

Wind Sand & Stars

Specialists in the Sinai & Desert Environments



Sinai Historical Odyssey 26th April – 3rd May 2012

With guest speaker **Professor Janet Soskice**

Professor in Theology and Religious Studies at the University of Cambridge and author of *Sisters of Sinai: How Two lady Adventurers Found the Hidden Gospels*

The backdrop to many Biblical traditions, the inspiration for the earliest psalms, and the remnants of the crusades and medieval journeys of those who came before us are all integral to this gentle adventure across the Sinai. As well as being closely associated with the Old Testament, Sinai was an important centre for early Christianity. The journey encompasses historical sites including chalcolithic tombs, ancient inscriptions and, of course, St Catherine's Monastery, one of the treasure houses of early Christian manuscripts and art, including the Syriac palimpsest Gospels discovered by the Scottish twins Margaret and Agnes Smith, as told in Janet Soskice's enthralling book.

Our guest speaker Janet Soskice will share her insights and lead discussions as we travel with our Bedouin hosts through their desert land, steeped in history. The itinerary includes a two-day camel trek and some days will involve walking on foot along mountain paths, guided throughout by our expert leaders and local guides, with 4-wheel drive vehicles in support.



Image: Mt Sinai & 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."

Dr Pamela Bickley, February 2011

"Janet Soskice is an endlessly fascinating storyteller, whose skill in bringing the past into the present so meaningfully is not only a remarkable asset, but helped to make the journey unforgettable. Each day was even more thrilling than the preceding one, with the climax at Mt Sinai itself delivered beyond expectation."

Gabriel Somorjay, April 2011

About Janet's book *Sisters of Sinai: How Two lady Adventurers Found the Hidden Gospels*

"An extraordinary and compelling book, combining vivid travel adventures, wonderful characters, and absorbing journeys of the mind and heart. Janet Soskice brilliantly and accessibly unfolds one of the most gripping sagas of biblical detection, while telling the story of two magnificent women who trespassed intrepidly in the world that sought to exclude them." John Cornwell

Itinerary

Day 1 Arrive

We drive north to Sinai's eastern sandstone desert and arrive at our first night's camp, where we enjoy supper and sweet Bedouin tea around the campfire. *O/n under the stars*

Day 2 Desert acclimatisation

A relaxed start to the day, with time to adjust to our new surroundings. We have tea with the family of Sheikh Hamid, an old friend and sheikh of the local Bedouin tribe. Optional scenic walks include the nearby site Mayet Meheilil, a remarkable geological feature where water comes forth from the rock, as told to us in the story of Exodus. In the afternoon we return to our camp. *O/n under the stars*

Day 3 Exploration of historical sites

Today we can walk along the beautiful White Canyon to the lush green oasis of Ayn Khudra which lies on the ancient pilgrim route from Jerusalem to St Catherine's Monastery. Early rock inscriptions are still visible along the way, a testament to the many people who have travelled across Sinai through the centuries. In the evening we continue discussions around the campfire. *O/n under the stars*

Days 4 - 5 Camel Trek

We experience Bedouin life at first hand as we ride on camels and enjoy the slow pace of traditional desert travel, the ever-changing scenery and the warm hospitality of our hosts. We can visit the Nawamis, chalcolithic burial chambers, and also trek through Gebel Matamir, a beautiful area of soft golden sandstone hills eroded over time into delicate patterns. Each day we discover more of this area, as we trek with the Bedouin along desert valleys and canyons, over hills and sand dunes, the views changing constantly. In the evening there is time to relax around the camp fire, enjoying the remarkable desert night skies and cups of hot, sweet tea with the Bedouin. *O/n each night under the stars*

Note: Each person has their own trekking camel. The saddles are padded and there will be regular rest breaks.

Day 6 St Catherine's Monastery and Mount Sinai

In the morning we will wake early and travel by 4-wheel drive to Sinai's rugged granite interior, to St Catherine's Monastery, which lies at the foot of Mount Sinai and is the world's oldest continuously inhabited monastery.

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, including the early Syriac Gospels discovered by the Scottish twins Agnes and Margaret Smith.

Either during the afternoon or the following morning, we can continue together 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 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 Catherine's Monastery & the Red Sea

Depending upon the timing of the ascent of Mount Sinai we may have a relaxed morning to enjoy the Monastery's surroundings. We can also visit the nearby village of St Catherine, before we transfer to the Red Sea coast for your final night. *O/n 4* hotel Red Sea coast*

Day 8 Depart

A final morning on the Red Sea coast, if flight times allow, then depart for the airport.

Costs

Land arrangements £975

Flight £350 – 450
(depending upon time of booking)

Cost Includes

- All local transport and accommodation
- Full board (in the desert 2 cooked meals & picnic lunch, including bottled drinking water)
- Qualified leader, local guides and camels
- National Park fees and Monastery Museum entrance fees
- Comprehensive travel insurance

Cost excludes

- Egyptian Visa (£20 in advance or US\$15 on arrival, please see separate note on requirements)
- Gratuities £50 (invoiced)
- Single Supplement £40 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
- Border taxes (if any)

Visa

Please note visa is NOT required for this itinerary, unless you are travelling elsewhere in Egypt independently, or you do not hold a British or EU passport (please refer to the Egyptian Consulate www.egyptianconsulate.co.uk/Visas.php or call the office).

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Please note all desert itineraries are subject to change.