



The Great Sphinx of Giza

# In the Land of THE PHARAONHS

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These are the voyages of one intrepid couple. Our nine-day mission: to explore strange new places. To seek out new cultures and an old civilisation. To boldly go where few Bangladeshis have gone before! Queue music!

My wife and I have wanted to visit Egypt for a long time. This winter an opportunity finally presented itself. We had saved up some money and we asked ourselves, "Given an option where would we want to go?" The answer was obvious—Egypt. It is said to be the cradle of civilisation, the land of ancient monuments, steeped in history, folklore, mystery, fantasy and conspiracy theories. Egypt is now super affordable. Their currency is now at its lowest in the last 10 years. In 2010 1 USD would convert to 4 Egyptian Pounds, whereas now it is at 17.88 Egyptian Pounds per USD. Hotel prices and food costs are at an all-time low. The best time to go to Egypt is from October till May, when the weather is cool and comfortable. We flew Gulf airlines, which takes about 10 hours to reach Cairo from Dhaka—five and half hours from Dhaka to Bahrain, then two hours from Bahrain to Cairo, with a two-hour stopover in between. The flight back is faster because you fly with the wind. We went for a nine-day trip. We booked with an Egyptian tour operator in Cairo called Explore Holidays Plus. They sent us all the travel documents to help us get our travel visas. I found their prices very reasonable—at least 40 to 50 percent cheaper than our local travel agents, that too with full five-star accommodation and better tour plans. I chose them after considerable research; they are highly reviewed in Trip Advisor and other renowned travel websites and blogs. My



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personal opinion? They are an unbelievably helpful and professional tour operator. And the guides take excellent photos, which was a serious bonus for us! They were with us throughout the trip, every step of the way. The weather in Egypt, from November to January, is quite chilly for Bangladeshis and a good jacket is a must. However, the sun is a constant companion (it's part desert after all), so those who want to avoid it should think twice. Sunglasses, scarves and a good sun-hat are highly recommended.

**Day 1, Cairo:** We landed in Cairo at around 1 pm and completed all formalities at the airport without any hassle. We then made our way to the hotel in downtown Cairo beside the famous Tahrir Square, overlooking the great Nile river. On the way there, our tour guide, Mo Sobhy (they write Mohammed as "Mo" unlike our "Md"), gave us a brief overview of Egypt and its history.

**Day 2, the Pyramids of Giza:** The Pyramids loomed though the fog as we drove closer and closer to the area. Even from such a distance they were massive, dominating the entire horizon of our vision. When we finally reached, the Great Pyramid of Khufu was blocking out the sun! All I could think was that my life is a lie! All our lives we have been led to believe that the present is the most advanced that humans have ever been; but there I was, standing in front of monuments which "present day" scientists have yet to figure out! I really have no words to explain the feeling of seeing the Pyramids in person and being able to touch the most ancient wonder of the world—50 stories high, four-sided

triangular objects, sitting there quietly for approximately 4,500 years. Our guide told us the history and asked us to imagine ourselves 4,500 years ago, when the pyramids must have been bright with their white limestone covering and the tips made of solid gold. "If seeing them now makes you feel like this, imagine how people back then must have felt when they saw these gigantic glowing beacons from hundreds and thousands of miles away across the desert," said our guide.

After we had our fair share of the Pyramids (along with camel rides and a thousand photos), we went to the Cairo Museum, which houses a lot of the world's oldest antiquities, including most of the belongings of Tutankhamun, found intact in his tomb.

**Day 3, Alexandria:** We travelled to Alexandria, the north-most city of Egypt by the Mediterranean Sea. The city gets its name from Alexander the Great. In contrast to Cairo and Giza, Alexandria feels greener with long roads hugging the Mediterranean coastline. This city has architecture from most of the world's ancient super powers. Alexandria had libraries before many of the world's people had pants! We visited the Citadel by the Bay, built where the great lighthouse was originally. We had lunch by the sea and visited some of the old Roman and Greek catacombs.

**Day 4, The Citadel of Cairo and Mosque of Mohammad Ali:** Early in the morning we started for the Mosque of Mohammad Ali, built from 1830-48 (brand new by Egyptian standards!). It sits atop a hill in Cairo and watches over the city like a guardian.

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Temple of Horus at Edfu