



travelicon

THE NILE



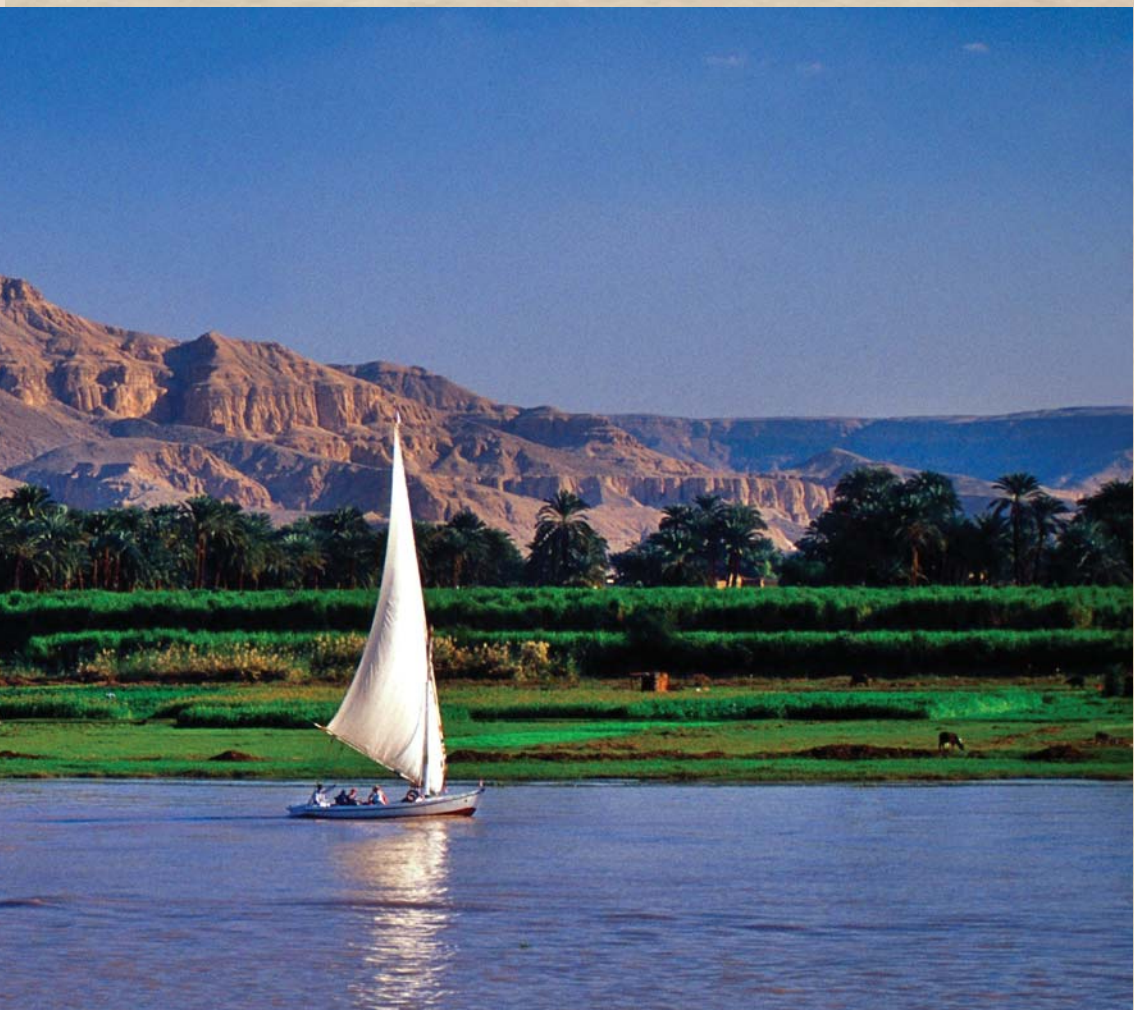
Horus fresco in the Temple of Queen Hatshepsut, Luxor

THE NILE IS AT THE HEART of all 5,000 years of recorded Egyptian history and is easily the most famous river in the world. What makes it so special for me is the tangible link with history that I feel more strongly here than anywhere else. This is most true of the stretch of Nile between Aswan and Luxor, where pharaohs built their imposing temples and tombs. Although you may travel upon the Nile in a modern cruise boat, or beside it in an air-conditioned minibus, your view from the window has changed so little since Pharaonic times: bullocks still plough lush fields watered by the Nile, fields that once belonged to the temples that lie alongside the river, glimpsed through the fronds of palm trees as you approach.

It used to be that a visitor had the choice of a Nile cruise to visit this region, or using Luxor and Aswan as bases from which to explore. However, with the closure of The Old Cataract in Aswan, the only other decent Aswan hotel, the Movenpick, is incredibly oversubscribed. There are

alternatives that suffice for a one-night stay, but we do not recommend staying longer than that, which makes it difficult to visit the southern reaches of the Egyptian Nile without taking a cruise.

Fortunately a cruise can be a wonderful experience: sliding past bucolic scenes whilst watching egrets glide over your wake, in between insightful guided tours of Ancient Egyptian remains. The key to a good cruise is picking the right boat. You want something small (under 60 cabins), that has character, is new or newly refurbished, has an itinerary that avoids most other tour parties, and docks either on a private quay or away from the 6-deep cruisers on the main town quays. In truth, no boat combines all of the above, but there are a handful that have most of these features. You could do much worse than go for the history and clever itinerary of the S/S Sudan, or the Edwardian style and private docking of the M/S Oberoi Philae.



Feluccas on the Nile, Luxor

by **ANDREW HUNT** North Africa & Arabia Programme Manager

There are several key sights that form the heart of all cruise itineraries and the greatest concentration is around Luxor. The Temple of Karnak is vast and best-known for its hypostyle hall, mesmeric rows of truly enormous columns. Across the river is the Theban Necropolis, centred on the renowned Valley of the Kings. The Temple of Hatchepsut is another key spot; I am always struck by the ability of the artists to render Hatchepsut in classic, male, Pharaonic style yet by subtle curves and shaping of the face, ensure you know she was a rare female Pharaoh.

Moving south down the Nile one arrives at Edfu Temple, with its vast pylons and atmospherically lit interior, and then Kom Ombo, where the temple is unusually dedicated to two gods, Sobek the crocodile-god and Haroeris, a falcon-headed god. At Aswan, much of the attraction lies in the scenery, with the Sahara Desert reaching right to the fringe of the Nile, juxtaposed against rounded, elephantine boulders that give the main island its name.

So this deals with the famous sights. But if you have more time and a sense of adventure, there are other places you should visit, less busy but no less interesting. The Nubian Museum in Aswan puts the illustrious Museum of Egyptian Antiquities in Cairo to shame. Well-laid out and well-labelled, it is a pleasure to visit. Up in Luxor, the Tomb of Sennedjem at Deir el-Medina has always stuck in my mind. One of the artisans who worked on Pharaonic tombs in the Valley of the Kings, Sennedjem's tomb is much smaller than theirs, just a vaulted burial chamber barely big enough to stand up in, and a couple of small antechambers. But every surface is brightly and vividly covered in scenes from Sennedjem's life and afterlife. Being completely surrounded by these images depicting tales and beliefs over three thousand years old gives me that amazing sense of connection to the past. It's a past that everyone should experience, and it makes the Nile a true travel icon.

FACT *file*

Summer is the hottest time of year for travel to Egypt and should be avoided by all but the most ardent sun-worshipper. May is not a bad time to travel: low season rates but not quite as hot as the height of summer.

Travelling in spring and autumn is best, although prices are more expensive.

An introductory trip to Egypt with a cruise, time in Cairo, and travelling in May would cost **£1,425 per person**.

A longer trip, with relaxation time, quality accommodation and travelling in high season would cost **£2,700 per person**.

For further information please contact our Egypt specialists on **01993 838 410**.

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M/S Steam Ship Sudan