

From Edfu to Aswan



PHOTOS BY DAVE GIBSON

Final days of an epic journey

Above, left; A pallet and a blanket is all this man has to call home. Above, right; A fisherman rows to the spot he will drop his net on the Nile River. Bottom, left; Thumbs up at Edfu Temple.

Dave Gibson Egypt

Docked in Edfu, we settled in for a good night's slumber. There were three mosques within two blocks of us so it was impossible to miss the call to prayer. Five times a day from 4:30 in the morning until nine o'clock in the evening Koran scriptures are intoned over loudspeakers so that the faithful and the disbelievers get the message. It occurred to me that maybe the reason Muslim countries seem to be always at war is because they aren't getting enough sleep.

Horse-drawn carriages awaited us on the street for a short ride to Edfu Temple dedicated to sky god Horus. Built in 232 through 57 B.C. during the Ptolemaic Kingdom, the structure was buried under twelve meters of sand until its excavation. During our visit, some people donned masks as sand strafed the temple walls. In falcon form as the sky god, Horus' right eye is said to represent the Sun and his left eye the Moon.

A gauntlet of vendors offering maps and trinkets awaited us as we exited the grounds. At other sites, while walking beside me, I would say with a smile, "No thank you...No thank you...No thank you... No thank you...No shukran (thank you)...No shukran...No shukran," and a fourth sterner and more pointed "No shukran" which usually rid me of them. This time the vendor actually had something I wanted – a traditional Egyptian cotton shirt. He was asking 900 Egyptian Pounds (50 U.S. Dollars) which I felt was too high.

Switching our negotiations to dollars, I offered him fifteen if he had one that fit. Running back to his booth to grab a larger size and returning, we continued haggling as I walked toward the buggy. "Forty dollars," he countered. "Fifteen," I said. "Thirty dollars. Fifteen." By the look on his face and tone of his voice, I'm sure he thought he had me when he presented what seemed to be his best price of twenty-two dollars as I sat in the carriage about to return to our ship. Again, I came back with fifteen. Budgeting at the last second knowing that the shirt would cost me twice as much back home if I could even find one, with our driver

at the reins, I made what would be my final bid of twenty dollars and it was accepted.

Taking tea and biscuits from the sundeck of the S.S. Sudan, we chugged along while absorbing the scenery. An eagle grabbed a fish from the river and herons dotted the shoreline. Fishermen worked their nets from wooden rowboats. A man led his camels down the bank for a drink and donkeys grazed verdant islands of grass in the river. Puzzled for a time wondering how the donkeys got there, we deduced farmers had towed them by rope from their boats. Nubian ruins appeared on both sides of the river as we approached Aswan at sunset.

Rafted to another riverboat, we walked our gangplank to board, continued through the beam of their ship, and took its gangplank to shore. Within easy walking distance, perched atop a bluff overlooking the Nile River, the Temple of Kom Ombo was aglow in lights. Divided in two equal parts, the left side's engravings honor sky god Horus and the right side, fertility god Sobek. Along with rulers of the heavens Horus and Hathor, Sobek was considered the other god of creation. Represented in the human body with a crocodile's head, he was thought to have formed the Nile with his sweat. Crocodile mummies may be viewed at the museum next door.

The next day, my dad and I lounged onboard with nothing on our schedule until 2:30 p.m. Catering to tourists, lateen-rigged sailboats called feluccas crisscrossed the river. As our final full day on the S.S. Sudan and the last attraction of the cruise, we departed by minivan for the Temple of Isis at Philae. Goddess of the Moon, she was the protector of women, children, and healer of the sick. Fate itself was thought to be controlled by Isis. When a dam was built in 1902, the entire complex was flooded. In 1970 it temporarily reemerged after the completion of the Aswan Dam upriver and forming of Lake Nasser. The Egyptian government and UNESCO teamed to pump the water from between the low dam and the high dam so that the temple could be moved to higher ground

Continued on page 17



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Trip of a lifetime with my dad

Above, left; The Temple of Philae's only access is by water taxi. Above, right; Boats moored by the river's edge. Upper middle, right; A tuk-tuk transports a crop in the morning. Lower middle, right; Bob Gibson relaxes on the sundeck of the S.S. Sudan. Bottom, right; A tourist and a local at the Temple of Philae.

Continued from page 16

on nearby Agilka Island. A project that took ten years to complete, fifty thousand stone blocks and pillars were dismantled, marked, transported, and reassembled where it stands today. Water taxis provide access to the site.

Not all stories have a happy ending: We were told by our travel agent at Original Travel that our CDC vaccination cards showing two shots and a booster were all we needed to enter Jordan and Egypt, but a \$40 negative test would be required 72 hours before returning to the U.S. While our cards got us into Jordan, we found out that they weren't good enough for the second leg of our journey to Egypt without a negative COVID test taken within 48 hours of departure. We tested at the Amman airport, barely catching our flight to Cairo. Little did we know then, bad scheduling by our travel agent and confusion in regard to coronavirus testing would plague us later on.

Following a day of R & R spent by the pool at the Movenpick Aswan on Elephantine Island, we boarded our Egyptian Air flight from Aswan to Cairo the next morning. Arriving 15 minutes late, it took another 15 minutes to deboard the aircraft and forty-five minutes to collect our bags. By the time we reached the international terminal, Jordanian Air's check-in desk for our connecting flight to Amman had closed as it was by then one hour before takeoff. Thus, it was from that point forward our "Original Travel Cairo Hell" began. Having scheduled our connection too tight, with any foresight and due diligence, the agent should have flown us into Cairo the day before.

We sat in the airport another eight hours in hopes of catching the next flight out on standby at 8 p.m. When there were no seats available, we purchased two more tickets scheduled for 6:30 a.m. the next morning. Exhausted and frustrated

by the snafu, it took another two hours to arrive at our lodging. On the way to the hotel, we stopped at a hole in the wall to be tested for coronavirus since the test we took in Aswan was supposedly no longer valid for U.S. entry due to our delay. Being led around by our airport greeter who spoke little English, I thought we were within the 72-hour requirement, but he informed me it is 60 hours. A quick 15-minute test administered under unsanitary conditions resulted in my dad receiving a false positive. Another test at that time wasn't allowed, effectively leaving us stuck in Egypt. If we had known that we were being tested again that evening, we never would have purchased airline tickets for the next day until receiving negative results.

In all, three nights passed calling the emergency number of our travel agent and in contact with our Cairo concierge. Hard to understand over the phone, at one point he suggested that we take a taxi in a land where we don't speak the language to a testing site. That proposed test would have to be administered the next day since it was a weekend and everywhere was closed. We finally were able to arrange through our agent in England a test at the hotel. With negative results in hand, the Red Sea parted and we bought tickets to Chicago via Amman for the third time. Moses didn't have this much trouble getting out of Egypt. Excluding \$360 for unforeseen COVID tests, we shelled out an additional \$4,000 in airline tickets and another \$600 for hotel rooms. Upon receiving a refund weeks later from the travel agency, we were out \$2,300.

Even considering the three days of torture we endured in Cairo, being able to spend two weeks with my dad on such an epic adventure where so many spectacular locations were seen and experienced, I would without hesitation do it again.

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