

Anita's Travel with Friends
EXPLORATION, EDUCATION, ADVENTURE!
Sharing travel information and experiences.

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BULLETIN – 2007 ADVENTURES

Plans for 2007 Adventures are in the works. . . and near completion. Since the first one is in January, the bookings will need to be made soon. . . especially if you want time to plan for the best air fare and flight times.

EGYPT AND JORDAN - January 5th - 25th, 2007

I've already got my airline tickets for this one, but I've held back sending out details until I could arrange to add a few things to the itinerary that you won't want to miss! I can hardly believe it's only four months away.

This 20-day trip will combine the best elements of in-depth tours of the most important and impressive ancient sites (Pyramids, Sphinx, Luxor and Valley of the Kings, Abu Simel, and Petra, to name the most prominent), cultural exploration on a 3-day Nile cruise and the Nubian environment in Aswan, a Felucca excursion, a Bedouin-connected desert safari and oasis exploration with an emphasis on bird and animal life, (optional) climb up Mt. Sinai to watch the dawn, a fun camel ride or two, and visits to Greco-Roman and Crusader sites, as well as important Coptic churches and monasteries. We will drive through the Suez Canal tunnel, take a hydrofoil to Aqaba, and experience local music and dramatic and stunning glow-lit nights at some of the most beautiful locations.

Our trip begins in Cairo, and travels a southwest circle to the dramatic and magical White Desert, Black Desert and Bahariya and Fayoum Oases. Returning to Cairo, our sleeper train follows the Nile south to Luxor, Karnek and Valley of the Kings. After our horse-drawn carriage ride to Karnek and exploration of the Valley of the Kings area, we board our boat for three-days of relaxing observation of local life on the Nile interspersed with stops at some of the most famous river-side temples in this area.

We disembark in Aswan, Egypt's second largest city (pop. 150,000) and because of the large Nubian population, more typically African than Middle Eastern. In addition to the morning flight to Abu Simel, we will experience the vibrant and exotic Nubian Bazaar, a Felucca cruise, and a short and fun camel ride to the 10th century Monastery of St. Simeon.

Returning to our starting point again by sleeper train, we explore the medieval Cairo, its famous Khan el Khalili bazaar, the beautiful Ibn Tulun Mosque, and other unique and fascinating parts of the old town. The following day, we depart east toward Suez, drive through the Suez tunnel and on to the Sinai peninsula. After a relaxing evening, those who

are ambitious enough to arise early and exercise their determination will climb Mount Sinai to watch the dawn, joining pilgrims to experience this very special place; its spectacular views in the early sunlight are worth the climb.

Our hydrofoil zips us up the Gulf of Aqaba to the city of that name, and we enter the southern end of Jordan. "Full of historic adventure and desert mystery, Jordan not only manages to remain one of the most stable, modern and safe places in the Middle East, but also one of the most welcoming, hospitable countries in the world" (*American Association of Travel Agents newsletter Travelsense, 8/29/06*).

The inspiration for Lawrence of Arabia, Wadi Rum is a vast desert landscape, renowned for its spectacular landscapes. We explore this protected area in jeeps, operated by the local Bedouin community. Then on to Petra, the Rose Red City, and the most famous sight in Jordan. Twice a week, the ancient city is lit up by night, candles line the cliff-walled entrance and front the famous Treasury. We can expect entertainment by Bedouins, sharing their traditional singing and dancing in this amazing setting. The next morning with our guide we explore the city by daylight, its elegant temples and tombs cut from red sandstone, and climb up to the Monastery for a fine view of the entire site.

Continuing along the King's Highway, a road dated back to time of the Old Testament, we visit Shobak Castle and the ancient village of Dana, next to the Dana Nature Reserve with spectacular landscapes and profusion of birds and wildlife, and the ancient mosaic map in the church at Madaba. If time permits, we will visit Mount Nebo for its sacred history and stunning views. For the finale of our refresher course in ancient history, we spend our morning visiting the Roman city of Jerash, described as the best and most completely preserved city of the Roman-Greco period. An afternoon unique experience, we enjoy the warm waters of the Dead Sea, the lowest spot in the world. The water is so densely salted, sinking is virtually impossible. We return to the capital city of Amman for our final night.

This trip is active, and will involve a good bit of travel to experience the most important and spectacular parts of this epic cradle of history. However, there are some days (or portions of days) "at leisure", which will give you the opportunity to relax, or choose to take in an additional myriad of sights and experiences.

Interested?? Email me to request a detailed itinerary. The group will be a minimum of five and a maximum of ten persons, allowing out-of-the-way places and unique encounters accessible to small groups with flexibility and spontaneity. A positive attitude, endless curiosity, and sense of adventure are required. I will have the final costs next week, they have been preliminarily stated in the range of \$2900 - \$3500 per person, excluding international air fare.

**MONGOLIA - EPIC JOURNEY AND THE NAADAM FESTIVAL – 20 days
scheduled between June 28 and July 20, 2007 (dates could possibly be adjusted a bit,
but highly unlikely)**

Yes, this is almost a full year away. But being at the right place to experience the annual Mongolian National Festival requires advance planning and booking to ensure the availability of the desired lodging and transport! This journey is a true adventure, encompassing a wide range of exposures to dramatic and unusual natural scenes, wildflowers, unique and prolific birds, and a wide range of wildlife (including the prehistoric Przewalski horses). Physical activity includes several short hikes to enjoy

lakes and scenic overlooks, horseback or camel riding. Fishing, swimming and kayaking are available at various locations, or you can choose to relax, read, paint or photograph.

We will have many opportunities to visit and communicate with native peoples, including a secluded Yak herding family, a Gobi desert nomadic group, and perhaps the teepee dwelling Dukha folk who herd reindeer.

Visiting several historic monasteries and temples in various locations will give us an insight to the Mongolian Buddhist traditions and provide additional encounters with the local people. We will also have the extraordinary privilege of enjoying at least two concerts of Mongolia music including the unique art of Khoomi (throat) singing, and one with dance.

Our experience of the Naadam festival will take place in a scenically-located village, providing the ability to enjoy the relaxed atmosphere and much improved photo opportunities over the very-crowded contests held in the capital, Ulaanbaatar. The viewing of the traditional athletic contests of horse racing, archery, and wrestling will be much more involving and we may expect more communicative encounters with local residents.

Although we will visit the capital, enjoy its museums and markets, and impressive and famous Midgid Janraisig temple, we will be elsewhere at the time this city is the most jam-packed with other tourists.

Outside of Ulaanbaatar, accommodations will primarily be in traditional *ger* camps, combining local authenticity with the creature comforts of home. They are heated with wood stoves and furnished with colourful traditional furniture. Most ger camps have hot showers and western loos. Breakfasts and dinners are served at the camps, with picnic lunches provided during our active days.

A fantastic preliminary itinerary has been proposed, although it is subject to adjustment if we wish. Group size will be limited to ten people. E-mail me if you wish the details, or have other questions about this once-in-a-lifetime adventure.

The cost of this tour is a bit higher than the rest of Asia, but is more than worth it! And is pretty much all inclusive, almost all meals, three internal plane flights, all in-country transport and horseback riding, etc. Organized by a UK company specializing only on Mongolia, they have impressive connections with people important in providing the best experience possible. Depending on the number of our group, expect prices to be in the range of \$4,600 to \$4900 if booked by September 30th. Later booking may result in a small increase.

Are you excited yet?? Send me your ideas and questions, and block out your calendar dates, plan to book post-haste. I expect these trips to fill up fast, or accommodations and transportation, especially internal airline flights to become more expensive or perhaps unavailable far in advance of the trip dates.

If you have traveled to these areas, I would love to have your comments and suggestions.

Bon Voyage,

Anita

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This newsletter is a non-commercial communication between friends. Any travel arrangements made will be a collaboration of individuals, and each participant will be responsible for their own transportation to an agreed upon departure point, payment of fees, visa and passport arrangements and any trip cancellation or medical insurance.