. He had 4 sons who were called caliphs. The last caliph successor made up his own rules and formed the Shi’ite sect. The Sunni sect is made up of Muslims who follow the Koran completely.

There are 5 basic beliefs for Muslim. 1. Worship Allah/God and revere the Prophet Mohammed. 2. Pray 5 times a day. (no matter where you are) 3. Fast from sunrise to sunset during Ramadan. 4. Help each other- alms giving. 5. Go to Mecca if you can once in your lifetime. Alms giving can mean being friendly to everyone, especially non-Muslims. In the 2<sup>nd</sup> book of the Koran it says that a Muslim man can marry a maximum of 4 women as long as he can take care of each wife’s children and he promises to teach each wife about the Muslim religion. He has to be fair to each family and try not to create envy between the families. Mohammed, our guide, said that this is very hard and therefore you should only marry one woman!



# Our Egypt Adventure - February, 2006

Jihad means struggling and defending. It has been misused to mean “war” against non-Muslims. There are two kinds of jihad: 1. Big jihad is against the enemy you cannot face-yourself. This is the great jihad. 2. Minor jihad is defending yourself against others. You do not have the right to commit suicide. “Holy War” is not written in the Koran. It is just made up by people for political reasons. The true Muslims condemn 9/11. Allah does not condone killing or burning.

There are 72 million Egyptians: 82% are Sunni, 18% are Christian, and less than .01% are Jewish (only 130 Jewish people). There is only one synagogue in Egypt. You must have a minimum of 10 men to have prayers in synagogue.

We visited the [Mosque of Mohammed Ali](#), also know as the [Citadel](#).



The citadel and minarets of this mosque tower high above Cairo’s skyline. The original buildings were started in 1176 as part of a great fortification by Saladin, but were torn down by Sultan el-Nasir and by Mohammed Ali to make way for their own mosques and

palaces. It is modeled on the Blue Mosque of Istanbul. The enormous dome is supported by four semi-domes. The interior is quite spectacular-lots of gold and greens. Mohammed Ali is buried under a marble cenotaph to the right of the entrance. The decorations are very



baroque and elaborate throughout. But you must remember that this is mainly a place of worship for Muslims. Therefore, we had to remove our shoes while inside and remain respectful of the people who were there worshipping.



The courtyard is made of alabaster and is overlooked by a large French clock tower given by Louis Philippe in exchange for the obelisk now at Paris’ Place de al Concorde. Many in Cairo are still upset that this trade was made, since the clock

## Our Egypt Adventure - February, 2006

has never worked from the first day. Guess they felt that they got the short end of the trade for the beautiful obelisk from the temple of Luxor.



After the Citadel we went to the [gold shop, Mondy Bazaar](#) where many of us ordered our 18 K gold cartouches.

Our next stop was for more shopping at the [Khan el Kahlili](#), one of the most famous Egyptian bazaars.



It was twilight when we arrive and the minarets were making the calls for prayer. Standing at the entrance to the bazaar streets you could see mosques from every direction and the sound of



the call to prayer was quite loud. Inside Khan el Kahlili, it was just like you see in movies. The streets were lined with shops selling just about anything you could imagine and each shop owner wanted your business. They would yell to you to come into their shops and they really loved to barter. We heard: "How can I take your money today?" "You buy this-I marry you". "Lady, lady, I make good deal for you". Some of the shop owners were very aggressive, or "sticky" as Mohammed would say. One of them chased MaryAnn down the street almost 3 blocks to get her to buy something. Once again, my little bit of Egyptian, "la shukran" really worked well. All in all, it was an exciting night, not really scary. As it approached dusk we heard the sound of the minarets calling the Muslims to pray. As you looked around the area at the start of Khan el Kahlili, you saw many, many beautiful mosques.



We also saw many interesting sights, such as the man on bicycle carrying a huge tray of fresh baked breads. By the time we got back on the bus and back to the hotel it was now very dark. Once again, the traffic was incredible, with no one using lanes or turn signals, but everyone using their horns. We noticed that many cars did not use

## Our Egypt Adventure - February, 2006

their headlights. Mohammed said that many Egyptians never use their headlights because they think it might be rude to shine a light into someone's face and their religion does not want you to be rude to others.



Tonight we had a folklore show and dinner including a belly dancer who was much better than the one we saw on the boat. Tonight there was also another wedding reception at the hotel. It was as loud and as much fun as the first one we saw. The bride and groom looked so cute.



**Sunday February 26<sup>th</sup>**-We woke up to another dust storm. After breakfast we checked out of the Sheraton for our trip to **Alexandria**. Whenever we traveled, we went in a caravan of 3 buses with police cars in front and back with armed guards and there was an armed guard on each bus. As we got to an intersection, the police cars put on their sirens and stopped all traffic for us again. Soon we were outside of Cairo and on the road to Alexandria. The road was built before the 2<sup>nd</sup> world war and was paved in the 1970s. This was a long trip so we were able to hear much history and information about Egyptian life from Mohammed during our voyage.



After the 1952 Revolution women could vote and go to universities. Women make up about 49% of the population and they do not go by their husband's last name. A woman's name is her given name, her father's name, and her grandfather's name. Women are teachers, nurses, TV and radio personalities, travel agents, doctors, and engineers. There are two female judges and 2 female pilots on Egypt Air. Most lawyers are men. The divorce rate in Egypt is 20-21%. There are two types of divorce. Four years ago the law changed to create a "peaceful divorce" whereby the wife with children can keep the house and the kids until they are 12 years old, then the kids go to the father until they are 18 years old. The kids can then decide who they want to live with. The husband must support the wife and kids until he dies. Then there is the "non-peaceful divorce" which takes 3



## Our Egypt Adventure - February, 2006

months in court. The husband pays for the kids and the wife keeps the house but does not get alimony.

There are no longer so many “arranged marriages”-mostly just in small villages. Most marriage ceremonies are very religious. There is the church ceremony in the morning and then the reception party is in the hotels late at night for the very rich. These parties are very elaborate and go on until the wee hours of the morning.

As far as housing, there are very few rental units. There are mostly condos, so for young people to get married and have a place of their own to live is very hard. The family helps out. There are very few single family houses-only for the very, very wealthy. Most apartments/condos are 350 square feet with 2 bedrooms, kitchen, bath and cost about \$150,000 Egyptian pounds. This is outside of the city. Inside the city of Cairo the price doubles. Usually houses are paid for in cash. Any mortgages are for 15 years maximum with 50% down. Most credit cards are in the name of the woman and the man’s name is never mentioned.



Muslim ladies are honored by God in the Koran. The Muslim religion believes in and honors all other religions and therefore they feel that women should dress like the Virgin Mary, who is most honored by the Muslim faith. That is why Muslim women should be dressed and covered in veils except for the face, hands, and feet, just like the Virgin Mary. When the men marry, it is their duty to teach their wife about the Muslim religion and they should ask their wife to dress in the veil to honor the Virgin Mary. However, women are not forced to do this. Mohammed is married with 2 children and his wife didn’t wear the veil at first but now she does. The most tolerant/liberal Muslims are in Egypt, Lebanon, and Turkey. Men’s dress, in long robes and headdresses, has nothing to do with religion-just the weather. The long robes that both the men and women wear are called galabeyas.



## **Our Egypt Adventure - February, 2006**

Parliament has 20% women and there are 4 female ministers in Parliament. There are 16 ambassadors all over the world. In 1922 there were 22 million people in Egypt and now there are 72 million. Egyptians had to learn to reclaim the desert land to take care of all these people. There are lots of private farms on either side of the road to Alexandria.

Military service is compulsory since the 1850s. There are military camps along the road which look a lot like prisons. Mohammed said that this was because young men don't like the military at first and may try to run away to go back home.

Health insurance is compulsory in the public sector, but not very good. It is not compulsory in the private sector. There is very good family planning in the cities due to the population explosion. Now most families in the cities have 1-2 children. In small villages, having sex is the only way to have fun, so there are too many children. The Muslim religion says nothing about contraception.

As far as modern day politics go, Egypt was originally the Republic of Egypt and Sudan, but Egypt broke away from that and formed their own Parliament with 17 parties. There are two main parties, the National Democratic Party, led by Mubarak and another one. The other 15 parties are "just there". Elections are in November by the people. Last year 10 people ran and Mubarak won again with 70% of the vote. You must have an Egyptian mother and father to register to vote and you must be 18 years old. There have been 4 Presidents since the Revolution. Nazib was the first appointed president, and then Colonel Abdel Nasser was elected by Parliament in 1956. In the 1967 "6 day war" with Israel, Egypt's air force was destroyed in a surprise attack. Nasser blockaded the Strait of Tiran. Israel struck back and took control of the Sinai Peninsula and closed the Suez Canal which didn't open for another 8 years. Nasser offered to resign, but the people reelected him to office where he remained until he died of a heart attack in 1970. Anwar Sadat took the Presidency and he looked to the US for support instead of USSR. On Oct. 6, 1973, during Yom Kippur, Egypt launched a surprise attack across the Suez Canal at Sinai. Egypt's national pride was restored. Israel asked the US for help and President Carter said that Egypt had to stop the war. A ceasefire was signed at Camp David and Israel and Egypt had the

## **Our Egypt Adventure - February, 2006**

first diplomatic relationship in the Middle East. The rest of the Middle East turned away from Egypt. President Sadat was assassinated on October 6, 1981-shot by his own people. October 6<sup>th</sup> was considered as a victory by Egyptians. Hosni Mubarak then took over as President. He has been a good business man, updating the roads, communication, and school.

Life expectancy in Egypt is low. The biggest killer is high blood pressure and heart disease. There is no minimum wage in Egypt.

On our trip across the delta we saw many high pointed domes with holes. These are pigeon houses. We also saw lots of olives, mangoes, citrus, grapes, and bananas being grown.

Alexandria's history is the bridging link between the pharaohs and Islam. The city gave rise to the last great Pharaonic dynasty, the Ptolemies, provided entry into Egypt of the Romans, and nurtured early Christianity before fading into obscurity when Islam's armies passed it by to set up camp in what would become modern Cairo. Alexandria was built in 332BC by Alexander the Great as the first port city in Egypt. He went to Persia, where he died two years later, and then Ptolemy I continued to build. It was designed to look like a giant chessboard. Ptolemy made it look Egyptian by adding sphinxes, obelisks, and statues from the older sites of Memphis and Heliopolis. Alexandria developed into a major port on the trade routes between Europe and Asia. During the reign of Cleopatra, Alexandria rivaled Rome in everything but military power, a fact that Rome could not tolerate and eventually acted upon. Under Roman control, Alexandria remained the capital of Egypt, but during the 4<sup>th</sup> century AD civil war, famine, and disease ravaged the city.

Royal graveyards were in the center of town for all Ptolemies, Cleopatras, and for Alexander the Great.

Alexandria had 5 neighborhoods-Alpha, Beta, Gamma, Delta, & Epsilon. Alpha was for rulers of Ptolemy. Beta was for all Greeks. Gamma was for all foreigners. Delta was for all Jewish people. Epsilon was for all Egyptians. The town was finished in 270BC by Ptolemy and it had one of the 7 ancient wonders of the world-the Lighthouse of



## Our Egypt Adventure - February, 2006

Alexandria built in 279BC. The lighthouse was 135 meters high on a small island now just under water in front of Alexandria.

4% of the 8 million population is from Greece, Britain, France, and Italy. Alexandria is the trade center of cotton. There is also a lot of natural gas-it is 6<sup>th</sup> largest production in the world. There are factories for soap, salt, and medicines. There are 30 miles of beach and 4 million Egyptians use it as a summer resort.

Our first stop was to the “so called” [Pillar of Pompey](#), which is over 88 feet high, 29 feet thick, and built in 297 AD in honor of Emperor Diocletian. The surrounding area holds the remains of the Serapeum Temple. Mohammed said it was “so called” because it was round, not a pillar, and Pompey was not here. The temple was destroyed many times. The Pillar was started by Ptolemy I and Ptolemy II and carved from a solid piece of “pink granite” from Aswan that was floated on a reed boat down the Nile.



We climbed to the top to get a great view of the surrounding city and a close up of several of the carved statues.



Next stop was to the [Roman Amphitheatre, the Park of Pan in Ptolemaic](#) times. The amphitheatre was built as a theatre during the 3<sup>rd</sup> to 4<sup>th</sup> centuries AD. It originally had 16 steps but only 13 steps remain. It once had a huge dome on top supported by red, white, and green stone columns. The Egyptians used to watch wrestling here. This was the center of the city and is now under excavation.



## Our Egypt Adventure - February, 2006

The [Library of Alexandria](#) is actually the 2<sup>nd</sup> one. This is not the same location as the one built by Ptolemy II. The original library, founded in the early 3<sup>rd</sup> century BC during the reign of Ptolemy II, was said to be the greatest of all classical



institutions. It once held as many as half a million texts. Legend has it that every vessel entering the city's harbor had to hand over any manuscripts for copying. The first library was burned when Julius Caesar ordered his soldiers to burn his own fleet so that they wouldn't be taken over by Ptolemy IV. The fleet caught fire and the fire grew until it consumed the ancient library. Cleopatra VII tried to build another one. Mrs. Mubarak decided to build a new library and it opened in 2002 and became known as [Bibliotheca Alexandria](#). The library is a huge, very modern building. The outside dome has carvings of 135 world languages. The Impressions of Alexandria exhibit, which traces the history of Alexandria, was very interesting. There was also a Planetarium structure outside, but we didn't have much time to explore that.



Now we proceeded on to our hotel, on the grounds of the [Montazah Palace](#). The Palace contains 135 acres of gardens (not flowers, so much as shrubs and trees) and the huge palace of King Farouk which he used as his summer "fishing camp".



Amazing! The building was not open to the public, and there were renovations going on, but we walked around it. The views from the building were very beautiful, and the building itself was incredible.



Our hotel, the [Helnan Palestine Hotel](#) is a 5 star hotel and most of the rooms were quite nice. However, Eddie and I had room #907, but since the hotel only had 7 floors, we

# Our Egypt Adventure - February, 2006

were in the basement! Actually we had a “cabana” room by the pool. It was very, very small with many funny features. There was a simple on/off switch for the AC, there was no toilet paper holder, the towels were just thrown helter-skelter around the bathroom, there was only 1 small glass in the entire room, and 2 very small beds. The hotel management must have felt sorry for us, since they did give us a complimentary bottle of wine with fruit and cookies. Perhaps this was



our consolation prize! Everyone else seemed to find great pleasure in our accommodations, but we really didn't mind. The rest of the hotel was great. And we had the pool right outside of our door. As soon as we checked in there was entertainment for us-music and another whirling dervish performance. He was great! We



had some more Stella beers in the lounge and then a very nice buffet dinner. We presented a monetary gift to Bob Marks. We had speeches from our guides and from Pam (the wife of poor Joe who passed away while on the river boat). It was a very nice night but we were told that there was another sandstorm coming and we had to leave Alexandria by 10:00am so that we could make it back through the desert.



**Monday, February 27<sup>th</sup>**-We awoke to a very nice buffet breakfast at 8:00am. Several of us put our feet into the Mediterranean and then we walked around a bit more. We were all sorry to



have to leave Alexandria so soon. It would have been nice to have more time to explore this beautiful city and to walk some of the corniche.



## **Our Egypt Adventure - February, 2006**

We started back on our 3 hour bus trip back to Cairo. This time we went through the desert instead of through the delta. Once again we had the same 3 bus caravan with police cars armed with Russian made machine guns and the bus guard had a Glock machine pistol. The land on either side of the desert is irrigated and has lots of things being cultivated. We saw more of the pigeon houses. Mohammed said that Egyptians eat a lot of pigeon. We also saw many carts pulled



by donkeys and horses carrying everything from fruits and vegetables to gasoline tanks. One was full of some type of green grass which hung over the side of the cart-three times the size of the cart. It was a very picturesque drive.

We heard that gasoline is 8 Egyptian pounds (\$1)/gallon, Diesel is about \$.50 /gallon and premium gas is \$2/gallon. There are no Egyptian made cars. There are assembly lines for other cars for windshields, tires, seats, etc.

On the way back we saw a herd of dromedary camels. We will be able to ride a camel later in the trip and I can't wait to try it.

Kids go to school and then before or after school they work in carpet factories or with their parents in business or in the fields. They are paid and are able to save some money for college. Carpet schools are on the road to Sakkara and Mohammed promised we would visit them later in our trip. The drug problem is not bad in Egypt. The work keeps the kids out of too much trouble. Egypt is very tough on crime. For capitol crimes, (murder, rape, drug dealing) you are hanged. The trials will last 1 month maximum and then you are hanged.

Major industry in Egypt is canned food, fabrics-cotton & linen, natural gas, and assembly lines for car parts. And of course, tourism is a major industry. Vegetables and cotton are exported to the US and wheat is imported from Syria, US, and Canada.

The Suez Canal is incredibly important to Egypt's economy, providing \$8 million/day revenue with 45 ships crossing per day and each ship pays \$100,000/ship to cross the canal. The only thing that cannot go through is nuclear waste. Recently a French ship was

## Our Egypt Adventure - February, 2006

turned back for trying to do this. The total income from the Suez Canal is \$5 Billion per year and \$8 million per year from tourism. The most important job is in the travel/tourism business. The second most important job is the oil business and then import/export business. There are 10 million palm trees in Egypt and they provide a good business in dates.



We stopped at a rest stop and had some really interesting Egyptian pancakes. It was sort of like making pizza dough where they throw it up in the air, only this was much thinner and covered with sweet sugar.

I just noticed something about the Egyptian money-on the front of the bills there are modern day scenes, like mosques, etc. and on the back of the bills are ancient Egyptian scenes like Abu Simbel and Ramses II.

Surprisingly, along the desert road there are several beautiful mosques with tall minarets and lot and lots of billboards. We passed an area of small villas, one of very few areas in Egypt that has single family villa homes. I guess that farming is a pretty good business to be in.

As we came back into **Cairo** Mohammed told us that they are going to be building a new Cairo Museum on 200 acres of land with 5 stories instead of the current 2 story building on 6 acres. It will take 5 years to be built. Once it is complete, then they will finally be able to display most of the antiquities that they have stored in the basements.



We noticed that the scaffolding on buildings is all made out of wood and tied together with ropes. OSHA would never approve! There seem to be many unfinished houses and Mohammed said that this has to do with the culture...the people don't care about how the house looks on the outside as long as the inside is finished and pretty. Also, the families always have a chance to help out their kids when they marry and can't afford a place of their own. They just add on an extra floor for the kids. The culture is very strong about the families staying together. A son always walks one step behind his father. We also saw some mud brick homes that were very primitive. Some farmers



## Our Egypt Adventure - February, 2006

keep the old tradition of living in mud brick huts instead of regular buildings and some live in villas. We see many buildings in the city that look unfinished, but they are all inhabited.

Some trivia from Mohammed...There are no more Egyptian ibis here, they all moved to Florida. There are white egrets here. He said that camels first came from Nebraska City, Nebraska. (Now this one I took with a grain of salt!!) The Tourist Police, Antiquity Police, and Traffic Police don't like each other and never work in harmony. KFC and Pizza Hut are directly across from the Sphinx. (This is actually true!)



We stopped at a carpet factory along the way for a very interesting demonstration by the children who work here. Some of us, like Liz Doyle, even got



the chance to try our hand at carpet weaving. The carpets were very beautiful, but also very expensive.

One of the very interesting things I observed was the big dark knot on the forehead of the gentleman who gave us our lecture. It seems that this is caused by many, many years of aggressive



praying by Muslims. Bowing your head to the floor 5 times a day for each day of your life can cause a callous on your forehead.



Just outside the carpet factory we saw our first camel and obviously we were all excited, so some of us had our picture taken with him.



More trivia...On the fields of Sakkara palm trees are painted white so that drivers don't run off the roads. Camel meat is very delicious-it is cooked very slowly over a small fire. The Arabic word for "cheers" sounds like "visahita". We tried this phrase out quite a few times!



We finally arrived back at our **Cairo Sheraton Hotel and Towers** and checked in. We are on our own for dinner tonight. Six of us walked down the street to a wonderful Swiss restaurant called

## Our Egypt Adventure - February, 2006

Le Chalet. We virtually had the restaurant to ourselves. The waiters were all very friendly and the food was excellent. We had a full meal with appetizers, salad, entrée, and dessert as well as drinks and the price was very reasonable. We felt safe walking the main streets at night as far as muggings go, but not so safe trying to cross the busy streets since the traffic was still pretty crazy even very late at night.



**Tuesday, February 28<sup>th</sup>**-Half of our group leaves for their trip back to the states today. Our half started out after an excellent breakfast for our next big adventure. Today is a very beautiful day with no sand storms. We are traveling to the only remaining one of the 7 wonders of the ancient world—[the Pyramids of Giza](#). Surprisingly, the great pyramids are located right in Cairo and can easily be seen from the streets.

On the way, Mohammed gave a brief history lesson of burials. Early graves, even the royal graves were merely a hole in the ground around 5 feet deep and there were no mummies. This was during the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> dynasty. During the 3<sup>rd</sup> dynasty were the great pyramids. The very first pyramid built was the [Step Pyramid of Djoser](#) built in [Sakkara](#), formally called [Memphis](#), around 2800BC. The great



pyramids of [Cheops](#) (Khufu) and [Chephren](#) (Khafre), and [Menkaure](#) (Mycerinus) were built on the plains of Giza later. The problem with pyramids for burials of the kings was that grave robbers could easily see them. During the second half of the middle kingdom burials of royalty were done in the Valley of the Kings on the west bank of the Nile. Houses (symbolized as life) were on the east of the Nile. Graves (symbolized as afterlife) were on the west bank. Graves had to be on the west bank and also higher than the flood plain. Pyramids had 5 rules of construction: 1.They were used for graves only-no temple worship areas. 2. They were always 4 sided buildings. 3. They had no foundations. 4. They were solid inside. 5. They were individual burial places.

## Our Egypt Adventure - February, 2006

Labor to construct the pyramids was from both public and private sectors-public sector was people of Egypt and private sector was rich non-Egyptian families who provided workers. The workers were divided into groups based on their skills. 1. Some workers cut the stone blocks from the western side of the Nile. These were very skillful workers who were able to carve the 2 ½ to 20 ton blocks of solid granite (once again with no real tools other than copper and bronze and before the invention of the wheel). 2. The second group transported the blocks to the solid land. 3. The third group laid out the site, and were basically the world's first surveyors. These were very skillful workers. The base of the Cheops pyramid is 754 feet on each side and is virtually level, only off by a few inches. It covers 13 acres. 4. The 4<sup>th</sup> group hauled the blocks and put them into place on the pyramids.



This was very precise work as each block weighed between 2 ½ to 20 tons each and the placement of the blocks is so perfect that you cannot even slide a credit card in between them. The second line must be one block shorter all around than the first line and there is a maximum 15 degree slope.



The great pyramid of **Cheops** is 480 feet high. For construction, ramps were built spiraling up to the top. Any spaces between the blocks were filled with polished limestone. The entire pyramid was built of limestone and granite. The interior temperature never changes from 22 degrees C.

(Only 150 people per day are allowed inside Cheops and you must be there by 6:00am to have a chance to go inside.) Current theory is that the pyramids were not actually built by slave labor, but by paid labor. King Cheops was a smart man. He told farmers to work for him when they couldn't farm due to flooding of the Nile. He was considered as a god by his people, so the people wanted to work for him and build this great burial place to assist their god to the afterlife. This way, their god would take care of them and assure them a place in the afterlife. The main burial chamber was carved inside the pyramid, but Cheops changed his mind and wanted to be buried in the heart of the pyramid, so the workers put in his



## Our Egypt Adventure - February, 2006



sarcophagus first and then finished the pyramid. There are 12 pyramids in Giza. A “Queen Chamber” made for offerings to the King/God was recently found by Zahi Hawass, the Secretary General of the Supreme Council of Antiquities.

It took 20 years of work to move 2,500,000 blocks of limestone, each weighing an average of 2 ½ tons of weight to make the great Pyramid of Cheops. The entrance to the tomb is on the eastern side of the Nile overlooking the valley.

So far there have been 108 pyramids discovered in Egypt, all with plain inside walls except 6 in Sakkara. Those 6 pyramids have words inscribed inside them called the Text of Pyramids, which are made up

of 700 hymns and prayers. During the Old Kingdom they were called Texts of Tombs and in the New Kingdom these were called Book of the Dead.

**Chephren** was the son of Cheops. His pyramid is 450 feet high. It sometimes looks higher than Cheops because the



base is higher. It was originally paved all around with blocks of limestone to give it a totally smooth shiny white exterior, but most of that limestone has been carved away for other purposes and only the top still has the limestone sheath. It was possible to go inside of Chephren's



pyramid and Eddie decided to pay for that trip. I figured with my bad back and bad knees, I wouldn't be able to do it. He said that you walked down a steep corridor that was only 3 feet high and 3 feet wide with two way traffic so that you had to stay bent down the whole way. Then it leveled off before going up again. Then the corridor went uphill until you came to the burial chamber where the sarcophagus would have been. There was absolutely nothing to see. No beautiful carvings or tomb paintings like in Valley of the Kings. The only thing on the wall was graffiti on the wall from Belzoni in the

# Our Egypt Adventure - February, 2006

1800s, the first person to open the tomb in modern times. Not for anyone with claustrophobia!

The third pyramid was for **Menkaure** and it has pink granite blocks for part of it. There are also 3 smaller pyramids for Queens, the remains of various mortuary temples, and the solar boat museum.



The whole experience of being at the pyramids and getting to climb up a little onto them to fully understand their vastness was awe inspiring!



We spent a while walking around them and exploring and then we were taken up to the hilltop for our camel ride. This was lots of fun, but a little scary at first.

Some of our group wanted to ride double. I thought that was a mistake. And Dennis fell off his camel as it was getting up and got scraped up, hurt his back, and



broke his camera. I was brave and got my very own camel named Lauren. Eddie's camel was named Lawrence of Arabia. We took a walk on the hill above the pyramids and got some pretty cool pictures from there.



From here we drove down to see the Sphinx, the oldest statue with the



face of man and body of an animal. This used to be part of a stone quarry millions of years old. The Sphinx was carved in 2650 BC. It is 240 feet long and 65 feet high and is carved from one solid piece of



limestone. It is believed that the workers gave it the face of King

Chephren. It was quite an impressive site from any angle, especially with the pyramids in the background. It is missing most of the nose and the fragments are in the Egyptian and British Museums. The theory is that Napoleon and his troops shot off the nose



## Our Egypt Adventure - February, 2006

when they used it as target practice around 1799 AD. It was also used as target practice by the Turks when they invaded Egypt.

And sure enough, just as Mohammed said, there is a KFC and Pizza Hut directly across the street from this great statue. What a travesty!



After seeing this wonderful site, we started our trip to Sakkara and Memphis. We stopped along the road for a very nice lunch where we



had a chance to relax and share our experiences at the pyramids and the camel rides.



After lunch, we got back on the bus and continued our drive over to **Sakkara and Memphis**. Memphis was the first capital of Egypt during the Old Dynasty. It was built by King Menes around 3,100 BC on the west side of the Nile to protect his city from attacks by Bedouins. King Menes was the first pharaoh to wear the crown of upper and lower Egypt and he built his city at the exact site where the delta met the valley. Memphis became a great city and was the important cultural, commercial, and cult center for the God Ptah (the creator of the gods and the world). The temple of Ptah and all of the other temples and buildings were built out of mud brick and were long ago destroyed. Memphis has many schools of art. There were water buffalos (a sort of pink color) from the Delta.

Memphis was originally called the City of White Wall. (Ineb-Hedj) The name we use today derives from the Pyramid of Pepi I at Sakkara, which is Mennufer (the good place), or the Coptic Menfe. Memphis is the Greek translation which came after Alexander the Great. The city originally had many fine temples, palaces, and gardens, but today there are only some scattered ruins and some statues.

## Our Egypt Adventure - February, 2006

The most impressive statues still seen in Memphis are located in the small town of Mit Rahina. Here we find the Alabaster Sphinx and the massive fallen statue, The Colossus of Ramese II. The [Alabaster Sphinx](#) was carved in honor of an unknown Pharaoh during the 18<sup>th</sup> dynasty between 1700 and 1400 BC. The facial features suggest it was in honor of either Hatshepsut or Amenhotep III. It is 26 feet long and 13 feet tall and weighs around 90 tons.



It may have stood outside the Temple of Ptah along with the Colossus of Ramses II. It spent many years lying on its side in water, which is why it has corroded over the ages. The sphinx is sometimes called the Calcite Sphinx. Calcite is an opaque white stone that is often called alabaster. The statue has the beard curled up which means that it was carved after the king's death.



We next saw the fallen [Colossus of Ramses II](#). The size of that statue was huge! It was placed inside a small museum with a balcony where you could look down on it to fully appreciate its size. The statue's eyes had no detail which means that



they were carved after the king's death. This symbolized that the pharaoh was looking at the afterlife. There was a large cartouche carved on the shoulder as well as on his belt with the name of Ramses II.



Our next stop was at [Sakkara](#), home of the [Step Pyramid of Djoser](#). It is believed that the Step Pyramid was created by Imhotep, who was called Doctor, Sage, Architect, Astronomer, and High Priest. During an excavation in 1924-1926, a pedestal of a statue of Djoser was found. The Step Pyramid is the



## Our Egypt Adventure - February, 2006

oldest known of Egypt's pyramids. It was built for King Djoser of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Dynasty. On the pyramid, most of the outer casing is gone and in some places the core masonry has disappeared. There were obviously different stages of construction. The original structure was an underground burial chamber. It was a rare square chamber. Most mastabas were rectangular. The royal tomb is 28 meters underground with a vertical shaft leading to it. The entrance was sealed with a 3 ton piece of granite. The face of the mastaba was limestone and apparently intended to be the finishing touches of the building. It was then enlarged all around with 10 feet of additional

limestone and then again with an extension of the eastern side to make it rectangular in shape. Again it was enlarged and a two-tiered structure was made. After the third stage was finished, the process to make it a true pyramid was begun. Over 200,000 tons of stone was used to make the additional two tiers that went above the existing two-tiered structure. It was then made into the six-tiered pyramid which is here today. The mortuary temple is just north of the pyramid and is in total ruin. On the southern wall across the Great Court are carved cobra heads or uraei. The cobra head (uraei) was often seen on crowns of the pharaohs. Many of the chambers inside the tomb are said to be lined with blue tile, but we were not allowed to enter the tomb. Mary Ann had fun hiding in the pillars of the Mortuary Temple.



Next we went to a [Papyrus Factory](#), where we were given an interesting demonstration on how papyrus is made. The papyrus plant is cut, peeled, sliced into strips, and soaked in water for 6 days. Then the pieces are weaved between cloths and put into the press for another 6 days to dry and then they are painted. We got to shop to our hearts content and purchase many beautiful papyrus paintings. Afterwards we went back to the Mondy Bazaar to pick up our gold cartouches.





## Our Egypt Adventure - February, 2006

We went back to our hotel to repack our bags for the trip home. Obviously this was not an easy task as I had purchased many new



items. Somehow, I managed to get everything into the suitcases. We went back to the Z Bar for our last happy hour with the gang.



We got cleaned up and joined Joe & Mary Ann for a late dinner in the Tea Garden in the hotel.



There was another big Egyptian wedding, our 3<sup>rd</sup> one here at the Sheraton. This was lots of fun with the loud music and dancing.



We stayed up all night and roamed the hotel to take one last picture with the cool statues there. We checked out of our room at midnight and got on the bus at 12:30 am for our trip to the airport. The plane left Cairo at 3:50 am and we had a good flight with a movie about horse racing. Our second flight from

Frankfurt to Miami took 10 hours and we had 2 meals and 2 movies- "Legend of Zorro" and "Elizabethtown". We had a very smooth entry through customs in Miami and then boarded our bus for the drive back to Marco Island.

Thinking back on this trip, I am in awe of how much I saw and how much I learned. At times it was a very tough trip and some of the people had trouble doing all the walking through the sites and the many bus rides, but Bob Marks did such a wonderful job of organizing this trip and, all in all, it was great!

# Our Egypt Adventure - February, 2006

I think back on the trip and realize that one thing which made it so great was our guide, Mohammed. He was so very charming, and so knowledgeable, a wonderful guide.



**Compiled and edited by  
Cindy Crane  
August, 2006**



# Our Egypt Adventure - February, 2006

## APPENDIX I

Some Arabic which I learned from him:

“Isha Allah”= “God willing”...they say this a lot!

“La shukran”= “no thank you”-an invaluable phrase in Egypt

“Ya la”= “let’s go” -he used this to get us all to move a little quicker.

“Mesalama”= “goodbye”

“Visahita” =“cheers”



Some of my favorite colloquialisms from Mohammed:

“Pinky granite”

“Palmy trees”

“Say hello to your bags.”

“I like to washing the dishes.”

“Our crocodiles are not your alligators.”

“Could you imagine?”

“Don’t rush your luck.”

“No way, Jose!”

“Cannot be found in the Lonely Planet book.”

“A to Z”.

“Big disaster!”

“Everything begins in Egypt!”

“Feeling the touch of the place...”

“That much destroyed”

“Tourists.....”

“There was something wrong in the horns...”

# Our Egypt Adventure - February, 2006

## APPENDIX II MORE PICTURES



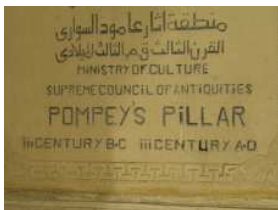
# Our Egypt Adventure - February, 2006



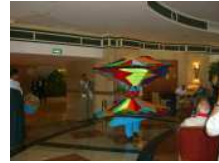
# Our Egypt Adventure - February, 2006



# Our Egypt Adventure - February, 2006



# Our Egypt Adventure - February, 2006





# Our Egypt Adventure - February, 2006

