

traveller

Encounter
with our
harsh past

— p48

YOUR GUIDE TO THE PERFECT DESTINATION

The Daily Telegraph

Lazy days . . . drift down the Nile on a felucca and discover some well-preserved temples

Jewels of the Nile

A journey in an Egyptian sailboat could change your life, writes ANGELA SAURINE

Any marriage proposal is likely to turn a girl's head. But when you've heard at least a dozen such offers you begin to value the price of true love — one million camels or the men who offer only five. While flattered, I laughed off their proposals. This was Egypt after all and I'm blonde — or yellow-haired as the men suggested.

Days later however, to my surprise, I found myself seriously contemplating one offer.

The advance came from a young farmer who had wandered down from the hills after hearing the sounds of beating drums and singing from around our campfire.

After spending three days sailing down the Nile on a traditional wooden sailboat called a felucca, I found myself enticed by the simple life the locals led.

I was one of 10 Westerners who boarded the boat, one of three sailing together, in Aswan.

By day we would lie around on cushions and read, play backgammon with the cheating crew and perhaps help with dinner.

Mostly though, we would lie back watching life along the lush banks of the Nile — cattle, goats and buffalo meandering along, kids riding donkeys or swimming in the bull-rushes, women doing their washing and fishermen rowing past with large nets.

Three times a day we would stuff ourselves silly from a smorgasbord of delicious breads and salads spread out before us.

And occasionally we would stop to swim in the Nile, assured by our crew that tales of crocodiles and parasitic worms are nothing but travellers' myths.

In the evening we slept under a sea of stars while a seemingly endless parade of glittering cruise ships passed by.

Despite the luxuries those ships offered,

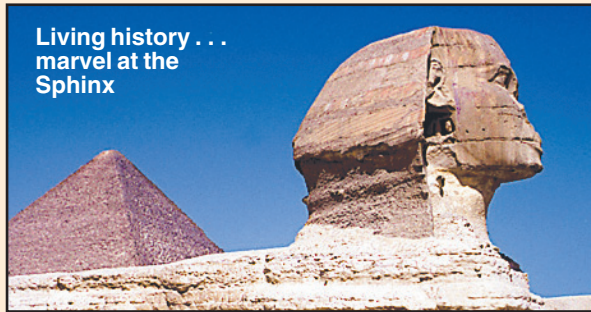
NEED TO KNOW

Getting there: Emirates has daily flights to Cairo via Dubai.

Tours: The Imaginative Traveller has an 11-day Felucca Sailtrek tour from \$735 plus \$US90 local payment. The tour visits Cairo, Aswan and Luxor as well as a three-day felucca voyage.

More: 1300 135 088 or imaginative-traveller.com

Living history . . . marvel at the Sphinx



I pitied those travelling aboard for missing out on something special.

The Nile cuts through Egypt from the Sudanese border north to the Mediterranean Sea, passing through the bustling capital Cairo and past the ancient icons of the Pyramids of Giza and the Sphinx.

The river was the lifeblood of ancient Egyptian civilisation as all of its cities lay along the Nile Valley.

Tribes migrated to the river around 8000BC after climate change caused pastoral lands to dry up, forming the Sahara. Agriculture in the new communities flourished.

These days, little seems to have changed.

Along the way we visit the riverside temple at Kom Ombo, which was built during the Ptolemaic and Roman periods.

Located about 50km north of Aswan, the double temple dedicated to the crocodile god Sobek and the falcon god Horus was excavated last century.

But the best-preserved temple in Egypt is still to come at Edfu.

The overwhelming structure showcases thousands of intricate carvings giving an

insight into ancient Egyptian life, as well as a large courtyard and massive columns.

We also stop at the occasional village, walking along dirt tracks past banana plantations, only to be swarmed by a mass of excited children — some shy, some bold — but all enthralled by our digital cameras.

A young girl asks if she can have my watch. It is only later, when the manager of a restaurant offers me a painting I stop to admire on the wall, that I realise in Egypt the old saying of giving someone the shirt off your back is part of the culture.

Feluccas still offer the most basic travel with not even a bathroom on board.

The crew passionately loved to sing and dance and would do so at every opportunity. I absolutely adored them.

They were always happy, teasing each other and playing jokes on the Westerners.

At the start of our voyage we had been instructed to take our watches off, because time didn't matter on board a felucca.

In the morning crew member Cheeky Monkey would wake us at dawn, telling us it was much later than it really was and

pretending to be annoyed with us for not getting up. Their repertoire of English songs included Bob Marley's *Buffalo Soldier*, *In the Jungle* and *She'll be Coming Around the Mountain When She Comes*.

The words were adapted to Egyptian life, with such lines as: "She'll be sailing a felucca" or "She'll be riding on a camel when she comes". The songs were repeated over and over again as they taught us traditional dances and led us around the campfire dancing *Locomotion*-style.

I have seen similar displays on television that have obviously been put on for the tourists' sake, but this was different.

These warm and wonderful people loved their lifestyle and were eager to encourage others to join in.

My favourite of all was Little Mohamed, who had a big smile and cheeks you longed to squeeze. He didn't speak any English and adored dancing more than the rest of the crew put together.

At just 14, he was about to take over as cook from Cheeky Monkey, who was leaving to commence his military service.

Skinny Mohamed was angry with Little Mohamed for giving up school for life on a felucca, even though he had chosen the same path for himself.

While most of Skinny Mohamed's friends had joined the army, he had chosen to "combine a job with a holiday".

But he chastised Little Mohamed for making the decision before he finished his education.

When we reached Edfu it was sad to say goodbye to the crew, who had embraced us so warmly and made our experience so special.

They felt like old friends, but I knew I would never see them again.

I didn't want to leave, but I had been struck with traveller's diarrhoea, and a felucca is the last place you want to be at such a time.

Looking for a super holiday? Find it at

www.**SUPERSHOW**.com.au

'we love this country'

98 75 50 25 15 8 7 6 5 45 45
CMYK12 CMYK
PROOF OK CORRECTION SIGNATURE: ED AD

ED: ST ST
PUB: DTM 16-FEB-2006 DTM 16-FEB-2006