Tales and Travel: Destination Egypt!
Egypt Facts

LAND: Egypt is located in northeastern Africa. Egypt has a dry climate and is mostly desert. The Nile River is an important source of water and weaves its way through the country. The Suez Canal is located in Egypt, shortening commercial travel between Europe and Asia.

GOVERNMENT: For thousands of years, Egypt was ruled by pharaohs, kings, and dynasties. Egypt has one of the oldest histories of any country in the world. Egypt is now a republic. Cairo is the capital and largest city. Other major cities include Alexandria and Giza.

LANGUAGE: Arabic is the official language of Egypt. Ancient Egyptians used the hieroglyphic writing system for over 3,000 years. Hieroglyphs were inscribed in monuments, temples, tombs, and other important buildings in ancient Egypt.

Popular Sights

Pyramids: Built over 4,500 years ago and considered to be one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World. Pyramids were used as tombs for mummified kings. 35 major pyramids remain standing. The Pharaoh Khufu built the Great Pyramid at Giza, the largest pyramid in the world. The Great Pyramid stands 482 feet tall and is built of 2.3 million blocks of stone, each weighing between 2 and 15 tons.

Great Sphinx: Built by the Pharaoh Khafre. The giant stone figure depicts a human head with a lion’s body.

Valley of the Kings: A burial ground of over 60 tombs for pharaohs of ancient Egypt located on the west bank of the Nile River. The most famous tomb is of the pharaoh Tutankhamen, discovered in 1922. Tutankhamen became pharaoh when he was only 9 years old in 1334 B.C.

Animals: Arabian Camels

Arabian camels grow to 7-11 feet in length and weigh 1,000-1,400 pounds.

Arabian camels have one hump. The hump stores fat which allows the camel to go days without food and water. The fat is burned for energy.

An Arabian camel may drink 15 gallons of water in 10 minutes. Baby Arabian camels are born with a small hump.

Camels live in the desert. Camels have large, padded feet to walk on the hot sand. Camels have long, silky eyelashes and thick eyebrows to protect the camel’s eyes from the sun.

Arabian camels can travel at 2.5 mph for as long as 12 hours without stopping. They are capable of carrying a load of 300 pounds.

Arabian camels are native to Arabia and North Africa.

A ship is returning to Egypt after a long journey to Nubia. As the shoreline comes into view, the lieutenant turns to his commander and tells the tale of another voyage.

I was sailing the Red Sea on a great ship bound for the gold mines of Nubia. There were 120 of the best and bravest sailors of Egypt. There wasn’t a fool among them. Their hearts were fiercer than lions. The arm of each one was stronger than the next, and the heart of each one was braver. They laughed at the thought of a storm!

But suddenly, a great wind arose, and a mighty wave dashed against our ship, breaking the mast. I grabbed hold of a piece of wood, and none too soon! The ship sank, and of those in it, I was the only one to survive.

I floated until the surf cast me on an island shore. I crawled beneath some trees and fell asleep.
When I awoke, I found myself in a paradise. All around me were good things to eat: ripe figs, grapes, vegetables, grain, and an abundance of fish and wildfowl. I ate until I was full. Then I built a fire and made an offering to the gods, thanking them for my safety.

Then suddenly, trees splintered and the ground trembled. I thought it was another storm, but I looked up and saw a gigantic Serpent with a royal beard and scales of gold and lapis lazuli. The Serpent spoke, asking me, “Where are you from and how did you get here? Speak quickly, for if you do not answer me, I will spit fire and burn you to ashes!” I was so terrified I became speechless.

The Great Serpent picked me up in his mouth, carried me back to where he lived, and put me down again, unhurt. He said, “Fear not, I will not harm you. How have you come to this island?”
I told him I was on my way to Nubia when a storm destroyed our ship and all my companions were drowned.

“I know what it is like to lose companions,” answered the Serpent. “I lived here with my sisters and brothers and all our children. We were seventy-five serpents living together in harmony and plenty, when one day a star fell from the sky and killed everyone except myself. So you and I are both survivors. How I miss my family!”

When he mentioned his family, I thought of my own wife and children and I wept.

“Grieve not,” said the Serpent, “for good will come of your misfortune. You are safe here. You will stay here for four months, and then a ship will come filled with your countrymen who will return you to Egypt, and you will be reunited with your family.”
How happy I was to hear this! “O Good Serpent, when I return to Egypt, I will tell Pharaoh of your kindness, wisdom, and hospitality, and we will send you gifts of gold, fragrant oil, and myrrh.”

At this the Serpent laughed. “Little One, I have all the riches I need and more, for I am the Prince of Punt. Surely God brought you here to this Island of the Soul. When you leave, this island will disappear forever under the waves, but it will always be with you, for it lives in your heart. Whenever you face danger, take courage, and know that this island lives within you.”

And so I lived with the Serpent, and we became good friends. In four months’ time, a ship appeared. I climbed a tree to hail it and recognized Egyptians aboard.

When I went to tell the Serpent that the ship had arrived, he already knew. He said, “Farewell, Little One! You will reach your home in two months and embrace your wife and children. Speak well of me in your town and establish my good name. This is all I ask of you.”
The Good Serpent gave me many gifts, and we filled the ship with greyhounds, long-tailed monkeys, baboons, and all kinds of precious things.

I brought these gifts to Pharaoh, who rewarded me with a fine house, and appointed me lieutenant.

Then, as the Serpent predicted, I returned to my family. What a joy it was for us to be reunited!
Animals: Gazelle

Gazelles live in the grassy plains and semi-desert areas of East Africa. Gazelles weigh 100 to 175 pounds and stand 31 to 35 inches tall.

The main diet of the gazelle consists of grasses and leaves from native bushes. Gazelles can survive during long periods of hot and dry weather and can live with little water. Gazelles retrieve their drinking water from dew and green leaves.

During the dry season, gazelles gather in large herds consisting of hundreds of gazelles. Gazelle herds are smaller during the rainy season, often consisting of less than 12 animals.

Both the male and female gazelle have large, unbranched, and hollow horns. Gazelles do not shed their antlers annually like deer. The antlers of gazelles are permanent. Gazelles use their horns as weapons when cornered by a predator.

The Egyptian Cinderella by Shirley Climo

Long ago, in the land of Egypt, where the green Nile River widens to meet the blue sea, there lived a maiden called Rhodopis. When she was still a small child, Rhodopis had been stolen by pirates. She was snatched from her home in Greece, taken across the sea to Egypt, and there sold as a slave.

Like the Egyptian servant girls, Rhodopis went to the water’s edge each day to wash clothes or to gather the reeds that grew along the riverbank. But Rhodopis looked different from the Egyptian girls. Their eyes were brown and hers were green. Their hair hung straight to their shoulders, while the breeze blew hers into tangles. Their skin glowed like copper, but her pale skin burned red beneath the sun. That was how she got her name, for Rhodopis meant “rosy-cheeked” in Greek.

“Rosy Rhodopis!” scoffed the servant girls, hissing her name between their teeth.

Rhodopis pretended not to hear, but she blushed rosier than ever.
Although her master was kind, he was old and liked to doze beneath a fig tree. He seldom heard the servant girls tease Rhodopis. He never saw them ordering her about.

“Hurry, Rhodopis!” they would shout at her. “The geese are in the garden, eating up the onions!”
“Mend my robe!”
“I’m hungry, Rhodopis! Bake the bread!”
Rhodopis always hurried to do their bidding, for the Egyptian girls were household servants and she was only a slave.

Rhodopis found friends among the animals instead. Birds ate crumbs from her hands. She coaxed a monkey to sit upon her shoulder and charmed a hippopotamus with her songs. It would raise its huge head from the muddy water and prick its small ears to listen.

Sometimes, when her chores were done and the day had cooled, Rhodopis would dance for her animal companions. She twirled so lightly that her tiny bare feet scarcely touched the ground. One evening her master awakened to see her dance.
“No goddess is more nimble!” he called out. “Such a gift deserves reward.” He tugged his chin whiskers, thinking, and then declared, “You shall go barefoot no longer.”

Her master ordered a pair of dainty slippers made especially for Rhodopis. The soles were of real leather, and the toes were gilded with rose-red gold. Now when Rhodopis danced, her feet sparkled like fireflies.

The rose-red slippers set Rhodopis more apart than ever. The Egyptian servant girls were jealous, for they wore clumsy sandals woven from papyrus. Out of spite they found new tasks for her to do, keeping Rhodopis so busy that she was too tired to dance at night.

One evening, Kipa, who was chief among the servant girls, announced, “Tomorrow we sail for Memphis to see the Pharaoh. His Majesty is going to hold court for all his subjects.”

“There will be musicians and dancing,” said another servant girl, eyeing the rose-red slippers.

“There will be feasting,” added a third.
“Poor Rhodopis! You must stay behind,” Kipa jeered. “You have linen to wash and grain to grind and the garden to weed.”

The next morning, just as Ra the Sun was climbing into the sky, Rhodopis followed the servant girls to the riverbank. Kipa wore a necklace of blue beads. Bracelets jingled on the wrists of the second. The third had tied a many-colored sash about her waist. Although Rhodopis wore a plain tunic, on her feet were the rose-red slippers.

Perhaps they will let me come along to see the Pharaoh after all, she thought. But the three servant girls poled their raft around the bend in the river without giving Rhodopis a backward glance.

Rhodopis sighed, and turned to the basket piled high with dirty clothes. “Wash the linen, weed the garden, grind the grain.” She slapped the wooden paddle against the cloth in time to her song.

The hippopotamus, tired of so dull a tune, pushed out of the reeds and splashed into the river.

“Shame!” cried Rhodopis, shaking her paddle. “You splattered mud on my beautiful slippers!”
She polished the shoes on the hem of her tunic until the rosy gold glittered in the sun. Then she carefully put them on the bank behind her.

“Wash the linens, weed the garden...” Rhodopis began again, when suddenly a shadow fell on the water. Rhodopis jumped up. A great falcon, the symbol of the god Horus, circled in the sky with wings spread so wide that they blotted out the sun.

“Greetings to you, Proud Horus,” Rhodopis murmured. She bowed her head and felt a rush of air on the back of her neck.

When Rhodopis dared to lift her eyes, she saw the falcon soar away. Dangling from his talons was one of her beautiful slippers. “Stop!” she pleaded. “Come back!” But the bird did not heed her. He flew toward the sun until he was no more than a dark speck against the gold.
Rhodopis bit her tongue. One shoe was worse than none at all. Now she’d have to dance like a stork, hopping about on one foot, and even the monkey would laugh. Rhodopis tucked the slipper into her tunic and returned to her laundry, salting the river with her tears.

After Rhodopis had lost sight of the falcon, the mighty bird followed the course of the Nile to the city of Memphis, to the square where the Pharaoh was holding court. There the falcon watched and waited.

The Pharaoh’s name was Amasis. On his head he wore the red-and-white crown of the Two Egyptians. The double crown was heavy and pinched his ears. He preferred driving the chariot fast as the wind to sitting on the throne. Amasis yawned.

At that very moment, the falcon dropped the rose-red slipper into his lap.

The slipper was so bright that Amasis thought it was a scrap of the sun. Then he saw the falcon wheeling overhead.

“The god Horus sends me a sign!” exclaimed the Pharaoh. He picked up the rose-red slipper. “Every maiden in Egypt must try this shoe! She whose foot it fits shall be my queen. That is the will of the gods.”
Amasis dismissed the court, called for his chariot, and began his search at once.

When the Egyptian servant girls arrived in Memphis, they found the throne empty and the streets deserted.

They were so angry on their return that even seeing Rhodopis without her rose-red slipper did not please them. “Slaves are better off barefoot,” snapped Kipa.

The Pharaoh journeyed to distant cities. He tracked the desert where pyramids tower over the sand, and he climbed the steep cliffs where falcons nest. The rose-red slipper was always in his hand. Wherever he went, women and girls, rich or poor, flocked to try on the slipper. But none could fit into so small a shoe.

The longer Amasis searched, the more determined he became to marry the maiden who had lost the tiny slipper. He summoned his royal barge and vowed to visit every landing along the Nile. The barge was hung with sails of silk. Trumpets blared and oarsmen rowed to the beat of gongs. The din
was so dreadful that, when the barge rounded the bend in the river, Rhodopis fled in alarm. But the servant girls ran to the water’s edge.

“Now we will see the Pharaoh!” cried Kipa.

Amasis held up the rose-red slipper. “Whoever can wear this shoe shall be my queen.”

The servant girls knew that shoe, and knew its owner, too. Yet they clapped their hands over their mouths and said nothing. If one of them could wear it...

First Kipa, then the others, tried to put on the slipper. Each cramped her foot and curled her toes and squeezed until tears ran down their cheeks. Still her heel hung over.

“Enough!” said Amasis wearily. He would have set sail again had he not chanced to see Rhodopis peering through the rushes.

“Come!” he commanded. “You must try this rose-red slipper.”

The servant girls gawked openmouthed as the Pharaoh knelled before Rhodopis. He slipped the tiny shoe on her
foot with ease. Then Rhodopis pulled its mate from the folds of her tunic.

“Behold!” cried Amais. “In all this land there is none so fit to be queen!”

“But Rhodopis is a slave!” protested one of the servant girls.

Kipa sniffed. “She is not even Egyptian.”

“She is the most Egyptian of all,” the Pharaoh declared. “For her eyes are as green as the Nile, her hair as feathery as papyrus, and her skin the pink of a lotus flower.”

The Pharaoh led Rhodopis to the royal barge, and with ever step, her rose-red slippers winked and sparkled in the sun.