

My Short Time with Egypt

Egypt has been a place of wonder and mystery for centuries. People from every age, land and era have been drawn to the wonders that are held in the vast sands of time surrounding ancient cities from the upper to lower regions of the Nile. In lower Egypt, comfortably situated at the mouth of the Nile Delta lays Cairo. The land that surrounds the area was once home to the bustling metropolis of Memphis and a sought-after land by powerful rulers and ancient travelers alike. Now a crowded city of almost 8 million with another 10 million in the surrounding area, Cairo is the capitol of Egypt and the tenth largest urban area in the world. Here, I found friends holding hands, children laughing in the streets and more historical wonders than were capable of being explored.

Upon entering Cairo, you will notice that driving lanes are obsolete and road signs are more for your consideration. However wide the road is, that's how many cars fit on it. With this being said, taxis are relatively inexpensive, a great way to meet locals and get information and a lifesaver if you don't want to pay damages on a rental car. I found a hotel on the river, checked in and headed to the Nile to put my toes in the water. The crocodiles, you ask? They're all tidied away upstream behind the Aswan Dam. Cairo does a fine job of keeping the riverbank open for tourism so once there you're sure to find a small restaurant right on the water with lamb kabobs, fresh pita and cold drinks.

The Tahrir Square, meaning “liberation” but also known as the “martyr square,” is located in close proximity to the Embaba Bridge, which you will have to cross when visiting the Pyramids and the Sphinx. The square itself, though surrounded by rich history, comes intact with a unique history of its own. Host to revolutions and political movements since the early 1900's, Tahrir square has seen everything from peaceful demonstrations of the people to resignations and ousting's of Egyptian presidents. Surrounded by the Egyptian Museum and the House of Folklore with the mosque tower in the background issuing the daily azans, or calls to prayer, this hub for Cairo life comes together in a neat round about, sprouting off shoots in each direction to a new and exciting part of Egypt.

I left the square and took a taxi across the Embaba bridge. I actually found a guide outside of the Egyptian Museum who offered to show me around for about \$40 American dollars, which I accepted. They say to be careful about being robbed by people posing as guides, and certainly I could have explored on my own, but having a local who speaks the language and knows the area turned out to be well worth the money... and he was nice. Not only did we get to visit the Great Pyramids, but, for free, he arranged that we walk down into the Queen's pyramids, which were tight quarters, to say the least. I rode a camel through the desert and around Pyramid of Giza to look of the city of Cairo and realize how much has grown up around this untouched feat of human strength and intellect.

The advantages to having a guide also took me to one of the best, out of the way restaurants down an old dirt road where a tiny old woman covered in ash still sat on the ground in her hut making the best, clay-oven pitas I've ever tasted. I'm sure that he received a commission, but we visited a local art store where I learned to craft hand-made Papyrus and see the culture portrayed through history and art. Then we visited an oils store in the middle of a small road, seemingly in a neighborhood with short clay buildings and wooden windows, where I purchased some of the base

fragrances that they export to major perfume brands across the world.

Regardless of how much time you have to spend in Egypt, I was able to turn three and a half days into a grand tour of the city, a drive out to the temple of Hatshepsut and the Colossi of Memni and a train ride to Luxor, home to Karnak Temple and an outstanding view of the Valley of the Kings, nestled neatly in the desert directly across the Nile. If planned properly, and with a little determination, you can see a great deal of the history that embodies Egypt in only a short amount of time. The cost is cheap, and the people are beautiful, kind and compassionate. To fall in love with a place like Egypt is easy to do, it's returning home without exploring each and every grain of sand that proves more difficult as the days pass.