

Monica Ramirez – Egypt Trip Report

A few days ago I returned from a trip to Cairo, Egypt and still now as I write this I cannot fathom my experience because it was that incredible. Luckily I did not have this experience alone, I shared it with my sister who was a trooper throughout this whole trip because not only was it her first trip ever, but she suggested it. We chose to take this trip because we felt that it was something that would add to a life experience and it sure did. We learned what a different world lies outside of the United States and that is the beauty of the Muslim culture in the Middle East.

Egypt is a place of wonders and full of beauty. We were shocked when we arrived because the diversity is slim to nothing, obviously a very different picture than the one we were used to in the US. It was a strong, yet positive culture shock because when we arrived all we saw was men everywhere! I mean everywhere! Yes, there were women but seldom did we see them out, and if they were, they were out with their male family members or husbands. To add on to the shock we saw only what we had seen on televised documentaries and that was that many of them were covered from head to toe in their black ensembles. Being that we come from a country that is so liberal regarding what women may wear, this added to our list of shocking moments. I emphasize that this shock was a positive learning experience regarding the Muslim community and culture.

After this overwhelming culture shock when we arrived at almost six am we were greeted by a wonderful driver who made our stay an amazing one. There were more friendly people than we thought there would be. Initially we fostered a slight fear that because we were two traveling females alone that we may have had issues, but we thankfully did not. Moving forward with our

experience we did everything anyone could do in Egypt. We visited the pyramids on camels, went inside the middle pyramid, and headed over to Saqqara to see more. We also enjoyed Cairo's mummies in their museum, the citadel and even the markets where we learned how to bargain like true Egyptians. Our fun started the first day we were there because we were accompanied to go shopping in downtown Cairo and then had dinner on a ship on the Nile for a few hours. All of this even now as I write it seems so surreal.

In addition to exploring Cairo, we went to several cities that were in our paid tours. The cities were Aswan, Luxor, Dahab, Petra in Jordan and finally Alexandria. In Aswan we saw their high dam, the temple of Philae and the most amazing part of that was Abu Simble, also known as the temple of Ramses II, the great pharaoh. That was stunning to see and it almost made my sister and I cry because these are things that you only see in books and the history channel. Nevertheless, we made it this far and there was no looking back.

Next stop was Luxor where we saw The Valley of the Kings and Queens, the Temple of Hatshepsut and the Karnack Temples. All of these sites once again, took our breath away, and made us feel as if we were in a dream. Our tour guides were also amazing when giving us the history so the experience was that much more meaningful. After this, we headed back to Cairo to take a bus to Dahab, by the coast of Acquaaba, which was phenomenal yet simple. Our hotel was ok, but what made up for it was that we were right by the beach and we had a view of Saudi Arabia. To add to our astonishment of being so close to this country, at night as we ate and relaxed by the beach we could see a city light up on the shores of Saudi Arabia. It was wonderful and comforting at the same time because we were finally in a cooler place; Aswan, Luxor and Cairo got so darn hot! Needless to say, we enjoyed all of them.

Furthermore, we managed to head over to Petra in Jordan the city made of stone, which as everything else had been, was also very beautiful. It was stunning to see that people had taken the time to carve their lives into beautiful stone. They even made a little Petra, an area in which they conducted all trade and other business. We learned that it was inhabited until 1983. Here too we met great people and the hospitality was amazing. Last, but not least was Alexandria. This was a quick tour because it was a one-day excursion. Nonetheless, we got to see some cool stuff like their citadel and where the king Ali lived. We even sat in the palace gardens and had a culture talk with our awesome driver!

There were a few perks and that is that many people are slightly aggressive, not violently, but desperately when they are trying to sell you things because of their poor economic situation. We were a bit overwhelmed at first, but nothing that we could not deal with. Furthermore, because there are tensions with America in the Middle East, we did have to say we were Mexican sometimes because if not we would be put on a later train or bus on our way back to our destinations. In addition, because it is not allowed in some areas for an Egyptian man to be with American people, we learned this was so because the country does not want any Americans in danger. The food also got us a bit sick, not to the extent that we were incapable of going anywhere, but enough so that we had to keep in mind when we ate so that we would not get sick during a tour. This was a time when it had never been so much fun to live off Pepto Bismol.

I have to say that our plans might have been cut short in regards to Petra if it weren't for the Globetrotter Grant award. Petra as I mentioned is the city in stone, one of the seven world wonders. I have to say that once we got everything together and budgeted our money for this trip, we were able to make it to Petra. Initially we did not think that there would be enough cash for this and had even asked for some advice on other scholarships or awards but turns out the

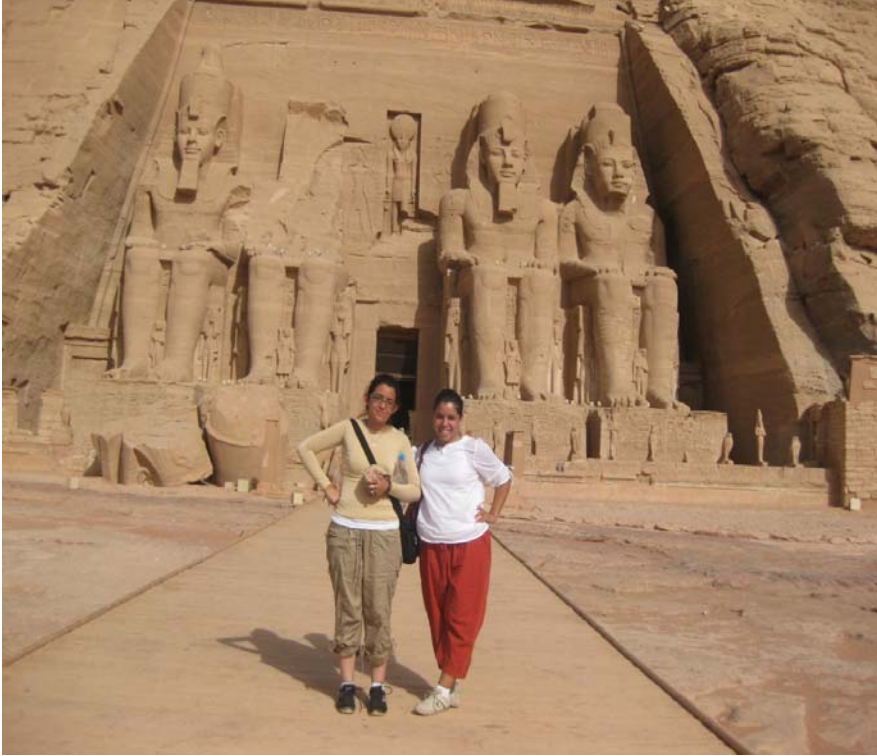
Globetrotter award was all we needed to complete the trip of a lifetime. With that said I can now officially say that my sister and I have not only set foot in many cities in Egypt, but we can also say we were in the beautiful city of Petra in Jordan. It is opportunities like the Globetrotter Grant that made that much of a difference in our memories, our hearts and most importantly our lives.

In the end, my sister had an amazing first trip and just as I suspected she cannot wait for our next one because the fire within her has ignited and mine has just grown more. We loved it and would love to go back because we miss the great people we met and the city and yes the chaotic, unsettling scary driving techniques that make a person's heart drop. I am even looking into the American University of Cairo for graduate school because I loved it so much. We are even considering getting teaching credentials for English to see if maybe one day we will live the dream and teach there together as sisters. Yes, these are big dreams, but this is what the beauty of such an amazing country like Egypt will do to two humble Los Angeles girls.



Pyramids
of Giza





Abu Simble
(Temple of
Ramses)



Alexandria the Citadel



Cairo, the Citadel

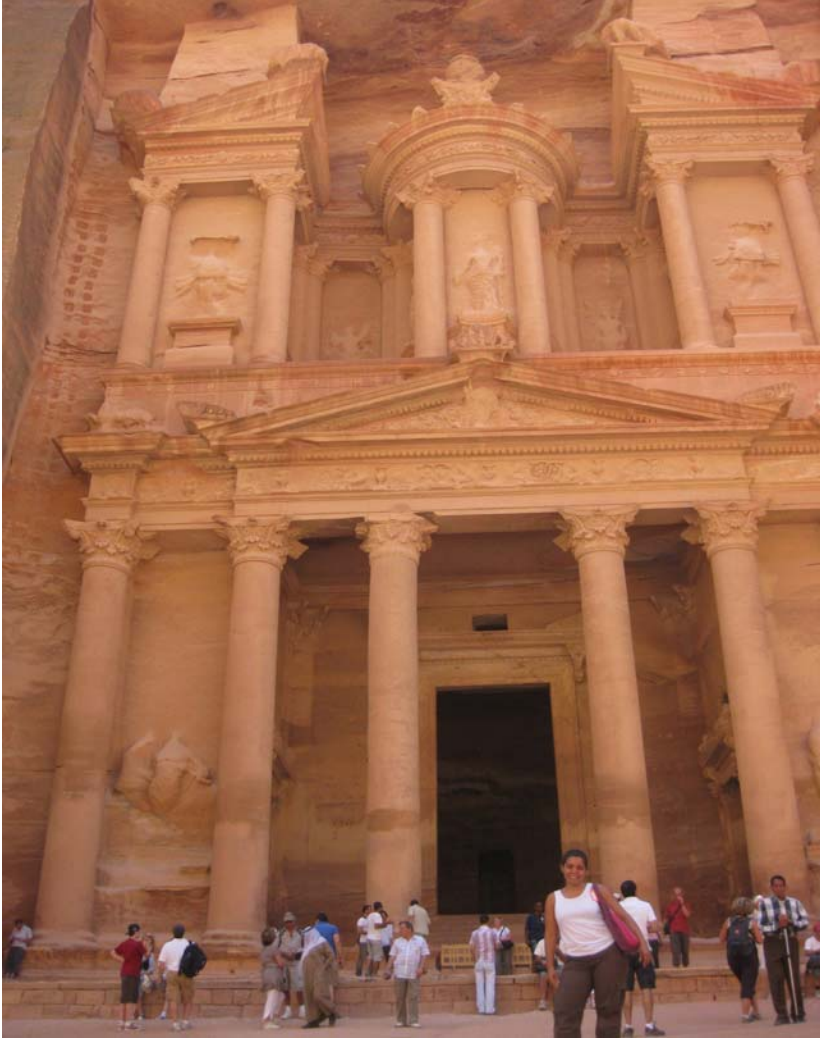


Luxor,

Karnack Temples



Nile dinner cruise



Petra, Jordan



Sphinx



Temple of
Hatshepsut



Dahab, Coast
of Acqaba
with a view of
Saudi Arabia



Colossi of Memnon