

The Hostetler Newsletter

- Special Edition -

April 2013

Info & Prayer Trip to Egypt

In March I had the incredible opportunity to travel to Egypt for two weeks with a group of six other Christians. The goal of the journey was to gain personal insight into life in an Islamic culture, to meet and encourage Arabic Christians during a challenging time, and to see first hand how God is working through the mission organization EMO, who has been reaching out to the people in and around Aswan for over 100 years.

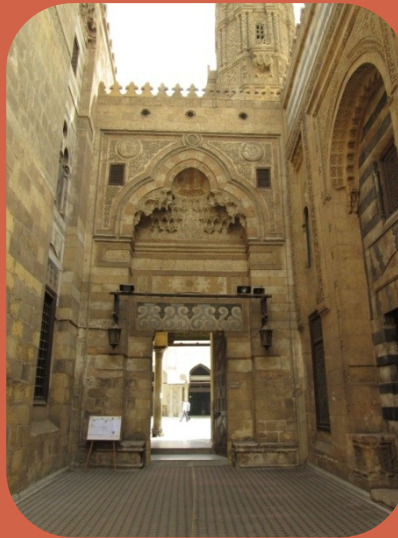
Our first impression of Cairo was loud, dirty and chaotic. The constant honking of car horns, streets filled with vehicles and people, the muezzins calling for prayer as early as 4.30 am, a thin layer of dust covering everything...

All together we travelled almost 3,000 km (1,800 miles) by taxi, mini bus, train, jeep, boat, and one time on the back of a camel! I am trying to capture our impressions with pictures and words that help to convey a little of the powerful impact this trip had on us....



I hope that reading this letter will reflect a little of the tremendous blessing the trip was to me. Thanks to all of you who prayed for us and our trip and thanks to our awesome travel guides Joachim, Hanna and little Sarah!

Salaam, Uli



Minarets characterize every city or village – some of them of beautiful architecture; others decorated with colorful lights that shine brightly during the night.



Islamic Egypt – In Cairo we visited the Al-Azhar Mosque, the home of the leading school of Islam, established during the 10th century. It is situated in old Islamic Cairo with its narrow streets filled with colorful bazaars. The impressive building with its open air court has a prayer hall big enough for 5.000 men.



Even in the Nubian village of Ballana near Aswan new mosques are being built and the hand of Fatima protects the door of a colorful home.



Men are required to pray at the mosque four times a day – I cannot imagine how they get anything done during the day....



Coptic Egypt – In Cairo we visited the cradle of Egyptian Christianity, where the evangelist St. Marc founded the church during the first century. The oldest Coptic church is build right next to a Roman fortress and secret passage ways go all through the underground because the Christians have always experienced a great deal of persecution. Every detail at that church symbolizes a spiritual message – from the thirteen marble pillars the pulpit stands on (Jesus and the 12 disciples, Judas' pillar being of black color) to a wooden roof structure that resembles Noah's ark.



Near Aswan we visited St. Simeon a monastery built around 300 AD. It was situated along a caravan route. In addition to giving monks a remote place to live and worship the Lord, it provided shelter to anybody coming by. The Muslim travelers had a special section where they would spend the night.



Stone used to imprint the cross onto the holy flat bread...

View out of one of the monastery windows into the desert...

Ancient Egypt – near Cairo we visited the Pyramids. 4,500 years of history looked down at us and we marveled at the site of incredible engineering and human effort to ensure safe passage into the after life.



Further down the Nile we visited the Luxor temple and some tombs in the Valley of the Kings. The size of the monuments as well as the details in the wall paintings and hieroglyphic documentation was overwhelming!





Women often travel separately from men.

Life in Egypt – Cairo with its 8 Million inhabitants looks like a typical metropolitan city, yet combining the old and traditional ways with the new. Business men in suits and ties pass men in jalabiyas - women in European style dress walk along those covered in black from head to toe.

Down the river things change dramatically and one feels like being transported into a time long passed. Most of the business is done by men and women are hardly seen in the streets. Vendors sell their colorful goods arranged beautifully along the side of the street. Half an animal simply hangs on a hook out in the open.



Sometimes a make shift store is all one has....



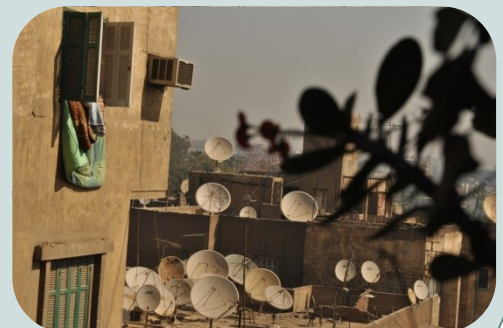
Transportation is done using donkey drawn wagons, tuctucs (motorcycles with a small cabin for three people), open trucks, or anything else that has wheels.



In some places the time seems to stand still and the men are sitting in the streets, talking, smoking, observing, hanging out – while the women are busy at home, taking care of the family, cooking, cleaning, washing, raising the children, supported by their often very large network of other female family members....



In spite of the often old fashioned way of life, EVERY house has a satellite dish allowing access to the latest news from all over the world – including several Christian stations!



Nature in Egypt – One might think that a country made up of 90% desert is boring. Absolutely not! We were blessed to spend three days in the desert, seeing the most wonderful things! We learned why the black desert is black – small dark particles of eroded volcanic granite covering the beige colored sand – and why the white desert is white – an ancient lime stone sea bed from when the desert was actually filled with water! Over time the wind and the sand have sculptured different shaped figures out of the very soft lime stone.



At first glance one has the impression that the desert is empty of life. But somehow the Lord is able to sustain bugs, grasshoppers, foxes and even a lonely group of palm trees – plus many other critters we thankfully did not encounter, like scorpions and snakes.

We slept under the stars and woke up with the sun. And had a lot of fun together, praising the Lord around a camp fire.



The Nile River – the artery of the land – gives luscious life to just a few kilometers to its left and its right. Programs are underway to extend the reach of the water to be able to grow olives, dates, and cactus figs in one of the harshest environments. The spiritual lessons are amazingly clear! Water is absolutely necessary to sustain life – Jesus promised all those who believe in Him the life giving and never ending supply of living water! This water – the Holy Spirit – can sustain life even in the worst of conditions, as one's roots go deep into soil of God's Word (Psalm 1 and Colossians 2:6-7)



My travel friend Michelle.... right before we roll down the sand dune behind us in the picture...



Nubian Egypt – The Nubians are an ethnic group of people living in the South of Egypt and the North of Sudan. They are often tall and very dark, their villages are colorful and clean. Many of them used to live and farm around the Nile, but were resettled because of the construction of the large dam near Aswan. This has caused them great grief.



Over 100 years ago a few men from Germany had a heart to reach this people group and as a result a mission organization was founded. This organization has changed names several times, but is now called Evangeliums-gemeinschaft Mittlere Osten (that I am working for part-time) and has its headquarter in Wiesbaden! Amongst other things they have just recently completed the translation and recording of one of the Gospels in the native Nobiin.



Three of our team spent two days with Nubian families and experienced first hand the hospitality of these great people! Our prayer is that this visit has deepened the relationship between our local missionaries and the Nubians in this village to reach them for Christ in the future....



EMO - Mission Stations – staffed with an international team of Christian doctors, nurses, and administrators. It was awesome to see the large number of obviously Arabic people filling the court yard and hallways and rooms one evening, when we toured the in- and out-patient facility in Aswan. The hospital just turned 100 years old and has an excellent reputation in the city. Many talk about the different spirit in this place and how they are being treated so much better than in the government clinics.



The medical outposts in the small towns of Ballana and Darau serve the even poorer country folk. The flair is that of colonial times – a walled property with a small clinic that opens to the public several days a week, while the missionaries are sort of locked up during the other times. Lady nurses administer the stations alone, with the aid of two or three local helpers and visiting doctors from Aswan and have a deep abiding faith in the Lord and His sustaining grace, provision and protection.

We were extremely blessed to hear the testimonies of several long time missionaries – their faithful obedience to the Lord in sometimes adverse living conditions and a politically uncertain time inspired all of us to seek Him more diligently and to practice being

