

CST Egypt 2022



Egypt April 28 -May 10, 2022. First CST travel since December 2019.

Beginning with our final CST briefing and travel document gathering on April 16th, it would be less than 2 weeks before arriving at Dulles International Airport in the U.S. I wasn't very surprised by the typical fast pace, from the Egypt Air ticket counter check-in, TSA security screening and to our departure gate. Although potentially, hectic at times, it all was quite expected. Check-in went well as did our screening process before heading to our departure gate. As we boarded the flight, I realized local customs are indeed relative, no matter where you're from. We, as Americans have accepted that we can sometimes be judgmental of each other as well as those who are not from our country. We, like anywhere else in the world, can be harshly critical of others who don't share our values, practices and views, when it comes to how we treat each other. Particularly in public settings, that's all about to change. Now try to forget everything you know about "social distancing" conditioning (laughing). It's been more than two years without international travel with CST, and here we are, on our way to Egypt.

As with any 10 or more-hour international flight, it might be a bit challenging to remain comfortable. However, there are activities to help pass the time. International flights typically have a very nice meal menu as well as a variety of first run movies available, at no additional cost. You can stretch your legs and take a walk around the cabin or take a nap. Before you know it, the pilot announces that we're making our final approach and will be landing in Cairo, Egypt, as the anxiousness builds. I could only imagine the pent-up expectation of the world's return to tourism after more than two years of COVID shut-down. While on travel to Egypt, I began to make comparisons of our (US) customs and practices regarding personal spaces, polite etiquette and right-of way foot traffic. Well, we were all told to pack our patients, because now we'll not only need that but our openness to a culture change and maybe a sense of humor might help. Welcome to Egypt.

While on travel to Egypt, I began to make comparisons of our (US) customs and practices regarding personal spaces, polite etiquette and the right-of way regarding foot traffic. Nothing fully prepared me for the celebrity reception we received everywhere we went. From the time we entered the arrival lobby of the Cairo Airport and at every turn, we all were greeted with incessant offers of goods and services by the locals. We were each surrounded and treated like entertainment Rockstars from America every time we stepped off the motor coach to the hotel entrance, where the local's access ended. What I also wasn't prepared for, was to witness the unbridled display of survival skills practiced by everyday Egyptian city life. This applies to vehicle and pedestrian travel as well. Imagine this! traffic lights, crosswalks at intersections and vehicle travel lanes. None of these tools or lane markers mean anything, even when they exist.



Having 20 years of managing airport security for the federal government in the US, I was always fully aware of passenger screening in the US; however, only acutely aware of and yet, hadn't experienced firsthand the security practices of countries outside of the US since COVID at the end of 2019. The security screening in Egypt is ridged, redundant including x-ray screening of property. Unlike the US this screening intensity clearly applies to almost all venues such as hotels; some restaurants, and museums. All of our in-city tour bus travel from the airport as well as all road travel had to be accompanied by armed police dressed like secret service. After 3 days in Cairo, we were scheduled for our first in-country flight to Luxor and our 4-night cruise on the Nile.

Upon arriving at the Cairo airport, I immediately noticed that everyone and their property x-rayed entering the airport lobby had to be screened. After booking and boarding pass issue at the ticket counter, we and our property were all re-screened and property x-rayed just prior to accessing the gate area. This process was consistent for all in and out of country flights.

The only places where this “elevator sales pitch” by local vendors didn’t exist were inside of the hotels, restaurants and I would say cruise ships where it not for the absolutely amazing skill, resourcefulness and daring of some young “rolling river” gift shop owners. Imagine, you’re cruising down the Nile having breakfast, gazing out of the ship’s water-level river view windows while in the breakfast buffet line. As When a bright blue skiff, or something a little larger than a rowboat slams into the side of the cruise ship (woman laughingly screams). Now, mind you, we’re cruising at several knots (mph). The two occupants of the skiff tie their small boat to the side of the cruise ship and go right to work.



This is truly a remarkable practice, whereby these enterprising river-flowing entrepreneurs is apparently okay with the cruise lines. Once securely attached to the cruise ship the vendors begin a slow speed goods for cash exchange begins. Passengers look over the side in amazement from the upper deck, which in our case is four levels up above water level. The river vendors will show garments from the small boat below. Potential buyer’s points out a desired article and the Riverboat “sales guys” will pitch the item up to the prospective buyer with the skill of an NFL Quarterback. All transactions were made via airtight plastic bags to ensure neither product nor cash would be lost to the Nile. This “New York Stock Exchange” frenzy type sale’s drill would last until we reached the next sales district.



At the end of the cruise, we visited a Nubian village via small sail boats or Felucca’s where we 60 Camels awaited us. 60 CST travelers enjoyed a majestic camel ride before visiting the Nubian village who welcomed us with tour of their school, village community and an extraordinary meal and ceremonial dance as we were invited to participate. I truly memorable day and evening. The next day we took a flight back to Cairo for 3 final days.

After our return to Cairo, I visited a grocery store near our hotel, when it all became very clear to me. Egyptians are neither rude, aggressive, or mildly hostile at all. That’s just who they are. What we consider normal behavior at home, is just their normal behavior in Egypt. While inside the store, I stopped for a moment to observe the way they interact with each other and shop for their groceries. It may seem a bit different from the way we do. We do say “excuse or pardon me” went preceding through or passing by someone or reaching for an item on a shelf. They may or may not, I saw shoppers have their feet run over by shopping carts, people being brushed by others making physical contact. All of this activity, is done without a sound, no “excuse me” not even in Arabic, but it was all okay.

Like I stated earlier, what I wasn’t prepared for was to witness the unbridled display of survival skills practiced by everyday Egyptian city life. This applies to vehicle and pedestrian travel as well. Traffic lights, crosswalks and vehicle travel lanes, doesn’t mean a thing and yes, even in the grocery store. Now that I’ve met Egypt, I wouldn’t change a single thing and I have come to love it all. Because I learned Egyptians are not so unlike ourselves, just different, and beautiful.



Calvin Champion, not a journalist, just an observer