

ANCIENT LUXOR

Karen Worrall takes a tour of Egyptian antiquity via Luxor's historical monuments

Present day Luxor straddles the Nile in Upper Egypt on the site of ancient Thebes, sheltering some of Egypt's grandest monuments honoring the dead and the divine antiquities.

The bustling city center, main tourist area and religious temples are on the east bank, while the majority of the mortuary monuments are located on the calmer, more rural west bank.

Early morning visits to Hatshepsut Temple and Medinet Habu avoid the midday desert heat, while the temples of Luxor and Karnak, along with the adjoining Avenue of the Sphinxes, are open into the evening.



MEDINET HABU

Queen Hatshepsut and Thutmose III built this complex of buildings in the early 18th dynasty. The last great pharaoh, Ramses III, later chose this as his mortuary temple. He had reliefs and inscriptions deeply carved (the king was wary of usurpers) decorating a 75,000sq ft surface to record his military and naval victories. Foundations of his adjoining palace remain. Don't miss the Migdol Gate, Sacred Lake and the Great Hypostyle Hall.



STATUE OF RAMSES II AT LUXOR TEMPLE

Discovered in pieces in 1958, the 82-ton statue of Egypt's longest reigning pharaoh was fully restored and unveiled in April 2017. He negotiated the first-known world peace treaty in 1258BC, fathered more than 100 children, and lived into his 90s. Inside are the courtyards of Ramses II and Amenhotep III, the Colonnade of Amenhotep III, plus chapels and a sanctuary to explore.

AVENUE OF SPHINXES

More than 1,350 human-headed sphinx statues lined the mile-and-a-half-long, 250ft-wide road connecting Karnak and Luxor temples 2,300 years ago. Concealed until 1949, gradual ongoing excavations have so far unearthed around 900 statues, with one discovered as recently as August 2018. About 40% of the avenue can be walked today. The Mummification and Luxor Museums are nearby and are well worth a visit.



TEMPLE OF KARNAK

The largest remaining religious site of the ancient world is dedicated to the worship of Theban gods Amun, Mut and Khonsu. This vast temple city showcases pharaonic architecture, and was added to over 2,000 years from 2055BC by multiple kings. The Great Temple of Amun takes precedence, containing eight pylons and several courts and halls. Make time for the temples of Ptah, Ramses II, Osiris and Khonsu and the sacred lake. Visiting in the evening for the sound and light show is recommended.

MORTUARY TEMPLE OF HATSHEPSUT

The longest of the 63 Valley of the Kings tombs is that of the unconventional second female ruler Hatshepsut. She claimed the role of pharaoh while acting as regent to her stepson after her husband (and half-brother) King Thutmose II died, and is the only woman with her own tomb here. Visitors are greeted at the temple's third level by statues of her as a male with a pharaoh's kilt and beard, highlighting her dominion. Well-preserved reliefs, courtyards, chapels and statues of gods are highlights.

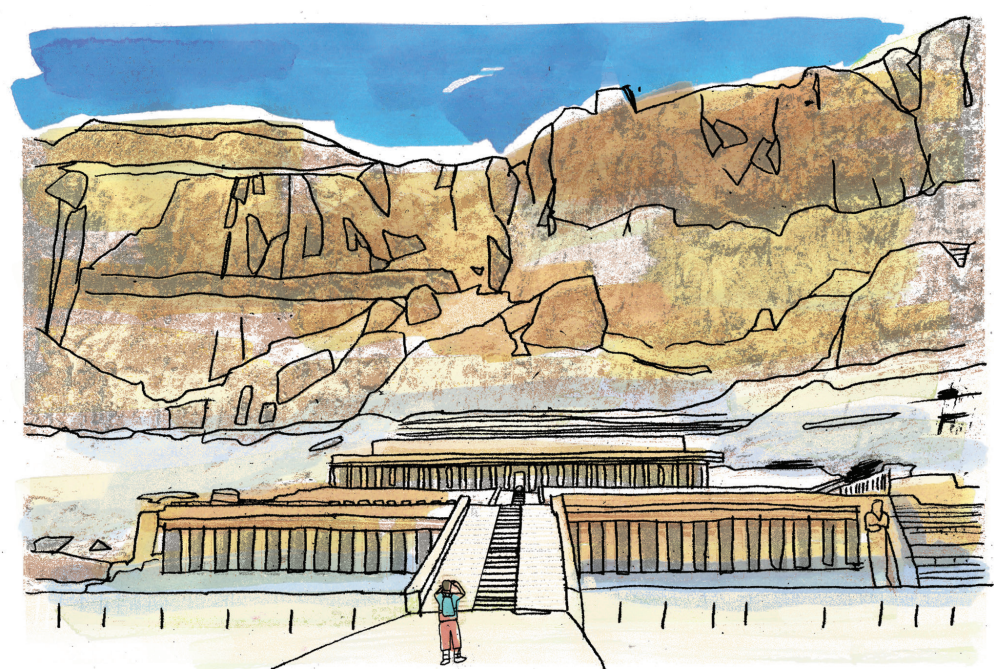


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