

Report of Egyptian Corner Contest Winners' Trip to Egypt



4 January – 18 January

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I. Introduction

On January 4th 2010 Jean Taylor, David Currie and Emily Osvold traveled to Egypt for a two-week trip through Cairo, Alexandria and Luxor. The Baltimore Friends of the BA of the Baltimore-Alexandria Sister Cities Committee organized the visit to give the participants highlights of the most important historical sites as well as a contemporary feel of each city.

In each location the students were accompanied by a guide who showed them around and accompanied them on their visits to historical sites and other tourist attractions. The trip also had scheduled free time, in which Jean, David and Emily had a chance to explore on their own and see different parts of the cities.

We would like to thank the Baltimore-Luxor-Alexandria Sister City Committee for sponsoring our trip. We would also like to give special acknowledgment to Dr. Abdelwahab Elabd for organizing all the logistics including accommodations, transportation, schedules, and more. We are also grateful to our hosts and guides in each city for their warm and generous hospitality as well as the personal time they took to show us around.

II. Schedule and Detailed Visits

January 5th, 6th, and 7th, 2010

Day 1

We arrived tired but excited midday on January 5th. After Dr. Elabd greeted us at the airport and gave us a more detailed plan of our visit as well as a prepaid phone, (which we were especially grateful for), we headed over to the Smart Village for a small introduction to the area and to meet our delightful guide for Cairo – Mr. Sherif Farahat.

My first impressions of Cairo left me with the immediate feel of a developing nation, accented particularly by the roadways of Cairo as well as the transportation. From a family of four on a motorbike or ten men and four goats in the back of a truck, to a malnourished mule amenably obeying his master, the people of Cairo understand that where there is a destination, there is a way.

The driving practices of the city were quite a scene to behold. After a few days of being driven around, it appeared that the only rule of the road was that there are no rules at all. Even so, the drivers of Cairo seemed to share an unspoken understanding about how others drive, and appeared to have a minimal number of accidents considering the driving practices on the road.

After touring the Smart Village we headed with our host, Mona Hosny, to her beautiful home on the outskirts of Cairo. That night our palates had our first introduction to Egyptian cuisine – a fine affair of pickled vegetables, chicken, salad, rice and a traditional Egyptian stew.

Day 2

We spent our first full day in Egypt at the Smart Village. There we received an extensive visit of Cultnat, the Center for Documentation of Cultural and National Heritage. Cultnat is a terrific resource for all of Egypt. In ten years the organization has thoroughly documented for preservation an extensive variety of Egyptian heritage from archaeological sites and old relics to different styles of architecture found in Cairo.

Day 3

Our second full day in Cairo started early with a visit to the pyramids followed by a trip to the national museum. We were all in awe of both experiences. The United States has such a short history relative to the rest of the world – especially Egypt. Seeing all the artifacts and other relics brought to life everything we had learned in school and gave me a better understanding of the Egyptians' innumerable contributions.

January 8-11 Alexandria

Day 4

Our time in Alexandria was refreshing in body and spirit with the cool Mediterranean breeze and the calmer flow of traffic. El Amir Mohsen met us at our hotel on the afternoon of the 8th. We spent the day enjoying foul and falafel as well as wandering the fish market, strolling along the pier, and getting an exclusive tour of one of Alexandria's hidden gems – a alleyway of art. Amir had a friend that was dedicated to using the artists of Alexandria to transform unkempt parts of city into works of art. He also created a small studio for the artists to create their art and sell it for a small profit. Jean and I bought a few pieces to remember a very special part of Alexandria.

Day 5

Amir showed us around the historical sites of Alexandria, specifically the Colosseum, Palace, and the historic Bibliotheca Alexandrina. The library was architecturally stunning, but even more impressive was its capacity and resources of which it can hold eight million books. We ended the day with a traditional Egyptian meal at the famous Hosny restaurant, filling up on our usual tahina, baba ganoush, hummus, lentil soup and kofta.



El Amir, Emily, Jean and David and the Alexandria library

Day 6-8

Our last two days in Alexandria were spent at the library. On Sunday we were each given tours of different areas of interest relative to our field of study. I spent my morning in the Publishing department, Jean in the Arts department and David in the Production studio. It gave us each a chance to explore our own interests further and to get a closer look at different functions of the library. Bibliotheca Alexandrina is not just merely a library, but an organization that staffs thousands of Alexandrian citizens as well as a host of different people from all over the world.

That afternoon we had lunch with Heidi, the secretary of Ms. Mona Elnashar. With almost every person that we met in Egypt, we found that the Egyptian people are some of the warmest, most friendly people we had ever encountered. Heidi was a testament to this, engaging us in genuine, thoughtful conversation about the current economic and political position of Egypt and its peoples.

January 12-16 Luxor and the Red Sea

Day 9-13

On Tuesday, January 12th we met Abdelwahab Elabd and his wife Hanaa, along with two of their friends, Said and Laila Oweis at the Cairo airport and flew with them down to Luxor. Immediately upon arrival in Luxor I observed such a difference from both Alexandria and Cairo. Luxor, quiet and slow-paced, was warmer, less polluted and lush than any of our previous destinations. Our enchantment with the new city only grew as we drove past the Luxor temple and wound our way alongside the Nile.

That evening we were invited for dinner at one of Abdelwahab's friend's restaurants on the Nile. For many hours we sat along the river, enjoying the sunset in great company, wonderful food, and engaging conversation. Again we got to delve into the topic of the Egyptian government and its history over the last fifty years or so. As a student studying international relations, I was extremely interested to learn about the state of Egypt and the Egyptians' position on their own country.

Over the next few days in Luxor we had the pleasure of visiting many of the most historic and famous sites in Egypt, including Valley of the Kings, Hatshepsut Temple, Karnak and the Luxor Temple. Each site was incredibly fascinating and mystifying. It was amazing to stand before these archaeological sites and contemplate the construction of each and its capacity to withstand the test of time. Although the formation of many of the temples was explained, the sheer amount that the Egyptians accomplished is almost mind-boggling.

Luxor was a lovely city set in the middle of a spectacular region of Egypt. Unfortunately the natural beauty of the area along with the historic sites makes it one of the top tourist destinations in the country. Every temple and ruin we visited was almost overwhelmed with an onslaught of tourists from all over Europe and Asia. Although each site we visited was very crowded, the sites themselves were too grand to be having the experience be detracted by the amount of tourists present.

Jean, Lola, Hanaa, and Emily at Luxor Temple



While in Luxor, Jean and I took a day trip to Hurghada on the Red Sea. There we stayed at the lovely Bella Vista resort where we went for a boat ride and snorkeled. Once again we found the Egyptians to be very friendly, outgoing people. We were constantly engaged in conversations about where we were from, what we were doing in Egypt and our overall experience. Talking to the staff reinforced previous impressions that I had made – that many Egyptians are working in jobs far below their level of education. A number of the

staff members that we spoke to were engineers or had gone to university in Europe, but they couldn't find work in their own field so they ended up working at the hotel. Although you can certainly find this in every country, I felt as if Egypt had its fair share of the under-employed.

January 17th and 18th Cairo

Day 14 and 15

On the 17th of January we headed back to Cairo for the last day of our trip. After arriving at the hotel, we walked for a long time before finding any food. Finally we made our way into the Sheraton hotel and found the Aladdin restaurant on the tenth floor with outdoor seating overlooking the Nile and Cairo. It was a perfect end to our trip. The three of us sat in the restaurant for many hours, enjoying our last bites of Egyptian cuisine, playing cards, and reflecting upon our trip. We started out as three acquaintances, only knowing each other through the contest, but by the end of our two weeks together we had shared many experiences and had grown into good friends.

III. Conclusion

Our trip to Egypt was an incredible learning experience. We were all so impressed by the warmth of the Egyptians and their gracious hospitality. Coming from a developed country we were not as used to the constant demand for *baksheesh* for small favors and the seemingly endless hassling because we were foreigners. However, this was not a deterrent from my experience but only added to the sense of the culture and environment. I was also very fascinated by Egypt's history, but as a student of international relations, I was very intrigued to learn about the current situation of Egypt. I discovered the country to be rich in so many different aspects of life – from history, archeology, architecture, cuisine, and culture, that one can only get a small glimpse of everything Egypt has to offer in two weeks. This experience has opened my eyes to a beautiful part of the world that Americans know some, but not enough about. I feel fortunate to have been a part of our small journey to this ancient land, and hope that many other Americans can one day see this country or through a program or website such as the Egyptian Corner, gain a deeper appreciation for all that Egypt has to offer.

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We would like to thank you for giving us this incredible opportunity to spend two weeks exploring Egypt. Special thanks to all of the wonderful people that hosted us for our visit. We feel very grateful for their generous hospitality and time that they took to spend with us. Last but not least we would like to extend a big thank you to Abdelwahab Elabd for all the hard work and time he put into organizing our trip.

Images of Egypt Contest Cairo, Alexandria & Luxor January 4th-18th 2010



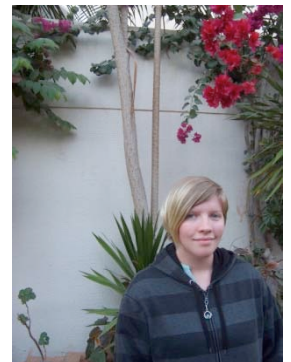
Cultnet



Library of Alexandria

Introduction

On January 4th Jean Taylor, a college senior from College of Notre Dame of Maryland in the U.S., departed for two weeks to explore Egypt. This trip was given to three winners of the Images of Egypt contest promoted through the Mayor of Baltimore and the Baltimore Friends of the Alexandria Library of Baltimore/Luxor/Alexandria Sister City Committee. I am very grateful to the Baltimore Friends for granting me this amazing opportunity to explore the land of Egypt, the culture, the people and both the modern and historical contributions of the country.



Cairo

Tuesday, January 5th, 2010

Arrived in Cairo airport and went from there to the Smart Village and the Cultnet Building where we met Sherif Farahat our guide during our stay in Cairo. We went home with Mona Hosney who was kind enough to let us stay at her house while in Cairo.

Wednesday, January 6th, 2010

Today was spent exploring the Smart Village and taking a closer look into modern Egypt. Cultnet, the Center for Documentation of Cultural and National Heritage, is the building where the people are working to preserve and record Egyptian history and culture. Part of that means building an internet database where people from all over the world can access information on any aspect of Egyptian culture, past or present. Cultnet also hosts the world's first Culturama exhibit. Culturama is the first panoramic 9 screens worldwide where people can interact and learn about Egyptian history. More Culturamas are being produced but Egypt was the first country to have one. The Star Rider exhibit within Cultnet showed how the ancient Egyptians were ahead of their time with their knowledge of time and clocks, astrology and the stars, and the fact that they believed the Earth was round. I also enjoyed the look of the Smart Village and how they mixed history and modernity with their symbols and architecture. The theme of white buildings and blue-glass windows gave the place a calm, streamlined feel.



Thursday, January 7th, 2010

We learned that today was the celebration of the Coptic Christian Christmas Day in Egypt so it was considered a national holiday and most people had off of work. Sherif showed us the historical side of Egypt today. We visited the pyramids and the National Egyptian Museum, Al Alhazer Park and we visited a mosque later this evening.



Alexandria

Friday, January 8th, 2010

Arrived in Alexandria this morning and our guide, El Amir Mohsen, showed us around the city. He took us to the 100 year old fish market and then to Haret Elakbat, an alley where artists

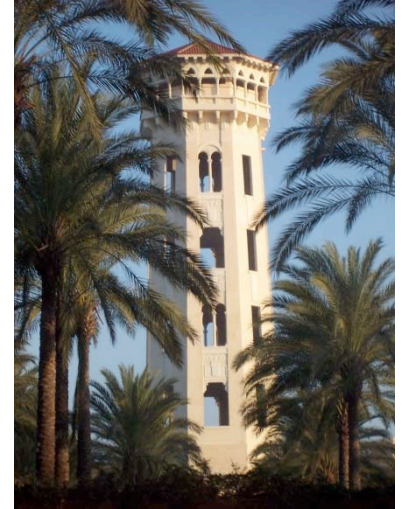


have come together to help change the community for the children. They collaborated with different artists around the world and the children of the community and came together to paint messages of peace and friendship on the walls of the alley. Two men who live within one of the buildings of the alley take raw

materials to make shoes for poor children. I really enjoyed seeing artists coming together to create art to change the world. As an artist myself, it was a very inspiring idea.

Saturday, January 9th, 2010

El Amir took us to see the site where Pompeii's Pillar still stands and to the site of a Roman amphitheatre. We visited the Library of Alexandria next where we had a tour of the museum of Antiquities. That particular museum showed us a quick glimpse of Egypt throughout the ages. After that we toured the Manuscript museum which held a collection of ancient Arabic manuscripts from religious tomes to math lesson books. We also went on the general Library Tour where we learned about the architecture of the library and about its huge internet database. There are two internet archives in the world, one in New York and the other resides within The Library of Alexandria in Egypt. Amir also showed us the king's summer garden and palace and the famous hotel that once was the palace of the princesses of Egypt.



Sunday, January 10th, 2010

We spent the day at the Library of Alexandria. The children's library was excellent. There were areas where they could read, watch educational show, and an area for movie or storytelling



time. There was an activity room where they could draw and a computer area where they could either play games or research projects for school. They even have a special computer for any students with learning disabilities. We also got to view the current art Biennale currently hosted within the Library's conference hall building. We also

met Ms. Mona Elnashar and her secretary Heidi who was kind enough to give us tours around the different Library facilities.

Monday, January 11th, 2010

We explored the Library's extensive internet database and then went to see a show within the Library of Alexandria's Planetarium. We saw the show Seven Natural Wonders and the Seven Wonder of the Ancient World. The Planetarium was impressive in size and technology. There were also multiple options for language from Arabic and French, to English and German, etc.



Luxor

Tuesday, January 12th, 2010

Left Alexandria and met up with Abdelwahab Elabd, his wife Hanaa, and their friends, Said and Laila Oweis, to leave together for Luxor.

Wednesday, January 13th, 2010

We got to see both sides of the Nile, the East bank and the West bank. We visited the Valley



of the Kings where we visited three tombs. The tomb of Ramses I was the most preserved over the years of history. His tomb still contained the vivid colors of the paint on the walls. I was fascinated by the sheer amount of symbolism within the tombs. I was greatly influenced by the art I viewed while on my trip and it has

proved inspiring for my own work. We also visited the Temple of Hatshepsut, the Karnak Temple,

which revealed a great amount of information about the pharaohs and their different views, and the Luxor Temple. To have walked within these ancient monuments after years of only viewing them through a history textbook was an eye-opening experience.

Thursday & Friday, January 14th & 15th, 2010

Emily and I stayed by the Red Sea for two relaxing days. Everyone was very friendly, as they had been all over Egypt.

Saturday, January 16th, 2010

We visited the Luxor Museum which housed an impressive collection of mummies, art, and artifacts of everyday life. The design of the museum was pleasant. I really enjoyed our visit to the Nubian Village. To see a community of women coming together and creating not only art but a means of supporting themselves and helping other women to support themselves was very inspiring.

Sunday, January 17th, 2010

We spent our last day in Egypt in Cairo, walking around the city and enjoying our last hours in the fascinating country. What I miss most is the friendly atmosphere and the open welcoming atmosphere that I felt every time I walked along the streets among the people. People are what make a country and Egyptian people are one of the happiest warm people to each other and to foreigners.

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I would like to sincerely thank everyone who made this trip possible for us. I appreciated every moment during this experience. I would like to thank everyone who hosted us and guided us in each city with special thanks to Sherif Farahat, Mona Hosney, El Amir Mohsen, Ms. Mona Elnashar, Heidi, Said, Laila, Hanaa and most importantly Abdelwahab Elabd. I thank you for all you have done for us. I am eternally grateful to all of you.

Egypt

With my experiences in Egypt I have come to learn more about this country than I ever knew before. I not only got to experience the history and ancient culture up close but the modern side of Egypt and the people of today. Most of the time when Americans think of Egypt their minds picture the pyramids and pharaohs. Since I have seen Egypt in person other images pop into my mind when I think of that country. I picture mosques and Coptic churches. I see people in the latest European fashions walking next to men in robes and turbans. I remember the friendly faces and warm attitudes of the people I met on the streets. I see the children running excitedly through the streets. I see the future grow as the Smart Village expands. To have this multi-faceted knowledge of Egypt has enriched my life. I plan on using my knowledge to spread awareness of this captivating country to my family, friends, and future acquaintances.