



Dear Traveler,

This is the time of the year when we all celebrate Thanksgiving. A time when we pause to feel and express gratitude for all the myriad blessings bestowed upon us by our Creator. Indeed, ranking at the top of the list of things for which we must be grateful is that we finally overcame the Covid curse, and travel has been restored to its pre-pandemic levels.

Thus, I thank each and every one of you who entrusted us at STS and continued supporting us and giving us your business even at the height of the pandemic and continued to do so during the robust recovery in 2022. We look towards 2023 with high expectations, wherein we can continue to contribute to enriching your lives with travel experiences.

Eastern Turkey has always been one of our hottest-selling destinations. This tour comprises a unique package to a “less-explored” region of Turkey, in which we take less-traveled roads to visit isolated sites inhabited by predominantly Kurdish communities whose rich culture has often been either insufficiently explored or completely misunderstood. As usual, we offer this tour twice a year, in the spring (**May 18 - June 02, 2023**) and in the fall (**Nov 14 - Nov 27, 2023**), so we invite you to join one of them if you have not yet seen the “other Turkey” led by our excellent local guide: **Ms. Aysel** who has ranked extremely high with our clients in the past.

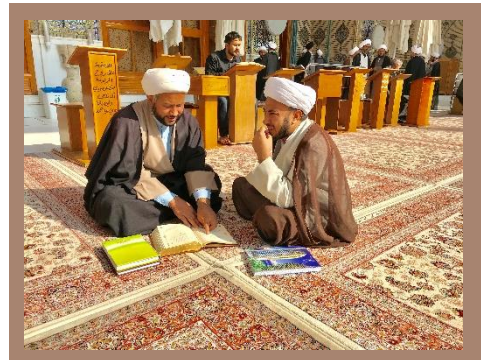


Saudi Arabia, a wealthy producer of oil and the birthplace of Islam is an intriguing kingdom that few people are aware it has such a rich cultural heritage, and landscapes of absolute beauty. While the monarchs of the kingdom are continuing their effort to diversify their economy and open up to the outside world, more tourists are trickling in now benefiting from the easy visa regulations and the superb infrastructure, exploring its deserts, mountains, and heritage cultural sights both ancient and modern.

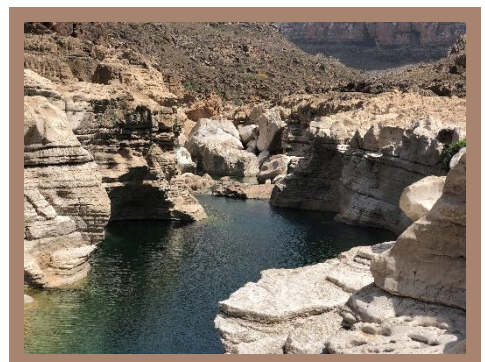


After a short visit to my parents in Cairo last month, I flew to meet our group in Riyadh to spend the first three days of their tour with them. My tour made me aware of how prices there are steadily on the rise, and what is even more important is that currently, under the modernizing initiatives of the Saudi Crown Prince, Muhammad bin Salman (better known as MBS), the country's culture is undergoing a radical change. Much of the traditional exotic way of life is rapidly being erased to be replaced by the trappings of modernity, so, those who want to see this country before the total dissolution of its pristine state should not delay for long. Another reason to avoid delay is that Saudi Arabia has greatly simplified visits via their electronic Visa system. This simplification in obtaining a visa has encouraged a flood of tourism, undoubtedly contributing to the loss of the country's "undiscovered" allure. Join us on either our [March 06 - 19, 2023](#), or our [November 14 - 27, 2023](#), tours.

Another destination that has always intrigued hard-core adventurers and seekers of ancient civilizations is **IRAQ**. Having written profusely in previous Newsletters about Iraq, it would be redundant to regale you at length here once more about the fabulous treasures this amazing ancient land offers. Home of civilizations such as the Babylonians, the Sumerians, the Akkadians, and the Assyrians, Iraq holds some great sites that fire the imagination and captivate the soul. Additionally, it provides a straightforward and close encounter with the major denominations of the Islamic faith and displays the impressive Holy sites and monuments that adorn their ancient cities. We would be delighted to see you on our [March 06 - 20, 2023 tour](#) or our [October 25 - November 08, 2023](#), tours. Both tours are led by competent historians who will enhance your visit with their knowledge.

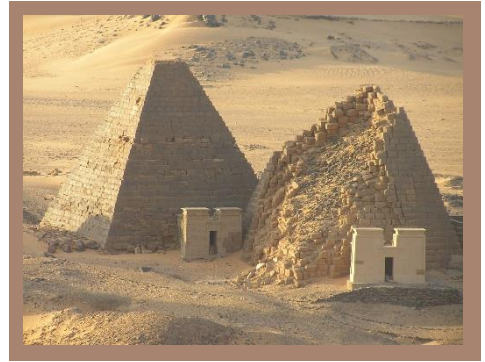


This month we successfully executed an extensive adventure tour that combined mainland **Yemen** with **Socotra** Island. On this tour, those who joined our capable leader, **Nancy Weber**, have been afforded a fantastic glance into a country that few travelers visit. Our tours this month took place using Yemenia Airways via Cairo, so our guests had a couple of short stops to relax in Cairo and visit some of the sites they have not seen before which opened up recently. Our [February 05 - 14, 2023](#) tour to Socotra has only 2 spots left while the [November 05 - 14, 2023](#), is sold out. The Yemen [February 14 - 22, 2023](#), has only one spot left, while the [November 14 - 22, 2023](#), still has spots available.



Another country that has yet to be overrun by mass tourism is **North Sudan**. We offer two tours there in 2023, one February 19 - March 01, 2023, and the second November 03 - 13, 2023. Both tours are led by experts on ancient Nubia, long-term excavators of the sites in Sudan. They are world-renowned lecturers and Nubian archaeology and history teachers: **Geoff Emberling** is leading the February tour, and **Richard Lobban** is leading the one in November. This tour is the natural continuum on the ancient pharaonic legacy of the Nile Valley and Egypt, so anyone who has been captivated by "ancient Egypt" will be completing the circle by visiting this stunning country with its extremely hospitable people and some of the most captivating ancient awe-inspiring ruins, consisting of pyramids, temples, and tombs.

While always looking to push the boundaries of the unfamiliar and exotic, we are offering a perfect extension to our North Sudan trip which is **South Sudan** tour (**February 08 - 15, 2023** and **Nov 13 - 20, 2023**). It's an easy one direct flight between Khartoum and Juba and that give you one of the least visited nations in the world. There you will visit interesting tribes and nomadic clans of cattle-herders. The people of these dynamic groups have distinctive "V" shaped markings on their foreheads and dye their hair in cow urine, giving it a yellowish-orange tint. South Sudan is one of the most exclusive unexplored frontiers on the African continent and a dream destination for those in search of the ultimate "off-the-beaten track" adventure.



As our special **Egypt** tour in **March'2023** is sold out, we invite you to consider our similar **April 23 - May 06, 2023**, tour to the ancient land of Egypt, the very cradle of civilization. The tour will include a glamorous five days aboard a luxury private yacht sailing the Nile. The tour includes the fabled Berber Oasis of Siwa and the Seat of the Oracle of Alexander the Great. Another spectacular journey in Egypt will be offered from **October 17 - November 03, 2023**. Sadly, the Grand Egyptian Museum (so-called GEM), which will house the best of Egypt's ancient treasures, is still not open and, so far, does not have a specific opening day. Still, we anticipate the big day is not far as President El Sisi has strongly urged the director and the committee in charge of this multi-billion-dollar project to quickly finalize it so it can be opened within the coming few months.



Given how **Pakistan** is becoming one of our most popular destinations - perhaps the natural reward for our pioneering work in introducing it to our clientele several years ago--we made some improvements to our itinerary despite its record of roaring success so far. The idea is not to rest on our laurels but to constantly seek to offer better products to our clientele. Pakistan has two distinct regions with very different weather patterns: the North and the South, and each of these regions is hospitable at different seasons of the year. The southern part from Karachi on the Arabian Sea to Lahore (and Islamabad) is scorching in summer and very warm in spring and fall, while the beautiful stretch from Islamabad towards the Chinese border along the Karakoram Highway, which winds along the Hunza Valley is freezing in winters but relatively mild in spring and fall but ideal in summers. Thus, the country is almost split into two opposite weather seasons. As a result of these climatic facts, we have carefully chosen the tour dates to offer North and South combinations that would not constitute noticeable hardships with the climate, and we have also expanded the itinerary of the 2023 tours to be 21-25 days long. Please see our website for details of our tours from **March 01 - 26, 2023**, and **October 11 - November 05, 2023**. Aside from this new spring and fall tours, we have also revamped our May tour to Chitral's Kalash festival **May 09 - 21, 2023** and added a North Pakistan component to it **May 15 - June 02, 2023**, which is an ideal time to visit the mountainous ranges of the country. Another great news is that we succeeded in luring **Roger Williams**, a Pakistan specialist and one of the best tour managers, to lead our tour. Noteworthy is the very convenient way of acquiring a visa to Pakistan, which is obtained electronically via email without needing to send your passport anywhere.

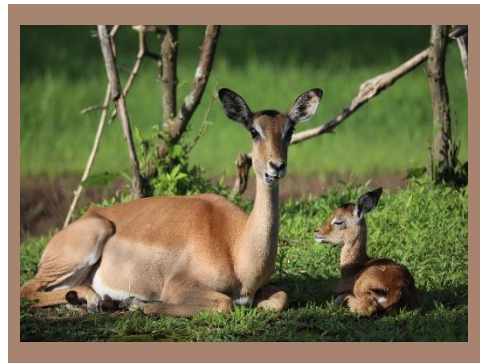


This November, we ran our first debut program to **Western Sahara**. This adventure takes you deep into the Sahara Desert, across oceans of sand and steep dunes, stopping along the way to meet nomadic tribes and savor the wilderness of the Sahara. This 11-day tour departure began in the Berber city of Agadir on the shores of the Atlantic Ocean in the southern region of Morocco. It traversed south to the bustling camel market of Tafnidilt, where nomadic shepherds trade their sheep, goats, and camels! From here, it entered the semi-autonomous contested Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic known as Western Sahara. The tour ended on the

sandy Dakhla Peninsula, surrounded by clear, turquoise waters. Our next tour to Western Sahara is **March 03 - 18, 2023**, and the next one will start from the mystical town of Marrakesh. We are also repeating this tour in **March 2024**. The journey snakes its way down through various oases dotting the southern region affording the chance to see and marvel at a unique world of vast sand dunes, rock formations, and petroglyphs painted by far-gone ancient ancestors. One gets an image of what a large part of the earth must have looked like at the dawn of Time. As you make your way through Western Sahara, you will mingle with isolated populations of nomadic tribes and caravanners that have survived this harsh environment for millennia. At the end of the tour in Dakhla, you can fly back to the USA or cross overland into another fascinating Saharan country, Mauritania. Here you will explore fabled cities of ancient kingdoms such as Atar and Chinguitty, where a trove of ancient manuscripts survived for centuries in private collections and clandestine libraries. Mauritania is a geological wonderland inhabited by very hospitable people. The date for our coming tour to Mauritania is scheduled to begin on **March 18 - 25, 2023**.



In line with our constant effort to launch new programs every year, we would like to introduce you to one of the most exciting projects we recently included in our itinerary. The First is our **Zambia and Malawi** program in **May 14 - 26, 2023**, which is already sold out, so now we are offering it again in **May'2024**, with a newly added segment which includes visiting **Zimbabwe** as well--not to see wildlife and do game drives--but rather to visit some obscure and forgotten ancient sites. Great Zimbabwe has been described as “one of the most dramatic architectural landscapes in sub-Saharan Africa.” It is the largest stone complex in Africa built before the modern era, aside from the monumental architecture of ancient Egypt. It was constructed between the 11th and 15th centuries and was continuously inhabited by the Shona people until about 1450 (the Shona are the largest ethnic group in Zimbabwe).



Additionally, we shall drive to visit the Matobo Hills and caves, a UNESCO World Heritage site that exhibits a profusion of distinctive rock landforms rising above the granite shield that covers much of Zimbabwe. The large boulders provide abundant natural shelters and have been associated with human occupation from the early Stone Age to early historical times and intermittently since. They also feature an outstanding collection of rock paintings. The Matobo Hills continue to provide a strong focus for the local community, which still uses shrines and sacred places closely linked to traditional, social, and economic activities.

The tour will be limited to 12 travelers and will be escorted by one of our tour managers. I plan to join the group for the Zimbabwe segment of the tour. Please read the article below:

<https://education.nationalgeographic.org/resource/great-zimbabwe>

As you might recall, I mentioned in a previous newsletter how **Algeria** is rising rapidly to be one of the newest appealing historical destinations that are attracting strong attention on account of the wealth and depth of its history, its well-preserved ancient ruins, and its unique culture. We are therefore excited to present our North Africa programs for **April 27 - May 22, 2023**, and **October 05 - 30, 2023**, in the usual modular format where you can either join **Tunisia** along with **Mauritania**, then **Algeria**, or pick **Algeria** by itself as a 10-day program or a 16-day program.



The other new plan we are working on diligently and expect to finalize very soon is our **West Africa's Atlantic Coast** program covering four countries that have never been

commercialized from a tourist standpoint: **Liberia, Sierra Leon, Guinea Conakry, and Guinea Bissau**. People can also add to the end an extension to **The Gambia** and finish up in **Dakar**, Senegal - which offers more convenient flight options to go back home to the USA. This tour will be an amazing potpourri of nature, culture, ethnography, history, and wildlife. You will see sacred dancing masks reflecting traditional animism, and you will enjoy sailing amongst the Bijagos Archipelago and participating in "tribal concerts" performed by the Griots: descendants of musicians and storytellers with lineages dating back from the 12th century. You will venture into remote forests and mountains where the arrival of foreigners is rare. In the less known corners of Guinea, Sierra Leone, and Liberia, we will cross rivers onboard barges, walk on liana bridges to the isolated villages and houses of "Bird-Men" initiates, and be received by traditional chiefs sitting in council with notables and elders. A hidden trail brings us to diamond diggers' sites. Along the coast of the Guinea Gulf, we travel between pristine shores and islands. It is an exceptional tour that is scheduled for **January'2024** and will be led by our capable tour manager: **David William**.



Finally, the other new combo we are plotting for **Feb'2024** is our tour to **Gabon with Sao Tome & Principe** along with **Equatorial Guinea**. This tour comprises three visits to some of the least visited countries in Africa. Luckily, we could coordinate flights between all three without serious hardship. The program envisages seven days in Gabon along with four days in Sao Tome and Principe, then four days in Equatorial Guinea.



There are few places left in **Equatorial Africa** where you embark on a safari and experience the 'Big Five' game, like in Gabon's Loango National Park. Its remarkable range of biodiversity and pristine ecosystems provide nature lovers and intrepid travelers with such extraordinary occurrences. Famous for its beachcomber forest elephants and surfing hippos that roam its wild coastline, the national park is also brimming with other resplendent guises; mangrove forests, mirrored waterways, speckled tidal lagoons, and a vast track of savannah - epic locations that are always picture-ready for thrilling wildlife viewing. Vast herds of forest elephants, buffalo, monkeys, chimpanzees, red river hogs, hippos, sitatunga, duiker, crocodile, and hundreds of bird species sweep the landscape. On a gorilla trek, you will also have a breathtaking introduction to a troop of western lowland gorillas that thrive in what is considered one of the world's most intact primate habitats.

We have set the dates for some of our tours for the 2024 calendar year, the rest will be planned along, and the brochures will be ready within the next couple of months. If you are interested in any of those tours, we suggest having your name penciled down, and once the brochure is ready will send you a copy.

Sincerely,
Ihab Zaki, Managing Director
and Spiekermann Travel Team

