

# **THE HIGHLIGHTS OF EGYPT AND THE SINAI**

## **13 DAYS/11 NIGHTS CAIRO, LUXOR & SHARM EL SHEIKH RED SEA DIVING**

### **Day 1 – Friday – Departure**

Depart New York's John F. Kennedy International Airport this evening for Egypt. Dinner and a light breakfast will be served on board.

### **Day 2 – Saturday – Cairo**

Ahlan Wa Sahlan! Welcome to Egypt, Land of the Pharaohs! Upon arrival at Cairo International Airport, your tour representative will greet you, and assist with Customs formalities. After check in at the hotel and time to freshen up, meet with the Learning Through Travel representative to discuss the exciting days ahead. Visit Old Cairo and spend time at the famous Khan El Khalili Bazaar known for its narrow alleys. Hundreds of shops are selling all types of Egyptian handicrafts, silver and gold jewelry, cottons, copperware and perfumes. A welcome dinner this evening will introduce you to Egyptian cuisine.

**ACCOMMODATIONS: 5 – STAR DELUXE HOTEL (D)**

### **Day 3 – Sunday – Cairo**

Today you will visit the Giza Plateau where you see three Pyramids, the greatest being that of Cheops. It took 100,000 workers more than 20 years to construct. Entrance into one of the pyramids is included. Southeast of the Great Pyramids is the Sphinx, carved out of solid natural rock in about 2650 BC, a magnificent monument with the head of the Pharaoh and the body of a lion. Visit the first Pyramid ever built, the Step Pyramid of Zoser, in the Sakkara Complex. When Memphis was the capital of Egypt, during the Old Kingdom period, Sakkara was its necropolis. Spread over seven kilometers of desert, Sakkara is one of the most important archaeological sites in the world. Before returning to the hotel, visit the remains in Memphis, the first capital of United Upper and Lower Egypt.

**ACCOMMODATIONS: 5 – STAR DELUXE HOTEL (B, L)**

#### **Day 4 – Monday – Cairo/Luxor**

This morning you will be introduced to the masterpieces of ancient art in the Egyptian Museum of Antiquities, including the Mummy Room. The museum is home to the vast findings of King Tutankhamen's tomb and other important pieces of Egypt's history. Later today you fly to Luxor, Ancient Thebes.

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#### **Day 5 – Tuesday – Luxor/Sharm El Sheikh**

After breakfast cross the West Bank where you explore the Valley of the Kings, housing 63 tombs belonging to the Pharaohs of the New Kingdom, including the famous tomb of King Tutankhamen. Afterwards, continue to Deir El Bahri to visit the mortuary Temple of Queen Hatshepsut, considered one of the finest buildings in Egypt. Hatshepsut ruled Egypt as King for 20 years. This afternoon visit the East Bank of the Nile including the Temple of Luxor, where the Avenue of Sphinxes, famous for its artistic degree of uniformity, leads to the entrance of the temple and a seated colossus of Ramses II and a towering Obelisk are situated. Continue to the Karnak Temple, one of the most impressive monuments of ancient art and architecture in the world. The carvings, which adorn all the walls, depict the history and conquests of many of Egypt's Pharaohs.

A late day flight brings you to Sharm El Sheikh, the "Land of Turquoise" where rock meets coral reefs and the desert stops at the sea. Sharm El Sheikh offers rich and elegant seaside resorts and is often called the "Egyptian Riviera." Your resort has all the amenities of a luxury seaside hotel and offers spectacular shore diving and snorkeling.

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#### **Day 6 Wednesday – Sharm El Sheikh Naama Bay/Far-Middle-Near Gardens**

Today is spent to familiarize you with the dive company and the waters of the Red Sea. You will be transferred to the Divers Center where you meet with an instructor for an orientation session. The rest of the afternoon dive the shallow reefs off Naama Bay.

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#### **Day 7 –Thursday Sharm El Sheikh Ras Mohammed Diving**

Today you will begin your dive experience at the most spectacular site. The "masterpiece" of wall dives Ras Mohammed. It has been said, that if there were just one place in the world to dive that would be Ras Mohammed. The Wall extends from the eel garden in the north to a large rock formation in the south called the Shark Observatory. Above the surface is a sheer limestone cliff with a fringing reef below. Drifting southward with the gentle current, every ledge and crevice has something different to offer. Colorful soft corals grow from overhangs, surrounded by Anthias, which flutter around the wall like butterflies. Giant gorgonian fans, up to 15 feet across, spread horizontally on some of the ledges. A few areas, especially in deep crevices, are dark and devoid of life, while others are brilliantly colorful and alive with activity. Caves provide refuge for soldier fish, hatchet fish, and silver sweepers. If you look upward, you should notice schools of jacks or tunas, a shark or eagle ray. This sight will keep you in awe!

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### **Day 8 – Friday Sharm El Sheikh Straits of Tiran Diving**

Today you will dive one of the Sinai's most spectacular areas the Straits of Tiran. Starting from the north the first reef is Jackson Reef and on its edge rests the wreck of a freighter. The southeastern end, where the currents are weaker, is the perfect mooring place for all kinds of diving vessels. Starting your dive towards the north, you come across a forest of awesome Gorgonian fan corals dancing in the current at about 65 to 98 feet as well as a wide variety of reef fish. The long, narrow Woodhouse Reef, a drift dive from north to south, is home to reef sharks and eagle rays. At 130feet, you can find a small "Satellite Reef" 60feet in length. Its numerous caves and outstanding landscape makes it the most interesting section of the dive. Thomas Reef is the smallest of the 4 reefs, this location is for "experienced" divers only and it is always recommended to make a "test dive" to verify the direction of the extremely strong currents! Drift dive with the current and you will find some of the most colorful soft coral gardens anywhere in the gulf. Gordon Reef with its Lighthouse is the most eastern point of the Straits. Another freighter wreck rests here on the reef table, almost parallel to the one on Jackson Reef. Discover huge varieties of reef fish as well as large schools of groupers. On the sandy bottom at 16feet, many Garden Eels are peeking out from the seabed moving gently in the currents. It is a popular habitat for eagle rays and reef sharks who mainly cruise at greater depths, but are often spotted popping up for lunch to look at the divers. On the way to and from Tiran always look out for dolphins they love to swim along with the boats.

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### **Day 9 – Saturday – Sharm El Sheikh – The Wreck of the Thistlegorm**

There is no area in the world comparable to the site that you will dive today. Imagine diving in an underwater World War II museum to view a unique piece of military history and dive into the past. The SS Thistlegorm was sunk by German bomber planes in World War II. It rests at the bottom of the sea for over sixty years. Located in the Straits of Gubal, Northern Red Sea this famous vessel has been the subject of activity and drama during its life as a merchant ship and now as an excellent dive site. In 1941it was destined for British troops in North Africa to deliver supplies. Though described on the manifest as "MT" (Motor Transport), it hid a wide array of Land Mines, Shells, Ammunition, Weapons, Bedford Trucks, Armored Cars, BSA Motorcycles, Trailers, Vehicle spares, Aircrafts, Radios and a great deal more. Also on board were two sets of rolling stock to Egyptian Railways each comprising of a 0-6-0 Railway Engine, one Tender, and one Water Carrier being carried as deck cargo. After two months of sailing, the Thistlegorm landed in Egypt and was assigned "Safe Anchorage "F", waiting for orders to proceed to Alexandria. The Germans based in Crete, Greece were alerted of the anchorage and released two bombs right over the bridge. Both penetrated No 5 hold aft of the bridge, detonating a great deal of ammunition. The explosion sent the two locomotives spiraling into the air, as the ship was ripped open like a huge tin can. Even to this day, the rear decks are peeled back towards the Bridge leaving many divers wondering what exactly they are looking at. Some accounts have even described this as "Armor Plating!" Caught unaware, the Thistlegorm had no time to defend itself and quickly sank while the crew abandoned ship. In 1956, Jacques Cousteau found the Thistlegorm and kept it a secret until the early 1990's when a group of divers happened to discover her. Despite extensive damage aft of the Bridge, the main section is upright and on an even keel. You will never forget this site!

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### **Day 10 – Sunday – Sharm El Sheikh Ras Mohammed Diving**

Today you return to the magnificent Ras Mohammed National Park for another day of diving. There are over 1,000 species of fish found in this area. The coral reefs here are not just shelter and food for the different reef and pelagic fish they are in fact living creatures, which breathe, eat, and reproduce. See them in many different forms, shapes, and colors, from the largest colonies of hard corals to the tiniest swaying soft ones. About 205 hard coral species and about 120 soft coral species have been recorded here. On the western side, facing the entrance to Suez Canal offers approximately 45 coral species, including some endemic ones. The fossil reefs are made up of the fossilized bodies of ancient corals which have long gone but whose bodies have fossilized together for more coral to attach itself to. In fact these reefs can be seen from land as the water level had dropped from previous periods. Overall, these reefs range in age between 15,000 to 2 million years and many of the descendants of these ancient species are still alive today among the abundant living coral colonies.

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### **Day 11 – Monday – Sharm El Sheikh**

Your final day in Sharm El Sheikh is at your leisure. You may choose to take the optional tour to St. Catherine's Monastery, for this you would leave your hotel before sunrise. For those interested in climbing Mount Moses you will have the opportunity to do so. If you choose not to climb, enjoy breakfast and a rest at the St. Catherine Hotel, and then visit the Monastery. Constructed by order of the Emperor Justinian between 527 and 565 the monastery was built around what is thought to be Moses' Burning Bush, which has a chapel built atop. It is a spectacular natural setting for priceless works of art. Arab mosaics, Greek and Russian icons, Western oil paintings, paintings on wax, fine sacerdotal ornaments, marbles, enamels, chalices, reliquaries, including one donated by Czar Alexander II in the 19th century, and another by Empress Catherine of Russia in the 17th century. Perhaps even greater significance, this is the second largest collection of illuminated manuscripts (The Vatican has the largest).

Return to Sharm El Sheikh for the afternoon. This evening as the sun sets, take a camel ride out into the desert for tea and pastry at a Bedouin camp. Afterwards return to the hotel for dinner.

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### **Day 12 – Tuesday – Sharm El Sheikh/Cairo**

Today depart Sharm El Sheikh for Cairo where the remainder of the day is at your leisure. This evening enjoy a farewell dinner.

**ACCOMMODATIONS: 5 – STAR DELUXE HOTEL (B, D)**

### **Day 13 – Wednesday – Departure**

Farewell to Egypt as you transfer to the airport for your return flight to New York. **(B)**

## **TOUR HIGHLIGHTS**

- International air New York/Cairo/New York
- Domestic Air Cairo/Luxor/Sharm El Sheik Cairo
- 11 nights accommodation in a 5 -star deluxe hotel
- All transfers: Cairo/Luxor/Sharm El Sheikh
- Sightseeing and transfers by deluxe motor coach
- English speaking guide throughout Egypt
- Full day sightseeing Pyramids (entrance into 1 pyramid)/Sphinx –Memphis/Sakkara
- Full day sightseeing Egyptian Museum of Antiquities including entrance into the Mummy Room, Citadel, Mosque & Bazaar
- 5 days of dive excursions
- Transport of dive equipment to Sharm El Sheikh
- 11 breakfasts, 9 lunches and 10 dinners
- Hotel taxes and service charges
- Porterage
- Luggage Tags, Travel Bag, Passport Wallet and First Aid Kit

## **NOT INCLUDED**

- U.S. Departure Taxes, Airport Security, Fuel (\$ 285.00 subject to change)
- Domestic air within the U.S.
- Visa fees
- Items of a personal nature such as laundry, telephone calls, internet services, dive equipment, National Park fees, soft drinks, coffee, tea (except at breakfast), mineral water, alcoholic beverages, passport fees, gratuities for drivers, guides, transfer personnel, travel insurance, etc..

***Please Note: Itinerary sequence subject to change without prior notice due to government regulations and hotel/cruise confirmations. Other cruise itineraries are available upon request.***