

56 Day Cairo to Nairobi CAM0508

The words 'Cairo to Cape Town' conjure up images of an expedition through the heart of Africa, crossing deserts, rivers, mountains and overcoming the various challenges this continent can throw at you. As with any travel to remote parts of Africa you must sometimes expect a high degree of hardship: bouncing around on poor rocky un-tarred roads and even crossing a desert where there is no road, or sometimes having to bush camp for the night with no prospect of even a cold shower to wash away the dust. However, countries such as Sudan and Ethiopia are particularly rewarding for the traveller who likes to go places that have seen very few other tourists and meet local people who are keen to meet you and whose hospitality can be very humbling.

Weeks 1 & 2 - Our first day is spent in Cairo visiting the great Pyramids and Sphinx at Giza with our Egyptologist guide. The following morning we drive out of Cairo and head for the Western Desert leaving both modern and ancient civilizations behind us for a few days. Described as the 'desert of deserts' this vast world of desolation and beauty covers 2.8 million square kms. We visit 3 isolated oases, Bahariyya, Farafra and Dhakla where you can roll down sand dunes, hire a desert guide and some camels and head out to explore this sand sea and walk through the winding lanes of mud houses at the Citadel of Mut.

We end our first week at the city of Luxor where the Valley of Kings and Queens and Kamak and Luxor Temples will keep us busy exploring for a few days more.

A half day drive further south brings us to Aswan. Here you will notice the first of many cultural changes on this trip. The darker Nubian people in Aswan lead a more relaxed and less hectic pace of life than their Egyptian countrymen. We base ourselves here for the next 4 or 5 days in which time you can organise a 2 or 3 day felucca sail cruise to Edfu and Kom Ombo and also visit Abu Simbel. From Aswan we take the ferry across Lake Nasser to the port of Wadi Halfa in Northern Sudan. The ferry takes about a day and a night and is a supremely relaxing way to travel and a great opportunity to mix and chat to local Sudanese people.

Weeks 3 & 4 - From Wadi Halfa we rejoin our expedition vehicle for our drive across the Nubian Desert. We spend much of this journey hugging the banks of the Nile, passing through sleepy Nubian villages where we can rest in tea rooms or potter around the local souqs.

Khartoum is our next stop and it has a fantastic setting on the confluence of the Blue and White Nile. Our stay here is on the banks of the Nile at the quirky but interesting Blue Nile Sailing Club. Its office is housed in one of General Kitcheners old Gunboats, a relic from the British military campaign against the Mahdi over a century ago. For such a large city, Khartoum feels quite laid back. In our few days here you can visit the Hamed al Nil Tomb and witness the dancing dervishes who perform every Friday as well as the daily camel market or take a boat trip on the Nile. You can also visit the ancient Pyramids at Meroe and the temples at Naqa. From Khartoum we drive south-east through the towns of Wadi Medina and Gedaref on our way to Ethiopia. We spend about 5 days at the town of Gondar from where it is possible to organise visits to some of Ethiopia's most famous sites, including the holy city of Axum and the rock-hewn churches at Lalibela. These date from the 12th Century and have been kept alive by generations of dedicated priests who guard their precious religious and artistic artifacts.

Week 5 & 6 - Many of the roads we travel on in Ethiopia are very poor dirt or gravel roads and often in mountainous areas so travel is slow. Our route to Addis Ababa takes us via Lake Tana and the spectacular Blue Nile Gorge and Blue Nile Falls. From Bahar Dar you can organise boat trips to some of the small islands which have Monasteries dating back up to 900 years and which are still looked after by monks who live from subsistence farming. From Addis Ababa we head south towards Kenya.

The north of Kenya is very remote with nomadic tribespeople like the Rendille in Marsabit and the Samburu who still wear very distinctive and often elaborate dress. We pass through Marsabit National Park and then visit Samburu National Park which has

some unique wildlife like reticulated giraffe and Grevy's Zebra, as well as leopard, elephant, cheetah and crocodile. Next we drive via Archers Post and Isiolo to Nanyuki which is in the foothills of Mt Kenya and then continue via Eldoret into Uganda.

Weeks 7 & 8 - Kampala (the capital) has had a turbulent past, but these days is a friendly and safe city. We have a free day to spend in local cafes and nightspots and get to know the local people, there is also the opportunity to spend the day visiting a local Chimpanzee Sanctuary and rehabilitation centre on one of the islands on Lake Victoria. The following day we have a long drive as we head west through swamps, patches of forest and fertile green countryside. We also stop at the spot where our route crosses the equator.

Next is the Virunga range of volcanic mountains and the rainforests on these mountain slopes are home to several families of Mountain Gorillas. Getting up close to these amazing creatures is a truly humbling experience and one of the highlights of the trip. We will visit the gorillas in either Uganda or Rwanda. If we view them from Uganda there is the opportunity to paddle out onto Lake Bunyoni in canoes and visit some of the nearby islands or hire mountain bikes to visit nearby villages & schools. From Rwanda there is also the chance to visit the genocide museum in Kigali, which is a moving and interesting experience.

We then return to Kampala and camp near Jinja. Here, on the edge of Lake Victoria, the Nile begins its 6700km journey to the sea. We spend the next few days at Bujagali Falls, just downstream from the source of the Nile. This is a spectacular area, and with one kilometre of raging water below Bujagali Falls, a superb place to go whitewater rafting. We can also organise quad biking or a visit to a local school.

Re-entering Kenya we travel through hills covered in tea plantations. A further half-day drive brings us to Lake Naivasha. We camp near the lakeshore where Hippos sometimes feed at night! We also pay a visit to Elsamere - the former home of Joy Adamson - of Born Free Fame. You can also hire mountain bikes and cycle or walk through Hells Gate National Park - the only game reserve in Kenya in which you are allowed to walk. Or for a less active but equally enjoyable game viewing experience visit the Crater Lake Game Sanctuary. Both offer excellent scenery & opportunities to spot hyrax, abundant bird & plant life along with several types of gazelle, impala and eland.

We also go on a game drive at Lake Nakuru National Park home to almost one million pink flamingos amongst a horde of other game including rhino, lion, giraffe and leopard.

The trip ends in Nairobi. The rest of the group continues south.