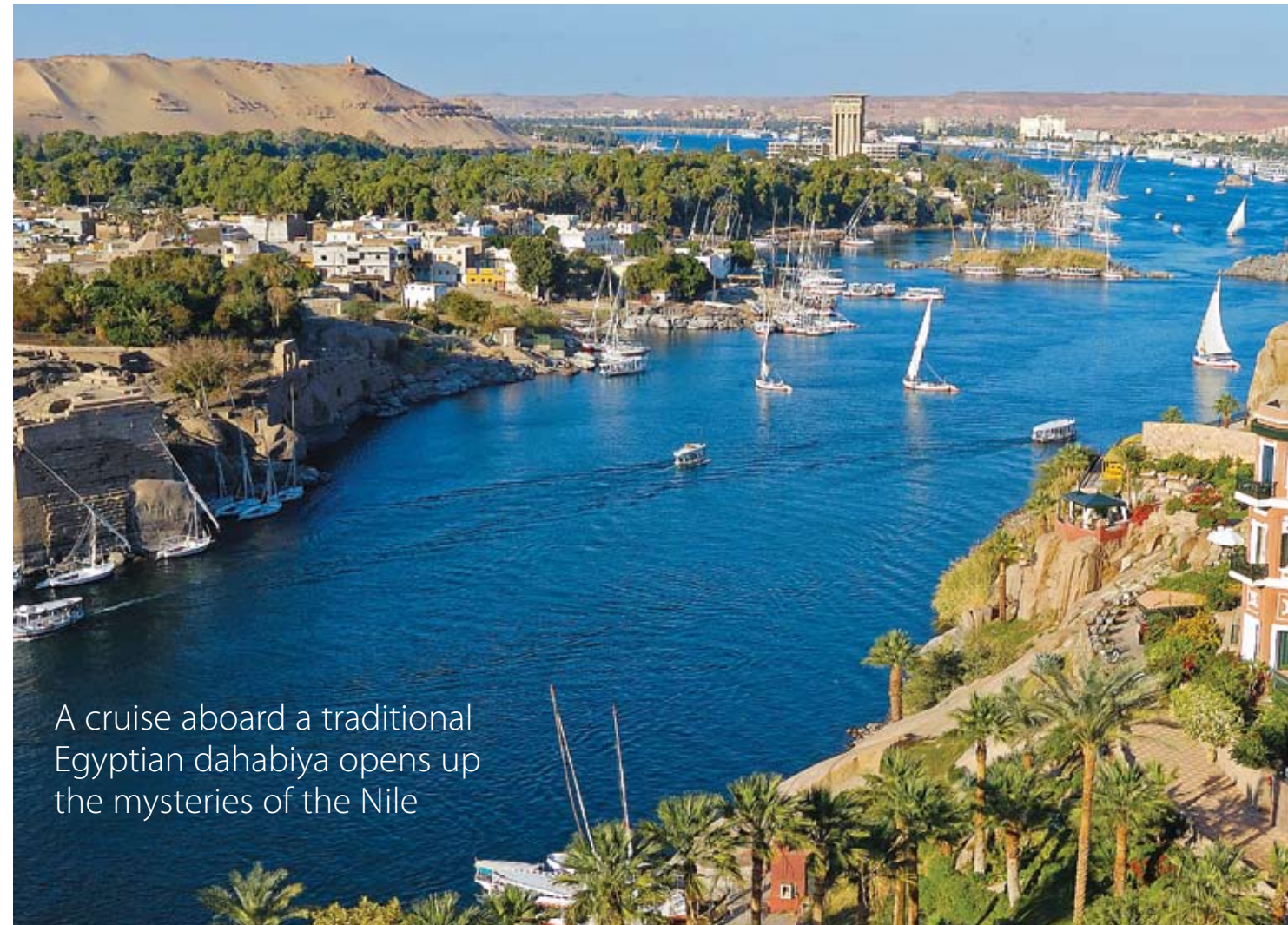


By Gary Blake and Wendy Johnson with photography by Gary Blake

CRUISING TO THE VALLEY OF THE KINGS



A cruise aboard a traditional Egyptian dahabiya opens up the mysteries of the Nile



When we stepped aboard the two-masted dahabiya *Hadeel*, visions came to mind of a bygone age, taking a page from a **Boy's Own Adventure Book** where Thomas Cook and Son paved the way to the four corners of the globe, taking the foreignness out of travel. A dahabiya was the choice for a 19th century grand tour of the Nile, and these river-going sailboats were common in Egypt in the 1920s when aristocrats and sophisticated travellers cruised the river in style. Such was our trip, and we fell into step with days gone by.

There are faster ways for the 21st century traveler to do the same route, such as aboard one

of the large, modern, white cruise ships, or even slower ways, such as on an open-decked felucca more suited for the adventurous young. As we approached *Hadeel*, moored on the bank at Luxor with its ship-to-shore gangplank bridging the waterside, men were working on board in traditional jillaba and turban headdress. On shore the sight of date trees and men riding donkeys made it an almost biblical setting in the early morning February sun.

Hadeel offered travel with comfort, and with its low freeboard and shallow draft the boat could get to riverside archaeological sites that larger cruise ships could not. With her slim beam she could glide along in the shallows along the river's edge, where we could see the

ancient world close at hand. She was built in 2007 in Alexandria, with a 147-foot length and 24-foot beam, and made of steel with varnished timber decks and wooden interior. Although the hull has a fine entry to the water, the V soon tapers to a flat bottom with a 2-foot draft, making the boat only suited for downwind sailing. Luxor to Aswan is the preferred route, using the prevailing winds with only a slight current of the Nile against it. The boat was rigged with two lateen sails made from Egyptian cotton, and this version of a lateen is not a true lateen but a seltee-lateen, having a short luff to the forward edge of the sail.

An experienced crew of 10 ensured our every need was met, and with only 16 passengers

it was an intimate cruise. The luxury didn't stop there, as a guide in Egyptology helped unravel the mysteries of the ancient monuments and temples, the relics of pharaonic culture, and made the whole complicated history come alive. Also onboard were two chefs, cabin crew, a captain, navigator, first mate and deck crew. Three more people manned the tow boat in the event of little or no wind and it kept the engineless dahabiya on schedule. This way of travel is perfect for peace and quiet, gliding over the water without a sound as one sleeps or relaxes onboard.

With the absence of buoys and charts we wondered how they navigated. The captain said it was from memory; the silhouette of a

familiar date palm, a waterside village and the moonlight was how he found his way through the sandbanks and shifting sands along his route. The wheelhouse had no depthsounder and lead lines are still used to check the depth of the sandy bottom.

On Luxor's west bank lies the Theban Necropolis, perhaps the world's richest archaeological site, containing the Valley of the Kings and Valley of the Queens in a secluded location among the limestone hills. By digging into these remote Theban hills pharaohs from Thutmose onward hoped to stop robbers stealing the priceless possessions buried with them for their afterlife, the most famous being the Tomb of Tutankhamun.



Cruising the Nile aboard a dahabiya, above and top, is the best way to experience the exotic culture of Egypt, such as, from left facing page, the Temple of Kom Ombo, the ancient city of Aswan and Kitchener's Island.

Luxor and Karnak stand on the east bank. The colossi of ancient Egyptian temples were stunning when illuminated at night and the neighboring Karnak Temple of Amun was expansive, much bigger and far more complex than the Temple of Luxor or any other monument in Egypt. We found the modern town of Luxor full of noise, markets and chaos, so we sought sanctuary aboard *Hadeel*. An early start the next day brought us to El Kab. Built long before the pyramids of Giza, El Kab is one of the oldest Egyptian cities and was an important trading town, standing at the crossroads of the great African and Arab trading routes.

The Temple of Horus at Edfu, which was buried under sand and silt for nearly 2,000 years, is the largest and best preserved Ptolemaic temple in Egypt. The Scottish artist David Roberts visited Egypt for 11 weeks in 1838, and his sketches show the local inhabitants using the tops of the vast sandstone columns for both shelter and housing. Afterward, we headed to Fawaza Island to overnight, with a shoreside buffet and fireside evening.

Unbeknown to the slumbering passengers, our journey the next day started at 4 a.m. With no engine it was impossible to tell whether the boat was moving or not. The

ried stone could be lowered down to the boats on the Nile.

As we headed farther up the Nile the river narrowed and the rocks on both sides acted as a canyon, with the wind funneling through the gap, enabling us to set sail. The captain's face revealed he preferred to be towed, as some steerage was lost.

The imposing Greco-Roman Temple of Kom Ombo, situated right on the riverbank, surfaced in the distance from the sugar cane and corn landscape. Careful timing was needed to nip in before the huge cruise ships lined up to dock, disgorging hundreds of tourists en masse. The unusual structure is completely symmetrical,

Aswan is where Egypt ends and Africa begins. The farmland became a narrow strip of greenery and the temperature rose. The Nile meanders through the town and up to the point where the Western Desert sand comes right to the edge of the river. The first of the six cataracts start at Aswan and limits access to the remainder of the river upstream out of Egypt into Sudan. Ancient Egyptians believed this region to be the edge of their world, the cataracts being guarded by three gods, and so believed their prayers and offerings allowed the Nile to rise and fall each year.

Now the Nile is tamed by the Aswan Dam, which in the process flooded some 160 miles of Egyptian Nubia as



Traditional feluccas sail the Nile, taking tourists to Aswan sites.

This is where *Hadeel* came into her own, as no large cruise ship could moor at the tiny waterside village. The children came to greet us, calling out "Salaam alaykum" (peace be with you) as we walked through fields of sugar cane, passing large men travelling on small donkeys, up to the tombs in the foothills. The guardians of the tombs opened them especially for us. From this vantage point you could view the area and still make out the settlement and ruins, and the tall, thick mud brick walls surrounding the remains of a township.

beautiful Nile scenery slid by the cabin windows. Egrets skimmed the water, water buffalo grazed on the banks, fields were worked by men and women in flowing robes, while fishermen in small boats and mounds of net caught their food for the day.

Gebel El Silsila was another stop where stones were quarried and cut by the ancient Egyptians, who by sheer manpower and ingenuity were able to remove huge sections of stone blocks for their monuments downstream in Luxor and Karnak. Rope holes were cut into the rocks, and using block and tackle the quar-

with each feature duplicated twice—two sanctuaries, two entrances, two halls—one to each of the two gods, the falcon god Haroeris and Sobek, the local crocodile god.

In the inner sanctuary you can see the seasons illustrated by hieroglyphics on the walls. The year was divided into three seasons: flooding, planting and harvesting, with gods for each. Water meters along the Nile were constructed to measure the levels for crop expectations and to calculate tax for the water use, and at Kom Ombo is a good example of a Nile-o-Meter.



far as the Sudanese border. Numerous temples were drowned beneath the waters, but the most famous, Abu Simbel, was moved in an extraordinary feat of engineering, as was the temple of Philae just outside Aswan.

The Nile at Aswan was filled with riverboats of all kinds and studded with islands. Feluccas, huge sailing boats with lifting keels that take tourists out to the islands, brought additional beauty to the river scene. Lateen-rigged with flax sails of an almost blanketlike material, the feluccas cruised the river, taking one back to colonial times and fulfilling a romantic notion of a cruise down the Nile under sail, even if only for part of it. On the opposite bank is the Mausoleum dedicated to the Aga Khan, who loved Aswan where he spent most winters.

It was here our eight-day trip came to an end, and what better way to depart but in the same way as the 19th century Grand Tourist, with a stay at the famous Old Cataract Hotel, positioned on the riverbank overlooking the cataracts of the Nile. 

EAST COAST

Educating Self-Reliant, Confident Sailors For Over 50 Years
 BEGINNER • CRUISING • ADVANCED
 Over 25 Sailing Courses on the Chesapeake and Tampa Bays
Annapolis Sailing School
 ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND
 TAMPA BAY, FLORIDA
 800.638.9192 • www.AnnapolisSailing.com

SOUTHWEST

Emerald Coast Yachts
 Sailing School, Charters, Yacht Management
 excellent instructors + more sail time + small class size
 Awarded ASA's Highest Honor "Outstanding Sailing School" & "Outstanding Instructors"
 Basic through Advanced, Coastal Nav & Cruising Cat Ready for more? Ask about the "Captain's Special" and "106+"
 888-204-0241 www.ecsailing.com

WEST COAST

Afterguard Sailing Academy
 STARBOARD!
 DUCK THAT BARGE! TRIM THAT SAIL!
 Did/does the person you've tried to sail with have a square mouth?
 Afterguard, the fun "No Yelling" place to jump start a whole new lifestyle.
 Excellent Instruction • Great Prices • sailing San Francisco Bay
 www.afterguard.net 510 535-1954

MIDWEST

America's Best
 VIRGIN ISLANDS
 BAHAMAS
 CHESAPEAKE BAY
 LAKE ERIE
 LAKE ST. CLAIR
 BAREBOAT INSTRUCTION
 BEGINNING-ADVANCED CLASSES
 LIVE-ABOARD LESSONS
 OFFSHORE PACKAGES
FAIR WIND SAILING SCHOOL
 www.fairwindsailing.com 866-380-SAIL

Magellan Sailing School
 San Juan Islands
 Mediterranean
 Caribbean
 ASA Certification Group & Private Classes
 Meatless Cruises in July
 San Juan Islands \$1500 per student
 All fees & books included
 magellansailing.com Skype: magellanyachts
 360-510-0696 Bellingham, WA

SOUTHEAST

Sail in historic St. Augustine Charters and Sailing School
 Sail This!
 One monthly fee. No maintenance. No worries.
 We sail beautiful St. Augustine year round!
 St. Augustine Sailing call 800-683-7245 www.sta-sail.com e-mail: sas@sta-sail.com
 ASA Sailing School Captained & Bareboat Charters Sunset Cruise Specials SailTime Fractional Sailing Yacht Sales
 800-683-7245 www.sta-sail.com

SAIL WITH CONFIDENCE
 ASA AMERICAN SAILING ASSOCIATION

Windward Sailing School
 Amelia Island, Fl.
 Certification Courses Basic through Advanced
 Private Lessons and Charters
 ASA Outstanding School
 Classes Available Year Round
 Discounts Available: for Combination Courses and Couples
 Discounts for local accommodations or live aboard classes available
 Capt. Tony Jones
 www.windwardsailing.com (904) 327-3265

Advertise Your ASA School Here
 Contact Us for Details on this Special Ad Section
Sailing
 (262) 284-3494
 ads@sailingmagazine.net