



MYSTAKIDIS TOURS
ORTHODOX PILGRIMAGES SINCE 1959

Egypt, Coptic Cairo and Sinai

Nine days from the churches of the Holy Family to the desert of the Fathers and the mountain of the Law.

DURATION

9 Days · 8 Nights

ROUTE

Cairo · Wadi Natrun · Mount Sinai

SEASON

Year-round departures

MYSTAKIDISTOURS.COM

WHY THIS PILGRIMAGE

Out of Egypt have I called My Son

Egypt holds three inheritances no other land can offer the Orthodox pilgrim: the refuge of the Holy Family, the desert where Christian monasticism was born, and the mountain where God gave the Law. This pilgrimage joins all three, with the pyramids of Giza included where they belong, as one astonishing afternoon rather than the point of the journey.

In Old Cairo you will descend into the crypt of Saint Sergius, where the Holy Family sheltered in their flight from Herod, and visit the Hanging Church above the Roman fortress gate. At Wadi Natrun, the ancient Scetis, you will pray in monasteries founded in the fourth century, where the successors of Saint Macarius and Saint Bishoy keep the desert rule to this day and welcome pilgrims to their tombs. Then the road crosses under the Suez Canal into Sinai, to the fortress monastery Justinian built around the Burning Bush, for the night ascent of the holy mountain and the sunrise where the Law was given.

Few journeys hold together the beginnings of everything, of Israel, of the Church's flight, of monasticism itself, in nine days. This one does, at an honest pace, with our own people at every step.

WHO THIS PILGRIMAGE IS FOR

Pilgrims drawn to the desert fathers and the roots of monasticism, parishes that have already made the Holy Land journey, and lovers of the Old Testament who want Sinai itself. The night ascent is optional; everything else asks only ordinary walking and patience with monastery hours.

THE JOURNEY

- CAIRO
4 nights: Coptic Cairo, Giza, Wadi Natrun
- WADI NATRUN
Day pilgrimage: the desert of Scetis
- SAINT CATHERINE'S
3 nights below the mountain of Moses
- CAIRO
1 night: return across Suez

Two bases: Cairo for the Holy Family and the desert fathers, Saint Catherine's for the mountain of the Law.

THE PILGRIMAGE, DAY BY DAY

Coptic Cairo & Sinai: the days

DAY 1 Arrival in Cairo

Arrival at Cairo International Airport, where our pilgrimage director and local representative meet the group and manage the visa formalities at the bank counters before passport control; have \$25 in cash ready. The coach crosses the Nile into the city, sixteen centuries of Christian Egypt and a thousand minarets in one skyline, with first views of the citadel on its ridge. After check-in and time to rest, your director walks through the days ahead over dinner: what the monasteries ask of visitors, how the Sinai crossing works, and where the early mornings fall. Those still awake may end the evening on the hotel terrace watching the river traffic, the same Nile that carried the Holy Family south. Dinner at the hotel.

OVERNIGHT Cairo

MEALS D · 4-star hotel

DAY 2 Coptic Cairo and the Pyramids of Giza

Morning in Old Cairo, inside and around the Roman fortress of Babylon. At the Church of Saint Sergius and Bacchus we descend to the crypt where the Holy Family sheltered in the flight from Herod, the oldest continuously venerated refuge of the Lord's childhood; above stands the Hanging Church, built across the fortress gate towers, with its cedar-and-ivory screens and the icon the Copts call the Mona Lisa of Egypt. We also visit the Church of Saint Barbara and the Ben Ezra synagogue, by tradition near where Moses was drawn from the river. In the afternoon, out to the Giza plateau: the three pyramids, already two thousand years old when the Holy Family passed, and the Sphinx below them. Return for dinner at the hotel.

OVERNIGHT Cairo

MEALS B, D · 4-star hotel

DAY 3 Wadi Natrun, the Desert of the Fathers

Into the western desert to Wadi Natrun, the ancient Scetis, where Saint Macarius the Great settled in 330 and monasticism took the shape it keeps to this day. Of the four surviving monasteries we visit two as the monks' hours allow, ordinarily the Monastery of Saint Bishoy, where the saint's incorrupt relics are carried in procession each summer, and the Syrian Monastery, with its seventh-century frescoes of the Theotokos and the cell where Saint Ephrem's tamarind staff, by tradition, took root and grows still. A monk guides each visit, and there is time for questions in the guesthouse over the monastery's own bread and tea. We return to Cairo in the late afternoon with the desert light going gold behind us. Dinner at the hotel.

OVERNIGHT Cairo

MEALS B, D · 4-star hotel

DAY BY DAY, CONTINUED

DAY 4 The Patriarchate of Saint Mark and the Cave Church

Morning at the Patriarchate of Saint Mark in Abbasiya, the largest cathedral in Africa, where we venerate the relics of the Evangelist, a portion solemnly returned from Venice in 1968 after eleven centuries, and hear how the see of Alexandria counts its unbroken line from Mark himself. The Coptic Museum near Old Cairo follows, with the world's richest collection of early Christian Egypt: fourth-century textiles, the Nag Hammadi bindings, carved lintels from vanished desert churches. In the afternoon we drive up Mokattam to the Cave Church of Saint Simon the Tanner, hewn into the cliff above the city of the garbage collectors, seating ten thousand, the largest church in the Middle East and among the most moving. Dinner at the hotel.

OVERNIGHT Cairo**MEALS** B, D · 4-star hotel**DAY 5 The Road to Sinai**

An early start east out of the delta and under the Suez Canal through the Ahmed Hamdi tunnel, crossing in a minute the line between Africa and Asia. On the far side we pause at Ayun Musa, the springs of Moses, where Israel first camped after the crossing of the sea, then run south along the Gulf of Suez with the water on our right hand and the granite of the peninsula rising ahead. The road turns inland through the Wadi Feiran, the great oasis below Mount Serbal where tradition sets Rephidim and the battle of the uplifted arms of Moses. By late afternoon the fortress walls of Saint Catherine's appear at the mountain's foot. We settle into a traditional pilgrim guesthouse below the monastery; dinner early, sleep early, for the night ascent.

OVERNIGHT Saint Catherine's Village, Sinai**MEALS** B, D · Traditional pilgrim guesthouse**DAY 6 The Night Ascent of Mount Sinai**

In the small hours we set out by torchlight up the camel path, the route pilgrims have climbed for sixteen centuries, rising in long switchbacks through the cold desert night. Camels can be hired for the first two thirds of the way for those who wish. The final 750 steps of the Stairway of Repentance, cut into the rock by a monk in fulfilment of a vow, bring us to the summit chapel of the Holy Trinity at 7,497 feet, on the height where God spoke with Moses and gave the Law. We keep the sunrise on the summit, the granite ranges of Sinai turning red beneath us, with prayers and hymns as the light returns. The descent is by the steeper monks' stairway past the Basin of Elijah for the sure-footed, or back down the camel path for the rest. Late morning at the guesthouse, then sleep, and a quiet afternoon.

OVERNIGHT Saint Catherine's Village, Sinai**MEALS** B, D · Traditional pilgrim guesthouse

DAY BY DAY, CONTINUED

DAY 7 Saint Catherine's Monastery and the Burning Bush

The Monastery of Saint Catherine, built by the Emperor Justinian between 548 and 565 around the Burning Bush, is the oldest continuously inhabited Christian monastery in the world, and it has never been sacked. We enter after the monks' morning prayers: the basilica with its sixth-century carved cedar doors and the great apse mosaic of the Transfiguration, the Chapel of the Burning Bush behind the altar, and the living bush itself in the courtyard. We venerate the relics of Saint Catherine, and see icons from the monastery collection, the finest in Christendom, works that survived iconoclasm because Sinai lay beyond the emperor's reach, among them the sixth-century Christ Pantocrator. The afternoon is free in the valley, with an optional walk to the hermitage gardens and the skete of the Forty Martyrs. A final night at the guesthouse below the mountain.

OVERNIGHT Saint Catherine's Village, Sinai

MEALS B, D · Traditional pilgrim guesthouse

DAY 8 Return to Cairo

We take the morning road north along the Gulf of Suez, retracing the pilgrim route with a rest stop on the coast, and pass back under the canal into Africa by early afternoon. The remainder of the day in Cairo is deliberately free: rest by the pool, return to the Coptic quarter for unhurried veneration, or join the optional evening sailing on the Nile in a felucca as the lights come up along the corniche. At the farewell dinner your pilgrimage director gathers the week: the crypt of the Holy Family, the desert of Macarius, the relics of the Evangelist, the Burning Bush, and the sunrise on the summit of the Law. Groups regularly tell us Egypt was the pilgrimage they almost did not take, and the one they cannot stop describing. Dinner at the hotel.

OVERNIGHT Cairo

MEALS B, D · 4-star hotel

DAY 9 Departure from Cairo

After breakfast, transfer to Cairo International Airport with your pilgrimage director, who remains with the group through the security lines and check-in; allow three hours for Cairo's formalities. Morning flights connect through Europe and reach the East Coast the same evening. You leave having walked the whole first geography of the faith: the river of the infant Moses and the refuge of the infant Christ, the desert where monasticism was born, and the mountain where the Law was written, joined to the Church that has endured in Egypt through every century since the Evangelist Mark first preached in Alexandria. Ask us about combining this itinerary with the Holy Land on a single crossing at Taba in a future year.

OVERNIGHT None, departure day

MEALS B

YOUR PILGRIMAGE, PLAINLY STATED

What is included, and what is not

INCLUDED IN THE PRICE

- ◆ Five nights in a 4-star hotel in Cairo and three nights in a traditional pilgrim guesthouse below Saint Catherine's Monastery
- ◆ Half-board throughout: breakfast and dinner daily
- ◆ All land transportation in a modern air-conditioned coach, with police-convoy coordination where required
- ◆ Licensed English-speaking Egyptologist guide, briefed in the Orthodox tradition, as required by Egyptian law
- ◆ Entry fees to every site, church, monastery, and museum named in the itinerary, including the Giza plateau
- ◆ Veneration arrangements at the Wadi Natrun monasteries and Saint Catherine's, confirmed with the fathers
- ◆ Airport transfers on the group arrival and departure days

NOT INCLUDED

- ◆ International airfare to and from Cairo; group air quoted separately on request
- ◆ Egypt entry visa, obtained on arrival, currently \$25 in cash
- ◆ Single room supplement, quoted on request
- ◆ Travel insurance, strongly advised
- ◆ Tips to guides and drivers; we suggest \$8 to \$10 per day for the guide and \$4 to \$5 per day for the driver
- ◆ Camel hire on the night ascent, optional, payable locally
- ◆ Lunches, alcoholic beverages, and optional excursions, including the felucca evening
- ◆ Passport fees and items of a personal nature: laundry, telephone, minibar

Guesthouse nights at Saint Catherine's are simple, clean, and warm, in the manner of pilgrim houses; Cairo hotels are 4-star international class on the Nile or in Zamalek. Prices are per person, twin share, land only, in US dollars.

BOOKING YOUR PILGRIMAGE

Terms, plainly stated

RESERVING YOUR PLACE

A deposit of \$400 per pilgrim confirms your reservation. Places are assigned in the order deposits are received, and each departure is limited to forty pilgrims.

BALANCE OF PAYMENT

The balance of the pilgrimage price is due 90 days before departure. Prices are per person in US dollars, sharing a twin or double room. A single room is available for a supplement, quoted on request.

CANCELLATION

More than 90 days before departure	Deposit only
89 to 60 days before departure	50% of the price
59 to 30 days before departure	75% of the price
Inside 30 days of departure	No refund

TRAVEL INSURANCE

Travel insurance is not included and is strongly advised. We recommend a policy covering trip cancellation, medical care abroad, and baggage, purchased within days of paying your deposit.

GROUP SIZE

A minimum of 15 pilgrims is required for the pilgrimage to operate. Maximum 40 pilgrims per departure, so that veneration at the holy places is never rushed.

A FAMILY COMPANY

Mystakidis Tours has led pilgrims to the holy places since 1959, a family company in its third generation. Your group travels with one experienced pilgrimage director from arrival to departure.



BY TELEPHONE

+1 (646) 475-7994

BY EMAIL

sales@mystakidistours.com

ON THE WEB

mystakidistours.com

Every itinerary can be adjusted for your parish. Ask us about preferred dates, group air from your nearest gateway, and a visit from our team to present the pilgrimage to your community.