

EXPLORING THE TREASURES OF EGYPT

Jerry & Mary Boyle



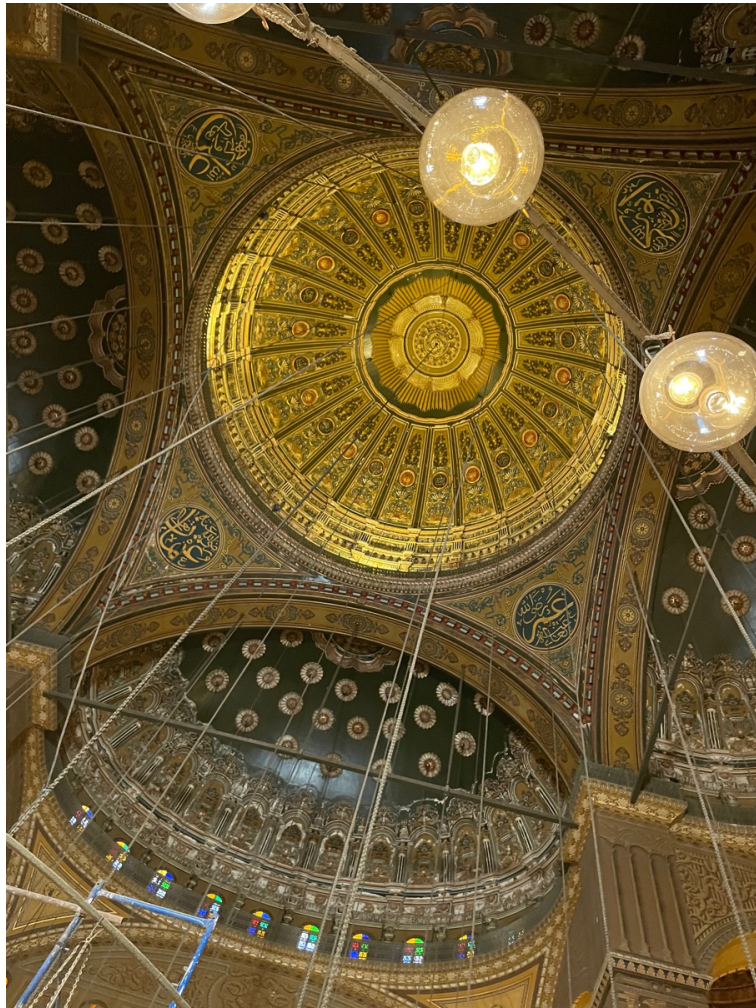
Jerry & Mary at the Pyramids

In mid-November 2022, Jerry and Mary Boyle set off to explore the treasures of Egypt on a Uniworld Nile River Cruise traveling with our travel agent, John, and fellow adventurers. This trip had been on our wish list for over a year and provided a unique opportunity to explore this part of world.

We flew from Los Angeles to Cairo, via London Heathrow. The 25+ hour trip was a bit exhausting; but once we arrived in Cairo, it was well worth it. While the city is bustling, just a short ride from the city, we found ourselves in ruins dating back millennia. This trip by Uniworld Boutique River Cruises included 8 days cruising the Nile River on the Uniworld S.S. Sphinx. The Sphinx is the newest river boat in their collection. Once aboard, we experienced a gracious welcoming staff, spacious accommodations, and delicious food ranging from familiar to exotic local delicacies.

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Ceiling of the Alabaster Mosque in Cairo

The San Simeon Travel group of 60 were divided into 4 groups with a certified Egyptologist for each group. Our Egyptologist, Hamid, was with our group for the entire trip. Hamid was able to bring every ancient ruin, temple, statue, and exhibit alive for our understanding and enjoyment. While in Cairo, we visited the stunning Alabaster Mosque of Muhammad Ali atop the highest hill overlooking the city. The last stop on this very full day of touring was the historic Egyptian Museum. The artifacts were slowly being moved to the new Grand Egyptian Museum (GEM) that was still in its final stages of construction. The Egyptian Museum still has many of Tut's treasures on display, including his solid gold mask.

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The Temple of Karnak

We flew south to Luxor early the next morning. Hamid escorted our group of 17 on a tour of the magnificent Temple of Karnak, built by Ramses II, 3,400 years ago. When originally built, the temple was close beside the Nile; but now it is landlocked. Despite the passing of many centuries, the temple is still an awesome display of soaring colonnades of columns and passages. The columns still show many of their original colors; this is amazing considering the centuries of heat, wind, and sand bombarding them.

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Colorful columns and ceiling of the Dendeara Temple

The next day, we left the boat at 7:00 a.m. to tour the stunning Dendeara Temple built to worship the fertility goddess, Hathor. It was a perfect 65-degree morning and no crowds. Dating back to 2400 BC, this temple is considered one of the prettiest and most complete. The rooms are decorated floor to ceiling with original colorful artwork. It still has its entire original roof where we were able to climb and enjoy views of the rugged countryside.

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The Temple of Luxor at night

About a mile from the Karnak temple is the Temple of Luxor (circa 1400 BC). We were privileged to have a private after-dark tour of the Temple exclusively for the Uniworld group. All the ruins were spotlighted, which highlighted its immense scale. Today, there is also an active Mosque in the large complex. Most unique to this Temple is the mile-long Avenue of the Sphinxes connecting it to the Temple of Karnak. This passage is lined with carved sphinxes the entire way. The sphinxes were buried under centuries of sand and just recently rediscovered and restored.

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The Valley of the Kings is located across the river on the West Bank of the Nile; about a 45-minute drive from Luxor. Again, it was an early start for our group arriving at the Valley of the Kings just after sunrise. So far 63 tombs have been found, but they estimate over 100 are still buried under centuries of sand and rock.



King Tutankhamen's Burial Tomb – Valley of the Kings

The most recent find was King Tut's Tomb discovered 100 years ago by Howard Carter, British archaeologist. Tutankhamen's was the only tomb discovered so far, that was only partially looted in antiquity. It still held thousands of his treasures for the "after life," including his solid gold coffin and gold funeral mask (currently on display at the Egyptian Museum in Cairo). We walked down steep long tunnels to reach Tut's burial chamber where we saw his actual mummified body. The walls and ceilings of the tunnel were filled with colorful hieroglyphics to help the king pass into the afterlife. The tunnels are well lit with a combination of stairs and pathways with sturdy handrails. We explored four underground tombs, including Tut's, that day.

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Each day of this trip was filled with new experiences including a lovely afternoon high tea in the gardens of the historic Old Cataract Hotel in Aswan overlooking the Nile. This 19th century pink palace has been a favorite of presidents and notables since it opened. Agatha Christie wrote her book *Death on the Nile* at this hotel.



The grand Abu Simbel Temple sculptures are 60 feet high

The magnificent Abu Simbel Temples were a highlight of the trip. We took a 40-minute early morning flight from Aswan Airport, south to the Temples located on the shore of Lake Nasser. Over the millennia, the shifting sands almost completely buried the entire temple, leaving only the top of the heads visible. The temple went undiscovered until 1813 when a Swiss orientalist found the top frieze of the main temple peeking above the dunes in the distance. It was not until 1817 when they were finally able to fully expose the temples and chambers inside.

Built by Ramesses II in 1124 BC, each of the four statues on the façade are 60 feet high. When the Aswan High Dam was built in the 1960s, the entire temple complex had to be moved 650 feet horizontally and 211 feet vertically to avoid inundation when the lake was filled. It was a huge engineering feat. Adjacent to the large temple is a smaller temple dedicated to Ramesses wife, Nefertari. Her temple façade features six carved statues (four of Ramesses and two of Nefertari). We spent about 2 hours at Abu Simbel before flying back to Aswan, returning to our boat for lunch and a relaxing afternoon.

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The Great Pyramid and Sphinx on the Giza Plateau - Cairo

The next day, we flew back to Cairo from Aswan. Our final day in Egypt featured another very early start from our Cairo hotel to the Giza Plateau to experience the Great Pyramids, built 5,000 years ago. Dawn was just streaking the sky when we arrived. The biggest and oldest pyramid was missing its original solid gold top, but that didn't take away from the awe-inspiring site. These blocks of stone were all hand-carved and manually put in place 5,000 years ago – an engineering marvel of immense proportion. Near the pyramids sits The Great Sphinx. It looks small compared to the pyramids, but it's over 70 feet high. It looks so serene gazing off into the desert.

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Camel rides next to the pyramids... we couldn't resist. The camel driver literally lifted each one of us up on the saddle. Following a few screams and gasps, the beasts were standing upright with each of us clutching the horn on the saddles to keep from sliding off. It was a fun experience and a definite lifetime memory.

Our 2-week Egypt trip was amazing. This article only captures a few of our experiences in this ancient part of the world. The Egyptian people were so warm and welcoming everywhere we went, which made for wonderful memories to last many lifetimes.