

# BibleLands Egypt Challenge

organised by

DIFFERENT TRAVEL

## About Egypt



Egypt conjures up images of windswept sandy deserts, pyramids, the dramatic River Nile, ancient tombs and pharaoh Kings. Egypt is a place of historical, religious and social significance and is a place steeped in mystery and intrigue. Part of North East Africa, Egypt covers 1,010,000 square kilometres and shares borders with Libya, Sudan, the Gaza Strip, Israel, the Mediterranean Sea, and the Red Sea. The population of Egypt is approximately 82 million people, making it the most populated country in Africa and the Middle East. The

majority of these people live along the River Nile, the only place where arable land for agriculture can be found.

The major tourist attractions in Egypt include the pyramids at Giza, the Sphinx, Abu Simbel temples, the Valley of the Kings, the River Nile, St Katherine's Monastery, the Sahara desert, Mount Sinai, diving in the Mediterranean Sea, the Suez Canal, the Aswan Dam and much more. Egypt has so much to offer.

## Sharm el Sheikh

Sharm el Sheikh is located at the Southern tip of the Sinai Peninsula. It is known as the City of Peace because of the large number of peace conferences that have been held there. Sharm el Sheikh used to be a fairly unimportant fishing port, but has since developed and is a major tourist draw with excellent facilities and activities including visiting Mount Sinai, St Katherine's Monastery and diving in the stunning coral filled Red Sea.



## Mount Sinai



Mount Sinai, also known as Mount Horeb, Mount Musa, Gebel Musa or Jabal Musa (Moses' Mountain), is the name of a mountain in the Sinai Peninsula. It is 2285m high and the tallest peak in the Sinai Peninsula. The Monastery of St. Katherine can be found at the foot of the adjacent Mount Katherine (alt. 1260m).

There are two principal routes to the summit of Mount Sinai. The longer and shallower route, *Siket El Bashait*, takes about 2.5 hours on foot, though camels can be used. The steeper, more direct route (*Siket Sayidna Musa*) is up the 3,750 "steps of penitence" in the ravine behind the monastery. The summit of the mountain has a mosque and a Greek Orthodox chapel neither of which are open to the public. The chapel supposedly encloses the rock from which God made the Tablets of the Law. At the summit also is "Moses' cave" where Moses waited to receive the Ten Commandments.

## St Katherine's Monastery

Saint Katherine's Monastery can be found at the mouth of an inaccessible gorge at the foot of Mount Sinai. It is one of the oldest continuously functioning Christian monasteries in the world.



The monastery is Greek Orthodox and is a UNESCO World Heritage Site. The monastery was built between 527 and 565, enclosing the Chapel of the Burning Bush, the site where Moses is supposed to have seen the burning bush; the living bush on the grounds is purportedly the original.

The monastery library preserves the second largest collection of codices and manuscripts in the world, outnumbered only by the Vatican Library. It also houses irreplaceable works of art: mosaics, the best collection of early icons in the world, liturgical objects, chalices, and church buildings.

## The Itinerary

### **Day 1 (Sat): LONDON / CAIRO / SHARM EL SHEIK:**

Fly from London to Sharm el Sheikh via Cairo and transfer to your hotel for an overnight stay.

### **Day 2 (Sun): SHARM EL SHEIK / ST KATHERINE'S**

Transfer to the village of St Katherine's, situated in the Sinai Peninsula, close to the monastery. This afternoon take a gentle trek in the surrounding desert landscape.

### **Days 3 & 4 (Mon & Tue): ST KATHERINE'S**

Spend two days exploring the area on foot, including a visit to St Katherine's Monastery, the world's oldest functioning Christian monastery. Climb the dramatic Moses Mountain (2285m) in time for sunset, returning after sunset to the hotel.

### **Day 5 (Wed): ST KATHERINE'S /CAIRO**

Return to Sharm el Sheik and take a short flight to Cairo. On arrival, pay an introductory visit to the project where you will be working for the next few days.

### **Days 6, 7 & 8 (Thu, Fri, Sat): CAIRO**

Spend three days undertaking a range of tasks at the BibleLands project.

### **Day 9 (Sun): CAIRO**

A day to explore the sights of Cairo. Visit the pyramids and the world-famous Cairo museum on a full-day guided tour.

### **Day 10 (Mon): CAIRO / LONDON**

Return flight to London.

## BEFORE YOU GO: A – Z OF INFORMATION ON EGYPT

**A is for Arrival.** British Citizens entering Egypt require a visa. You should contact the Egyptian Embassy for up to date information about visa applications <http://www.egyptianconsulate.co.uk/Visas.php> . Visas are available on arrival at the airport to British Citizens. (Correct at time of writing).

**B is for Begging.** Egypt is a relatively financially poor country and with that comes the fact that people (children and adults) will beg. This is obviously a very personal issue, but it is impossible to personally sort out all of Egypt's financial problems. Giving things to beggars encourages them to rely on tourists for income and prevents them seeking financial security. It also makes life difficult for future tourists who are then seen as an income. If you must give things to beggars, do so discreetly and properly. If you want to give to a child, give that item to the parents instead.

**C is for Communications.** The country code from UK to Egypt is +20. The country has 3 main mobile phone networks with coverage across a fair amount of the country and so, with the exception of remote areas, it is quite likely that your mobile phone will work. Remember your charger and to switch to the international roaming option with your phone provider. Internet and e-mail and cyber cafes have sprung up in major towns and cities and can cost around £1 / hour or less.

**C is also for Clothing.** Being a predominantly Muslim country, your clothing should be conservative, neat and respectful (this applies to males and females alike.) Shorts, short skirts, sleeveless tops and tight t-shirts should **not** be worn as they may cause offence. If you wish to wear a t-shirt, ensure it is loose-fitting and the sleeves come down to at least the elbows. Long (calf-length) loose skirts and Capri pants are suitable in light (but not see-through) fabrics. Loose linen or cotton trousers and shirts will be comfortable and respectful. Women should bring a pashmina or large scarf which can be used to cover up when entering religious buildings, particularly mosques.

**D is for Day pack.** Throughout the trek your day pack is your responsibility. What's more, you will carry your own so please don't make it too heavy. We recommend a 25-30 litre pack. You should carry some essentials with you including sun hat, sun cream, water bottle (at least a litre), tissues and packed lunch. You may also wish to bring your camera.

**D is also for Dehydration.** Day time temperatures can rise to 30C so it is wise to consume at least 2l of bottled water to avoid the risk of dehydration. Oral rehydration salts are also essential to keep with you at all times to replace lost salts from sweating.

**D is also for Dietary Requirements.** The majority of special diets, such as vegetarian, vegan, gluten-free, etc, can be catered for. Please ensure that you notify us of any dietary requirements at the time of booking or as soon as possible.

**D is also for Discount.** Nomad Travel and Outdoor has been kind enough to offer you a **10% discount** redeemable against any equipment or vaccinations required for this trip. All you need to do is visit their website, <http://www.nomadtravel.co.uk> and select the items you wish to buy. When you get to the checkout, enter the following discount code for 10% off: DTC1000.

**E is for Electricity.** Two round pin (European) plug sockets are standard in Egypt, so please take an appropriate adaptor. Electricity is 220V/50Hz so please ensure your electronics are suitable for this voltage.

**E is also for Etiquette.** Always endeavour to be polite and respectful and take your lead from the local people around you in terms of what is acceptable or not. If you show respect then it will be reciprocated.

Egyptians are very conservative with regards to women and matters of sexuality. Away from the Westernised Sinai and Red Sea beaches you should dress conservatively and smartly. When entering buildings of religious significance it is important to cover shoulder to ankle. A shawl or pashmina can come in very handy for these situations.

If you're male, don't be surprised if another male holds your hand or forearm or engages in some form of bodily contact - there's no taboo against men holding hands and unlike in the West, this behaviour is not associated with homosexuality. In general, Egyptians are a lot more comfortable with less personal space than are most Westerners; however, pairs of Westerners should be cautious in engaging in same-sex contact. Normal contact is quite acceptable (shaking hands, pats on the shoulder, etc.) but same-sex Westerners holding hands could be mistaken as a sign of homosexuality, which is quite taboo in Egypt.

**E is also for Expenses.** Laundry, drinks, personal spending money, personal equipment, souvenirs and tips are not included.

**F is for Food.** Egyptian food is varied and healthy.

**Mezze**, which is vegetable based and bursting with a variety of flavours and colours, is a fantastic way to start a meal. Alternatively forgo the main course and order a selection of mezze instead.

**Bread** is a staple of the Egyptian diet. It is made with wholemeal and plain flour and cooked over an open flame. It is often torn up and used to wrap around morsels of meat.

**Salads** are simple, with fresh vegetables tossed in olive oil and vinegar. Tabbouleh (bulgur wheat, parsley and tomato with lemon and garlic) is a common salad to find. Ensure that salad is washed with purified water.

**Vegetables and soups** are fresh and delicious. Lentils are frequently used, along with corn, cucumbers and tomatoes being common ingredients.

**Meats** such as kofta and kebab are two popular dishes in Egypt. Lamb is the most commonly found meat, as is chicken, and pigeon which is extremely popular.

**Seafood** is fresh and delicious. You can find squid, mullet, sea bass, bluefish, sole and shrimp on menus, freshly caught from the coast.

**Desserts** in Egypt are very sweet. *Mahalabiya* is a blancmange like concoction made with ground rice, milk, sugar and orange or rose water topped with pistachios and almonds. Rice pudding and *omm ali* (layers of pastry filled with nuts and raisins soaked with cream and milk and baked in the oven) is also popular. Baklava is probably the most popular pastry, which is made from light filo pastry drenched in honey and syrup.

**H is for Haggling.** When shopping for gifts in market places where there are no price tags on items it is expected that you will haggle. The first price can be up to 10 times more than the value of the item, but remember that you should pay what you think is a good price for the item, not trying to get the price as low as possible.

**H is for Health.** You are advised to seek medical advice before travelling and to ensure that all appropriate vaccinations are up to date. For further information contact your GP at least 8 weeks before departure. If you wish to get an idea of vaccine requirements before visiting your doctor, please see <http://www.fitfortravel.scot.nhs.uk> .

**I is for Insurance.** Different Travel will do everything possible to ensure a safe and enjoyable trip however certain risks are involved and should be recognised by participants. Therefore travel insurance is a mandatory requirement of joining a Different Travel tour. Travel Insurance is a cost-effective way to protect yourself and your equipment in the event of problems due to cancelled trips, delays, medical problems, baggage loss or damage.

**I is also for Internet.** Internet cafes are plentiful in Egypt and reasonably priced. Wi-Fi is available at coffee shops, McDonald's restaurants and many hotels and hostels.

**L is for Language.** Arabic is the national language and you will win friends quickly by trying a few words, especially in the more remote villages you will be visiting. Here are a few useful phrases & numbers in Arabic.

Hello – Salaam a-lay-kum            (Response) Walay-kum es sa-lam

How are you? – Iz-ay-yak (to a man)  
Iz-zay-yik (to a woman)

I'm fine– kway-yis il-Ham-du lil-lah (to a man)  
kway-yi-sa il-Ham-du lil-lah (to a woman)  
kway-seem il-Ham-du lil-lah (to a group)

Yes – Naam

No – La

Thank you – Shu-kran

Please – man fad-lak/min fad-lik/min fad-lu-kum (to man/woman/group)

Good morning – sa-bah al-khayr (Response) sa-bah an-noor

Good evening – mi-sa al-khayr (Response) mi-sa an-noor

Good night – tis-bah a-la khayr (to a man)  
tis-bah-ee a –la-khayr (to a woman)  
tis-bah-u a-la-khayr (to a group)

(Response) wen-ta bi-khayr (to a man)  
wen-tee bi-khayr (to a woman)  
wen-too bi-khayr (to a group)

Goodbye – ma-as salaama

I don't understand – a-na mish faa-hem

1- waa-hid      2- it-nayn      3- ta-loo-ta      4- ar-ba'a      5- kham-sa      6- sit-ta  
7- sa-ba              8- ta-man-ya      9- ti-sa              10- ash-a-ra

### **M is for Money.**

The local currency is the Egyptian pound (EGP), which is divided into 100 piastres. The currency is often written as LE (short for French *livre égyptienne*) or by using the pound sign £.

The exchange rate for British Pound is: £1 = 8.85 LE. (January 2010)

Banknotes are available in all denominations ranging from 200 pounds to the thoroughly useless 5 piastres, while coins were rather rare until new 50-piastre and 1-pound coins were introduced in the summer of 2006. Counterfeit or obsolete notes are not a major problem, but exchanging pounds outside the country can be difficult. Foreign currencies can be exchanged at exchange offices or banks. Many higher-end hotels price in dollars or Euros and will gladly accept them as payment. American Express, Diners Club, MasterCard and Visa are accepted, but only bigger hotels or restaurants in Cairo and restaurants in tourist areas will accept credit cards as payment. Traveller's checks can be exchanged in any bank, but like all Egyptian bureaucracy, it will take a while. ATMs are ubiquitous in the cities and probably the best option overall.

**P is for Photography.** When taking photographs of the local people, it would be wisest to ask their permission. Taking a photograph of someone without their permission – especially in rural areas can cause offence. After obtaining permission, do not be surprised if a bit of *baksheesh* (payment) is expected.

**R is for Religion.** Muslim (mostly Sunni) 94%, Coptic Christian and other 6%

**S is for Safety.** Pick pocketing is a problem in Egypt's bigger cities, particularly Cairo. Many locals opt not to carry wallets at all, instead keeping their money in a clip in their pocket, and tourists would be wise to adopt this as well.

On the upside, violent crime is rare, and you are highly unlikely to be physically mugged or robbed. If, however, you do find yourself the victim of crime, you may get the support of local pedestrians by shouting "Harami" (Criminal) while chasing the person who robbed you.

Egyptian men will make compliments to women; do not take offence if they do this to you. Men shouldn't be worried, either; if they do this to your partner/daughter, it will be nothing more than a compliment, and won't go any farther than that.

**S is also for Scams.** Travellers often complain about being hassled and attempts at scamming while in Egypt. While irritating, most of this is pretty harmless, like attempting to lure you into a local papyrus or perfume shop. Typically, you will be approached by a person speaking fluent English who will strike up a conversation under social pretences. He (and it will always be a he) will then attempt to get you to come along for a cup of tea or similar at his favourite (most-paying) souvenir shop. This could also happen outside museums etc where the scammer will try to make you believe the "museum is closed" or similar.

Hassling, while never dangerous, could also be annoying, especially in the heavy touristic areas. There is no way to avoid this, but a polite *la shukran* (no thanks) helps a lot. Apart from that, try to take hassling with a smile. If you let yourself be bugged by everyone trying to sell you something, your trip won't be a very happy one.

Potentially more annoying are taxi drivers or others getting a commission fee to lead you to their hotel of choice, of course paying commission fees for each guest they receive. Firmly stand your ground on this. If they insist, just ask to be dropped off at a street or landmark close to the place you are heading to. This scam is especially common among taxi drivers from the airport.

**T is for Tipping.** Tips or *baksheesh* are an integral part of Egyptian culture. You are expected to tip pretty much everybody who does a service for you, and Egyptians will not hesitate to bluntly ask you for *baksheesh*. Keep a stack of small bills handy for tips. Some general guidelines:

**Bathroom attendants:** LE 1

**Guide:** LE 25-30/day

**Hotel bellman:** LE 5 per bag

**Hotel doorman:** LE 10 for services rendered (flagging down taxis etc)

**Restaurants:** In fancier restaurants, a service charge (10-12%) is added to bills, but a 5-10% tip on top of that is common. In fast-food places, tipping is unnecessary.

**Taxi drivers:** 10% on metered fares, but not necessary if you agreed the fare in advance

**Site custodians:** LE 5 if they do something useful, none otherwise

**Tour drivers:** LE 10/day

An exception: if you ask a stranger for directions, tips are not necessary and may even be considered offensive. Also, officials in uniform should not be tipped, even though a good few will ask you. (Paying officials *baksheesh* as bribes, not tips, is another story)

Last but not least, beware that as foreign tourists, you are seen by many as easy money and you should *not* let yourself be pressured into tipping for unnecessary or unrequested "services" like self-appointed tour guides latching on to you.

**W is for Water.** You are advised to drink plenty of bottled water each day (at least 2 litres) and have a supply of re-hydration salts just in case. The climate in Egypt is very dry and you are at serious risk of dehydration if you do not keep your fluid intake high. You should always keep a bottle of water with you and drink even if you don't feel thirsty.

Egyptian tap water is generally safe, although it does sometimes have an odd taste due to the high chlorine content. It is not recommended for regular drinking, especially to very local differences in quality. Bottled mineral waters are widely available. Beware of the old scam, however, whereby vendors re-sell bottled water bottles, having refilled with another (perhaps dubious) source. Always check the seal is unbroken before parting with your money (or drinking from it) and inform the tourist police if you catch anyone doing this.

Be a little wary with fresh fruit juice, as some sellers may mix it with water. Milk should also be treated carefully as it may not be pasteurized. Try only to buy milk from reputable shops. Hot beverages like

