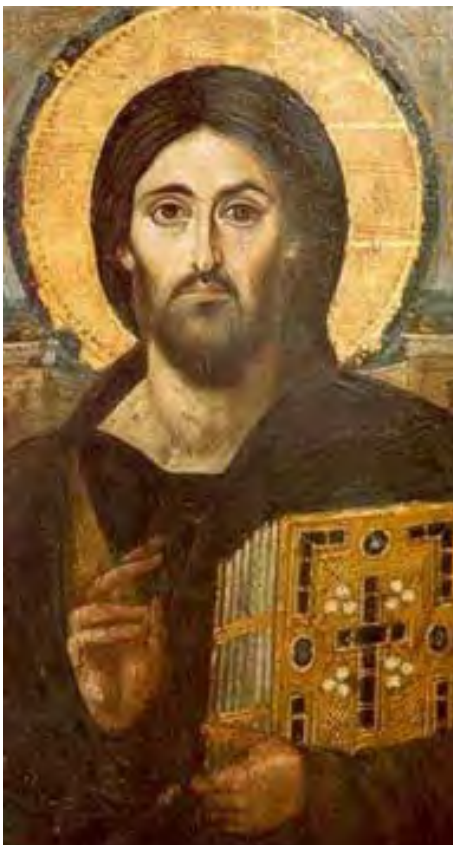


An invitation to join a Retreat and Exploration of St Catherine's Monastery 12th - 19th February 2017

Inspired by an earlier visit to St Catherine's Monastery with Wind Sand & Stars, Liz Edmunds resolved to go back and spend a week there. It is not only an historic marvel but is a profoundly spiritual place.

*Amongst the guest speakers will be **Father Laurence Freeman OSB**, leader of the World Community for Christian Meditation. There will be those who know about manuscripts, those who are familiar with the icons and many of us who have read the *Sisters of Sinai* by Janet Soskice.*

Saint Catherine's Monastery or the **Sacred Monastery of the God-Trodden Mount Sinai** lies at the foot of Mount Sinai where the Bible says that Moses received the Ten Commandments. The monastery is built on the site where it is said that Moses saw the Burning Bush. A Chapel on the site of the Burning Bush was built by order of Helena, mother of Constantine I. The fortified Greek Orthodox Monastery was built to protect the Chapel at the order of the Emperor Justinian (who reigned 527-568) and is a UNESCO World Heritage Site. It is one of the oldest working Christian monasteries in the world. It contains the world's oldest continually operating library, possessing many unique books which preserve the second largest collection of early codices and manuscripts in the world, outnumbered only by the Vatican Library and contains Greek, Arabic, Armenian, Coptic, Hebrew, Georgian and Aramaic texts.



The Monastery also houses irreplaceable works of art: mosaics, the best collection of early icons in the world, many in encaustic as well as liturgical objects, chalices and reliquaries, and church buildings. The large icon collection begins with a few dating to the 5th (possibly) and 6th centuries, which are unique, the monastery having been untouched by Byzantine iconoclasm and never sacked. The oldest icon on an Old Testament theme is preserved there, as well as the oldest known surviving example of the icon of Christ Pantocrator (left). A project to catalogue the collections has been ongoing since the 1960s. The monastery was an important centre for the development of the hybrid style of Crusader art and retains over 120 such icons, by far the largest collection in existence.

"We look forward to your group's visit and showing some of our manuscripts; by then we will have the new library in operation, with a reading room for scholars." Monastery's Librarian **Father Justin**.

Further details: Liz Edmunds elizabeth.edmunds4@btinternet.com

Further details & booking pack:

Wind Sand & Stars fay@windsandstars.co.uk 01256 886543 x 7

Itinerary

Day 1: Arrival in South Sinai

We are met on arrival at Sharm el Sheikh International Airport by our Wind Sand & Stars representatives and drive north to the quiet resort of Nuweiba on the Gulf of Aqaba.
Overnight 4 hotel, Nuweiba*

Day 2: Journey to St Catherine's Monastery

After breakfast we travel through the beautiful eastern sandstone desert towards St Catherine's Monastery, stopping on the way to view rock inscriptions carved by early pilgrims as they journeyed from Jerusalem to St Catherine. We can take in the stunning view of the nearby oasis of Ayun Khudra as we enjoy sweet Bedouin tea and a picnic lunch. We may also have time to stop at the *Nawamis*, remarkable tombs dating from the Bronze Age, before we continue to the spectacular granite mountains where the Monastery lies at the foot of Mount Sinai.

Days 3 - 7: At St Catherine's Monastery *

We will spend the next five days based at the Monastery. Built in the 6th century by the Byzantine Emperor Justinian, its towering outer walls, built to protect the monks from marauding tribes, still stand. Inside we can visit the magnificent Basilica and also spend time viewing the rare collections of icons and early manuscripts in the museum. We may also be able granted rare access to the Monastery's remarkable library under the tutelage of Father Justin.

There is an optional ascent of Mount Sinai on one day, a steady uphill walk for 2-3 hours along the traditional camel path (with camels available for hire), then up steep Byzantine steps carved into the rocks to the summit. Below lies the Garden of Elijah, where it was told that Elijah hid from God on the mountain.

The Monastery is open to visitors each morning from 9am-12pm, while the afternoons will offer us time for independent study, exploration of the local village of St Catherine and optional walks to some of nearby hermitages and viewpoints, or simply time to absorb the special atmosphere.
O/n each night St Catherine's Monastery guesthouse

Costs

Land arrangements	£950
Flight	£350 - £500 approximately
Minimum number	10

Cost Includes

- All local transport and accommodation
- Full board at the Monastery Guesthouse and B&B at 4* hotel in Nuweiba
- Qualified Wind Sand & Stars group leader
- English-speaking Egyptian guide
- St Katherine's National Park fee and Museum entrance fee
- Comprehensive travel insurance (please note an additional insurance premium for clients 65 years or over)



Day 8: Depart

In the morning we return to Sharm el Sheikh and our flight home.

Please note all desert itineraries are subject to change.

Wind Sand & Stars has an impeccable safety record and everyone's safety and wellbeing is our top priority. The final itinerary will be confirmed with this in mind, with some flexibility depending on the group, local conditions and to allow for Monastery opening times and flight times.

Cost Excludes

- Egyptian Visa (US\$25 if needed, see separate note)
- Gratuities £50 (invoiced)
- Single Supplement £150 per person (invoiced)
- Hire of camel up Mt Sinai (£10, optional)
- Soft drinks and any other personal expenses
- Additional transport and accommodation for separate arrival or onward travel outside the main itinerary

ATOL protection

The air holidays and flights in this brochure are ATOL Protected by the Civil Aviation Authority. Our ATOL number is 6382. For further information, visit the ATOL website at www.atol.org.uk.

