



Siwa, oasis and white desert

EGYPT

Foto di L. Marchese

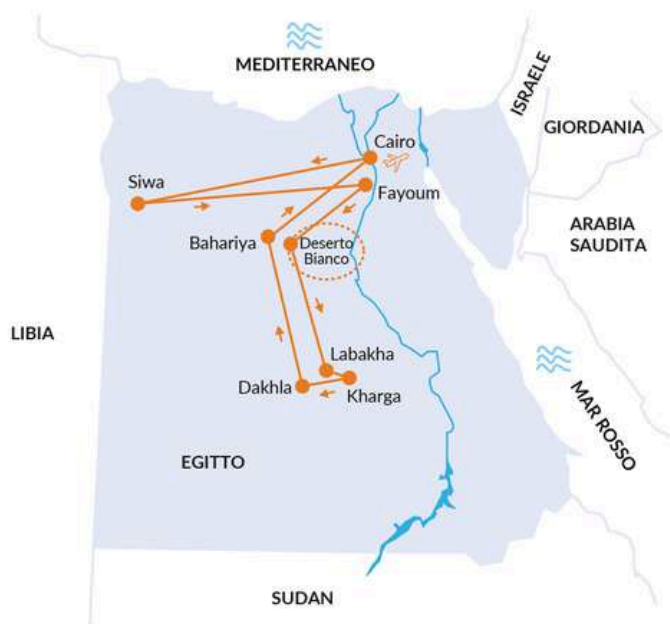


12 days

26 December 2024 - 06 January 2025

English speaking tour leader

The 'unforgettable' of the trip:



- The mysterious **oasis of Siwa**, between the ruins of the fortress of Shali and the Oracle Temple
- The salt lakes of Siwa and the 'magic' lakes of **Wadi el Rayan**
- The "desert whales" of **Wadi el Hitan**
- The desolate landscapes of the **black desert** and its natural sculptures of the **white desert**
- The fascinating **Djara cave** with its stalactites and stalagmites
- Roman fortresses along the *Limes* of **Labakha** and **Umm al Dabadib**
- The impressive early Christian necropolis of **Bagawat**
- The Ottoman town of **El Qasr**, with its maze of alleyways
- The painted tombs of **Muzawaka** and **Qaret Qasr Selim**, and the golden mummies of Baharia



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The Egyptian oases of the Western Desert, located along the ancient caravan routes between Libya and Sudan, preserve the vestiges of the most important kingdoms of the past, from Pharaonic majesty to Hellenistic influences, from the mighty Roman fortresses along the Limes to the early Christian period and the Ottoman civilisation.

Walking through the dense palm grove of the Siwa oasis or through the narrow streets of the Shali fortress, built entirely of kerchief (a mixture of rocks, mud and salt), visiting the tombs of the 'Mountain of the Dead' or the Temple of the Oracle, where Alexander the Great is said to have been crowned king of Egypt, or refreshing oneself at Cleopatra's springs, one breathes in an aura of mystery, which does not dissipate when admiring the garish colours of the turquoise and reddish waters of its salt lakes, nor the sinuous sands of the Sahara in the background. A mystery that continues in the Fayoum region, where fossils of prehistoric whale skeletons lie strewn on the sands of Wadi el Hitan, 'magic' lakes create plays of light and colour among the ochre dunes silhouetted against crystal-clear waters, and which amplify as soon as one glimpses the desolate hills of the black desert, and then thicken further in the presence of Sahara el Beyda, the famous white desert, with its bizarre shapes that give rise to the imagination. But that's not all: the desolation of the desert holds within it the Djara caves, with its mystical stalactites and stalagmites, the Roman fortresses of Labakha and Umm al Dabadib, the painted tombs of Muzawaka, which combine Pharaonic art with that of the Roman empire, the early Christian necropolis of Bagawat, up to the Ottoman town of El Qasr, where one suddenly finds oneself in the tales of 'The Arabian Nights', and ending in Baharia, where golden mummies imperturbably observe the passing of time. An intense journey of history and mystery, but also of encounters with the warm Berber and Bedouin populations, always ready to welcome visitors and lead them to discover the treasures of this lesser-known region of Egypt.



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Day 1: Thursday 26 December

Italy/Cairo

Flight to Cairo. Transfer to the Hotel Novotel Cairo Airport or similar by hotel shuttle. Overnight stay in a double room with services.

Day 2: Friday 27 December

Cairo/El Alamein/Siwa

After breakfast, meeting with the Kanaga Africa Tours staff and transfer by tarmac road to the Siwa oasis. Along the way, we will make stops to visit the memorial of the Italian fallen in the famous 1942 Battle of EL ALAMEIN, during World War II, and for lunch in a restaurant. Arrive in SIWA in the late afternoon, Egypt's most isolated oasis, inhabited mainly by a population of Berber stock who speak Siwi (a declension of Tamazigh) and are mainly engaged in agriculture. In the oasis, in fact, there are 250,000 date palms, 40,000 olive trees and vast orchards (especially orange and fig trees), fed by 280 hot springs. Accommodation at the Ghaliet Ecolodge (or similar), nestled in the palm grove, and time for a refreshing dip in its spring water pool. Dinner in a dimly lit restaurant inside the Shali fortress, and overnight stay in en-suite double rooms.

Day 3: Saturday 28 December

Siwa Oasis

After breakfast, the morning is dedicated to visiting the archaeological sites of SIWA. We begin with the ruins of the "mud city" of SHALI, whose foundation dates back to the 13th century, and which was built entirely from kershef, a typical local material consisting of a mixture of clay, straw and salt. Following this, we will travel to the JEBEL MAWTA or "mountain of the dead", a hill of limestone rocks on whose sides numerous tombs were excavated during the XXVIth Pharaonic dynasty, during the Greek-Roman period. Here we visit the tomb of Siamun, a notable who lived during the 3rd century BC, whose walls are decorated with valuable paintings. Afterwards, we will travel to AGHURMI, a fortified village built on a hill and surrounded by an immense palm grove, where we will visit the ORION TEMPLE or Ammon Temple, where in 331 BC Alexander the Great's divine lineage was revealed to Alexander the Great, legitimising his claim to the throne of Egypt. A short distance away, we visit the remains of the UMM UBEYDA TEMPLE, characterised by a long hieroglyphic wall dating back to the XXX dynasty. Lunch in a restaurant with a view of the CLEOPATRA BATHS, formerly called the 'spring of the sun', a circular pool where the inhabitants of the oasis cool off during the hottest hours of the day. Return to the hotel and time at leisure. In the afternoon, we travel to Birket Siwa Lake where Fantasy Island with its famous FATNAS SPRING is located. Tasting a mint tea or fresh juice while waiting for the sunset over the lake. This is followed by a dimly lit dinner in a restaurant near a hot spring, where we can relax with a rejuvenating night bath in this particular pool. Overnight stay in double rooms with services.



Welcome to Egypt!



View of Shali



Detail of the Shali ruins



Craftsman in the oasis



Oracle temple



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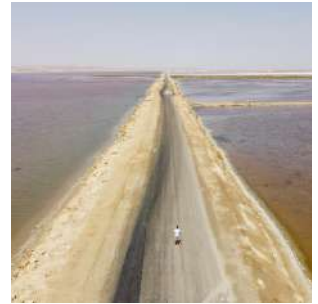
Day 4: Sunday 29 December

Siwa Oasis

Breakfast at the hotel and morning dedicated to visiting the SIWA SALT LAKES. Crossing a spectacular road lapped on both sides by the water of the lakes, we reach the recently established salt mining area, which has created a series of brightly coloured "pools" (deep blue, blood red, ...) in which you can swim. Given the high salinity of these waters, you can float effortlessly! We return to the hotel for a shower before heading to the city centre, where we can admire the craftsmen at work and shop in the market area: lamps made of salt and olive wood, dates, olives and extra virgin olive oil, ... Lunch in a restaurant. In the early afternoon EXCURSION IN THE DESERT on the edge of the city, where we can appreciate the soft dunes of the Sahara and the lakes and springs that spring suddenly from its sands. We will wait for the sunset over the dunes before heading to a desert camp for a Bedouin-style candlelit dinner, where we will enjoy meat and vegetables prepared with the zarb, a kind of oven dug under the sand. Return to the hotel, overnight stay in double rooms.



Cleopatra's Baths from above



Towards the salt lakes

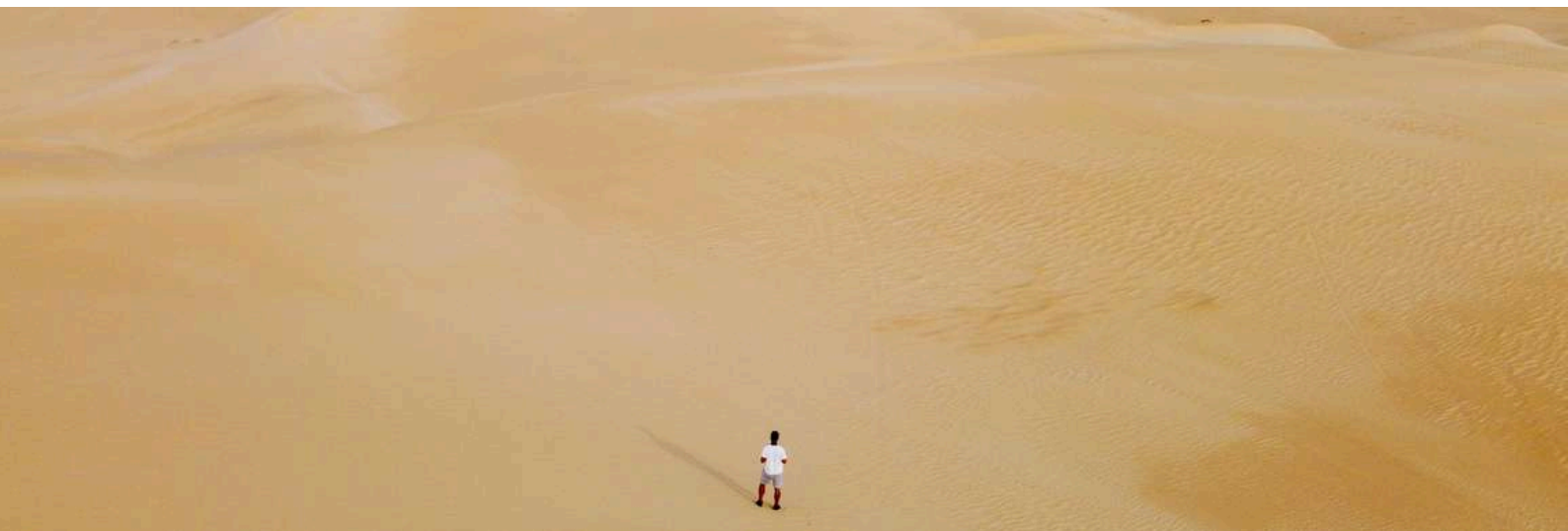


Salt lakes

Day 5: Monday 30 December

Siwa/Tunis

Breakfast at the hotel and transfer to the FAYOUM region, a vast depression south-west of Cairo, which receives water from the Nile via one of its branches that was channelled in ancient times and disperses into a dense network of 234 secondary canals. Lunch in a restaurant on the way. Late afternoon arrival in TUNIS, where, weather permitting, we will stroll through its narrow streets decorated with colourful murals and visit the craftsmen who produce ceramics, the country's main activity. Accommodation at the Olive Tree Lodge or similar, dinner and overnight in double rooms with en-suite facilities.



The immensity of the Sahara



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Day 6: Tuesday 31 December

Tunis/Wadi el Hitan/Wadi el Rayan/Tunis

Breakfast and departure towards the Western Desert until we arrive at WADI EL-HITAN, a UNESCO World Heritage site, known as "the valley of the whales", an extraordinary open-air museum with more than 400 skeletons of ancestors of present-day whales. Walking on the sand, which 40 million years ago was the bottom of the ancient Eocene sea, we will discover the skeletons of two species of archaeocetaceans, the Basilosaurus and the Dorudon, which are particularly interesting because of their tiny hind limbs complete with feet and toes, showing how cetaceans descended from land mammals. We also visit the museum, which not only houses the two best-preserved specimens, but also displays an interesting exhibition on the history of the region. Picnic lunch. We cross the majestic barkane dunes of Qusor Arab, where we stop to fully appreciate the landscape. Arrival at WADI EL-RAYAN and visit the small and unique waterfall in Egypt, created by the difference in height between the upper lake and the lower lake. We will then explore the lakes of this region and the magnificent landscapes that surround it, in particular the LOWER LAKE and the MAGIC LAKE, nestled between the sands of the Sahara. Return to the hotel, dinner and overnight stay.



Typical pigeon houses



Tunis village murals



Wadi el Hitan



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Day 7: Wednesday 01 January

Tunis/Black Desert/White Desert

After breakfast, we depart for the Sahara Saouda, or BLACK DESERT, characterised by a plateau from which rise numerous conical-shaped hills covered with black basalt rocks. We will climb one of these hills to better appreciate the incredible landscape, and to search for the famous star-shaped stones (marcasite). Picnic lunch at El Hayz, near the springs. Next we will visit the Crystal Mountain, which owes its name to the presence of large calcite crystals, before arriving at the AGHABAT (or Aqabat) valley, where we will stop for tea in this magnificent setting. We will then enter the Sahara el Beida, the famous WHITE DESERT, a depression of about 3,000 square kilometres where snow-white rocks, resembling snowy expanses, rise from which rise pinnacles with bizarre and imaginative shapes. These organogenic white limestones were deposited here about a hundred million years ago, during the Cretaceous, when a calm, shallow sea covered this area. They consist of countless shells of microorganisms and unicellular algae that accumulated on the seabed, which once receded, left these limestones exposed to the weathering that shaped these extraordinary natural sculptures. We will admire the sunset in this magical setting, before a candlelit dinner at the fixed tented camp and an overnight stay in *khaima* tents with shared bathroom/shower.



The Aghabat Valley



The White Desert



Sunset over the "mushroom"

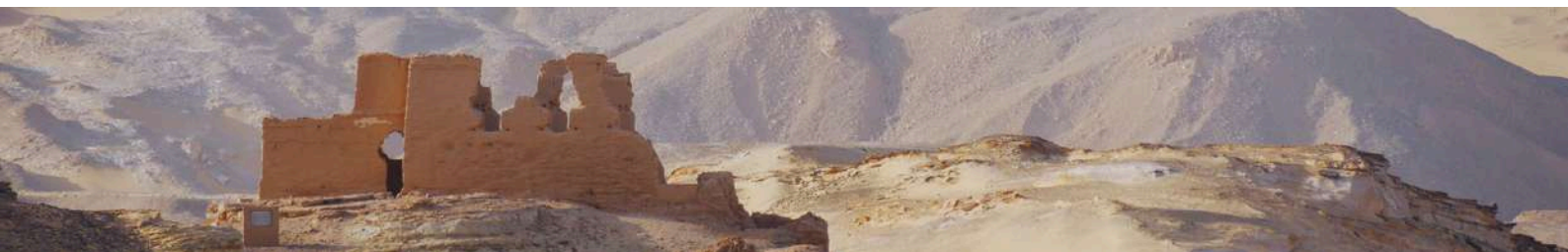


Djara cave

Day 8: Thursday 02 January

White Desert/Djara/Kharga

Breakfast at the camp and time at leisure to appreciate the white desert at first light, when it is easy to spot the fennec, the small desert foxes. Afterwards, departure along a track to the DJARA CAVES, hidden in the middle of the Sahara, in a fissure into which we descend a few metres before entering a large cave with a surprisingly cool climate, and adorned with spectacular stalactites and stalagmites. Picnic lunch in the cave. We then descend southwards to KHARGA OASIS, the southernmost and most populated of the oases, capital of the New Valley Governorate. Inhabited since Neolithic times, the oasis underwent great expansion during the Ptolemaic period, around the 3rd century B.C., and was the crossroads of all the tracks connecting the other oases and the Nile Valley. Accommodation at the Hotel Sol Y Mar Pioneers or similar, dinner and overnight in double rooms with services.



Roman fortress of Labakha



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Day 9: Friday 03 January

Kharga/Labakha/Umm el Dabadib/Kharga

Early in the morning, after breakfast, we head to LABAKHA, a tiny oasis in the middle of an isolated desert landscape, which preserves the ruins of a four-storey-high Roman fortress, two temples and a vast necropolis. This site along the Limes, the southern border of the Empire, controlled the caravan flow out of Roman Egypt and westwards. If possible we will continue along a difficult sandy track to the site of UMM EL-DABADIB, where there are the remains of the fortress and the most complex underground aqueduct built by the Romans in this region. Return to Kharga, lunch in a restaurant. In the afternoon, visit of the ARCHAEOLOGICAL MUSEUM of Kharga, with valuable exhibits including sarcophagi from the Roman period, the IBIS TEMPLE, built during the Persian period under Emperor Darius and dedicated to the god Amun, and the NECROPOLIS OF BAGAWAT, one of the oldest and most important Christian necropolises in the world. Dating back to the 4th century and consisting of 263 mud-brick tombs and a large church, the site features well-preserved paintings depicting Old Testament passages, such as the Chapel of Peace and the Chapel of Exodus, which we will visit. Dinner and overnight at the hotel, in double rooms with servants.



Along the Roman *Limes*



Archaeological Museum



Ibis Temple



Christian Necropolis of Bagawat



Bashendi Village

Day 10: Saturday 04 January

Kharga/Dakhla/Al Qasr

Breakfast at the hotel and end of sightseeing around Kharga. Head west and visit the picturesque village of BASHENDI, which owes its name to an Indian prince (Pasha Hindi) who settled here in the 11th century. This town contains painted and decorated mud-brick houses, the imposing Sheikh's Masusoleum and a Roman necropolis, of which we will visit the tomb of Kytinos, decorated in Pharaonic style. We will then head to BALAT to visit the necropolis of QILA EL-DABBA, where seven large mastabas belonging to the oasis governors of the 6th dynasty (2460-2200 BC) have been found, and where we will visit the tomb of Khentika, with a funerary flat decorated with elegant paintings. Lunch in a restaurant or hotel. In the afternoon we visit the old Ottoman-style medieval town of AL QASR, built entirely of thatched and mud bricks, with beautiful acacia wood lintels decorated with the name of the house owner and the date of construction. Here we visit the 11th-century Ayyubid mosque, with the imposing minaret of Sheikh Nasr el-Din towering over the village, and lose ourselves in its winding alleyways, which keep cool during the torrid summer months and protect the inhabitants from the frequent sandstorms. Dinner and overnight stay in a hotel in double rooms with services.



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Day 11: Sunday 05 January

El Qasr/Abu Minqar/Baharia

After breakfast, visit the DEIR EL-HAGAR TEMPLE, dedicated to the gods Amon-Ra, Mut and Khonsu, built during the reign of Nero (54-68 A.D.) and embellished with valuable bas-reliefs during the reigns of Vespasian, Titus and Domitian. We continue to the MUZAWAKA NECROPOLIS ('well decorated'), which consists of a series of over 300 tombs, some of which have perfectly preserved the paintings in their original colours, such as those of the officials Petosiris and Petubastis, which we will visit. The main themes typical of the tombs of Pharaonic Egypt are present, but they are depicted in a Greco-Roman style. Departure northwards, with a stop at Abu Minqar for a picnic lunch. Late afternoon arrival at the BAHARIA OASIS, which has always been a focal point of caravan routes in the Western Desert between the Nile Valley and Libya. We will travel to the top of GEBEL EL-ENGLIZ, where we will see the remains of a fort built by the British during the First World War and admire the sunset from above. Traditional dinner in a private house, where we can enjoy local specialities such as kofta, lamb meatballs, shish tawooq, marinated chicken skewers, molokhia, a kind of mallow soup accompanied by rice, sambusek, puff pastry rolls filled with meat or vegetables, full, broad bean stew... Accommodation at Hotel Alya or similar, overnight in double rooms with services.



In the alleys of Al Qasr



High reliefs at Deir el-Hagar



Paintings in a Muzawaka tomb



Traditional dinner

Day 12: Monday 06 January

Baharia/Cairo/Italy

After breakfast we will visit the ARET QASR SELIM TOMBS in Bawiti, built during the XXVIth dynasty, in particular that of Zed-amon ef-anekh and Banentiu, with beautifully decorated hypostyle burial chambers. Afterwards, we visit the MUSEUM OF THE GOLDEN MUMMIES, which exhibits 10 of the many mummies from the Roman period found in the region, only discovered in 1999. Time at leisure for shopping at the market and handicraft cooperatives in Baharia, where you can find precious dates, Bedouin clothes and... camel hair socks! Departure for Cairo, lunch en route. Arrival at the airport and end of services.



Museum of the Golden Mummies



Tomb at Qaret Qasr Selim



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**Individual participation fee in double room
(min. 3/max. 16 pax)**

2,690 €/pax

**in promotion at € 2,590
for booking before 26/09/2024**

**in promotion at € 2,490
for booking before 26/06/2024**

Supplements:

- Enrollment fee: **free!**
- Visa service: **60 €**
- Single room/tent: **310 €**
- Day use in Cairo: **on request**
- Extensions Cairo and Giza, Wadi Natrun and Alexandria, Sinai trekking, Red Sea, Lake Nasser *dahabeya* cruise to Abu Simbel: **on request**

The fee includes:

- English-speaking guide;
- English speaking tour leader (from 6 pax);
- Visits and excursions as scheduled;
- All transfers by Toyota Hiace 16-seater minibus or similar (max. 8 clients/bus) and Toyota Land Cruiser 7-seater 4x4 (max. 4 clients/car) including driver, fuel and tolls;
- Full board except dinners in Cairo;
- 11 overnight stays as mentioned in the itinerary (9 in hotels, 2 in fixed tented camp with services);
- Field equipment (except sleeping bag) for nights in the desert.

The fee does not include:

- The visa for Egypt;
- Cancellation, health, covid, baggage insurance;
- Air flights;
- Drinks and mineral water;
- Dinners in Cairo;
- Possible day use in Cairo;
- Possible extra nights in Cairo;
- Tips for photos and videos;
- Tips and expenses of a personal nature;
- Everything mentioned in 'supplements';
- Anything not expressly mentioned in 'the fee includes'.