

THIS IS EGYPT

AN INTRODUCTION · 2026 EDITION

Cruise Ship *or* Dahabiya?

Two very different ways to sail the same river. The honest introduction to choosing your boat between Luxor and Aswan, drawn from our directory of 245 Nile vessels.



THE CRUISE SHIP

or



THE DAHABIYA

The one decision that shapes your whole Nile trip

No. 01

The biggest choice on a Nile cruise is not the itinerary. Nearly every boat sails the same stretch of river between Luxor and Aswan and stops at the same 4,000-year-old temples. The choice that actually changes your trip is the **kind of boat**: a motor cruise ship carrying a hundred or more guests, or a small sailing dahabiya carrying a dozen. They share a river and almost nothing else.

IN ONE LINE

The dahabiya

A traditional twin-sailed boat with 4 to 12 cabins, moving largely under wind. Quiet, intimate and slow on purpose, mooring at sandbanks and islands the big ships pass by. From about **US\$300 per person**, rising to several thousand on the luxury sail boats.

IN ONE LINE

The cruise ship

A floating four- or five-star hotel with 40 to 160 cabins, a pool on the sun deck, bars and nightly entertainment. Sociable, comfortable and the cheapest way to cruise, from about **US\$95 per person** on a value 3-night sailing.

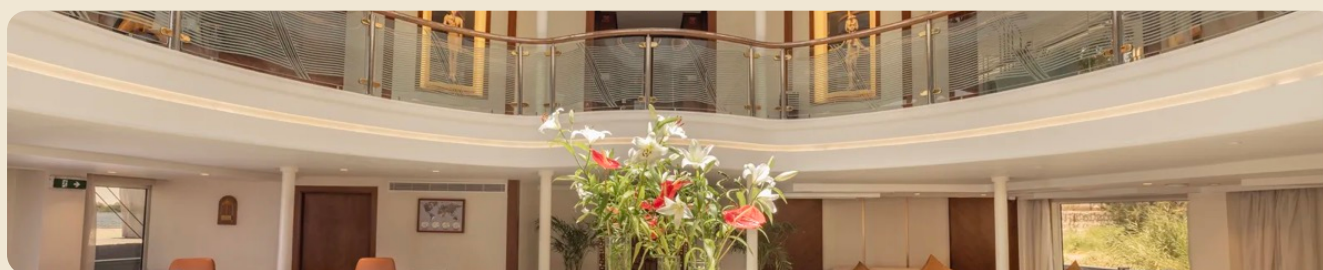
How to use this guide

Read pages 3 and 4 to understand what each boat actually is, then the side-by-side on page 5. If you only have a minute, page 9 gives you the decision in two lists. Prices throughout are indicative 2026 ranges, per person sharing a cabin: a guide, not a quote, because Nile rates move with the season, the cabin and the boat.

Everything here is drawn from the This is Egypt Nile directory: **245 vessels documented by name**, 138 motor ships and 107 dahabiyas, checked against the operators rather than copied from reseller price grids.

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ONE RIVER, TWO WORLDS: THE ATRIUM OF THE ALL-SUITE SONESTA STAR GODDESS

The cruise ship, a floating hotel

No. 02



VIKING OSIRIS, LEAD SHIP OF VIKING'S ELEVEN-BOAT NILE FLEET, UNDER WAY NEAR LUXOR

A Nile cruise ship is exactly what it sounds like: a four- or five-star hotel that happens to move. Forty to 160 cabins, a sun-deck pool, bars, a spa on the better boats, and a nightly entertainment programme. A licensed Egyptologist guides the whole boat through the temples, and meals run to a hotel timetable.

It is the sociable, facilities-first choice, and crucially the **cheapest way to cruise the Nile**, because fixed costs are shared with a hundred other passengers. The mainstream five-star names are **Sonesta, Mövenpick and Jaz**; international lines such as **Viking** run their own fleets; and at the top sit all-suite boats like the **Oberoi Zahra** and **Sonesta Star Goddess**, where the cabin is a genuine suite and service follows.

Your cabin is a proper hotel room of roughly 15 to 35 square metres, often with a French balcony, and on suite ships considerably more. If square metres, a pool and evenings with life in them matter to you, this is your boat.



THE POOL DECK: THE BIG SHIPS' TRUMP CARD

40-160

CABINS

100-300

GUESTS ABOARD

3-7NIGHTS, LUXOR-
ASWAN**Pool**SPA · BARS ·
SHOWS

The dahabiya, a house under sail

No. 03



LAZULI ALBATROS UNDER SAIL: EIGHT CABINS, SIXTEEN GUESTS, ESNA TO ASWAN

A dahabiya is a traditional twin-sailed wooden boat carrying a dozen guests or fewer, in 4 to 12 cabins. It genuinely sails when there is wind, and a small tug takes over only when the breeze dies. Because the boat is small and shallow, it moors at quiet sandbanks, islands and village landings the big ships steam straight past. You wake to birdsong and an empty riverbank, not a raft of six hulls tied to a concrete quay.

The modern dahabiya is a revival. From the early 2000s a handful of operators rebuilt traditional hulls with en-suite cabins and shaded decks, and today roughly **104 sailing dahabiyas run by about 17 named fleets** work the Esna to Aswan reach. The best-known names are **Nour El Nil, Lazuli and Merit**, with the ultra-luxury **Ashranda** boats at the top.

The trade-off is honest: no pool, no nightclub, smaller cabins, and a daily rhythm set by the wind and the temples. What you get back is the whole boat feeling like yours.



THE SHADED DECK: WHERE THE WHOLE DAY HAPPENS

4-12

CABINS

8-24

GUESTS ABOARD

4-7NIGHTS, ESNA-
ASWAN**Sail**WIND, PLUS A
QUIET TUG

Side by side, at a glance

No. 04



SHIP · THE OBEROI ZAHRA, ALL-SUITE LUXURY



DAHABIYA · ROYAL CLEOPATRA, EIGHT CABINS UNDER SAIL

	CRUISE SHIP	DAHABIYA
GUESTS	100–300 across 40–160 cabins	8–24 across 4–12 cabins
POWER	Diesel engines, fixed timetable	Wind, with a tug when the breeze drops
PACE	Faster; more temple time per day	Slow and near-silent; sailing is the point
ON BOARD	Pool, bars, spa, nightly shows	Sun deck, shaded lounge, a chef cooking for twelve
MOORS AT	Main town docks, often rafted several boats deep	Sandbanks, islands and villages the ships pass by
ROUTE	Luxor–Aswan, 3 to 7 nights	Esna or Luxor to Aswan, 4 to 7 nights
FROM, PER PERSON	~US\$95 up to US\$3,800+ on suite ships	~US\$300 up to US\$11,000+ on luxury sail boats
BEST FOR	First-timers, value, sociable trips, facilities	Couples, families and anyone who wants quiet

The one thing they share: the temples. Kom Ombo, Edfu and Esna between the two cities, Karnak and the Valley of the Kings at Luxor, Philae at Aswan. The route is identical. Only the life on board differs.

Life on board, hour by hour

No. 05

On a ship the day runs to a hotel timetable: buffet breakfast, guided excursion, lunch, pool, dinner, show. On a dahabiya the day runs to the wind: a temple in the morning, hours of slow sailing with tea on deck, a mooring at an island before dinner. Neither is wrong. They are simply different holidays.

ON THE SHIP



A SUITE ON THE OBEROI ZAHRA

Cabins. A proper hotel room, typically 15 to 35 square metres with a full bathroom, controllable air conditioning and daily housekeeping; suite ships push well past that with sitting rooms and butlers.

Food and service. Buffets with themed evenings, a barbecue on deck, efficient service shared across a hundred guests. Bars and a spa fill the gaps between meals.

Evenings. A nightly programme: Nubian shows, galabeya parties, live music. There is always somewhere to be.



SHIP · MAKING WAY BETWEEN THE TEMPLE STOPS

ON THE DAHABIYA



A CORNER CABIN ON NOUR EL NIL'S MEROE

Cabins. Smaller and simpler, but the boat itself is the luxury: with a dozen guests, the shaded lounge and sun deck are effectively yours, and you never queue for anything.

Food and service. A chef cooking fresh for one table. Meals are plated, the kitchen adapts to you, and the crew learn your names by day two. Reviewers return to the cooking again and again.

Evenings. Dinner on deck, a sky full of stars, and quiet. Bring the book you have been meaning to read.



DAHABIYA · A TABLE SET FOR TWELVE, ON DECK

Where the boat spends the night

No. 06

This is the difference travellers remember. Big ships moor in Luxor and Aswan rafted three or four deep against a concrete quay, generators humming, sometimes with another boat's windows a metre from yours. A dahabiya sails largely under wind, near-silent, and moors for the night at sandbanks and islands. For couples, and for anyone sensitive to noise, this page alone often decides it.

NORTH ↑ · THE RIVER FLOWS TOWARD LUXOR

Luxor

Karnak · the Valley of the Kings · most cruises start or end here

Esna

Temple of Khnum and the river lock · most dahabiyas board here

El Kab

Rock-cut tombs above the river

SAILING BOATS MOOR · BIG SHIPS PASS

Edfu

The great Temple of Horus, the best-preserved in Egypt

Gebel el-Silsila

Sandstone quarries that built the temples

SAILING BOATS MOOR · BIG SHIPS PASS

Kom Ombo

The twin temple of Sobek and Horus, right at the water's edge

Aswan

Philae · the Cataract reach · gateway to Abu Simbel

● Every boat stops ○ Sailing boats only



ÉTOILE D'ÉGYPTE ON THE QUIET REACH BETWEEN LUXOR AND ASWAN

Direction, in one line. Sailing south from Luxor gives you more nights and the classic build-up to Aswan; starting in Aswan is shorter and suits tight itineraries. Both directions see the same temples.

And the felucca? The little open sailboat you see everywhere is the third boat of the Nile: wonderful for an hour at sunset in Luxor or Aswan, but with no cabins it is a day sail, not a cruise.

What it costs in 2026

No. 07

Per person, sharing a cabin, for a typical 3 to 4 night cruise. Published Nile rates vary widely by season, cabin and reseller, so we show honest ranges on purpose. Treat them as a guide, not a quote.

Budget & mid-market cruisers

\$250 – \$800

Standard and comfortable 3 to 5 star ships sailing the same Luxor to Aswan temples as the luxury fleet. The cheapest 3-night sailings start around US\$95 to 150.

Five-star cruisers

\$800 – \$1,700+

The larger luxury motor ships: bigger cabins, pools, spas and more polished service. Boutique all-suite boats run US\$1,300 to \$3,800.

Dahabiyas, the small sailing boats

\$1,100 – \$2,500+

Premium per person because the boats are small. The most accessible sail boats start around US\$300 to 400; the ultra-luxury fleet reaches five figures.

Worth knowing: Lake Nasser

\$640 – \$1,300

A different cruise entirely, Aswan to Abu Simbel across the great lake, typically 3 to 4 nights.

What moves the price

Season. October to April is peak, with the best weather and the highest fares. May to August is hot and cheaper.

Length. 3 nights (Aswan to Luxor), 4 nights (Luxor to Aswan) or 7 nights round trip. More nights cost more overall but often less per night.

Cabin. A standard cabin, a suite or a private balcony can change the fare significantly on the same boat.

Budget the same extras either way

Most fares are full board, with the better operators including guided excursions and entry fees. On top, allow for the **Abu Simbel day trip** (US\$85 to 120), **crew tips** (US\$8 to 12 per person per day), drinks, and the domestic flights to reach Luxor or Aswan.

Per night, that works out to roughly US\$80 to 200 on mid-market ships, \$200 to 450 on five-star ships, and \$250 to 500 or more on a dahabiya.

Why we publish ranges, not price grids

Many prices published online are recycled reseller templates that nobody has updated in years. We quote every boat live instead, for your dates and cabin, so the number you get is the number you pay.

*A guide,
not a quote.*

Which should you pick?

No. 08

Pick the cruise ship if...

- ✦ It is your first time in Egypt and you want everything handled
- ✦ You want a pool, bars and life on board in the evenings
- ✦ You are travelling with a mixed or larger group
- ✦ You want the lowest possible price for the same temples
- ✦ Cabin size and hotel comforts matter most to you

Pick the dahabiya if...

- ✦ You are a couple or family wanting seclusion and quiet
- ✦ You value scenery and stillness over facilities
- ✦ You want moorings at islands the big ships cannot reach
- ✦ You are happy with a set rhythm built around the wind
- ✦ You want the more romantic, more memorable sail

FOUR TRAVELLERS, FOUR ANSWERS

The first-timer

→ CRUISE SHIP

Everything organised, an Egyptologist for the whole boat, and the best value while you learn the river.

The couple

→ DAHABIYA

Near-silence, empty moorings and dinner on deck under stars. The honeymoon answer, at every budget above entry.

The family

→ EITHER

A ship gives kids a pool and room to roam; a dahabiya can be chartered whole so the boat is entirely yours.

The social traveller

→ CRUISE SHIP

A hundred fellow guests, themed evenings and a bar that stays open. Dahabiyas are wonderful but quiet.

Still torn? There is a third way many travellers miss: do both. Three nights on a ship for the temples and the pool, then two or three on a dahabiya for the silence. Tell us your dates and we will build the combination.

Meet the fleet

No. 09

A few boats from our directory to anchor the categories. Every one of these, and two hundred more, has its own page on This is Egypt with photos, specifications and an honest description.

Cruise ships

The Oberoi Zahra OBEROI

All-suite luxury with a spa; Oberoi comfort on the southern Nile reach.

Sonesta Star Goddess SONESTA

An all-suite ship named for composers; the classic top-tier choice.

Viking Osiris VIKING

Lead ship of Viking's eleven-boat Nile fleet, built for its river itineraries.

Mövenpick Royal Lily MÖVENPICK · ACCOR

Deluxe cabins and Jacuzzi suites from the biggest five-star name on the river.

Le Fayen INDEPENDENT

All-suite sailing along the Luxor to Aswan Nile at a boutique price.

Dahabiyas

Meroe NOUR EL NIL

Larger cabins and lingering sunsets, Esna to Aswan, from the fleet that defined the revival.

Royal Cleopatra INDEPENDENT

Eight cabins under sail, Esna to Aswan; the golden-hour classic.

Lazuli Albatros LAZULI

Eight cabins, sixteen guests; the accessible way into sailing the Nile.

Eyaru & Nebyt ASHRANDA

The ultra-luxury sail boats: handbuilt, nostalgic, and priced accordingly.

Dahabiya Dream DAHABIYA DREAM

Six cabins, no engine, peaceful under sail.

245

VESSELS DOCUMENTED

138

CRUISE SHIPS

107

DAHABIYAS

~17

NAMED SAIL FLEETS

Counts from the This is Egypt Nile directory, September 2026. We verify against operators and drop boats we cannot stand behind.

Questions, answered

No. 10

Is a dahabiya better than a cruise ship?

Neither is better; they suit different travellers. A dahabiya is quieter, more intimate and moors at spots big ships cannot reach, but has no pool and a set rhythm. A cruise ship has facilities, entertainment and the lowest price. Both visit the same temples between Luxor and Aswan.

Is a dahabiya more expensive?

Usually, at the entry level. The cheapest big-ship fares, from about US\$95 per person for 3 nights, undercut almost any dahabiya, because you share fixed costs with a hundred passengers. But accessible dahabiyas start around US\$300 to 400 per person, so the gap is smaller than most people assume.

Does a dahabiya really sail, or is it towed?

It genuinely sails when there is wind, and is towed by a small tug only when the breeze drops or through narrow stretches. That is normal and expected on every dahabiya.

Do both visit the same temples?

Yes. Both sail the Luxor to Aswan corridor and stop at the same monuments: Kom Ombo, Edfu and Esna between the two cities, plus Karnak and the Valley of the Kings at Luxor and Philae at Aswan. Only the boat differs, and the sail boats add small moorings like El Kab and Gebel el-Silsila.

How many nights do I need?

Three to four nights covers the headline temples on a cruise ship. Dahabiyas usually run four to seven nights, because the sailing is slower and part of the point.

Which is better for families?

Both work. A cruise ship suits families who want a pool and space to roam; a dahabiya suits families wanting seclusion, and several take whole-boat charters so the boat is entirely yours.

Are the fares all-inclusive?

Most fares are full board, all meals included, and the better operators add guided excursions with an Egyptologist and entrance fees. Drinks, tips and optional tours are usually extra, on either kind of boat. What is included varies by boat, which is one reason we quote each one individually.

THIS IS EGYPT

Ready when you are

We keep the complete, operator-verified directory of Nile boats: every cruise ship and every dahabiya, photographed, described honestly and quoted live. No recycled price grids, and no booking fee to ask.



1

Browse the fleet

All 220 listed boats at thisis-egypt.com/nile-cruises, with filters for operator, size and trip length.

2

Shortlist & compare

The three-question finder narrows the fleet to a shortlist, and the compare tool puts up to four boats side by side.

3

Get a live quote

Message us your dates on WhatsApp. We reply with current, accurate rates for the boats that fit.

thisis-egypt.com/nile-cruises

WhatsApp +20 100 221 2390 · Live quotes, honest advice, no pressure

LUXOR

ASWAN