

ALUMNI ADVENTURES

Explore the world with Carleton College

18 April, 2011

Dear Participants in "Odyssey of Wonders: Ancient and Modern Egypt,"

Even today, nearly a year before our time together along the Nile, I write to share with you my wife, Teresa's, and my excitement as we contemplate the joys of what truly will be the trip of a lifetime. The itinerary we have planned together with Robin Weber '04, and her team at JOURNEYS International, is the result of our decades of experience studying and traveling in Egypt. We have worked to make the most of our time at those sites - ancient, medieval, and contemporary -- from which we will learn the most.

Because of my own long service as a Trustee of the American University in Cairo, I have been in constant touch, often daily, with many in Egypt over recent months and weeks. I just spoke with a man who toured Egypt with his son and who reported that the legendary friendliness and openness of Egyptians continues today and that the sole real difference he noted in the New Egypt (as already those throughout the country have begun to label the Egypt of February, 2011, and beyond) was that many sites were less crowded and thus more enjoyable.

Early in our time together in Egypt, we travel from the Cairo Marriott, which is on an island in the middle of the Nile, to the Great Pyramids at Giza and thence thirty miles south to Memphis and Saqqara. Saqqara is among my favorite three or four places on earth. Here, King Djoser built the step pyramid, as designed by his vizier Imhotep, who is credited with the invention not only of the pyramid shape, but also of writing and mathematics, and who was later deified. Here, the Old Kingdom pharaoh Snefru built at least two, and probably three pyramids. Nearby Memphis was the first capital of a united Egypt, more than five thousand years ago. And here, but for our lively conversations, silence reigns throughout the day.

Next day, en route to our flight to Luxor, we stop at the magically beautiful new campus of The American University (AUC) in Egypt. AUC faculty members and others will help us to understand what's behind, and what is the future of, "the New Egypt." A quick trip from AUC to the Cairo Airport, then our flight to Upper Egypt, where we board the SS Misr ("Misr" is Arabic for "Egypt"), our home for the days ahead. We sail first south, up river, stopping at ancient sites along the Nile during our journey to Aswan, where the Nile is fast, clear, and filled with islands, including one whose lovely gardens we will tour. Days on the ship follow as we return and sail north, down river, toward Luxor, Karnak, and Thebes, the heart of New Kingdom Egypt. The temples in Karnak, especially in the early morning and evening, are moving beyond ready description; and it is not at all difficult to imagine that Queen Hatshepsut or the pharaoh Thutmose III is there behind the next pillar. Across the Nile, in the west where all Egyptian burials took place, we'll walk down and through the tombs of Ramses VI and Thutankamon and others. And on the Nile we'll have the chance to sail in the romantic falucas (small sailboats) which ply these waters. Returning to Cairo, we'll come to understand the role Cairo played in the development of Islam and we'll see, in Tahrir Square, the site of the transforming events of early 2011, and the Egyptian Museum, where we will be among the final visitors before the museum is re-located out to Giza (and you do want to see the Egyptian Museum in its current state and location).

Ours will be a throughout fascinating tour of Egypt from before there were dynasties (say 3500 BC) to the New Egypt emerging today. Teresa and I are eager for you to join us for what I confidently predict will be memorable day after memorable day.

Sincerely,

Rob Oden