

Egypt essay sample

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Crossroads of the Western and Third World

Egypt is a country that is a culture both ancient and modern, a crossroads of Middle Eastern and Western cultures. Visiting the country brought many unexpected experiences and impressions, ones that will last a lifetime. The transition from the Western world to the Middle East was abrupt, jarring. The flight overseas kept my family in a deceptive cocoon of the First World; the interminable hours of polite service of flight attendants, in-flight movies, endless sky outside, and the drone of engines lulling me into a hazy state of mind unprepared for our abrupt deposit into the dry and dusty terminal of Cairo, Egypt's International Airport. From the moment we disembarked, nothing was like what I expected of the glamour that Egypt is presented with in books about the ancient glories of its antiquities.

For a Westerner, the first thing that assails upon exiting the aircraft are intense smells, odors that possess a flavor. Beyond the diesel of the planes, there are scents that permeate the atmosphere: dust, sweat, body odor, urine, mildew, perfume, foods, and other unidentifiable things overwhelm in an olfactory brew that coats the nasal passage and tongue. Though after a few days I became accustomed to the odors, even today I will catch a whiff of some unique scent that immediately takes me back to Egypt.

With over 82 million people, Egypt is the 15th most populous country in the world, with 10.9 million crowded into Cairo, the capital city (CIA). People may say that New York City is the city that never sleeps, but it is much more true of Cairo. It is chaotic. American pop music as well as Egyptian music blares at all hours. Drivers pay virtually no attention to any traffic directions.

In fact, on one day of returning from sightseeing, there was a rare rain shower increasing the chaos; drivers took matters into their own hands due to the lack of adequate drainage systems, and there were 15 lanes of traffic going in one direction and only one lane going in the opposite direction. Our own taxi driver also took matters into his own hands, choosing to drive right off the road and into the desert as a short cut.

Egypt is a crossroads between the Western world and the Third World because there is so much influence from the West, but also many traditional customs observed. On the streets of Cairo, women and men can be seen wearing typical Western style outfits of blue jeans and t-shirts, but just as often there are others wearing more traditional garb, the galabeya which is a robe like gown and various hats or scarves covering the head. Before I visited Egypt, I was a little nervous that my Western style of dress would be unacceptable and that I would need to buy new clothing in order to fit cultural if not governmental laws. However, Egypt is one of the most liberal of the Middle Eastern countries, so it was a relief that my fear was unfounded.

Visiting the antiquities of Egypt is one of the amazing and unforgettable experiences of the trip. My first view of the pyramids of Giza was unexpected, because as we approached the airport, I glanced out of my window and was surprised to see them below, toy-sized. When we finally approached the towering tombs of the Pharaohs on foot, the true immensity of these monuments was overwhelming. Various remnants of temples are scattered about the site, some with chiseled graffiti that is almost equally as ancient as the pyramids themselves. We went inside the pyramids, a guide

leading us down a steep and narrow passage to the tomb itself. The pyramids are unquestionably a testament to the greatness of Egypt's ancient grandeur, but the encroachment of humanity and animals into the sacred monuments is impossible to ignore; heavy inside the pyramid was the reek of urine.

The sights and smells, the chaos, the juxtaposition of Middle Eastern and Western cultures combined to make an everlasting impression on me. It has forever changed my view of what a Middle Eastern culture can be like, and also allowed me to better appreciate the advantages I have in my own life.

References

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