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Cairo - Aswan - Luxor - Cairo. Including two nights Felucca Nile Cruise, the best of Luxor and Aswan Temples, The Cairo Tour, Bazaar, Pyramids and The Egyptian Museum

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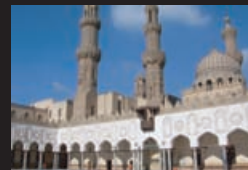
Diving and Beach Lover Packages

Yearly Dahab Christmas Festival Package
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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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Egypt

www.tntmagazine.com/guides



THE GODS AND GODDESSES OF ANCIENT EGYPT

AMON A ram or man with a ram-head, associated with the wind. An important temple was built to honour him at Thebes, where he became known as Amun-Ra, king of the gods.

ANUBIS The jackal-headed god of the dead and embalment. Anubis masks were often worn by priests performing mummification ceremonies.

ATUM The creator god, the first to exist on Earth, rose from the waters of Chaos to create the rest of the gods.

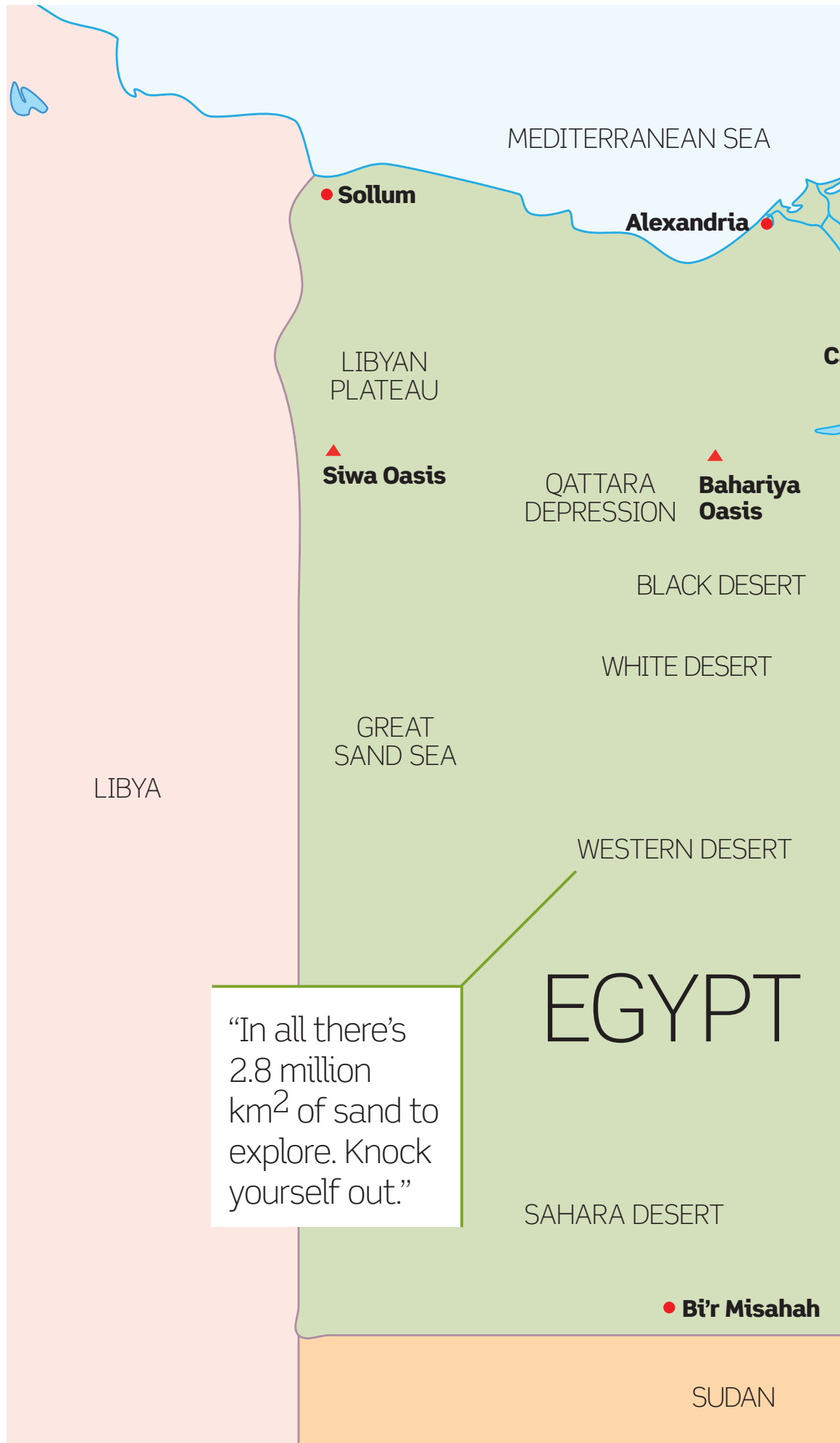
BASTET The cat-headed goddess of protection, a daughter of the sun god Ra, had a temple built at Bubastis.

GEB The god of the Earth, husband and brother of sky goddess Nut and father of Osiris, Isis, Nephthys and Seth.

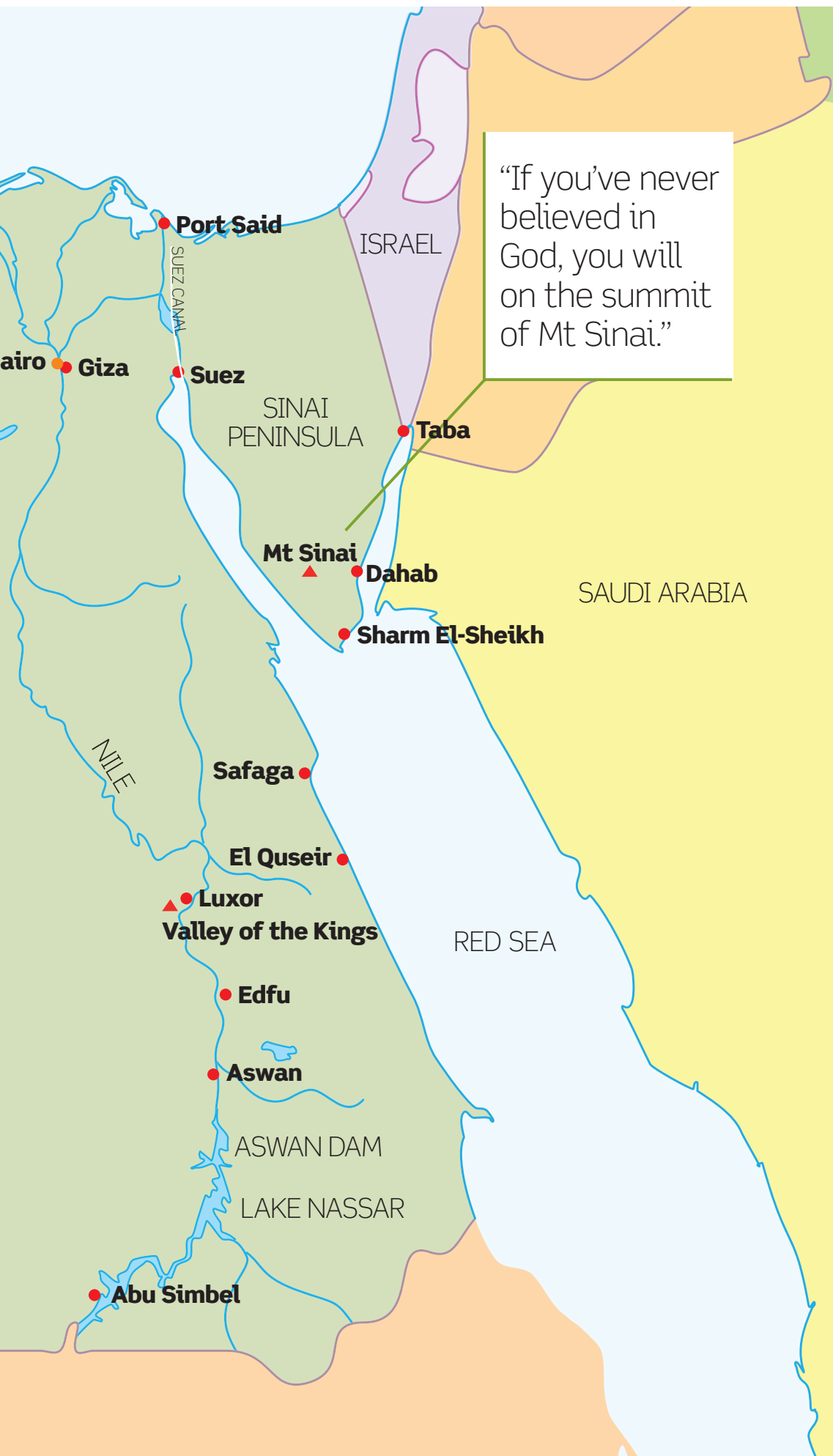
HATHOR Depicted with the ears of a cow, Hathor was the wife of Horus and goddess of love, dance, alcohol and, at Thebes, the dead.

HORUS Each Pharaoh was considered a living incarnation of the falcon-headed sky-god, ruler of day and the world of the living. The Horus temple at Edfu is one of Egypt's best-preserved.

ISIS Sister and consort of Osiris, mother of Horus, powerful protective goddess in her own right. The temple built to Isis at Philae is still standing.



“In all there’s 2.8 million km² of sand to explore. Knock yourself out.”



MA'AT Another daughter of Ra, Ma'at was depicted with a feather on her head and was the goddess of truth, justice, balance and harmony.

OSIRIS Ruler of the underworld, Osiris is portrayed as a mummified man and was worshipped at temples in Abydos and Philae.

NUT Mother of the sun, moon and heavenly bodies.

KHONSU The moon god was the son of Amon and Mut. The main temple at Karnak is dedicated to him.

RA The sun god of Heliopolis, seen as a man with a falcon's head, Ra was the most important of all the gods. The ancient Egyptians believed he was swallowed every night by sky goddess Nut and was reborn every morning after a journey through the underworld.

SEKHMET The goddess of war and sickness, Sekhmet was depicted with the head of a lioness.

SETH Son of Geb and Nut, Seth was god of chaos, the desert and foreign lands and murdered his brother Osiris. With a long curving beak-like snout, quite what Seth is depicted as is still anyone's guess.

SOBEK A crocodile crowned with a feathered headdress, Sobek protected the King and was associated with the Nile — live crocodiles were kept in pools at temples to honour him.

THOTH Usually depicted with the head of an ibis (although worshipped as a baboon in Hermopolis), Thoth was the god of writing and knowledge, and was believed by the ancient Egyptians to have given them the gift of hieroglyphics.



Abu Simbel



Why go to Egypt?

Summing up a country shaped by thousands of years of dominant civilisations, fallen empires and desert sand is no easy task.

Egypt is easily one of the most fascinating nations on the planet.

Whether you find yourself dodging traffic in the bustling streets of Cairo, standing dwarfed in the shadow of ancient Abu Simbel or diving into the rich blue waters of the wonderful and diverse Red Sea, this is a country

that showcases the best of north Africa and is often explored as part of a Middle Eastern trip.

Egypt's ancient culture and history has been the subject of scripture, scientific reasoning and some pretty bad depictions on celluloid. It evokes images of pyramids, ancient rulers and, sadly, the film *Stargate*.

To come here is to experience all that travel has to offer: it can scare the bejesus out of you or leave you awed and inspired.

REGION BY REGION

CAIRO

Where to start? The nation's capital can easily prove the highlight of any trip here, but surrounded by its 17 million inhabitants can leave you a bedraggled wreck. Traffic is mad, the streets are dirty and the exhaust fumes thick. But the culture is just as rich and the friendly nature of locals will leave you glad you came.

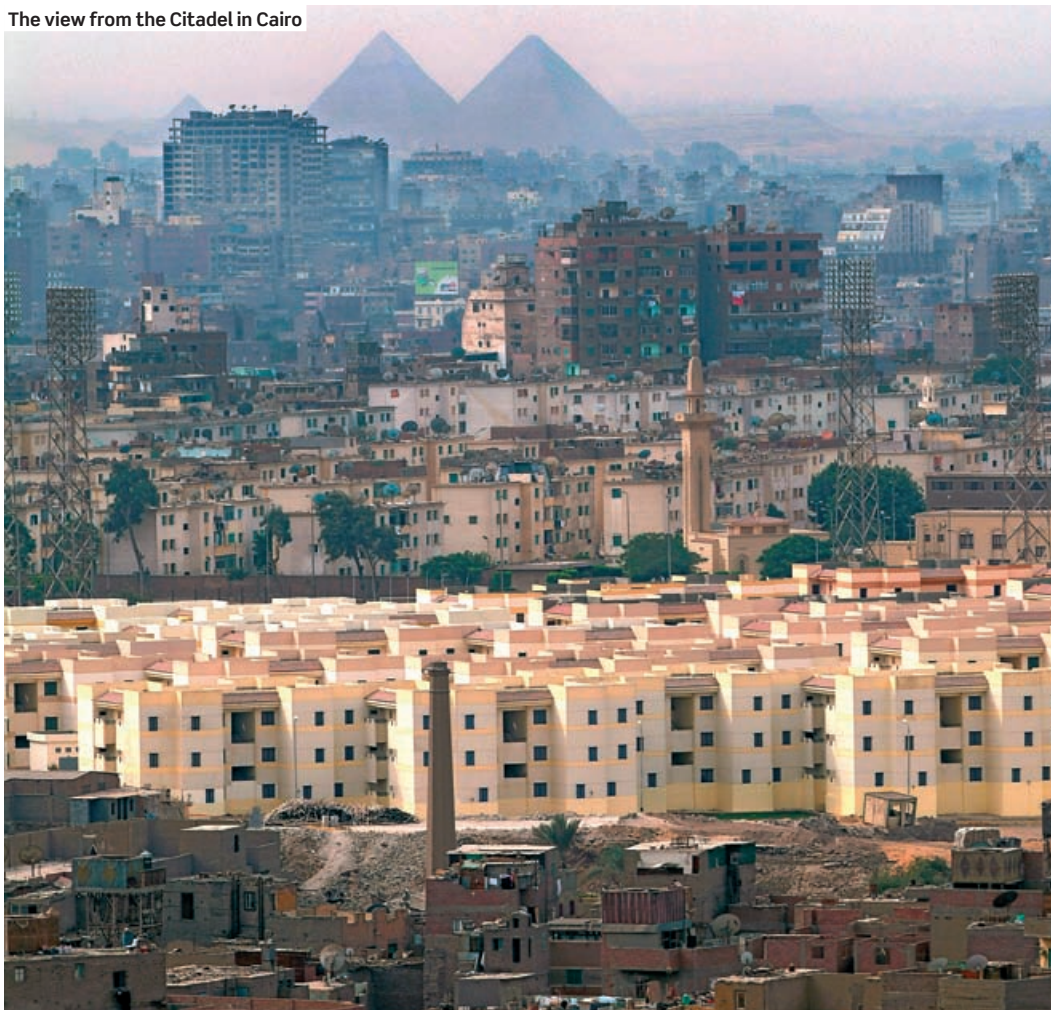
TOP FIVE

- 1 The Pyramids are minutes away. Get off your arse.
- 2 The Egyptian Museum has more ancient history, art and scarab beetles than you can point a stick at.
- 3 Coptic Cairo is the city's Christian heart; its quaint alleyways, markets and churches have been largely preserved.
- 4 The Khan el-Khalili Bazaar is arguably the most famous market in the Middle East. Haggling is a skill best put to the test here.
- 5 The Citadel is worth the ball-tearing cab journey there — if only for the views of the city.



The Sphinx

The view from the Citadel in Cairo



Cairo

DID YOU KNOW?

- » More than 77 million people call Egypt home.
- » Egypt is predominantly Islamic (90%) with Christians making up the remainder.
- » Arabic is the official language, but English and French are widely spoken.



The view from Mt Sinai at sunrise



ALEXANDRIA

It's a town easily missed by tourists who've done the Egyptian circuit and run out of steam during the final leg. The master plan of Alexander the Great, it is the country's only city by the sea, thus making it an ideal place to kick back on a quiet beach and quietly gloat that nobody else could possibly have it this good.

TOP FIVE

- 1 The Mediterranean beaches.
- 2 The Roman Amphitheatre. Discovered in the early '60s, this relic was almost reduced to the foundations of a new building.
- 3 Qaitbey Fort. It may look like a glorified light house but it's also one of the most eye-catching attractions on the edge of the main port.
- 4 The Catacombs of Kom al-Shoqafa. Thousands of folk once lay here entombed.
- 5 Pompeii's Pillar is 25m high and worth craning your neck for.

SINAI

It's no wonder Moses and his tribe got lost here for 40 years. Whether you're traversing the desert by camel, dining with Bedouins or diving into the Red Sea, the peninsula is worth every dusty moment of the arduous drive there.

TOP FIVE

- 1 The Red Sea. Dive, dive, dive.
- 2 Dahab. Kick back and relax.
- 3 Mt Sinai. Climb the mountain of Biblical proportions and pay far too much for a hot chocolate when you reach the summit.
- 4 Camel trek. Wander off with desert Bedouins and be quietly thankful for modern dentistry.
- 5 Sharm El Sheikh. You were going to extend your credit limit anyway.



Sailing the Nile

THE NILE VALLEY

If there was one region that encapsulates Egypt's ancient history, culture and contemporary lifestyle, it has to be the Nile Valley. Civilisations have risen and fallen along the banks of the Nile, and what remains is a valley teeming with a history unrivalled anywhere in the world.

TOP FIVE

- 1 The River Nile. You deserve to drench yourself in the longest river in the world.
- 2 Temple of Karnak. Truly amazing.
- 3 Valley of the Kings. Pharaohs' tombs were tucked away here to prevent looting. Lucky us tourists found them first ...
- 4 Abu Simbel. Needs a bit of work but King Ramses II gets a gold star for trying.
- 5 The Nubians. Get to know the traditional inhabitants of the Lower Nile Valley around a campfire and a sheesha pipe.



Abu Simbel

THE WESTERN DESERT AND OASES

A weather forecaster's worst nightmare, the Western Desert has a reputation for one scorching day after another. It only rains every couple of years. More folk than ever are opting for guided trips into these parts: do the desert loop from one isolated oasis to another and get sand in your shoes. In all there's 2.8 million km² of sand to explore. Knock yourself out.

TOP FIVE

- 1 Bahariya Oasis. Your first port of call on your desert loop and the last for the dearly departed in the massive Greco-Roman cemetery.
- 2 Dakhla Oasis. Rose-coloured rocks, saltwater lakes and all the good intentions of sending a postcard — if you could only find somewhere to send it.
- 3 Big Sand Sea. One of the most arid and infertile places on the planet. Don't go wandering off.
- 4 The White Desert. They sure look like icebergs, but what you'll find here is an impressive build-up of pure, white sand.
- 5 Siwa Oasis. It's a hike getting here but you'll find friendly locals and an unspoilt refuge when you do.



The White Desert

The Pyramids at Giza



TOP TEN HIGHLIGHTS

1 GIZA
The Pyramids and the Sphinx are the ultimate inspiration. This is the automatic association people make when thinking about Egypt and its ancient history. But all the school projects, travel brochures and documentaries can't prepare you for the exhilaration of standing beneath them. They are simply the greatest archaeological structures you will ever encounter.

There are pyramids right across the country but the largest and best preserved are those at Giza, about half an hour's drive from central Cairo. The Great Pyramid of Cheops is the last remaining of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World. It's also worth checking out the Solar Boat Museum where a royal boat, dismantled and buried to aid a former King's journey to the afterlife, has been reconstructed.

The pyramids of Cheops and Chephren are open for tours. Those opting for a tour with a difference may want to check out the nightly Sound and Light Spectacular, though it's debatable whether the price is worth what could only be described as the electrical equivalent of an eyebrow raise.

Where is it? Giza is about 25 minutes' drive from central Cairo. Find a shuttle bus or gun it in a cab.

The damage? 50LE to enter the main compound and an additional charge if you want to take photos. A tour inside Cheops and Chephren will cost 100LE and 25LE respectively. Entry into the Solar Boat Museum is 40LE. The Sound and Light Spectacular will cost 60LE (www.sound-light.egypt.com).

2 THE NILE
Slumber your way down the longest river in the world on a traditional felucca and enjoy typical Nubian hospitality.

Sure, the toilet amenities leave a lot to be desired, but after a long sheesha session on deck, nothing else need be a problem. Felucca trips are popular and most tour operators now offer the excursions as part of an itinerary. Independent travellers should have no trouble finding a felucca operator in Aswan. Costs are closely regulated but it's still worth shopping around for the best deal.

A decidedly more expensive alternative for those who prefer a little luxury is a five-star cruise boat on the stretch of the Nile linking Aswan, Edfu and Luxor. But it's hardly comparable with the open-air experience of silently drifting down stream with a handful of likeminded travellers, stopping off to swim, eat and drink. Rinse and repeat.

Where is it? Feluccas are best boarded from Aswan, although it's possible to take day or overnight trips from Cairo.

The damage? A trip on the Nile between Aswan and Luxor should set you back about 700LE.

3 MT SINAI
If you never believed in God, you will on the summit of Mt Sinai. The rugged mountain in the southern deserts of the Sinai Peninsula has for thousands of years been a place of pilgrimage for travellers wanting to retrace the footsteps of Moses.

The 7498ft peak is believed to be the place where God himself spoke to the Old Testament prophet and passed down the rules we've been breaking ever since. It'll take you about three hours to reach the top.

To really make the most of an experience like this, it's best to climb at night. Hundreds of people start the trek from the base of the mountain at around midnight, stopping along the way at one of the many stalls offering everything from hot chocolate to SLR batteries. Camels are also available for hire. The final ascent is a gruelling 200 metres, but it's all worth it when you watch the sun rise over the rugged mountain terrain.

At the base of the mountain, St Catherine's Monastery is believed to be one of the oldest in the world and was built around what is thought to have been Moses' burning bush. It's worth a look if you can still stand up.

Where is it? About three hours' bus ride from Dahab.

The damage? Entry into the Ras Mohammed National Park will cost you 20LE. Camel hire will cost around 20LE and entry into the monastery is 20LE.

4 THE RED SEA Any proud Egyptian will tell you the turquoise waters of the Red Sea off the eastern coast of the Sinai Peninsula make for the best diving in the world. When you plunge in to discover colour-

ful reefs and rich marine life, it's hard to argue. The Red Sea offers the diver everything from lagoons and vertical wall descents to cave exploration and wrecks long forgotten and rediscovered.

There's probably nowhere cheaper or more remarkable to become an accredited diver, and PADI dive courses are on offer at dive centres right along the Sinai coast, including the popular coastal resorts Sharm El-Sheikh and backpacking haunt Dahab.

While there are hundreds of sites waiting to be explored, beginners are best advised to stick to those around Dahab. The Blue Hole, Lighthouse or The Bells get the most points for marine beauty and will leave most visitors breathless — though not literally, we hope.

For the more experienced wreck diver, it's hard to pass up the chance to experience what is regarded as the single most popular wreck site in the world: the World War II freighter *Thistlegorm* was sunk by enemy fighters near the mouth of the Suez Canal in 1941 and all its cargo, including trucks, motorbikes and a couple of locomotives, went down with it.

Where is it? That big blue thing off the east coast of the Sinai Peninsula.

The damage? The average cost of a five-day dive course for beginners is around 1300LE. Refresher courses are available everywhere and daily fees for single dives apply. Prices include all diving gear. See www.redsea.com.



Diving the Red Sea

DID YOU KNOW?

- » At 6650km, the country is split by the Nile, the longest river in the world.
- » The Egyptians invented the toilet seat.
- » Camels didn't exist in Ancient Egypt. They weren't introduced until 525BC.
- » The Pyramids of Giza used to be white.

5 ABU SIMBEL

If standing in the shadow of the Great Pyramid felt a little surreal, the ancient ruins of Abu Simbel will leave you gobsmacked. Close your mouth, you idiot. Hidden deep in the southern deserts bordering Sudan, the Pharaoh Ramses II was good enough to build what is now one of Egypt's finest surviving monuments. The face of the temple is dominated by four enormous seated statues of the pharaoh. Erected with the specific intention of putting the wind up potential invaders from the south, the temple remains an awesome representation of ancient architecture. Add to that the utter isolation of the place and it makes for an amazing day out.



Abu Simbel

Where is it? In the middle of nowhere, bordering Sudan in the country's south. Flights depart every morning from Aswan to Abu Simbel. Buses also travel daily from Aswan but it will take you six long, hot, dusty hours to get there.

The damage? Return flights cost around £130. Entry to the ruins costs 70LE. Most tour operators include Abu Simbel on itineraries.

6 THE EGYPTIAN MUSEUM

It's regarded as one of the most decisive collections of ancient artefacts, ruins, precious jewellery and bones anywhere. If you can cope with the crowds and a pretty thorough security patdown, the museum is worth at least half your day. It is, after all, the only place in the world where you can come face-to-face with the death mask of Tutankhamen, the boy king whose death has long been the subject of speculation. But if thousand-year-old corpses are more your thing, don't miss the mummy chamber, whose residents still have hair, nails, skin and a dire expression on their faces. Macabre? Sure — but also spectacular.

Where is it? Throw a rock from central Cairo and you'll probably hit it — and cause a security scare.

The damage? Entry to the main museum costs 50LE. Entry into the mummy chamber will set you back 100LE. See www.egyptianmuseum.gov.eg.

7 HATSHEPSUT'S TEMPLE

Given the average snapper struggles to fit this massive temple in the one frame, it's hard to imagine it was once lost in the desert sands. It was only uncovered in the middle of the 19th century. Queen Hatshepsut was the first great woman in recorded history and this three-terraced temple was a bold representation of her wealth, popularity and power. Cleopatra who?

The Valley of the Kings



Where is it? A bus ride from Luxor.

The damage? Entry to the temple costs 25LE.

8 THE VALLEY OF THE KINGS

Experiencing one of the greatest graveyards in the world takes patience and a 1.25 litre bottle of water. It's hot and sticky and you'll be crammed into caves with dozens of other sweaty tourists. But to see hieroglyphics — depictions of life by those who lived it thousands of years ago — is worth it.

The Valley of the Kings is one of the most densely populated tourist destinations in the entire country. No matter the season, no matter the heat, you're likely to encounter package tourism at its most unappealing and most frustrating. We're talking tour leaders with megaphones, pop-up flags and hordes of retirees who use flash photography regardless of the signs requesting them not to. But if you can ignore the mob, take a moment to appreciate the final resting place of more than 60 of Egypt's most highly regarded ancient leaders, including the boy king Tutankhamen and Queen Hatshepsut. Not to be outdone, The Valley of the Queens is only a short drive south-west and hides around 70 tombs, mostly of royal wives and siblings.

Where is it? Down the road from Luxor.

The damage? Valley of the Kings 70LE, Valley of the Queens 25LE. It will cost an additional 80LE to see inside the tomb of Tutankhamen.

9 THE TEMPLE OF PHILAE

Originally plied together by the Romans, the Temple of Philae sat atop an island which was eventually flooded by the Nile. Rather than completely submerge the ruins, during the construction

of the Aswan High Dam, the temple was moved brick by brick to the Island of Agilika. It took almost a decade to complete before being reopened to visitors in the '80s. Tourists now arrive by boat — which can make for a nice change to being on the road. The island is also home to the Temple of Hathor, the Greek goddess of love. Those scared of commitment should avoid visiting at sunset for fear an outbreak of romanticism. It's also worth checking out the somewhat more contemporary feat that is the High Dam wall.

Where is it? On your way to Aswan.

The damage? Access to the island, including boat fare, is 40LE. Peering over the edge of the High Dam won't cost you anything — unless you fall.

10 LUXOR TEMPLE

Choosing a favourite out of the Temple of Edfu and the temples at Luxor is enough to leave any archaeologist rocking away in a white jump suit. Impressive enough by day, a night wander through Luxor's most famous monuments is inspiration enough to start humming the *Imperial March* from *Star Wars*. There's just something colossal about the place that will trigger your imagination. From the grand statued entrance, to the inner courts, pillars and the great obelisk of Ramesses II out front, it's 4000 years of history laid out in front of you. A few 21st century halogens give an avenue of sphinxes and Karnak Temple a far greater depth of field and, like so many tourists before, you'll stand there wishing you'd majored in ancient civilisations.

Where is it? Smack bang in the middle of Luxor.

The damage? Entry into Luxor Temple 40LE; Karnak Temple 50LE.



Temple of Philae, Island of Agilika



TOURIST INFORMATION?

Egyptian Tourist Authority
www.egypt.travel
Tourist information in Cairo
www.cairotourist.com
Accommodation and transport database
www.touregypt.net
Red Sea www.redsea.com
National events
www.festival.com.eg
The Egyptian State Tourist Office, Egyptian House,
170 Piccadilly, London (020-7493 5283).

ADDITIONAL READING

Books

Most of the Old Testament
The Seventh Scroll, Wilbur Smith
River God: A Novel Of Ancient Egypt, Wilbur Smith
Riddles Of The Sphinx, Paul Jordan
The Ancient Egyptian Book Of The Dead, Raymond O Faulkner
Ancient Egypt, David P Silverman

Films

Stargate (1994)
The Mummy (1999)
The Mummy Returns (2001)
The Scorpion King (2002)
Cleopatra (1962)
The Ten Commandments (1956)
Michael Jackson's music video Remember The Time (1992)

GETTING THERE

Flights depart for Cairo from most major European destinations including London, Amsterdam, Frankfurt and Paris. There are international airports in Cairo, Alexandria, El Alamein, Luxor, Aswan, Hughada, Marsha Alam, Sharm El-Sheikh and Taba. There are domestic flights with Egypt Air from Cairo flying to Mersa Matruh, Alexandria, Al-Arish, New Valley, Luxor, Aswan, Abu Simbel, St Catherine, Taba, Sharm El-Sheikh and Hurghada. See also www.red-seaflights.com. Check *TNT Magazine's* travel/flights section for the best deals.

GETTING AROUND

It's relatively easy to get around in Egypt. Trains, buses and cabs operate in most major cities and are easily accessed. There are trains between Cairo and Aswan, Luxor, Alexandria, Port Said and Suez.

You can catch a bus virtually anywhere but trips are almost always long and hot. Night buses travel in convoys and there is usually a lot of time to kill. Some of the cross-country bus networks include Golden Arrow, Pullman, East Delta and the Upper Egypt Bus Company. A hop-on, hop-off backpacker bus, Go Bus (www.gobusegypt.com) services the main tourist stops.

Taking a cab is a cheap and easy way of getting around Cairo, but settle on a fee before you get in the car, then sit back and try to regulate your breathing.

TOURS

Tours are a great way of seeing Egypt, especially for solo travellers or those with a time limit. Check the tours and travel section of *TNT Magazine* (www.tntmagazine.com) for sample prices from the leading London-based tour companies.

VISAS

Antipodeans and South Africans require a visa to enter Egypt. Australians and New Zealanders can purchase a visa on arrival for around £15. Make sure you have either pounds sterling or US dollars as customs officers are often reluctant to take the equivalent in Egyptian pounds. South Africans need to apply for a free visa before they arrive. See www.egypt.embassyhomepage.com. You must have at least six months remaining on your passport to gain entry. All visitors are required to register with the police within a week of their arrival, although Canadians, US citizens and passport holders from any country in the EU are exempt from this rule. Most hotels or tour groups will register a tourist on their behalf.

ACCOMMODATION

Accommodation in Egypt is hit and miss. In Cairo, Alexandria, Luxor and Aswan, you can stay in decent places at affordable prices but it pays to shop around as some budget digs can be substandard. Ask for recommendations from other travellers; tour companies will recommend accommodation to travellers joining their tours. Breakfast is almost always included and staff usually have plenty of hints and tips for getting around. There are plenty of hostels in downtown Cairo conveniently located to central

attractions and internet cafés. In peak season it's not likely to cost more than £6-£8 a night. The Sun Hotel, the Canadian Hostel, Lialy Hostel and Meramees Hostel are among the most convenient to the centre of town. See www.hostels.com.

CURRENCIES & COSTS

The Egyptian pound is divided into 100 piastres. On average, 1GBP = 11.2 Egyptian pounds (LE). Fifty Egyptian pounds is more than enough to feed you each day. Some of the coins are worth the same amount as the notes. Work it out before you hit the streets and get ripped off. A bottle of water or a cup of coffee will cost about 3LE and a kebab will set you back about 10LE.

ENTRY FEES

These will probably prove your greatest daily expenses. Students (and those carrying dodgy 'student cards') get a 50 per cent discount. Expect to be charged around 5LE to use your camera at some sights.

CULTURAL SENSITIVITY

Egypt could be described as far more liberal than many of its Arab neighbours, but that doesn't give visitors a licence to get their kit off in downtown Cairo. Women should still dress conservatively, and ensure they cover their arms and legs when entering religious sites. The less you wear, the more likely it is that you'll get hassled. And you're only asking for trouble if you start taking photos of anything military related — including soldiers, utility building, bridges and dams. The Egyptian government values its security and will not hesitate in taking your camera. Stick to the happy snaps.

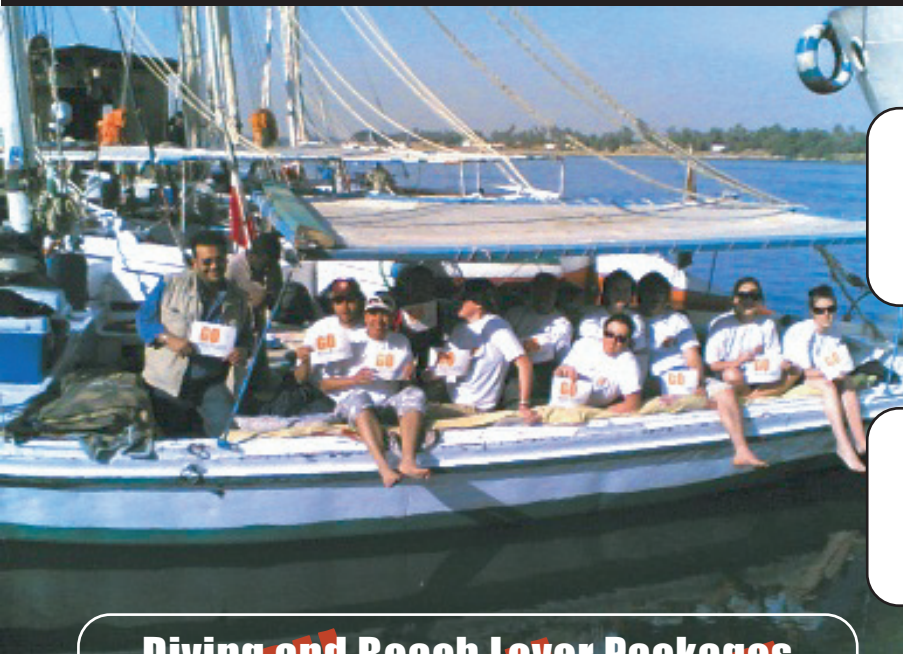
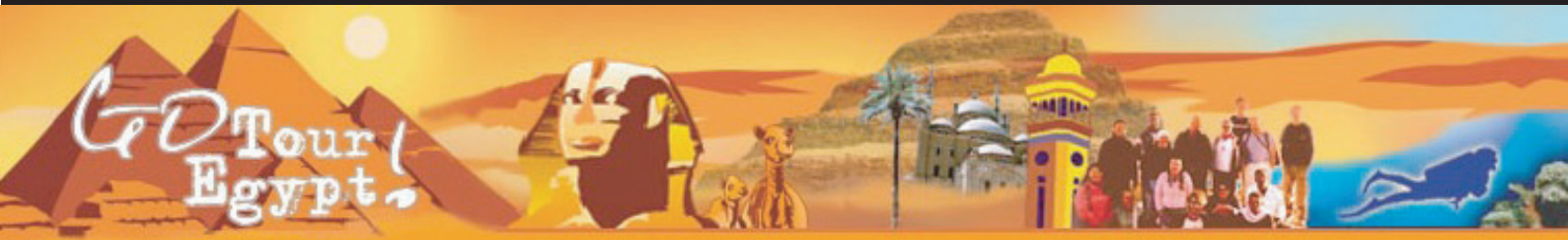
HEALTH & SAFETY

Travelling in Egypt is generally safe but, as with any destination, it pays to travel with a companion and to remain vigilant at all times. In July 2005, a series of terrorist attacks on tourist hotels in Sharm El-Sheikh cast a shadow over the safety of travellers to Egypt. The bombs killed around 90 people, seriously injuring dozens of others.

The attack was the worst security incident in Egypt since militants stormed the Temple of Hatshepsut in 1997, killing 58 tourists. Bombings in the east coast Sinai resorts of Taba and Nuweiba in October 2004, three attacks in Cairo and blasts in Dahab in April 2006 have put Egypt back on the terror stage.

Security was immediately tightened at popular archaeological sites and all major areas are now heavily policed. These attacks must be viewed in light of worldwide terror threats which could affect any city or town in the Western world or countries aligned to Western governments, and personal security remains a more immediate concern.

Although the crime rate across the country is generally low, street scams are prevalent in most cities and usually involve parting with cash for anything from student cards to a guided tour. A firm but polite 'no' is usually all you need to get the point across.



Timeless Egypt
9 days starts from £189 GBP

Cairo - Aswan - Luxor - Cairo. The best of Egypt. Including full Luxor and Aswan Tour, Cairo Tour, The Egyptian Museum, The Sphinx, The Giza and Sakkara Pyramids

Explore Egypt
14 days starts from £279 GBP

Cairo - Aswan - Luxor - Dahab, Red Sea - Cairo. Including full Cairo Tour, Luxor and Aswan Tour, Giza and Sakkara Pyramids, St.Catherine's Monastery, Mount Sinai and The Red Sea

Diving and Beach Lover Packages
Yearly Dahab Christmas Festival Package
Starting from 420GBP, Including Diving Course

Discover Egypt
14 days starts from £329 GBP

Cairo - Aswan - Luxor - Mt.Sinai - Dahab - Cairo. Including 5 Star Nile Cruise, Giza Pyramids, Sphinx, Valley of the Kings and Queens, the Amazing Red Sea, St. Catherine's and Mount Sinai

The Nile Dance
13 days starts from £539 GBP

Cairo - Aswan - Kom-Ombo - Edfu - Luxor - Cairo. Cruise down the Nile in luxury and learn to Belly Dance while you do! This unique trip also includes workshops, shows, shopping and parties!

GoTourEgypt Privileges

- ★ Student Discount
- ★ Monthly Promotions
- ★ More than 4 people get a Group Discount
- ★ Unlike others, No Local Payment Fee
- ★ Birthday and Anniversary Surprise - Just let us know!

