Dear “Odyssey of Wonders” Participants,

I am just brief hours back from a lengthy stay in Cairo and hence still feeling the effects — hardly salutary! — of two long flights. Still, so excited am I by everything I saw and sensed in Cairo that I want this moment to write a letter to all who have signed up for and all who are considering joining our “Odyssey of Wonders: Ancient and Modern Egypt” adventure this coming March.

You should know, at the outset, that my wife, Teresa, and I so love Egypt that I would delight in describing the country whatever the conditions were in this lovely nation. Still, and candidly, I will admit that I departed for Cairo wondering what would be the effects of the Egyptian Revolution of last winter. The very good news is that much in Cairo remains much as before. My many friends in Cairo do complain that they know someone who knows someone who’s heard from someone else that a car was stolen somewhere in the city where this would have been unlikely pre-Revolution; but first-hand evidence of any security issues neither I nor anyone else can produce. To be sure, crime can and does occur everywhere. Still, Egypt’s long tradition of possessing among the world’s lowest rates of crime does continue.

I walked about central Cairo most days I was in the city and, as so often before, marveled at the matchless sights and sounds of this ancient city. Crossing the Nile on one of the bridges near my hotel (just off Tahrir Square in central Cairo), I walked most of the way to the Marriott Hotel (great pool and gardens) on Zamalek Island where we will stay while in Cairo, and I saw families in abundance enjoying the same walk. Several days I devoted many hours to wandering around the Egyptian Museum, where our local guide, Lilian Naguib, will lead us during one of the final days of our Odyssey of Wonders. The Egyptian Museum, endearingly a bit of a mess (more Pharaonic treasures than can readily be believed but many not displayed in the best of conditions), remains a joy. The Museum, as always, was crowded, but less so than I have witnessed so often before and hence the more enjoyable. The room housing the treasures of King Tutankamun, for example, customarily requires standing in line for thirty minutes before one can enter; today, the wait was perhaps five minutes and I’ve never felt freer than during my visits this month to move very slowly through the room, dallying without guilt before one glorious piece of art after another.

Traffic in Cairo is perhaps very slightly diminished, but it remains sufficiently daunting that we will all be very happy to be floating on the Nile for much of our Odyssey. I took a taxi from central Cairo to meet our guide Lilian, and she is simply wonderful. Like guides everywhere, the quality of the mandated local guides in Egypt varies; and we are very, very fortunate to have Lilian as our local expert. I also met with a tour manager from JOURNEYS International and found him equally eager to ensure that our Egyptian adventure is planned with great care and will be carried out as flawlessly as possible.

Though it remains nearly six months until we all meet in Egypt, and even still jet lagged as I am, I would board a plane to return to Cairo tomorrow if my calendar allowed. We are very pleased to have the chance to share our enthusiasm for Egypt, ancient and modern, with each one of you. Just before spring arrives, we will all arrive in Egypt (the perfect time of year to visit the country) and begin our much anticipated time together. If Carleton is, as I have long insisted, “Learning in the Company of Friends,” just so will be our Odyssey of Wonders.

Sincerely,

Rob Oden