

Day Four | Mysteries of Egypt: Encountering the Pyramids, Sphinx, and Ancient Mummies

There's so much to write about, but I'm super short on time since we've got an early flight out of Cairo to Aswan in south Egypt this morning—more on that tomorrow!

I found myself saying to others in our group, "We are standing in front of the Great Pyramid" or, "Look, that's the Sphinx and we are standing in front of it." After seeing and reading about all of these mysteries and treasures in movies and books, to stand in front of them is rather surreal.



"How the heck did they build these giant things? There are tons of theories—some sound pretty reasonable, maybe even likely—but honestly, nobody's got a solid answer. Some say they'd have needed a ramp sloping and stretching 20 miles just to haul those massive stones up to the top of the Great Pyramid. Get this: they figure there's about 6,000,000 tons of stone in it, and if you lined them up, they'd stretch from LA to New York...and back! They don't let people climb it anymore, but I've got a grandson who'd be all over scampering up that thing. Not long ago, people used to hike up and have a picnic on top—it looks like you could totally pull it off!"

There are three pyramids around this part of Giza, including the big kahuna, the Great Pyramid. The Great one and the middle-sized one got a fancy limestone makeover which is mostly gone, but the third, smaller one was decked out with red granite instead.

The Red Granite Pyramid, the smallest of the Giza trio, has a few rows of granite at its base. Some of the stones were smoothed out, but the job was left unfinished—maybe because Pharaoh Menkaure kicked the bucket and everyone just put down their tools. The real head-scratcher, though, is how they managed to smooth that granite in the first place. Granite's super tough, and back then, all they had were soft copper tools. Copper alone wouldn't cut it, and there's no way they did it by hand without help. One idea is they rigged up some big, manpower-driven contraption—picture a giant stone cylinder rolling over the granite, coated with a gritty mix of sand or emery dust to grind it down. Check out the photo below—you can see they were mid-process when they stopped.



The Sphinx was another mind-blowing sight. I'd love to dive into all the details, but time's tight—anyway, get this: at one point, it was buried in sand to its head!



Next up, we hit the Museum of Egyptian History—Wow, it was unreal! All the mummies are kept there, including one our group leader, Dr. Collins, believes is the Pharaoh of the Exodus, Thutmose IV. He's got this theory that Thutmose IV is the guy because, after his reign, Egypt's kingdom tanked—economically and otherwise. Imagine your whole workforce vanishing overnight, all your firstborns dead, and your army drowned in the sea. That'd wreck any economy, right?

We were not allowed to take photos of the mummies, but one rebellious member of our group accidentally had his camera go off when standing in front of one.



That's a really brief overview of the day, and it probably needs a lot of editing, but... It is almost 4 am and we need to be down in the lobby at 4:15am to head to Cairo airport and then board our flight via Nile Air, to Aswan.