Aswan is a magnificent tourist destination. It is also Egypt’s southern gate to Africa. It lies on the eastern bank of the River Nile that smoothly flows in splendor through the granite rocks around the Emerald Islands. It is covered with palm trees and tropical plants, which gives it a great view on the Nile and makes it a perfect starting point for Nile cruises.

**History and Importance**

In Ancient Egypt, Aswan was known as “Sono”; or the market, due to then being a commercial center for the convoys coming from and going to Nubia. During the Ptolemaic era, it was named “Syene”, and then the Nubians called it “Lipa Swan”.

It was also known as the Land of Gold, as it was regarded a great treasure; being a cemetery for the Nubian kings who lived there for thousands of years. Before the Nubians migration, Aswan used to extend from Isna to the east towards the borders with the Sudan to the south. After the Islamic conquest, some Arab tribes lived there.

Aswan has a universal fame thanks to its great history and magnificent geography. 7000 years ago, there in Aswan the greatest civilization on the River Nile had emerged. During the Old Kingdom, Aswan played a great role in defending the country’s southern borders. Aswan was also the armies assembly center during the Middle Kingdom when kings tried to expand their rule towards the south, not to mention during fighting against Hyksos. Philae Island, the home-land of God Isis, had also attracted the attention of the Ptolemaic so that they completed the construction of its huge Philae Temple.

In an attempt to get closer to the Egyptians, the Romans erected many Pharaonic-style temples. An example of those temples is a small one in Philae Island established by Emperor Trajan. When Christianity became Egypt’s religion in the 5th Century AD, various Pharaonic temples were turned into churches. Philae Island had be-
come the center for one of the bishoprics, thus leading to the spread of Christianity in the south towards Nubia in Egypt and the Sudan.

Since the advent and spread of Islam, many writings in the Kof calligraphy that date back to the 1st Century AH have been found in Aswan. During the Islamic era and in the 10th Century AD, Aswan has flourished and became a road to “Aivab” on the Red Sea coast, where ships used to sail to Hejaz, Yemen and India.

Aswan was also an important cultural center during the 6th and 7th centuries AH where three schools had been built (namely Aswan, Al-Saifi-ah and Al-Najmiah schools). Moreover, Mohamed Ali Paha had also established the first military school in Egypt there in 1837.

The First Measurement of the Earth’s Circumference

In Aswan, Eratosthenes refuted the theory of a plane Earth. He made the first calculation of the measurement of the Earth’s circumference by taking Syene as a centre and Alexandria as an edge point to calculate the length of the arc based on shadow length at the solstice in the two cities. He depended on the fact that the sun shines perpendicularly on the tropic of cancer, which almost passes through Aswan, on 21 June.

Tourism in Aswan over ages

Aswan is characterized by several tourist features that made it a destination for tourists from all over the world, especially in winter. It has a moderate and dry climate due to its location on the Nile east bank. It is considered an international winter resort and also an open museum for many archeological landmarks which date back to various ages and spread all over the city such as:

Ancient Landmarks

Abu Simbel Area

Abu Simple Area lies in lower Nubia, south of Egypt, near the Sudanese border, about 280 km southwest of Aswan. It is a mountain cliff of red-dish sandstone that used to stand magnificently on the west bank of the Nile (and now on the west bank of Lake Nasser behind the High Dam). In this area, Ramses II, the third Pharaoh of the 19th ancient Egyptian dynasty, had two temples cut in the rocks. The two temples were meant to make Nubia populated and reinforce the Egyptian sovereignty on it as well as to establish the Pharaoh’s being a God and commemorate his victory over the Hittites at the Battle of Kadesh.

The two temples were completed in 1206 BC and were considered among the most magnificent temples of ancient Egypt. They are called the Great Abu Simbel Temple and the Small Abu Simbel Temple. With their outstanding architecture, good scales, huge statues and the inscriptions adorning the walls, the two temples are the most spacious and beautiful of all Egyptian rock
temples in all times.

The Great Abu Simbel Temple

The façade of the Great Abu Simbel Temple is about 33 meters high and 38 meters wide. It was cut 63 meters deep into the rocks. Four colossal 20-meter statues of Ramses, embodying the most important gods, decorate the façade of the Temple. Though huge, the sculptors were creative in carving the Pharaoh’s handsome face and his charming smile that welcomes the shining sun. Above the statues, there is a frame in which the names and titles of King Ramses II, the glorified, the born from the sun and the chosen from it, were inscribed. Above the frame, there is a frieze of sacred serpents, followed by another frieze of baboons in a row raising their arms in the air and, supposedly, worshipping the rising sun. The entrance, in the middle of the façade, is crowned by the statue of God Ra-Hurakhti. Next to and between the legs of the four colossi, there are other statues, no higher than the knees of the Pharaoh, of the family of King Ramses II (his mother, his beloved chief wife Nefertari, and his sons and daughters).

The Sun Festival at Abu Simbel

Over more than 3000 years, one of the astronomical miracles has been taking place at the Great Abu Simbel Temple with the rays of the sun piercing into the sanctuary and illuminating the sculptures of King Ramses II and two statues of Ra-Hurakhti, God of the Sun, and Amun, God of Thebes on the back wall. Only the statue of Ptah, the god connected with the Underworld, remains in the dark. This phenomenon takes place in two significant days of the year; on the dates that mark the pharaoh’s birthday (October 21) and his coronation day (February 21).

In these two days, thousands of tourists from all over the world come to Abu Simbel to watch this phenomenon during the the Sun Festival. The festival program includes music performance and narration about the era after Ramses II ascended the throne of Egypt in nine languages; Arabic, English, French, Italian, Spanish, Deutsch, Russian, Chinese, and Japanese.

The Small Abu Simbel Temple

It is located to the north of the Great Abu Simbel Temple, and was built by Ramses II to honor and commemorate his beloved wife Nefertari and for Hathor, the Goddess of Love, Music and Beauty. Although the temple is smaller than the great one, it is characterized by its beautiful drawings and bright colors.

The Sound and Light show was introduced to the two temples.

Philae Temples

They are located to the south of Aswan. Philae or “Phili” in Greek means “the beloved woman or women”.

Its Arabic name is “Anas Al-Wogoud” in reference to a myth with the same name in “The One Thousand Nights and Night” stories. The ancient Egyptian and Coptic name was “Pilak or Pilakh” which means “the end” because it was the most southern border of Egypt. It houses a group of temples that were dedicated to the worshipping of Isis, Hathor, Amenhotep and others. Recently, they have been relocated in Agilkia Island in implementation of the plan of Nubia monuments rescue against the rising subterranean water. Visitors of the temples can watch the Sound and Light show in different languages.

Nubia Old Temples

Nubia is the name of the land that extends from the south of the first cataract of the Nile in Aswan to Dongola beyond the fourth cataract in Sudan. This area encompasses the following restored temples:
Kalabsha Temple
It is one of the most magnificent temples in Nubia. It dates back to the era of the Roman emperor Octavious Augusts 30 B.C. It was moved from its original place on the Nile’s west bank and rebuilt near the High Dam.
Kalabsha Temple is the biggest temple built of sandstone in Nubia. Its walls bear inscriptions and engravings which depict the Egyptian story of Isis and Osiris.

Beit El-Wali Temple
It is one of the five temples cut in the rock which were built by Ramses II in Nubia. It contains a hall of columns and a terrace adorned with inscriptions and multiple-color texts in addition to scenes of the King in the battlefield.
The area also comprises other temples that are still under development, namely the temples of Al-Dekkah, Al-Dorr, Al-Sobu’, Aamda and Al-Mahraqa and Ebrim Palace as well as the tombs of Banout and Abou Auda.

Elephantine Island
The elephantine Island is one of the most beautiful places to visit in Aswan. It is like a piece of paradise with its wonderful gardens and precious archeological relics. It is a great place for entertainment, where visitors can enjoy strolling among the colorful houses in the Nubian villages of Siou and Koti on the island, fishing in the Nile, or taking a walk along its banks.

Island Temples
The island contains relics of rock temples that belong to different ages. Engravings on the gate of one of the temple’s south halls represent Alexander II, in the attire of an Egyptian king, offering sacrifices to gods.

Nilometer
The Nilometer dates back to the Roman era and it shows the scales of the Nile flood in Arabic and Greek languages. It had been used till recently.

Agilkia Island
Agilkia Island comprises the Philae Temples and monuments that were flooded by the Nile and were relocated and reassembled on the island 500 meters from Philae Temples site.

Amun Island
Amun Island is a small island. Recently, a hotel was built there.
**Tombs of the Nobles**

They were dedicated to the rulers of Aswan and Elephantine Island in the old ages. They are located on the west bank of Aswan. The tombs are carved in sandstone. They have a historical importance that places them at the foreground of the tombs of Upper Egypt. The most important of these tombs are Mekhu and Sabni tombs that represent the architectural style of the tombs at that time. The inscriptions on the walls of the tombs show the titles of the governors of Upper Egypt, the posts they occupied and the roles they played to protect the country as well as their journeys in Africa.

**St. Simeon Monastery**

St. Simeon Monastery dates back to the 6th Century AD. It is one of the most beautiful ancient Coptic monasteries that comprises a church the walls of which illustrate pictures of Christ and the Saints.

**The Unfinished Obelisk**

It is a huge obelisk yet to be finished. If finished, it would have measured around 41 m and would have weighed nearly 117 tons. Its importance lies in the fact that it carries inscriptions that explain the methods the ancient Egyptians used in cutting and sculpting obelisks.

**El-Anani Cemetery**

El-Anani Cemetery lies in the area surrounding the railways tunnel in Aswan. It consists of a number of domes that comprise remains of rulers of Beni El-Kanz, who played a major role in the prosperity of Aswan during their reign.

**Modern Landmarks**

In addition to ancient monuments, Aswan comprises a number of modern ones, including:

**Aswan Reservoir**

It is located to the west of Aswan. It was constructed in 1902 and it marked the beginning of using irrigation techniques in the country. It had been raised twice, the first in 1912, and the second in 1933. The reservoir contains 180 gates to control the distribution of the Nile water. The first Aswan reservoir power plant was built in 1953, and the second in 1985.

**Aswan High Dam**

Aswan High Dam is one of the marvels of construction of the 20th century and is considered one of the largest dams in the world. It is a rock-fill dam located 20 km south of Aswan city with a length of 3600 meters, a maximum height of 111 meters and a width of 40 meters at the top.

The idea of constructing the High Dam in Aswan goes back to the Egyptian Revolution of 1952. It was meant to provide Egypt with a stable water flow that allows agricultural expansion and protection of the country from high floods that used to submerge vast areas of lands or just get wasted in the Mediterranean Sea. It was also designed to provide Egypt with hydroelectricity as a mainstay of agricultural and industrial development.

**Aga Khan Mausoleum**

At first glance, Aga Khan Mausoleum may look a rough isolated building that stands high on the west bank of the River Nile. The style of the building is inspired by the Fatimid architecture in Cairo. It is distinguished by its elegance and imperial rose granite, which was used in a very unique way. It was built at the wish of the wife of Aga Khan III, a Muslim Indian princess, after he died in 1957.

Aga Khan Mausoleum is one the most beautiful visiting places in Aswan in which visitors can enjoy the quietness of the place, the panoramic view of the Nile; in addition to the interesting love story related to the building. The story tells that after the death of Aga Khan, his Muslim Indian wife used to lay a red rose on his tomb that is covered with white marble. She remained faithful to her husband till she died in 2000. And according to her will, a red rose is still laid on her dear husband’s tomb every day.

**Aswan Fortifications**

Aswan fortifications were established by Mohamed Ali Pasha. They encompassed the first military school which had four barracks, whose remains are still standing on the hill overlooking
the hotel zone and “Toqoq” mountain.

**Aswan Botanical Garden – Botanical Island**

Aswan Botanical Garden is located on an island in the Nile covering an area of 17 feddans opposite the city of Aswan. To the east of the garden is the Elephantine Island, which includes Aswan Monument Museum, Abul Hawa Dome and the Tombs of the Nobles, in addition to rare tropical and subtropical plants. The garden is considered one of the most important research centers in Egypt and one of the rarest botanical gardens in the world. That’s why it is one of the most important visiting places in Aswan.

**The Nubian Museum**

The idea of establishing the Nubian Museum goes back to the 1950s when the Nubian Monuments Rescue Program started conducting a study to specify the places that should be recorded practically and geometrically, as well as the places where relocations should take place.

In that regard, the UNESCO adopted an international campaign to build the museum, and in 1986, the foundation stone of the project was laid. Its building took about ten years and was inaugurated in November 1996.

The Museum has a unique location among the hills south-east of the River Nile, and on the road to Aswan airport on a high hill of sandstone and granite rocks, which are characterized by their graded compositions that were used for the external display of large statues. In addition, there is an exhibition of the activities of the Nubians through a small Nubian village amidst gardens covered with plants of Egyptian origin. Furthermore, some canals and lakes were dug to symbolize the River Nile from its upstream, and the Nubian folkloric arts are displayed on their banks. Moreover, there is a cave where a group of prehistoric animals is drawn on its walls. Achieving integrity has been taken into account while building the Museum, to be in a lower level in order not to distort the archeological area. The continental climate of Aswan was also taken into consideration. So, the window openings are small compared to the facades that reflect the Nubian architecture that has been prevailing in Nubia since ancient times. The Museum has six sections comprising 20 thousand archeological artifacts. Of the artifacts displayed for the first time is a 20-thousand year old skeleton of a man that had been found in 1982 in the Kobaneya area north of Aswan. The first piece that entered the exhibition was a statue of Ramses II, the famous Pharaoh of Egypt, which was found in the Nubia, and was transferred to the museum before being completed to be the first to receive visitors.

**Lake Nasser**

Lake Nasser is the world’s largest man-made lake. It is characterized by its clear water and its banks are rich in natural wonders and ancient monuments. The Lake attracted many birds from remote African regions. Visitors of Aswan can enjoy cruises in Lake Nasser, which are on a high level of comfort and luxury. On the other hand, the boats are designed splendidly with touches of modernity and elegance and usually contain all means of entertainment.

**Nature Reserves in Aswan**

Aswan has several nature reserves, amongst them are:

**Saloga and Ghazal Islands Reserve**

It is located in the River Nile, 3 km north of Aswan Reservoir. It is considered a unique environment with its natural green blanket. It harbors many rare resident, visiting and migrant birds. It is abundant in some 94 kinds of plants. It also shelters more than 60 species of rare and extinctable birds, some of them was recorded in the monuments of the ancient Egyptians, such as ibis, eagles and purple water hen that helps clean the environment from pests and decayed remains. Amongst the resident and visiting birds are: hoopoes, Egyptian geese, bee-eaters, swallows and nighttime and others.

**Wadi Al-Alaqi Reserve**

It is located 180 km east of Aswan. It is a fertile area for basic scientific researches, especially those related to geology, zoology and botany.
About 92 species of ever-green and seasonal plants, such as colocynth and giant fennel, as well as 15 species of mammals, such as camels, goats, zebras and gazelles, have been recorded there. It also harbors 16 kinds of resident birds such as hawks, eagles, ducks, and ostriches, in addition to some kinds of reptiles, such as scorpions, and a big number of invertebrates, most of them live under the trees, such as ants and beetles that play an important role in environmental balance and soil fertilization. This reserve has been included in the biological periphery reserves list under the supervision of the UNESCO. The reserve is also designed to preserve the genetic sources of plants, animals and birds, and emphasize sustainable development built on sound environmental bases.

Olba Reserve
Olba Reserve is one of the most exquisite parks for visitors, as it enjoys a unique climate thanks to its location between the tropical and desert regions.

Olba Mountain (1437 m high) is at the far south-east corner of Egypt. Hence, it faces the north humid winds that condense in the form of fog on the cold high mountain slopes, which leads to the existence of many diversified and rare trees.

A Nile Cruise from Aswan to Luxor
Such a cruise is an exciting experience where the visitors can go in short journeys by felucca to visit monuments of global fame and remote islands. They can discover the High Dam and sail to granite quarries, Temples of Philae and Kom Ombo. Visitors can also sail in the Nile by felucca around Kitchener’s island to see the famous Botanical Garden and go to Horus Temple in Edfu and take part in a traditional galabeya party. Visitors will also see the masterpieces of Luxor, namely the Karnak and Hatshepsut temples and the valleys of the Kings and Queens as well as Luxor Temple.

Therapeutic Tourism in Aswan
Aswan is very famous for therapeutic tourism. Rheumatism is one of the different diseases treated in Aswan where the patient is covered with the hot desert sand. World studies proved that Aswan’s climate is suitable for treating many chronic diseases as it is characterized by high levels of ultraviolet ray and low humidity rates that reaches 43.4% during the period from December to March, while it reaches 75%-100% in England during the same period.

Moreover, the shining sun all year long and the dry climate create an ideal atmosphere for treating some other diseases such as bronchitis, asthma and nephritis. Also, there are two centers in Aswan for treatment by sand and water. It is suggested to establish a tourist village in the area extending between Cataract Hotel and Aswan Dam that includes therapeutic centers, sanatorium for rheumatism and dermatology as well as places for theaters, cinemas, sports playgrounds and anchorage building for Nile boats and tourist cruises.

Development Projects in Aswan
On the path to comprehensive and continuing development that aims at upgrading Aswan as a city of global tourist fame and raising the standard of living of Aswan citizens, there are a number of projects such as:
- The project of developing small crafts industries.
- The project of building the infrastructure in the area of Alasadaka.
- The project of the industrial zones in the cataract area.
- The projects of land reclamations in Wadi El-Sa’eya and Wadi Al-Nakra.

- Magdi Yacoub Heart Center, which is one of the most important and largest centers in the Middle East in the field of heart diseases and scientific research. It is considered a research and training center serving the poor in the third world countries, in which they undergo operations and checkups for free.

This center will become the nucleus to qualifying and graduating trained specialists, where Egyptian and international experts in heart diseases take part in the work. This reflects positively on providing high quality medical service for the simple citizens.

Speaking about Aswan never ends. If you’re willing to spend an unforgettable holiday, never hesitate to visit this magnificent city, where Nile cruises have a special charm, particularly as they gained popularity among tourists because they consider visiting Aswan a trip of recreation and rumination in the beauty of nature and the magic of history.

In the early morning and with the first sun rays, the small and large Nile boats sail to the best places of the Nile for visitors to see a marvelous heavenly picture of smooth granite stones and rocks and grey and round islands covered with gardens and palm trees.