

Wind Sand & Stars

Specialists in the Sinai & Desert Environments



The Wisdom of the Desert – In the Footsteps of the Desert Fathers of Egypt 15th – 23rd September 2012

With guest speaker **Sister Bridget Tighe FMDM**

The origins of Christian monasticism can be found in Egypt's remote desert, a beautiful yet harsh wilderness, for centuries offering a place of refuge and solitude. This journey will trace Egypt's rich Christian heritage from the earliest Coptic churches in Cairo to ancient monasteries that developed around the pioneering desert hermits; St Anthony and St Paul. We continue overland to the Sinai peninsula where we visit St Catherine's Monastery and then experience for ourselves a night in the desert, sleeping under the stars. Our guest speaker will lead discussions as we travel, exploring the emergence of the Desert Fathers and Mothers, drawing upon their many sayings handed down over the generations and exploring the influence of these early men and women on western monasticism and spirituality.

Sister Bridget Tighe is a member of an international Franciscan Missionary congregation. Her ministries have included medical and social work in Jordan, consultant to an HIV/AIDS centre in Zambia, and membership of various ecumenical groups in the UK. Herself a Cambridge graduate, she was Founding Principal of the Margaret Beaufort Institute of Theology in Cambridge and was vice-rector of the Tantur Ecumenical Institute for Theological Studies in Jerusalem. She is currently Regional Leader of her congregation in England and Scotland. A qualified desert leader and experienced English-speaking local guide will also accompany the group throughout the journey.



Image: St Catherine's Monastery (Charles Wilson, 1881)

"It's a unique and unforgettable experience to travel through this extraordinary landscape, sleep beneath the night sky and visit places of such ancient resonance and splendour. With Wind Sand & Stars every detail has been considered and each day brings new delights."

Sinai Desert Journey, February 2011

"Thank you so much to you and your amazing company for the care, grace and sheer hard work that went into making the whole thing so seamlessly excellent."

Sinai Desert Retreat, 2010

Itinerary

Day 1 Arrive Cairo

We are met on arrival in Cairo by our Egyptian guide and transfer to our hotel for the night. *O/n 4* hotel, Cairo*

Day 2 Coptic Cairo

A day to discover Cairo's Coptic heritage, with a visit to the Coptic Museum and some of the churches that are amongst the oldest in the world and have never ceased to be places of Christian worship, including the Hanging Church and Saint Barbara. *O/n 4* hotel, Cairo*

Day 3 Monastery of St Anthony

We drive south to the Monastery of St Anthony in the barren hills of the Eastern Desert, a journey of about four hours. Believed to have been the father of the Christian monastic movement, St Anthony drew many followers, though he continued to seek solitude and spent his final years in a cave in the hillside above the monastery. We can visit the monastery with its many buildings, chapels, garden and spring, and also see the original Church of St Anthony, which contains a significant collection of Coptic wall paintings. St Anthony's cave can be reached on foot, it is a steep climb up wooden steps that takes about half an hour. We stay overnight in a nearby hotel. *O/n 3* hotel, Zafaraana*

Day 4 Monastery of St Paul

Today we visit the quieter Monastery of St Paul, the earliest Christian hermit who lived alone in a cave here for 90 years, where he was once visited by St Anthony. As we explore the monastery buildings, we can imagine of the life of silence, prayer and asceticism which flourished during the 4th century. Hermitages grew around the site of his cave and now the Church of St Paul forms the heart of the monastery complex. We return to our hotel for the evening and continue discussions guided by our guest speaker Sister Bridget. *O/n 3* hotel, Zafaraana*

Day 5 To Sinai and the Monastery of St Catherine

We travel overland through the desert to the Sinai peninsula, via Suez. It is a journey approximately 7-8 hours and we shall stop for lunch and rest breaks. Late afternoon we arrive at the monastery, in the heart of Sinai's rugged mountains. *O/n Monastery Guesthouse (small dormitory accommodation)*

Day 6 St Catherine's Monastery and Mount Sinai

Built in the 6th century by the Byzantine Emperor Justinian, the original great towering outer walls, built to protect the monks from marauding tribes, still stand. Inside we visit Justinian's magnificent Basilica church, with its remarkable original apse mosaic depicting the transfiguration of Christ. Today the Monastery houses one of the world's most famous collections of Early Christian manuscripts and art.

Either early morning or during the afternoon there is an optional ascent of Mount Sinai. We can walk along the traditional camel path - camels can be ridden this far - or it is a steady walk for approximately 2-3 hours. For the final ascent to the summit, we follow the pilgrim steps, the rocks to either side carved with crosses and signs of earlier pilgrims. The top is marked by a small chapel and mosque. Beneath the summit lies the Garden of Elijah, we can rest here before we descend. *O/n Monastery Guesthouse (small dormitory accommodation)*

Day 7 Into the Desert

It is a short drive to the beautiful sandstone desert, where our desert camp awaits. We can have tea with our Bedouin hosts from the Muzeina tribe, who are old friends of Wind Sand & Stars. There are optional scenic walks through this area of soft golden sandstone hills eroded over time into delicate patterns. We can visit nearby sites of interest including the *Nawamis*, Chalcolithic burial chambers. There is also time for silence and solitude. In the evening we can relax around the camp fire, enjoying the remarkable desert night skies and cups of hot, sweet tea with the Bedouin, while we experience first hand the power of the desert. *O/n under the stars*

Day 8 To the Red Sea coast

After a final morning in the desert, we travel to the Red Sea coast, where we can reflect upon our journey and prepare for our return to the modern world. *O/n 4* hotel Red Sea coast*

Day 9 Depart

A morning on the Red Sea coast, if flight times allow, then depart for Sharm el Sheikh International airport.

Costs

Land arrangements	£1,075
Flight	£350 – 450 (depending upon time of booking)

Cost Includes

- All local transport and accommodation
- Full board (packed lunches as required, cooked meals & picnic lunch in the desert, with bottled drinking water)
- Qualified desert leader, experienced local guides
- Monastery & St Katherine National Park entrance fees
- Comprehensive travel insurance

Cost excludes

- Egyptian Visa (£20 in advance or US\$15 on arrival)
- Gratuities £50 (invoiced)
- Single Supplement £120 per person (invoiced)
- Camel up Mt Sinai £10 one way (optional, payable on site)
- Soft drinks and any other personal expenses
- Additional transport and accommodation for separate arrival or onward travel outside the main itinerary

Visa

Please note an Egyptian visa is required for this itinerary. It can be obtained in advance or on arrival, please refer to the Egyptian Consulate www.egyptianconsulate.co.uk/Visas.php for guidance, or call the office.

ATOL protection

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Please note all desert itineraries are subject to change.