

ClassicBoat

WWW.CLASSICBOAT.CO.UK

FEBRUARY 2009

NEW HORIZONS FOR HIRE

with our global
charter guide

Elton John's
water taxi

Smack gives
Vivid dreams

Our 10
greatest sea films

Class revival:
Rebel with a cause

Restoration of the Year: the winner



CHARTER

Drifting UP THE NILE

Luxor to Aswan on a new dahabiya: photographer *Gary Blake* and partner *Wendy Johnson* get away from it all with a trip up the Nile in traditional Grand Tour style on a two-masted sailing riverboat.



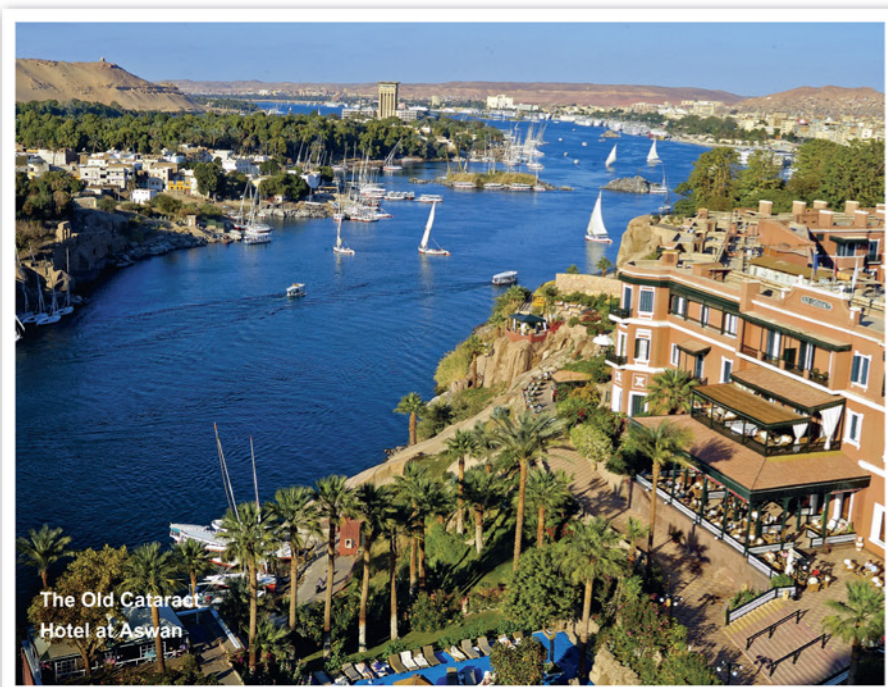
Sails are Egyptian cotton – naturally



The temple of Thebes



One of many feluccas to be seen at Aswan



The Old Cataract Hotel at Aswan

Stepping onto the dahabiya *Hadeel* – a two-masted sailing river cruiser – brings visions of a bygone age when Thomas Cook and Son arranged travel to the four corners of the globe, taking the ‘foreignness’ out of travel, so the traveller, though far from home, would have familiar comforts.

A dahabiya was the choice of the 19th-century grand tourist for his Nile trip, and they were common in Egypt in the days of the monarchy (1920s-40s) when aristocrats and sophisticated travellers loved to cruise the Nile in style.

With the age of ‘European enlightenment’ came a new interest in all things Egyptian, and parties of young travellers would arrive in Alexandria by ship maybe from Istanbul after a steam train journey from Paris or London. They would set off in a chartered felucca with a guide and native crew to Cairo some 60 miles south. Here they would visit the pyramids of Giza

then provision the boat in Cairo’s souqs and bazaars for a 8-12 week cruise up the Nile to Abu Simbel, 680 miles (1,094 km) south to the extreme of Egypt that borders with the Sudan. In the spirit of things, parties were held on board and overnight stays were at local hostels and rented dwellings, sometimes doing the odd bit of archaeological digging for fun.

There are faster ways for today’s traveller to do the same route – on one of the 500 large, modern, often soulless cruise ships; or even slower ways on open-decked feluccas, traditional lateen-rigged sailing craft more suited to the adventurous young.

But *Hadeel* offers comfort with a proper feeling of boating. The low freeboard gets you close to the water and the shallow draught lets you get to archaeological riverside sites the larger cruise ships can’t access. With her slim beam she glides along in the shallows of the river’s edge, just feet from the ancient world of the riverbanks.

As we approached the *Hadeel*, moored at Luxor, men were working on board in traditional robes (jillabas) and turban head-dresses, framed by date trees and men on donkeys. In the early morning February sun, it was almost a Biblical setting.

Hadeel, built of steel in 2007 in Alexandria, measures 147ft (45m) on deck with a 24ft (7.3m) beam. She has varnished timber decks, solid wood interior and although the hull is like a yacht’s, with a fine entry to the water, the vee soon tapers to a flat bottom with a 2ft (0.6m) draught. With no leeboards she can only sail before the wind. Upriver, Luxor to Aswan, is the preferred leg, using the prevailing winds to overcome the slight current of the Nile.

Her two lateen sails are cut from 20 oz (567g) Egyptian cotton, the same width and type of cloth as used on the sails of the J-Class yacht *Endeavour*. The Arab version of a lateen is not a true lateen but a selteelateen, having a short luff to the forward

edge of the sail. The sails are unwrapped from the masts, each supported by two wooden yards. Bow tackles haul the forward end of the yard, while the aft end is checked by braces, producing a curve in the sails that enables them to be set and trimmed.

In calms, the boat is towed by its tender, much more peaceful than the vibration and noise of an inboard diesel. With no buoys and charts, the captain finds his way through the sandbanks by “the silhouette of a familiar date palm, a waterside village and the moonlight” – plus a lead line.

An experienced crew of 10 meets passengers’ every need – luxury extends to a twice-daily change of bath towels! With passenger numbers limited to 16, it’s an intimate cruise but there’s always a quiet corner to find. The *Hadeel* takes guides in Egyptology on the trip who unravel the mysteries of the ancient monuments and temples and relics of the Pharaohs, bringing the history to life.



Hadeel, the new dahabiya – and, right, the old.



Shallow draught means it's easy to get ashore

Costs

Winter 2008-09 per cabin per night €390 or US\$ 610
 Christmas, New Year and Easter Weeks €495 or US\$ 770
 including full board and all excursions, entrance fees, guiding and transport

Agents for the *Hadeel*: Lena Olofsson of Galaxia Tours, Cairo
 email: theworld@galaxiatours
www.galaxiatours.com
 Tel: +20 22 414 4101; fax: +20 22 290 5979

Do's and Don'ts

Use a travel agent to arrange all flights, transfers and guides; it takes away the majority of the problems you will encounter en route.
 You will be constantly pestered by hawkers; just say a polite no and they will eventually go away.
 If you wish to drink alcohol bring your own supplies – it's a dry boat.
 Horse-drawn carriages are everywhere. Some of the horses are in a bad way. Best to avoid this mode of travel if possible.
 Take a camel ride – it can be fun.

On Luxor's west bank, secluded among limestone hills, lies the Theban Necropolis, perhaps the world's richest archaeological site, home to the Valleys of the Kings and Queens, with the tombs of Tutankhamun, the Colossi of Memnon, the Ramesseum, and the Temple of Hatshepsut, Egypt's only female Pharaoh.

An early start the next morning brought us to El Kab, once the oldest Egyptian city. This is where *Hadeel* came into her own, as no large cruise ship could moor up at the tiny waterside village. Children came to greet us, calling out "Salaam Alaykum" (peace be with you) as we walked through fields of sugar cane passing large men on small donkeys, up to the tombs in the foothills.

Unbeknown to the slumbering passengers, our journey started at 4am on the morrow; with no engine it was impossible to tell whether the boat was moving or not. The beautiful Nile scenery glided by our cabin windows – the grilles slide back giving

a clear view: egrets skimming the water, water buffalo grazing on the banks, men and women in flowing robes working the fields, fishermen in small boats with mounds of net.

At Aswan, Arab Egypt ends and black Africa begins. Farmland became a narrow strip of greenery and the temperature rose. The Nile meanders through islands and outcrops of granite and the Western Desert sand comes right to the edge of the river.

The first of the six cataracts starts at Aswan and limits access to the remainder of the river upstream out of Egypt into Sudan. Ancient Egyptians believed this region to be the edge of their world.

These days, the Nile is tamed by the Aswan Dam, which flooded some 300km of Egyptian Nubia as far as the border with Sudan. Numerous temples were drowned beneath the waters we sail over but the most famous, Abu Simbel, was moved in an extraordinary feat of engineering, as was

the Temple of Philae just outside Aswan, now relocated to a nearby island. Here a 'son et lumière' show brings to life the story of Isis, Horus and Hathor.

The Nile at Aswan is covered with river vessels of all kinds and studded with islands. Feluccas, huge sailing boats with lifting keels, bring additional beauty to the river scene, taking tourists to visit the islands.

On our eighth day, we relaxed in perfect style with a stay at the famous Old Cataract Hotel on the river bank overlooking the cataracts of the Nile. Since it was built in 1899, the hotel has welcomed the likes of Winston Churchill, the Princess of Wales and Tsar Nicholas II. It's also the setting of the Agatha Christie mystery *Death on the Nile* – and the suitably atmospheric setting for the end of our trip.

Nile Heritage at www.dahabiyya.com
Tel: +202 26435 820
email: info@dahabiyya.com