

Cairo Time



Special Interest Articles:

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Pyramids of Giza



From just the right angle a picture can be taken of the pyramids in Giza that would appear you are out in a remote desert of the Sahara on a caravan of camels about to go tomb raiding. Well the truth is the pyramids have city built around them and the sand they are on is littered with garbage that no one seems to care about removing. The only empty land is that that lies between the pyramids within the complex. And if you are lucky you will be able to spend a minute or two without someone trying to sale you something you do not need.

Within Giza there are 9 pyramids of which three are of the large variety

with Khufu or also know as Cheops being the largest at over 450 feet tall. They used over 10 billion pounds of stone to construct Khufu into the shape that the people 3800 years ago believe to resemble sun rays. They build over 100 pyramids in Egypt and most all of them along the Nile valley and the most amazing thing is that they all face true north with extreme accuracy.

Today walking on Giza plateau you are in awe of the pure mass and size of these structures that remained the highest manmade objects for over 3000 years until the Eiffel tower was built. The outside surfaces of them are very rough as the

smooth limestone plaster they had applied to make the pyramids has worn away from time and erosion.

My first thought was how fast can I climb to the top but a better question would be how fast can you dodge bullets as there are police everywhere with machine guns. They have a small area maybe 30 feet up the pyramid on the north side that tourist can climb up and take photos but the rest is off limits. This is probably the best with busloads upon busloads of tourist arriving by the minute they would need an onsite hospital to deal with all the people rolling down the pyramids and getting hurt if people were allowed to climb at their own leisure.



Into the Tomb



Maddie and Lisa climbing down into the queens chamber.

Everyone has their perfect idea of a trip to Egypt whether it is exploring temples, drifting down the Nile on a felucca sail boat or a camel ride to a pyramid. Well for Maddie it was to go into the hidden chambers of a pyramid. And for the brief time while we were inside the tomb I saw the biggest smiles you can imagine.

The entrance was at the base of the Queens pyramid and is located on the north side. A police officer was guarding the door and with a little greasing of the wheels (payoff) we were into the tomb. The passageway went down about 100 feet at a steep angle and a makeshift ladder was built so no one would fall. The passage was square and about 4 feet by 4 feet so you had to hunch the

entire way in. Once at the bottom the passage opened up into a good size room that was where the queen's sarcophagus would be with her mummified body and all valuable possessions.

I was expecting the ceiling in the main chamber to be vaulted because of the architecture at the time and the weight of the entire pyramid bearing

down but to my surprise it was flat. There were no seems so they must have cut a large stone to cover the entire ceiling. In the Valley of the Kings on the West bank of Luxor you will find that all the tombs were decorated with bright drawings of hieroglyphics on all the walls but in the tomb under the pyramid the walls were rough and bare.



Smells Nice

The markets of Cairo are massive with a vast and



impressive range of shops that carry anything and everything for just that special price. Some of the more interesting of these are the perfume dealers that have hundreds of casks and bottles full of scented oils. The scents range from simple aromas like vanilla to the more complex floral oils. The shop keepers are like

modern day mad scientists putting together some kind of crazy concoction at your request.

The problem with the system is that they put the final product into a poorly made container that will eventually leak the oily, smelly perfume all over your luggage.

Old Cairo



Also known as Khan El - Khalili, Old Cairo is truly like going back in time to a spice and trade market several hundred years ago. The term they use for the market is a Bazaar and that is not far from the truth. You will see all kinds of things here from the crazy to the cool with a mixture of local supplies to tourist curios.

We started by buying a beautiful Karan written in Arabic so there is no way we will ever be able to read it. Next we ventured to the main square in front of a mosque the size of a skyscraper and had a delicious lunch of local treats. The main rule is not to drink the water and make sure all the food is properly cooked. Our food was actually very

good except for the harem of cats living underneath our table. While sitting there you see all the Muslim men and women coming out of the mosque, separate entrances of course. You have to wonder why some women have only a scarf while others are all wrapped in black with only a slot for their eyes to peek through



– I guess this is a topic for another day.

As we ventured on after lunch we darted in and out of small alleyways and backstreets in what seemed like an endless labyrinth of shops. One of the shops you see a lot of are the ones that sell the Shisha Pipes or more commonly known as Hookah pipes. They are anywhere from 1 foot to 4 feet tall and are used to smoke the flavored tobacco. If you want to smoke the pipes then there are coffee houses all over where you go and hang out to smoke.

The drawback to the bazaar is all the storekeepers hustling you everywhere trying to get you to buy something. And remember as a rule of thumb that if they tell you it costs 100 you will be able to buy it for 25 if you are a good negotiator.



“The girls walking down a street looking for neat stuff in Old Cairo.”



“Executive condos with a Nile view somewhere in Cairo.”

Cairo behind the Scenes

I made the decision to wake up and take a long walk into the real Cairo away from the western hotels and tourist shopping areas. It was to my surprise of the level of poverty I would find just within steps of the five star hotels.

Egypt is a land of over 80 million people and 95% of them live along the Nile valley. Cairo is by far the largest city with over 17 million people living in the metropolitan area. The average salary for someone in Egypt is around 1500 LE or \$300 per month. Because of an employment rate of over 30% most couples only have one person working while the other stays at home.

One of the most noticeable things that will catch your eye is that every little mud hut or condo will have a satellite dish on top of the roof in fact some of the place appear that the dish is worth more than the house. They also have no

regard or for that matter respect for keeping things clean with trash lining the street and even along the river banks.

For me the most troubling was the dead horses, donkeys and dogs that you would find in alleys.



“Chicken and rice please.”

Local Cuisine

In Egypt if you want to eat Egyptian food then you go to an oriental restaurant and do not ask me why because they are a long ways from the orient. If

you want oriental food then you go to a Chinese restaurant.

The food here is simple and usually very good

made up of a protein such as kabob or chicken and two staples - rice and flat bread. This will be accompanied by several small dishes of sides like cucumber and tomato salad, eggplant, special sauce and Baba Ganoush. The Baba Ganoush is like salsa in a Mexican restaurant and it is made up of ground eggplant mixed with spices.

