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CAIRO—Egypt is enjoying what authorities believe is the greatest tourist boom since Herodotus, a well-known Greek travel writer, visited the Pyramids in the fifth century before Christ.

The first piece of advice to modern travelers to Egypt, therefore, is to book reservations as early as possible. Cruise ships and airliners last year brought to this country 344,478 travelers who stayed more than twenty-four hours. The average length of stay was about two weeks. In 1952 the figure was 208,000 and in 1953 252,000. Present indications are that the boom will continue.

The growing wanderlust among Americans and their financial ability to satisfy it has made the United States the largest source of tourists to Egypt. Americans are everywhere: buying tarbooshes (widely and mistakenly called fezzes), brass trays and brocades in the narrow, arched byways of the Moussky (Cairo's bazaar area); riding camels among the Great Pyramids at Giza; watching horse races at the Gezira and Heliopolis tracks; watching the desert-rimmed panorama of the incredibly green Nile Valley from deck chairs of sidewheelers newly restored to service on the river, or toiling through the tombs and temples of the ancient days.



Kennett Love
Pyramid of Zoser, in the desert at the edge of Nile Valley.

The Solar Ship

The archeological discoveries of the solar ships of Cheops at Giza and the massive truncated pyramid buried in the desert sands at Sakkara helped draw the attention of the traveling world to Egypt—the graph of arrivals showed a marked upturn last July, a month after the discoveries were widely publicized. The monthly influx reached a peak for the year of 41,000 visitors in September. But Egypt's travel boom has a much broader foundation.

Unfortunately the solar ship, which was lately being excavated, was completely closed to public view on Feb. 15 for an indefinite time. The ship is now being removed piece by piece from the subterranean chamber wherein it was discovered, for treatment in a chemical laboratory preparatory to its restoration.

In the pyramids Egypt possesses the only surviving wonder of the classic list of the "seven wonders" of the ancient world. Sight-seeing potentialities, joined with a moderate sunny climate and cool starlit nights, made Egypt one of the leading wintering places for wealthy Europeans in the leisurely days before World War I and even until the outbreak of World War II.

After the war political instability in Egypt and the Middle East prevented a revival of tourist traffic until Lieut. Col. Gamal Abdel Nasser and his youthful junta of army officers seized and fortified governmental authority nearly three years ago.

The leveling of incomes, particularly in the United States since before World War II, has vastly increased the number of persons able to travel for pleasure. Increase in air travel has brought Egypt within easy reach of tourists in Europe.

One of the most important reasons for a continuation of the boom is the serious attention given by Egypt's Department of Tourism, under an ex-shipping executive, Mohyeddin Shazly, to smoothing the path of visitors. Red tape has been cut to a minimum.

A courteous and well-trained corps of tourist officers wearing identifying armbands watches over the interests of visitors at ports and air fields, bazaars and modern shopping areas, hotels and sites of interest up the Nile Valley as far as Aswan. If the camel drivers at the pyramids get too hotly competitive or try to overcharge the foreign visitor, bewildered by a torrent of Arabic, a tourist officer will step up and take his side.

One of the most interesting improvements this year was the restoration of Nile steamboat cruises in January. The service will be suspended this month but will reopen in October. Prices for the eleven-day trip one way from Cairo to Aswan or back, with stops at Luxor, Thebes, Abydos, Edfu and other major archaeological sites range from 55 to 75 Egyptian pounds (roughly $160 to $190) per person. Travelers with less money or time to spend can take the two-and-one-half-day trip between Luxor and Aswan for 12½ pounds ($36). Prices include meals and are complete except for nominal fees at archaeological sites.

The cruises are a leisurely sample of the vacations of fifty years ago, when wealthy European and Egyptian families spent their winter holidays on the river in Dahabiyas, large, graceful houseboats rigged with triangular lateen sails similar to the present-day feluccas. The train trip to or from Aswan for the other half of the journey takes a night and a morning and costs $10 to $16 for good berths. There is a weekly plane service to Luxor for $22, while the overnight train trip costs $6.50 to $13.

Such trips add little if anything to the average daily cost of an Egyptian tour. The Government has estimated that the average tourist spends £4 (about $12) a day.

De luxe category hotel rooms with full board cost $9.50 daily for singles and $16 to $18.50 for doubles. First class category hotel prices range from $5.50 for a single room without bath to $11.50 for a double room with bath, also with full board.

In addition, there are some second class category hotels that are quite pleasant and comfortable and some excellent pensions at prices averaging more than 30 per cent less.

Hotel categories are issued by the Government, and a few of the "first-class" hotels could well be dropped a notch, but, in general, accommodations are good. Hotel prices average at least 20 per cent lower from May through September.

One innovation that may raise or lower the cost of an Egyptian holiday, depending on the luck of the traveler, is a new gambling casino for foreigners only, at the Mena House Hotel beside the Giza pyramids—a twenty-minute drive from downtown Cairo. There is also excellent duck and upland game shooting in the fall, winter and spring, with no daily or seasonal bag limits. The Red Sea is a spear fisherman's paradise, and of course has fine deep-sea fishing.

Most visitors, however, will be more interested in the Pharaonic and Islamic monuments and bazaars. For them agencies and hotels furnish a car for four or five persons with a driver and guide for £4 ($12) for half a day, or guided bus tours at half a pound per person for half a day.

Tips to Travelers

A few practical hints: Don't worry about Cairo's tap water. It is as pure as New York's. Fresh fruit is delicious here, but always peel it. If you like salads wait until you get home to eat them. It is a good idea to carry a supply of pills for intestinal troubles, just in case. There is no harm in getting a full set of innoculations before leaving home.

Summer weather here is far more bearable than in New York because, although midsummer daytime temperatures may be a degree or so higher, the heat is dry, and with two or three exceptions annually the nights are cool and breezy. Bring summer clothes, but remember that Cairo is a large, cosmopolitan city and it looks as funny to walk downtown in shorts and a pith helmet here as it does in New York.

The Egyptian pound is worth $2.89 at the official exchange rate, but generally costs about $2.94 at hotels and travel agencies. On the black market, which is more illegal than black markets in most European countries, a pound costs about $2.67. Although customs inspections are perfunctory for tourists, the law requires a declaration of all money and exchange transactions must be listed on the declaration. Heavy fines for discrepancies make black market transactions inadvisable as well as reprehensible.

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