

South Sinai Discovery

19th – 26th March 2017

with guest leader the Revd Mark Hunt

Come and journey with us through a stunning and ancient desert landscape. The story of Moses, a place of refuge for Elijah, inspiration for the Desert Fathers and remnants of the crusades and medieval pilgrims who came before us are all integral to this gentle adventure across South Sinai. The unique desert silence, the beauty of the sandstone hills and the opportunity for reflection have drawn people here for many hundreds of years. As we travel with our semi-nomadic Bedouin companions through their desert land, we take in historical sites including chalcolithic tombs, ancient inscriptions and, of course, the remote St Catherine's Monastery, one of the treasure houses of early Christian manuscripts and art.

The itinerary will involve riding on camels under the expert guidance of the local Bedouin, as well as optional trekking on foot with daypacks, supported by camels to carry main luggage and with back-up from 4-wheel drive vehicles. A gentle pace can allow time for quiet reflection as well as collective worship, giving a unique opportunity for a sense of timelessness away from the pressures of modern life.

Itinerary

Day 1: Arrive

We are met on arrival at Sharm el Sheikh International Airport by our local English-speaking Egyptian guide. We drive north to the quiet resort of Nuweiba on the Gulf of Aqaba.

O/n 4 hotel, Nuweiba*



Days 2-3: Acclimatisation and desert silence

In the morning we depart for the beautiful sandstone desert. On arrival at our camp we can drink tea with the family of Suleiman of the Muzeina tribe, who is an old friend of Wind Sand & Stars. A gentle pace allows us some time to acclimatise to our new environment and experience the desert silence. There is an optional walk to the oasis of Ayn Khudra, which lies on the old pilgrim route from Jerusalem to St Catherine and many rock inscriptions carved by these early pilgrims are still visible on the rocks. During the evenings there is time to relax and enjoy the unique silence and space of the desert. *O/n under the stars*

Days 4-5: Camel trek

Late evening and early morning, members of the local Bedouin tribe and their camels arrive at our camp for the start of our camel trek. This is a unique opportunity to travel with the Bedouin through their desert lands, experiencing at first hand the slow pace of traditional desert travel, the ever-changing desert scenery and their warm hospitality. We trek past golden sandstone cliffs eroded by the wind, through long sandy valleys dotted with acacia trees, near scattered Bedouin encampments and oases and in the footsteps of people who have travelled across Sinai through the centuries. We may also see the *Nawamis*, remarkable tombs dating from the Bronze Age. The route is flexible and there will be long breaks for lunch, with plenty of shade from the sun. In the evenings we relax around the fire, enjoying the remarkable night skies and cups of hot, sweet tea with the Bedouin. *O/n each night under the stars*

Note: You will each have your own trekking camel. The saddles are well padded and comfortable. There are frequent stops for tea, places of interest and rest breaks.



Day 6: Mount Sinai

We travel by vehicle to the heart of Sinai's rugged mountains and continue in the centuries' old tradition of pilgrimage as we follow in the footsteps of Moses up Mount Sinai. There is an optional walk along the traditional camel path - camels can be ridden this far, or it is a steady walk for two hours.



For the ascent to the summit, we follow the Byzantine steps, the rocks to either side carved with crosses and signs of earlier pilgrims. The top is marked by a small chapel and mosque. There are magnificent views of the surrounding desert and mountains. Beneath the summit lies the Garden of Elijah, a small green plateau with a chapel commemorating the cave where Elijah hid from God on the mountain. We can rest here before returning to St Catherine's Monastery. *O/n St Catherine's Monastery guesthouse (small dormitory accommodation)*

Day 7: St Catherine's Monastery

In the morning we visit the Monastery of St Catherine, founded in the sixth century by the Emperor Justinian. The original towering monastery walls, built to protect the monks from marauding tribes, still stand. The Monastery lies in the shadow of Mount Sinai and houses the burning bush and also the well of Moses. Inside we visit the magnificent Basilica church and see some of the many rare and beautiful icons that form part of the Monastery's world famous collection of Early Christian art. There is also time to visit the museum within the Monastery that displays many ancient manuscripts and treasures. We can enjoy our final afternoon and evening absorbing the special atmosphere of the Monastery and reflecting upon our time in Sinai, as we also begin to prepare ourselves for our return journey. *O/n St Catherine's Monastery guesthouse*

The final itinerary for these two days will depend upon the group, local conditions and also Monastery opening times.

Day 8: Depart

We depart for Sharm el Sheikh and the return flight.

Please note all desert itineraries are subject to change.

Costs

Land arrangements	£1,025
International flight London Stansted to Sharm el Sheikh	£300 - £500

Please note that flight costs vary depending upon the route and time of booking and full payment may be required upon booking, depending on the flight operator.

Cost Includes

- All local transport and accommodation
- Full board throughout (two cooked meals & picnic lunch in the desert, including bottled drinking water)
- Qualified Wind Sand & Stars desert leader
- English speaking Egyptian guide
- Local Bedouin guides and camels
- Comprehensive travel insurance (a supplement is payable for 65 years or over)

Cost Excludes

- Egyptian Visa (US\$25 on arrival, if needed, please see separate note on requirements)
- Gratuities UK £50 (invoiced)
- Single Supplement £40 (invoiced)
- Camel up Mt Sinai approximately £10 one way (optional, payable on site in Egyptian pounds)
- 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 itinerary 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.

