

**INFORMATION ABOUT EGYPT ECLIPSE TOUR
2006 MARCH – APRIL**

Please Read Carefully

Dear Eclipse Chaser,

Here is lots of useful information about our trip to Egypt. It was provided by our tour operator. If you have any questions or concerns, please let me know. I will need \$20/person (check only) for the visas as outlined below. If you are not arriving on our group flights, this service will not be available.

I am looking forward to traveling with all of you very soon.

Regards,

Marian

**Marian P. Cohen
Continental Capers Travel Center, Inc.
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Getting Ready to GO!

We know everyone is just dying to get going for their upcoming eclipse trip. We know everyone has questions and worries. We know everyone wants to know everything they can before it gets too late. We call this condition, “Gettin’ ready Itis” We hope this information helps everyone in their preparedness for travel.

Understand that documents will be send out approximately 2 weeks prior to travel.

We can not issue those documents any sooner, as the supplier does not provide them to us any sooner. This is an industry standard because details and travel plans may be subject to change. Exchanging vouchers at the last minute is very complicated.

Dress/Clothing:

You will not be required to bring a suit and tie or ball gown on any of our tours. Therefore, wear what you are comfortable in. If you are most comfortable in jeans, wear jeans. If you prefer slacks and a polo shirt, do. If you’re dying to wear your new dress, do. However, knowing that there are no expectations, please feel free to wear what you are most comfortable in.

*Egypt is a Muslim country and maintains a conservative culture. Be considerate of your surroundings in “modest” dress. This means it’s better to avoid bare shoulders, bare midriffs and short shorts. In beach, pool and swimming environments, feel free to wear typical swim wear. Mosques have propriety rules also. **Shorts are not allowed. A lady may not enter a mosque with bare shoulders.** See the segment below on customs and culture below.*

The weather will be moderately warm. Remember that “Upper Nile and Upper Egypt” mean Upper Temperatures. Luxor and Aswan will have the highest daytime temperatures with milder temperatures on the coast and in Cairo. The humidity is very low, so it will not likely feel uncomfortably hot.

You will have a lot of walking, so be sure your walking shoes are comfortable and broken-in before you leave home.

Temperature averages:

Cairo: Average Lows 56 degrees F, Average Highs 77 degrees F.
Luxor: Average Lows 55–60 degrees F, Average Highs 85–90 degrees F.
Alexandria: Average Lows 53 degrees F, Average Highs 71 degrees F.

As to immigration and visas:

A Visa is required for entry to Egypt. These are typically accomplished at the immigration desk on entry into Egypt for a fee of \$20.00.

HOWEVER, our supplier offers a very NICE service for Americans or EU citizens, whereas we pay the visa fee in advance with our passport details. Then, our guide can actually meet us INSIDE immigration right after we get off the plane to put the visa stamp inside our passport. With this service, we bypass the immigration desk entirely.

Importing goods and equipment:

Egypt wants to be sure we are not importing goods, so they will be watching our luggage for this. They are looking for large or hard-case bags. All of these bags are pulled to the side and examined by a customs official. The serial number will be recorded in your passport, then re-checked on the way out. This is not performed for ALL bags, just those with hard cases or which are very large.

Therefore, we would like anyone who anticipates a piece of equipment that will go in a hard-case bag to report to us in advance with the description of its prospective contents with serial numbers in conjunction with your passport details.

We will submit this list in advance, then on entry our representative will walk your equipment through customs on your behalf, with your passport to have this process done. This means you need to give your passport to our tour guide before you leave the airport for the bus. It will be returned as soon as that process is complete. On exit, remember to send your passport with our agent to record the exit of the equipment for serial number checking.

Electricity throughout will be 220V AC:

Egypt uses the standard European 2 round prong plugs. This means you need an adapter. Note that most camera chargers, camcorders, laptops and modern electronic devices which use a battery can use 220 vac. To be sure, look at the cord which goes to your device. If it has a square block (or cradle) between the wall and the device, it will have a printed card to say what it can accept. Look for the words, "IN: 110-240VAC" This is the range of current it can accept. If it says this, you can use it there without a transformer. Things without this, like electric shavers need a transformer. The transformer looks like a rectangular cube with in prongs and out prongs.

Whether you need the transformer or not; you all need the adapter between slotted and round plugs. You can buy this almost anywhere. I found them at Walmart, Target, Radio Shack, Walgreens, the Dollar Store, JC Penneys, Circuit City.

There are no immunization requirements for this tour.

We always recommend that clients review their immunizations they should have at home. Most Americans do not have recommended shots just to live in their hometowns. Use this as an opportunity to get caught up on this general health issue. It will increase your general health before you go.

The currency in Egypt is the Egyptian Pound (EGP):

The exchange rate today is 5.75 EGP to the dollar. 1 EGP = \$0.175 You can convert into EGP at the airport if you need a taxi or at the hotel when you arrive. You will need a passport to exchange money. Your exchange rates are best at a bank, but you likely won't visit one. The next best is the hotel, airport or cruise ship, the worst.

Traveler's checks in Egypt are not very helpful:

They are not readily accepted by merchants. One must go to a bank or money exchange and there is a fee to exchange one for cash. On occasion, the fee to exchange a travelers' check is larger than the traveler's check itself. We suggest that you utilize the hotel safes in your room, and when traveling, to use a money belt worn inside your clothing for large denominations of cash. Credit cards are a good tool when traveling. If the card is lost or stolen, you can report it missing and not be responsible for fraudulent charges.

Clients on Group Flights will meet in the airport as follows:

We send everyone with color-coded luggage tags for the group. You will know other group members when you see their luggage, as it has the same tags as you do.

Please use the tags we send so that we can identify you. In excess of 4 hours before departure, our group will meet across from the check-in counter line for your airline. After this, the group will be checking in and move down to the designated departure gate for your flight. It is not possible to check your luggage more than 6 hours in advance of departure or under 45 minutes before departure.

Clients who are on their own flights:

Should you arrive to the airport within 15 minutes of our arrivals into Cairo may find us in the airport to hop the bus for a hotel transfer. Unfortunately, we cannot guarantee a specific meeting location for our agents, as we don't know what terminal or time you might be coming in. Our ground operators and busses will be marked with a sign with Astronomical Tours Eclipse or some combination of these words. Be sure your tags are where we can see them, so we can find you too.

Getting to the hotel in Cairo:

If you are on a group flight, we are transferring all of you to the hotel on our group bus. Otherwise, the Zoser Partners Hotel is accessible by taxi. Use the address below. We will be checking clients at the desk and watching our list to be sure everyone arrives, so we will find you when you arrive. Because we start our tours in the morning, be sure that you have checked-in with our agents to let us know you have arrived and know when and where we are meeting in the morning.

Food & Drink:

We cover your breakfast and dinner cost meals throughout, save 3 nights. This will give you the chance to try local dining a bit. In Cairo, there are 3 restaurants at the hotel you can try as well as a wide variety of notable restaurants in Giza — you will need a taxi to visit those. Walking in Giza (and crossing that street are so busy it's a bit treacherous) You will be responsible for lunches if you feel you need them, and alcoholic beverages. It's easy in Luxor, as the Sheraton has 3 restaurants inside, and a cozy plaza outside operated by a dozen outside shop-keeps and restaurants. This is a great time to settle-in with closer friends you have met on the trip for a more private dinner.

FOOD AND WATER SAFETY:

*Be VERY careful when eating local fruit and vegetables to peel or wash them in bottled water before eating them. We suggest bottled water throughout your trip. Waterborne illness is a big problem for tourists, as well as chemical differences of our water. Should you find yourself with a stomach bug please appreciate that *Egyptian bugs are different than American stomach bugs.* They do not respond to the same medications as well.*

PLEASE DO NOT BE SHY to ask your guide for local stomach pills immediately and/or for the assistance of a local doctor.

We have witnessed these symptoms and illnesses first hand and *you do not want to rely on self-medicate with American medications — no matter how modern.* It is better to ask the guide or call for the doctor so that you can recover quickly and get on with a happy vacation, rather than to languish in discomfort on your special holiday. To call for a doctor at any time, just call the reception desk and ask. They all have fully qualified doctors on-call who are just minutes away. The doctor will visit your room equipped to help and will either have all the medications with him or have a pharmacy deliver them to your room. A doctor visit might cost about \$100 US. Pharmacy medication might run up to \$100 more if the bug has advanced. Your travel insurance will reimburse you if you have a receipt, but they will not pay the doctor on the spot.

Domestic flights inside Egypt:

You will fly inside Egypt several times. *The airport security in these airports is almost excessive.* There is a huge x-ray machine at the entry door of the airport. *You must send everything including your big bags through it in order to enter the building.* Then, you pass through security again on the way out of the terminal to get to the plane. There are x-ray machines everywhere in Egypt. You are permitted the same carry-on baggage throughout, but if you are not careful about its handling, it could get bruised in all these x-rays. Remember also, that you may not be able to get to the other end of the x-ray before your camera takes a bump down to the receptacle bin. Use caution.

Baggage trucking:

There will be instances when you and your bags will be separated for a brief time. At the end of your cruise, you will fly Aswan to Abu Simbel while your luggage is sent by baggage truck to the airport until your return. Relax. This is standard and everything will be fine. Suppliers typically have to handle this on one end or the other whenever Abu Simbel is involved.

Abu Simbel is reached by flight:

You fly to the little airport there and transfer straight to a bus to go to the monument. You will walk from the bus down to see the monument by foot and walk back. The walking tour takes about 3 hours. There is no reason to take all of your carry-on luggage on your flight to Abu Simbel. If you do have items with you, which you don't want to carry on-foot for this long, the bus has a luggage compartment. We discourage that because clients are prone to forget and leave items behind.

Monument etiquette:

Photographing in some places in Egypt come at an additional cost. However, most have either a "do" or "don't" policy. *It is offensive to an Egyptian to photograph in any form of a tomb.* Valley of the Kings, in the burial chamber of a pyramid, you will be required to leave your camera outside. Better to leave the camera on the bus in Valley of the Kings & Queens. Other places you will not be allowed to photograph are inside indoor museums like in Cairo; also you will find signs everywhere that indicate no FLASH photography. The excess light from flash photography truly does fade the paint colors, so please be kind in your photography. Don't worry. You will have plenty of places (too many) places where you can photograph - and you will not be disappointed in your opportunities to take pictures.

Fluids and Hydration:

Let us remember that Egypt is a desert. You will feel the effects of the sun and dry desert if you do not hydrate yourself and protect yourself from the sun. Please do not underestimate the body's need for water, as the dry heat is evaporating off moisture. Keep a hat and sunglasses with you at all times. *Bring or wear sun screen every single day.* Bring ample chapstick and lotion for your hands, face and hair. Keep a bottle of water with you at all times while touring and monitor your fluid intake. The dehydration effects are immense ... from headache, to heatstroke and susceptibility to illness. Eclipse day will be challenging with so many people focused on the event over so many hours. Please take care of yourself and enjoy a good trip.

Shopping will be a big part of your experience in Egypt.

“Where are you from?”, Egyptian shops don’t use price tags. One must ask the price. When you ask the price, they ask “where are you from?” This is a direct effort to determine how much they can get for the goods. And the most inflated pricing goes to Americans. In some markets, the vendors will try to shout and get your attention with American specific phrases to see if you respond, like “okie-dokie yankie-doodle” or “Aloha”. *An American tour group is a gold-mine for an Egyptian shop keep.* If you want to control your pricing, you must not divulge that you are American. If you’re looking for the best nationality to pretend to be; that would be “We’re Dutch”, for their hard-nosed negotiation skills and market savvy. When you are traveling to a spot by busload, there isn’t much you can do about this, so be prepared to play hard-ball in negotiations.

Egypt-specific items and warnings:

There are a certain number of things you’ll get excited to buy in Egypt — *and a lot of forgeries and scams to beware of.* When in doubt, ask your guide for guidance.

Papyrus: Vendors sell papyrus paintings by the dozen beside your bus. These are *fakes* painted on Banana tree bark. They can be fun for a child’s novelty, but don’t expect them to have value or last. Your guide will take you to a papyrus museum where you can look at some real works of art. This place will blow your doors off with the quality and quantity of design styles. You are safe to buy here and the prices are usually marked on the artwork. They take credit cards.

Jewelry: Egypt is known for its gold and gemstones. We have seen very reputable-looking stores sell fake stones in expensive jewelry first-hand. We really can’t offer any advice on each store beyond the input from your tour guide on safe and un-safe locations. **LET THE BUYER BEWARE.**

Alabaster Factory: You will stop at one — guaranteed. Alabaster isn’t made in a factory. It’s carved by 3 guys under a lean-to shade tent. The process of watching them make it is fascinating and a good photo op. The “factory” is a store beside the guys where the vases and sculpture is sold. You are an American here, so be prepared to negotiate. They take credit cards.

Rug Factory: You will stop at one. They will show you how the rugs are made and show you their showroom. You’re an American here, so prices will be high, but these rugs are not likely to be forgeries. The rug shop will even arrange for it to be shipped home if you so desire.

The Cartouche: Everybody thinks about buying one. They’re cool. Be patient and wait until your guide can help you sort this out. There are 100 shops who cook these out in high quality within 24–48 hours. You have the right to shop around. We have watched a lady pay \$2000 for an item she could have paid \$45 for if she had waited. Before the trip is over, your guide will pass around the brochure and ordering information from his/her source. They will run \$30–\$150 at the most with lots of variety, depending on the lettering. - and they will be ready for you before it’s time to go home. The catalog looks a lot like a class-ring ordering catalog.

Antiquities: *It is illegal to purchase or export an antique.*

Camel Rides: Riding a camel is fun, but be sure your guide sets up the transaction first. *This is another nifty scam.* Get the guy on the camel, then don’t let him down until he pays more.

Esna: *This is a stop on your cruise we need to warn you about before you go.* This town's entire revenue source is dependent on you, the Nile cruise visitor. You will be hosted to the temple, via a market-alley full of very, very hungry vendors. You will wait in line in the street with them trying to lure you in. It's unfortunately the only way it can work. When you are finished, you will walk back through the same vendors and may want to stop to buy something here.

Be sure to follow these precautions: These vendors frequently do not take no for an answer. They will do anything, holding you at-bay for hours if it takes to get your business. **DO NOT step into the store.** They often close the doors to 'trap' you inside. *Do not imply being American. Do not try anything on. Do not sit and take tea, or "step over here where it's cooler".* The vendors will not steal from you, but rather lure you into isolated situations where you are pressured to buy at hugely inflated prices in order to "escape". It is common for them to encourage you to borrow from a friend to buy the inflated items. We have never seen anything for sale here that wasn't available elsewhere for much less price and hassle.

In general for shopping: when in doubt, ask the guide's advice.

Customs, Culture and Propriety.

Egypt is a Muslim state. However, 99% of the population is conservative Muslim, with the other conservative Jewish or Coptic faith. It is appropriate to be considerate to customs and norms as inappropriate behavior can be offensive to many. Your reaction might be an uncomfortable glare or a turned up nose. Nobody will throw paint on you to cover your legs. In Mosques, pay closer attention to dress. *You will be asked to take your shoes off and carry them throughout.* Thousands of pious Muslims will be praying daily with their noses touching the carpet you are walking on. Do not drag dirty shoes across them even after you have taken them off. Ladies in shorts or sleeveless tank tops will be asked to cover up in the mosque. Free shawls are available to borrow at the entrance to wrap in if you arrive to the mosque underdressed. It is also rude to show the bottoms of your shoes to others. Even inadvertently, compare it to scratching an itch with your middle finger. *Be aware of your feet when you cross them in public.* It is extremely rude to prop ones feet up on an ottoman straight out in front before another.

Eclipse day:

The eclipse site is in a military zone bordering Libya. Our group will not consider flight into Libya should sandstorm threaten. Sandstorms are regional-wide and crossing the border by a few miles will not help our situation. We do not anticipate clouds. Further, the politics between the US and Libya are very strained today. Entering Libya without a visa is not possible. Visas must be acquired in advance, and must be done with a host inside Libya to invite you. At the time of writing of this letter, political conditions prevent the issuance of visas to Americans. We do not feel the political climate is appropriate for cross-over fleeing, nor the odds of success to be much different on the other side of the border and the obstacles to overcome such a crossing to be too great should we attempt it. We do not expect this position to change.

The military zone is a gargantuan fenced-in sand box with a road going through it east/west. Under normal, daily circumstances, there is nothing but sand for landmarks or civilization. Our camp will include formal tents erected of colorful Bedowin quilts and carpets for shade and comfort as well as drinks and snacks for the group at the eclipse site.

We cannot confirm having AC electrical service available at this time, but it may change before the event.

Our hotel in El Alamein is a 1–2 hour drive from the eclipse observing location, so we will be taking out before dawn to arrive to the site with time to set up before first contact. We are not distributing exact eclipse coordinates at this time. Inside this military zone, we must accept that our exact positioning may be subject to change.

On eclipse day, we will provide everyone eclipse shades. We cannot include safe solar filters for everyone's binoculars and telescopes. We will have a little eclipse film available for those who didn't remember to buy a solar filter for your telescope, binoculars or cameras before departing, but not enough for everyone's big telescopes.

Packing List:

Comfortable shoes
Spare pair of shoes
Sunglasses and / or hat - sunscreen
Chapstick
Long pants
Dinner clothing of choice
Long and short sleeved shirts
Fanny pack /or day-pack
Watch
Camera, lots of film and lots of chips
More film and camera chips.
Water-bottle and/or water-bottle strap for day-trips
Money wallet for cash kept inside clothes
Passport (bring an extra photocopy or have one available at home)
Cash — \$100 minimum per person — include small bills for tips, taxis
... PLUS what you can afford to spend on souvenirs.
Credit cards and/or ATM cards
Luggage tags sent by Astronomical Tours
GPS (if so inclined)
Telescope/binoculars
Solar filter for telescope
Prescription medicine
Non-prescription medicine like aspirin, antacid, imodium, sinus medicine,
Personal Toiletries - shampoo, toothbrush, hairbrush, toothpaste, hair ties, washcloth,
Hair dryers are provided throughout.
Remember to check your nail clippers and pocket knives/ multi-tool in checked luggage.

Emergency Contact Information:**March 25–27****March 30–31****April 05–06**

Cairo Zoser Partners Hotel
252 Pyramids Road, Giza
Cairo, Muhafazat al Qahirah, Egypt

March 27–30

Movenpick Hotel El Alamein
140 Km, Alexandria Matruh Road,
Alexandria, Egypt

AN IMPORTANT NOTE ABOUT THE HOTEL IN EL ALAMIEN: We held space for our group more than 1 year before the event. They sold out quickly and we could not get any more rooms. However, after our bookings were nearly complete in June, the hotel announced that it would not accept single supplement rooms. They feel the hotel is in too high of public demand; and that all the available beds should be offered to clients. We tried to appeal this position, but could not. Those clients of ours who are paid to be single sup clients will unfortunately, be forced to share a room with another single-sup client for the nights at El Alamien before and after the eclipse. This will NOT affect the status of single occupancy throughout the rest of the tour in single occupancy. The tour company is not offering any discount or refund of the SSUP fee in regards to this. We are sorry for the inconvenience, but there is nothing we can do, as the hotel is holding all the cards.

March 30–31

Sheraton Hotel Luxor
Al Awameya, P.O. Box 43
Luxor 83951 Egypt
Phone 011 (20)(95) 237 4544
Fax 011 (20)(95) 237 4941

April 01–05

Presidential Nile Cruise

ECLIPSE PHOTOGRAPHY FAQ

IMPORTANT!

You MUST USE a proper Solar Filter (*in front of the first, front element*) when pointing any telescope at the Sun, except during the Total phase of the eclipse!

Q. What equipment should I take?

A. Binoculars, a small Schmidt Cass., (like the Meade ETX or Celestron Nextar 5) small (travel sized) dobsonians and small refractors are great for observing. A 6-8 inch travel dob will yield great views and photos, and will work well, as you will be able to move it by hand to position it to the sun. Scopes like this can serve two purposes, in that they can be used for normal nighttime observing before and after the eclipse.

Not Photographing the eclipse: Observing an eclipse naked-eye is a wonderful experience. Let others take the photos! Bring along a good pair of binoculars. Not only will they come in handy for wildlife observation, but they will give you great views during totality!

Q. To track or not to track?

A. Good eclipse photographs can be taken without a motorized telescope mount. With the arrival of fine grain fast ASA film, a simple camera, a sturdy tripod and a long lens can capture great eclipse photos. We recommend using color negative film as opposed to color slide film. The wide range of tones and exposure values for color negative film far outweighs what once was a lower-grain advantage of slide film. Foreground objects add depth to eclipse photos and can easily be done with a wide variety of camera lenses. We have photographed eclipses with great success with everything from an 8mm fish-eye lens to a 2,000mm lens. This really boils down to what you really want to do. carry a bunch of equipment or travel light.

Q. Safety and Solar Filters

A. *Never point your telescope, video camera, binoculars, camera or naked eyes directly at the sun without sun protection.* You need to have an industry approved safe solar filter in order to prevent eye and equipment damage. We will be distributing solar viewing glasses. You will want to purchase a solar filter for the FRONT of your telescope that can be removed during totality. If you can't buy one, Astronomical Tours will help you make a filter for your binoculars and camera before the event so you can observe safely.

IMPORTANT!

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