

WORDS CARINE CAMBOULIVE // PHOTOS PIERRE BOURAS

SRILINING

Ever since *Carine Camboulives* and *Manu Bouvet* got into stand up 10 years ago, they dreamed of exploring the Nile without motorised assistance. This winter under wind and paddle power, they travelled down a stretch of the great river to dive deeper into Egypt's rich history and timeless mythology...

Our original idea was to find a traditional Egyptian sailboat, a Felucca, that we could use as a base camp while paddling down the Nile. We first had to pick an itinerary: would it be better to go north with the current but against the wind ? Would the other way around allow for an easier expedition? The section between Luxor and Aswan was looking like a great option with its numerous temples and spectacular landscapes comprising sand dunes and lush crops. Lake Nasser, further down south, would be a must-see also but the many crocodiles living there are not compatible with inflatable SUPs. Are standard SUP boards crocodile-proof? I'll leave that research to someone else. After talking with Assan, the captain of our boat we went for the Aswan-Luxor itinerary to have the current with us while our Felucca would tack her way up wind.

This traditional wooden sailboat has a simple but elegant lateen sail made of native cotton and natural fibers. No motor: it relies entirely on the breeze which builds during the day, and the river's current. The Felucca is wide and her entire deck is covered by mattresses which makes for a perfect resting area. It is all covered to provide shade from the harsh north African sun.

Our boat is assisted by a smaller Felucca where the other Hassan, (the chef), would prepare gourmet dishes on a small burner. The roof of the smaller boat provided a large area to store our boards and paddles.

NATURAL PROPULSION ON THE NILE

We load the boat in Aswan and set sail under a bright sun whose heat is tempered by 15 knots of cold winter wind. Manu can't wait any longer and launches his board. He paddles along the shore line to get some shelter from the head wind. Right from the beginning, I am impressed with how our captain can maneuver the boat with such precision, steering with his feet, approaching the river sides, racing with some other feluccas or just tacking suddenly to go back and pick up the hat that on of the kids- Shadé - dropped in the water! Hassan started to sail with his dad (also captain) when he was a toddler and has an intimate relationship with his felucca and the Nile.

Even facing the wind, the current being pretty strong, Manu is covering some good distance, moving at a similar path to the boat. I am now excited to get a real feel of the river by paddling its water. Assan manages to pick Manu up by coming alongside while he is still paddling. I jump on the board while Lou, our other daughter, is begging me to let her paddle. I want her to rest for the first day. There will be a lot more paddling to come...

I have been looking forward to this moment, to paddle these waters that have much history. As a stand up paddler, I get really intimate with how the water feels. It's unlike even swimming or surfing; the fact that the paddle becomes the extension of your arms and hands makes a special connection with the elements. The wind has now died allowing a perfect reflection of the landscape on the water surface. I

stop paddling for a moment and sit on my board to take it all in. The sun is about to disappear behind a sand dune while covering the opposite palm tree covered bank in the most beautiful red light. I feel very thankful to experience that very moment that I have been dreaming of for so long.

I paddle back to the boat, anchored on the western bank of the river, getting ready for the first night. The crew is digging a hole in the sand not. The boys set

a portable toilet seat on it and a basic tent for privacy. That will do for a restroom. We are glad to start the dinner with a hot lentil and garlic soup and finish it with a boiling tea - the temperature is already below 10 degrees. We drop the tarp sides of the Felucca so the sleeping area gets some protection from the cold air. Our boat has no railing so Shadé, who moves a lot during the night, sleeps with a leash attached to her ankle. There are no night clubs around so I don't need to do the same with Manu! At 5:10am, the "Fajr" prayer coming from the nearest Mosque announces the sunrise crescendo for a good 30 minutes. "What is the Imam saying?" I ask our guide Nageh while we all hide in our sleeping bags. "Wake up, wake up! Get ready to work, don't be lazy" he answers. Manu is already up, preparing the boards.

“*Once again I learn from those who are able to drop everything at any given time to welcome some strangers in their home, expecting nothing else in return*”



// Getting the kids drafting early!.



It’s so hard to crawl out of the sleeping bag into the freezing air, but each morning it’s worth it; the light is beautiful and has our photographer Pierre and cameramen Martin scrambling to their equipment. I’ve never paddled with a jacket and a warm hat on but it works just perfect! After a few strokes while the sun is making its way up, we warm up as we pass along the many crops irrigated by the fresh water from the river.

We quickly understand why “Egypt is the gift of the Nile”. It provided a crucial role in the development of Egyptian civilization, and is everything to the people. They drink it, wash in it, cook with it, fish in it and use it for irrigation and transportation. Life along the river has changed very little since Biblical times and apart from the electrical pumps sucking its water, time stood still on the River Nile for centuries.

MILLENIA OF HISTORY

There is so much to see on the river banks that hours pass by and we don’t even notice it. The wind hasn’t picked up since the first day making the paddling conditions perfect. When we rest on the boards, the current does the job. The mid day sun is hot, making a quick refresh in the water enjoyable. Today we paddle by Kom Ombo temple whose magnificent 2,200 year old structure overlooks the river. We pull our boards on the banks and walk to its entrance. It is a unique structure in Egypt because its ‘double’ design meant that there were courts, halls, sanctuaries and room duplicated for two sets of gods: the crocodile god Sobek, god of fertility and creator of the world, and the falcon god Horus. What Shadé and Lou will most likely remember are the many crocodile mummies displayed in the crocodile museum. For me, even after seeing all these monuments in films and pictures since my childhood, I am amazed by how powerful it is to actually look at them, walk around their structures and feel their stones. What is even more amazing is that we get to see these monuments with hardly anyone else around. The first reason for that being the region’s political instability keeping the tourists away even though 90% of Egypt is very safe nowadays. The other reason is that while being on a boat and even more on SUP boards you get to the temples way before all the daytrip excursions.

We jump back on our boards and paddle back to the boat. Lou is now super comfortable on her SUP and keeps pace with us. It is rewarding to see her grow through the many adventures we’ve taken. I know the water sports we introduce her to and the many cultures she witnesses is helping her in becoming a responsible grown up.

Each day seems very different along the Nile even though our schedule remains the same. We go to the markets, visit some schools, stop for Carcade tea (hibiscus tea) with the crew’s families and of course learn to decipher more Hieroglyphs.

On the last day approaching Luxor, Lou and I are paddling along a narrow island in the middle of the river. Because we thought Shadé had drunk enough water from the Nile, Manu has her in the Ergobaby on his back. They are a few minutes behind talking with some kids playing football on the banks. On the island is a small camp ground made of a tent and some carpets around a fire pit. Next to it is a large green garden with lots of lettuces. The group waves at us so we stop by for a tea. They help us pull the boards on the sand and our carbon paddles pass from one hand to another. Like me, they are amazed by how light they are. Manu arrives with Shadé and we all sit on the carpets while the older men prepares some tea.

“ *The many crocodiles living there are not compatible with inflatable SUPs. Are standard SUP boards crocodile-proof? I’ll leave that research to someone else...* ”



“ *I get really intimate with how the water feels. It's unlike even swimming or surfing; the fact that the paddle becomes the extension of your arms and hands makes a special connection with the elements* ”



They speak very little English but we manage to exchange some words and all enjoy the tasty flavoured drink. I noticed that one of them is still around the boards, visibly eager to give it a go. I invite him to give it a try, giving him a few tips on where to stand on the board and how to grasp the paddle. These inflatable boards are stable and surprisingly stiff so they provide a good glide even for a total beginner like him. The rest of the group is cracking up and screaming as their friend gets his first strokes. I like the image of a silouhetted Abaya (the traditional Egyptian men outfit) moving on such modern craft. After a good effort paddling back against the current to the island he gets my board back with a great smile on his face. We thank everyone for their hospitality and once again I learn from those who are able to drop everything at any given time to welcome some strangers in their home, expecting nothing else in return.

It has been a week now that we are paddling and sailing along some of the most beautiful landscapes Africa has to offer. The Nile travels more than 4000 miles through the continent to end in Egypt making it the longest river on earth. How many more SUP adventures does it hide in Sudan, Eritrea, Uganda...? [SUP](#)



GETTING THERE
Pegasus Airlines has flights to Louxor starting at 150 Euro return from most European cities.

SUP ON THE NILE
Fun & Fly: www.fun-and-fly.com
This travel agency specializes in water sports and can create a custom SUP trip on the Nile for you. Together with their local partner Huwans they have their own fleet of Felucca. They offer different itineraries on the Nile, either on a single person basis or for entire groups

www.huwans-clubaventure.fr. Price starts at 795 Euro for 8 days.

WHEN TO GO
December to February has cold nights and ideal temperatures during the day. Bring a warm sleeping bag and a hat. June to September are very hot during the day while nights remain much cooler.

EQUIPMENT
An inflatable SUP race board is ideal to paddle the Nile; easy to carry to move around.

