



Egypt & Jordan

December 2010

Cairo

12/15/10: It was a windy but exciting day. We had a tasty breakfast at the Mena House Hotel. Then, we visited the Giza Pyramids. We even climbed inside the Great Pyramid of Cheops, but his sarcophagus was empty. We also explored his mother's pyramid. Next, we rode a camel and saw the Sphinx.

At the Pharaoh's Boat museum, we learned that people had Cheops' tomb ready but sadly not the boat to lead him to the dark underworld. First, they needed to cut the wood into many puzzle pieces. Then they put it together as they hammered and sawed! It was discovered mostly by accident because they were digging for construction.

Afterwards, we bought two papyrus at the Papyrus Institute. It was the Last Judgment and the Tree of Life. Ancient Egyptians didn't write on paper, instead they wrote on papyrus made with papyrus reeds from the Nile. First, they strip the reed and use the skin for baskets. They squeeze the water from the middle. Then, they soak it in water for 6 days. The longer they leave it in the water, the darker it gets. They wove it like cloth and put it in a squeezing machine for 6 days. Finally, they have very strong papyrus paper.

After our buffet lunch, we observed students weaving oriental carpets. Subsequently, we saw Zoser's Step Pyramid in Sakkara, which was designed by Imhotep. Last, we traveled to Memphis that had giant Ramses II statues. We also took pictures of an alabaster sphinx.





12/16/10: Today we toured Cairo City, starting at the Egyptian Museum. That's where we saw rooms lined with treasures from ancient times and King Tut's mask, which is 11kg of solid gold! There were also statues to Ramses, Hatshepsut and Akhenaten.

We entered an exhibit with mummies of dead pharaohs. Ancient Egyptians made mummies because their god Osiris' brother Set drowned him in a coffin and chopped him into pieces. Isis brought him back to life by wrapping him in linen, and he became the first mummy. First to make a mummy, they took out the brain from the nose, wrapped the heart in linen and put it back because they would need it for weighing on judgment day. They removed the liver, intestine, stomach, and lungs to store them in canopic jars. The body was soaked in oil, salts, and spices, to preserve it for 20 days. Then, the body was wrapped in linen and soaked in oil for 20 more days. A funeral procession was held as they took the body to the tomb.

Afterwards, we visited the Citadel of Saladin, which had 2 big mosques. 75% of people in Egypt are Muslim. I don't know why but the school children all wanted to take pictures with me. It was crazy. Next we visited a Christian Coptic Church, built right on top a Roman fortress. Finally, we explored the crowded El-Khalili Market, where merchants were peddling colorful clothes, miniature pyramids, papyrus, jewelry, and other souvenirs.



Luxor



12/17/10: We flew from Cairo to Luxor, Egypt. When we arrived, we drove straight to the impressive Karnak Temple, which was built to worship the god Amen Ra. At the entrance, there was a ram avenue. The rams were like sphinx, just with ram heads. They lead up to a huge wall called a pylon. Inside the pylon, there was a big open court with many statues. Then, we walked into the hypostyle hall with 134 towering, decorated columns. Unfortunately, the original ceiling was lost in an earthquake. There were still 5 standing obelisks and also a lucky scarab beetle. Luxor Temple was like a miniature Karnak Temple. In fact, they were previously connected by the ram avenue. In the past, the temple was used as an early Christian church. A mosque was built directly on top of it.



12/18/10: We spent the day on west bank of the Nile, where ancient Egyptians buried their dead. We started at the Valley of Kings, where many pharaohs were found. There were 63 tombs, but only 14 were opened to the public. We climbed inside 3 that were colorful. One was very steep. We didn't enter Tutankhamen's tomb because it was empty. The tomb, discovered by Howard Carter in 1922, had many mazes, dead ends, and 12 steps down a dark stairway. He found couches that looked like animals and hard ivory headrests for pillows.

Next, we visited the Hatshepsut Temple. The sun was scorching. There were columns, long flights of stairs, and Osiris statues. Hatshepsut had become pharaoh in place of her stepson Tutmos III. So when he grew up and became pharaoh, he erased Hatshepsut's name, and destroyed her temple. However, the temple was restored by Polish scientists. Finally, we made a quick stop at Colossi of Memnon to take a photo of the two statues. What a long, sweaty day!



12/19/10: We went on a 3 hour drive to Abydos, the Temple of Osiris. There were 7 sanctuaries for the gods: Horus, Amen, Isis, Ptah, Ra, Seti and Osiris. Osiris had no false door, because this is his home temple. Seti was a pharaoh, but he was worshipped as a god. The temple was built by Seti and his son Ramses II. Why was there a helicopter and submarine on the hieroglyphics? We played with light around the columns.

Next we drove to Dandara, the Temple of Hathor, wife of Horus, goddess of love. The capitals of the columns were topped with the head of Hathor. There was a joyful Bes statue and Nut on the ceiling with 3 seasons: flood, plant, and harvest. The famous Cleopatra carving is located at the rear. This newer temple was constructed during the Greek and Roman era.



12/22/10: We rode a horse carriage to Edfu, the Temple of Horus, which was similar Dandara. There were statues of falcons at the entrance because Horus is the falcon god. The pylon had pictures of Horus, his wife Hathor, and the pharaoh. It was built by several pharaohs, all named Ptolemy. There were two boats carved in the open hall. Way inside the temple, there was a small replica of a cedar boat, but the original took 31 men to carry! Edfu means "battle ground." At this battle, Horus fought his uncle Set to avenge his father Osiris' death. This is one of the best-preserved temples in all of Egypt.

In the afternoon, we visited Kom Ombo, which means "hill of business", because people from north and south Egypt came to trade here. It is a double temple for Horus and his evil brother Sobek, the crocodile god. They fought over the temple daily. So Ma-at divided it in half. Noble women used it as a hospital to give birth. There were carvings of the ancient birth tools, calendar of festivals, and Ptolemy who married both Cleopatra II and III, mother and daughter. Afterwards, we had fun making silly poses for photographs.



Aswan



12/23/10: We took a motorboat to Philae, the Temple of Isis with carvings of vultures always protecting overhead. It was originally located on an island that was flooded when the Aswan Dam was built. So, it had to be moved to higher ground, stone by stone. There was a side temple to Hathor with images of Bes, the dwarf cat god of entertainment. Hadrian, a Roman emperor, helped build parts of the temple. The Greeks and Romans built many Egyptian temples so the people could be conquered easily.

12/24/10: We disembarked the Nile cruise ship and checked into Aswan Iberotel. The room wasn't ready, so we took a motorboat to the peaceful Aswan Botanical Garden, which had lemon, orange, coconut, and other tropical trees. At the Nubian Village, I played with a baby crocodile on my head, and a Nubian girl painted a flower henna tattoo on my wrist. We bought 2 pots and a rababa instrument, which looks like a violin. We walked around the colorful village then had stew at a Nubian restaurant for lunch. In the evening, Santa visited our hotel room before our Christmas dinner.

12/25/10: On Christmas Day, we went to the Nubian Museum. The Nubians live in southern Egypt and Sudan. The people have dark skin and believe they are directly related to Ancient Egyptians. They have no Greek, Roman, or Arabian ancestors. We saw mummies, monuments, and other artifacts that were flooded by the Nile when the Aswan Dam was constructed.



12/26/10: We woke up early at 3:00am to catch a flight to Abu Simbel. It was still dark when we boarded the plane. There were two temples: one for Ramses II and another for his wife Nefertari. The Temple of Ramses had 4 colossal statues of Ramses with his wife and daughters at his feet. Inside were carvings of the Battle of Khadesh against the Hittites. The inner sanctuary had statues of four gods. The Temple of Nefertari on the side had six smaller statues of the queen and Ramses with an ankh key in the door. Both temples were moved out of the lake onto a man-made mountain.



12/27/10: We visited the Unfinished Obelisk in the only granite quarry in all of Egypt. It was abandoned because it had a crack. Ancient Egyptians considered it bad luck, because they believed that obelisks represented sunrays, which should not be cracked or broken. Next we went to the Aswan High Dam, which was built on the Nile River in the 1960s by Egypt's President Nasser. It created an enormous lake named Lake Nasser! The dam helped control the flooding of the Nile and generate electricity. However, not everyone appreciated it. It flooded people homes and monuments to the south, was expensive, and there were crocodiles. At the end of the day, we went felucca sailing on the Nile River to Elephantine Island, a temple ruin. We climbed down their Nile-o-meter. I added sandstone, granite, basalt, alabaster marble, and amethyst to my rock collection!



Jordan

12/31/10: Last night, we arrived in Amman, Jordan and enjoyed local meal of mouth-watering grilled meats and crisp salads. Today, on the way to Petra, we visited the Mastaba Orthodox Church to view the famous 15m x 6m mosaic map made of 2 million natural colored stones. The ancient map of the Holy Land showed Jerusalem, Bethlehem, Jordan River, Dead Sea, Egypt, and the Nile marked where Bible stories took place. Next, we passed through Mt Nebo, where God showed Moses the Promised Land before Moses died. We toured a mosaic shop, watched a mosaic making demonstration, and saw many tree mosaics. Finally, we visited the ruins of Shurak Castle built during the Medieval Crusades.

1/1/11: On New Years Day, we explored Petra, a whole city carved out of stone. It was the capital of Nabataean Empire in the 6th century BC. We passed through the Siq, which was a 1-mile long gorge that led to the village. At the end, there was the Treasury, a well-preserved tomb, which had Greek and Roman columns, Assyrian lions, and an Egyptian Isis. It was named because of a legend claiming that the urn had treasures. In the village, there were caves, column ruins, an amphitheater, and a few more ornate but eroded tombs. It was an exhausting walk so we rode a bumpy horse carriage on the way out. Other visitors rode donkeys and camels too.

