

Dispatches

Dispatch from The Nile

by Melissa Morris

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Photos by [Morgan Pilcher](#)*Set Nefru*

My love for exploring new places no doubt comes from the way I was raised. Every summer, my family and I would go someplace new—never the same place twice—and I fell in love with experiencing new cultures, new sounds, new tastes, new sights.

And so it is probably not a surprise that, years later, I founded a travel-inspired luxury leather goods house called *Métier*. After so many years of traveling the world, I wanted to design perfectly-crafted bags that were beautiful to behold while also removing the pain points of travel through organization and ease. Funnily enough, while I created my brand to make travel easier, my life as an entrepreneur has only increased my frequency of travel. While many trips these days are for business, I make sure I also infuse my travels with visits to new places to inspire and unwind.

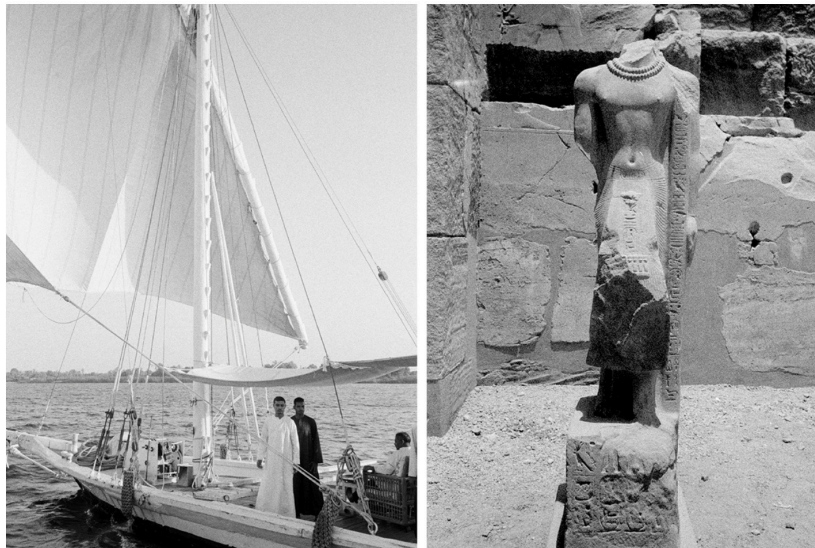
For so long now, Egypt has been at the top of my list—I've always been fascinated by its rich history and mythical stories. And so when a good friend of mine who's been spending a lot of time there said she would love to help me plan a special trip for my birthday, I jumped at the chance. The journey would include the opportunity to travel the Nile aboard one of the inaugural voyages of the *Set Nefru*, a traditional *dahabiya* that has been meticulously restored by [Al Moudira](#), the storied Luxor hospitality brand.

I assembled a group of friends from London and New York to join me on the adventure. I love bringing friends together who don't know each other—it's one of my favorite parts of creating a dinner party guest list, matchmaking and introducing great people to each other. Luckily my friends seem to trust me with this task, and so when I reached out to Erik, Sam, Zöe, Martha, Silka, Max and Morgan, everyone said yes and flights were booked.



AlMoudira

We started by staying three nights in Luxor, at Al Moudira's new private villas. Al Moudira is such a special place—so authentic and with so much intention infused into every detail by its legendary founder, Zeina Aboukheir, who sources all the Egyptian vintage and one-of-a-kind pieces herself. Additionally the level of service and care is truly unique; everyone we met who works there took such pride in their connection with the property. We stayed in Villa Zeina—which had been Zeina's home here; it was magical—a complete oasis and the perfect way to arrive.



Cruise on the Nile; Karnak

On our first evening, we took a sunset river cruise down the Nile and stopped at the iconic Winter Palace before visiting the temple at Karnak in the evening. It was dark outside by this point, and the white sandstone figures juxtaposed with the night sky were breathtaking. (I'll have to come back to throw a party at the really cool vintage Egyptian discotheque, called Sheherazade, sort of a Hotel Byblos meets Studio 54 meets Egypt vibe!)

The next day we were meant to take a sunrise hot air balloon ride, but unfortunately the wind wasn't cooperating. Hopefully next time! Instead, we were whisked over to the Valley of the Kings and Queens. I was fascinated with the ancient Egyptians' preoccupation with the afterlife; it was mind-boggling to consider how much they built and preserved so long ago. We then visited a local ceramics artisan before a special dinner prepared for us at the villa.

The next day, we packed our bags and boarded the Set Nefru—a 5-cabin traditional wooden boat that was built in the 1940s for a member of the Egyptian Royal Family and relaunched last year after a sensitive restoration by the Al Moudira team with the most understated but elegant materials—and set sail down the Nile. Our first stop was Edfu, the largest temple dedicated to Horus, and then we visited Silsileh, where we walked through the sandstone quarries thought to be the source of stone for many of Egypt's temples.

Days on the boat were pure magic—gliding along the river, the riverbanks looked surreal, like a

painting. We had so much fun lying on the striped daybeds listening to music, playing backgammon, reading, sketching.... The staff was incredible; it was so relaxing and spoiling. Although it was hot, I didn't feel compelled to jump in the water with the others until the captain dared me to, then I plunged straight into the Nile from the boat. (Set Nefru can be chartered for 3-7 days; each trip is bespoke.)



Cairo

After two blissful nights on the boat, we flew to Cairo and stayed in private Art Deco apartments that are part of a hospitality project launching in September by the same group as Al Moudira, with the most incredible views of downtown Cairo. We dropped our bags, settled in with a glass of champagne to watch the sunset, and then headed off to dinner.

The next day, we visited local artisans. I fell in love with [MADU](#), which was founded by Margarita Andrade, who also founded [Malaika](#) linens and [Threads of Hope](#). MADU is an incredibly tasteful selection of all things artisanal—ceramics from Fayoum, softest Egyptian cotton bedsheets from Malaika and hand-embroidered by Threads of Hope, handwoven patterned blankets; a treasure in the Zamalek area. Then we visited [Tintera Art Gallery](#), a contemporary photography gallery working with artists who have a connection to Egypt, as well as [Alef Gallery](#), which showcases Egyptian antiques and craft in the most amazing room of block-printed fabrics sold by the meter.

For me, the most magical part of the day was visiting the [Ibn Tulun mosque](#). They cover visitors' feet with great care, then you step inside this yawning, empty space and courtyard. I cannot describe the feeling of being in the busiest city one moment, then stepping into an expansive oasis that is so quiet and tranquil the next.

That evening, there was a birthday party for me on the roof terrace of our apartment, which was such a fun way to spend our last night. The owner recruited [Avec Karim](#), an up-and-coming young Egyptian chef who trained under Alain Ducasse before returning to Egypt, who is all about sourcing and highlighting Egypt's produce and presenting its culinary heritage in a contemporary way.



For our last day, my birthday, we all woke up early (with slightly sore heads from the night before) and visited the Pyramids. We had the most incredible and captivating guide. We visited Saqqara first and then Giza, and had lunch at Khufu's of delicious contemporary Egyptian cuisine with the best view of the Giza pyramids beyond. I would be remiss not to mention the camel ride, which I tried to avoid with all my might, but was birthday-bullied into it, so I can now check that off my bucket list.

I left feeling so inspired and amazed by what the Al Moudira team planned, and the way in which the Egyptian people were so friendly, so proud of their culture, and so happy to share it with us.

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Melissa Morris is the American-born founder and creative director of leather goods brand Métier, whose flagship boutique is on London's South Audley Street.

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