



MAGICAL TRAVELS

A travel guru's guide
to the most mystical and
amazing places
on earth.

Sharon Breslin

Chapter One: RETURNING HOME

Phones blasting, deadlines looming, clients waiting, staff wanting help, a back-log of quotes...Breathe Sharon, breathe!! A typical day in the world of travel, you either loved or loathed it. You either survived or you didn't. Sitting on the edge of my seat, the adrenalin flowing, not knowing what the day would bring, my eye caught an email as it popped up on my screen...INVITATION.

Ooohhhhhh...a welcome break in the chaos. Who was sending me an invite and what was it to?? Multi-tasking as usual, headset on, half way through my conversation, smiling at the clients who had just walked in the door, I clicked on the email and it opened it up. Filled with anticipation and a mix of curiosity, excitement and intrigue, I took a closer look. I'd been thoroughly spoilt over the years visiting amazing destinations around the world and had become a little blasé to 'invitations.' With my 'judgment' hat firmly in place, I thought it had better be good but more than that, I hoped the mysterious invite was to some place I had never been before.

How ignorant of me. I know that now but at the time I took it all for granted! Over the years I had worked hard and was rewarded with some incredible perks along the way. They say "never a dull moment" and in the travel industry this rang true many a day.

"It is with great pleasure that Innovative Travel would like to invite Sharon Breslin or a senior staff member on our up-coming educational tour to Egypt. We wish to thank you for your business to date and would like to have the opportunity to show you first hand the wonders of Egypt".

Egypt, hmmm, is it a place I would choose to go to? Let me see, what is Egypt famous for? The pyramids of course and I think maybe Egyptian men who hassle girls with blonde hair. Ha, ha, ha, I laughed to myself and thought at the time, how foolish, you really know nothing much about that continent or civilisation at all. Yes this one might be worth considering. Hmmm, I will sit on it for a couple of days. How nonchalant of me. Any thoughts of an invite, not to mention Egypt, were quickly lost as clients were brought to my desk and I focused all of my attention on their holidays and dreams. And the phones kept ringing, the deadlines loomed, clients and staff waited, quotes back-logged.... another day flew by but I think I remembered to breathe.

Life in the world of travel was all consuming and one day rolled into another. My mind continued to digest, ponder and syphon the pros and cons for the next few days. Well, I reasoned, why not accept Innovative Travel's educational invite to Egypt? But it was such a long way to go for just a week. Should I go? I could certainly do with a break. I hadn't been

to Egypt before. Oh my goodness would the business survive without me for whole a week? Oh what the heck, why not let caution fly to the wind, surely it was time for another adventure. Besides, it was time I got myself to the middle-east to learn a little more about a continent I had not visited to date. Right, go on, hit the button before you change your mind. Yes, thank you, INVITATION ACCEPTED.

Departure loomed close. Manic as usual with all of the last minute things being ticked off the list. Every travel file, notes written on, instructions left for the staff and my clients were advised that I was going to be away for a short time. Now what about me? Clothes, oh my goodness, what am I going to wear? How hot was it going to be? How much did I have to cover up when visiting the sacred sites? Will I need evening attire as well? The usual dilemmas when getting ready to depart for a foreign land. How will I fit it all in? My toiletries take up more room than my clothes! Sigh, the trials and tribulations of travelling. Even after all of these years I was still not a great “packer.” Oh well, throw it all in, better to have too much than not enough. Laughing to myself I thought, well that’s not such a smart way to travel, Sharon and let us not forget the compulsory shopping that you will need to squash into the suitcase for the long journey home. She’ll be right! Forever an optimist I knew that if there was a will there was a way and hey it’s only money after all. I could post some things home or give some of my belongings away.

The day finally dawned. Up with less than a couple of hours sleep, totally exhausted but totally exhilarated. Yahoo! On the road again, finally! The gypsy part of my soul was alive, excited and chomping at the bit for the next adventure. Business class (one of the treats for working hard and supporting the airline and supplier) would make the travelling time easier; a definite consideration given the fact that we had only a week to explore a brand new destination. It was these times that you loved beyond measure while working in the travel industry. It was the ultimate job with the most incredible opportunities. Even 20 years down the track I still went to work every day absolutely loving it. How blessed was I? Lady luck was surely on my side.

Malaysian Airlines via Kuala Lumpur with final destination Cairo. The airline was famous for its satays with peanut sauce served with champagne and we were not disappointed. What a fantastic way to start our journey. Unwinding, de-stressing, friendships cementing as we were being transported to another place and time. Our group was made up of a mixture of leisure and corporate travel companies and everyone was frantically trying to find their place within the group; the joker, the one who was always late, the one who was always on time, the loner, the timid one and the loud one. Dynamics were forming the tight knit bond that we would create over the following week as a group of strangers coming together, to travel to one of the most amazingly mystical countries in the world. Little did we know just what a magical

journey it was to become.

Arriving after a grueling 26 hours it was with relief that we gathered our bags and made our way off the aircraft into the terminal building at Cairo airport. Tired, in need of a shower and a few hours sleep to acclimatise we were hit with the chaos of Cairo airport. Wow. I looked around and there were men everywhere. Where were the women? There were men in uniform looking at you suspiciously and directing you into your respective lines to process your visa as a foreigner. There were tired looking men hunched over their brooms sweeping and cleaning the arrival hall, obviously very poor but grateful to have a job no matter how tedious. At least they got to see the many tourists that arrived in droves to one of the most famous cities in the world. The dull, archaic furniture and equipment had you wondering where on earth you had landed. I should have known after all these years of travelling that an airport can be very deceiving, especially in a country that has such extremes between the poor and rich. Over the many heads in the crowd of people we saw a welcoming sign, INNOVATIVE TRAVEL GROUP. How wonderful to be met and hastened through with an air of importance. Thank goodness, as I was really tired but full of excitement nonetheless.

Destiny was calling.....

Walid El Battouty was our guide for the next week. With his piercing green eyes and definite air of authority we instinctively knew that we had been assigned one of the best.

It seemed the crowds parted way as he knew exactly where to take us and within seconds he was guiding us with ease from the airport to our waiting coach outside.

Dust, dust and more dust. Sand, arid heat and yes, dust. Before long, the earthen colours dashed with a spot of green every so often would become a very familiar sight to us. Departing from the airport with Walid booming down the microphone, introducing us to his homeland with immense pride and passion - nothing, absolutely nothing, prepared me for my first glimpse of the pyramids.

Majestic, proud, standing tall in all of their glory, they simply took my breath away. Barely containing my excitement, my eyes devoured that first glimpse of them in the distance. I wondered how long it would be before we could get up close and personal. It was in this moment that I knew for sure that Egypt was not a simple holiday destination but so much more. I felt so at home. A country with so much depth, layer upon layer, ready to reveal itself if you respected it. So much history contained within its soil with a heartbeat so utterly unique. I could not put my finger on it but I experienced a strange yet familiar feeling all at the same time. It was like I had come home and in a funny kind of way I knew something or someone was waiting for

me. Every cell in my body felt so alive and I could hardly contain my

excitement. Excitement for what, I did not know. Almost forgetting that we had just flown from the other side of the world I felt work and all its stress simply melting away as we arrived at our hotel in the Giza area for the next few nights. After checking in and finding out where the pool was we agreed to meet in the early afternoon for our first official adventure. Unable to sleep, my roommate Annie and I fell into deckchairs poolside, a cocktail in one hand and a perfect view of the pyramids as they stood in all of their glory.

All of a sudden, I had a sense that this was a precious moment in time when destiny was calling. There was a greater picture all mapped out for me and I was blissfully unaware of it for now. However, the turn of events over the next week made me look at life in a whole new way. They were the first of many life-changing experiences I have now been so privileged to experience.

Toot, toot! Oh no, watch out! Looking out of the coach window we were totally intrigued and flabbergasted at the traffic, the roads and the activities that we were watching. This place is crazy. Our first afternoon and we were in the midst of Giza heading towards the pyramids. There were cars old and new, horses and carts, shoe shiners, sellers of refreshments, young children roaming the streets and adults going about their business. As our coach crawled through the madness looking for a place to park we had our eyes glued to the windows taking everything in.

As we stepped from the coach onto the great Giza plateau we were bombarded with the smells, noises and colours of Egypt. Smiling, yet wary locals gathered around us – hoping for a sale. Pushing past them, we followed Walid across the open desert land to find ourselves standing below the Great Pyramid of Giza – Cheops Pyramid. Words could not describe how it felt to stand there with all three pyramids a stone's throw away. If I reached out I could touch them and feel the solidness of the brick, marvel at the shape and try to figure out how each rock had been merged together with absolutely no joins.

It felt so surreal but at the same time the surroundings seemed familiar. I had a niggling feeling of “being home” from the moment I had stepped onto Egyptian soil. How could this be as I had only been here for less than a day? Pushing these thoughts aside I tuned into what Walid, our guide and Egyptologist, was sharing with the group. A phenomenon for sure, there is no other way to describe the most ancient of the Seven Wonders of the World. Listening to the facts from an Egyptologists point of view and at the same time absorbing the energy and listening to my inner knowing, I began to wonder how on earth they came to be here and how they had survived the test of time through the different civilisations. It was not until my second trip to Egypt that I began to

accept and understand the power of the pyramids and the Sphinx at a deeper level.

Like most first time tourists to the Giza Plateau, I found myself climbing up onto the humped back of a camel, in what I hoped was the most dignified way possible, to take the obligatory touristic ride around the pyramids. Weaving our way amongst the hustle and bustle of the hawkers, pinching myself every so often to remind myself I really was there, it felt like time stood still. Back to reality with a thump, I heard a hissing noise and felt my camel lunge and drop down to its knees. Managing to slide off, keeping myself upright and dignity intact, I was grateful to have my feet firmly back on solid ground.

Eager to keep us moving and reminding us that this was a travel agent's familiarisation with an incredibly full schedule, Walid rounded us all up and announced that we were heading to one of the most famous establishments in the area, a Egyptian perfume palace. There we would learn how the ancient Egyptians had become experts in creating their oils with natural herbs and plant essences such as cinnamon, cardamom, rose, geranium and many others. Secret formulas were concocted and passed down from generation to generation, upholding the nation's reputation as some of the best perfumers in the world.

Entering the perfume palace I felt as if I had just stepped back into Cleopatra's era. There were musky smells, dim lighting and unique perfume bottles surrounding us as far as the eye could see. Come, come, come and sit down over here. We were ushered into one of the corners, offered the choice of apple tea or a cold drink and made to feel welcome. This was something we would happily get used to over the next week. Sitting on comfortable chairs around a display table, the guide who had been allocated to our group introduced himself with a smile on his face and laughing eyes. He looked like he was going to be very entertaining. Perfume bottles were opened and passed around the group and I could hear oohhss and aahhhs as we sniffed and recognised some of the most famous smells we had come to know in the perfume world. Which one do you think this is....Chanel, Gucci, Dior, Elizabeth Arden? It was fascinating to hear how certain oils were used to create these signature perfumes. Our guide started to ask each member of the group, as the perfumes were being passed around, 'What does your boyfriend like to buy for you? What perfumes do you buy for your boyfriend?' I was hoping like heck he would pass me by as I was very shy at this time and I did not have a boyfriend so asking me this question would mean that I would be put on the spot and have to reveal a little more about myself. I could feel my stomach starting to twist in knots and I just wanted to shrivel down into the floor. Luck, however, was on my side and somehow he managed to skip past me and inside I heaved a huge sigh of relief. Gosh, it was only day one and we had flown such a long distance, dropped our gear and immediately headed out to see the pyramids. Emotions were high. They certainly did not need to be

ignited even more by having to talk about my love life or lack thereof!

Finishing his demonstration and leaving us with an amazing array of oils to choose from, our first purchases were made. Rose oil, lotus flower oil, Queen of the Nile oil – the names alone pulled you in and transported you back to a bygone era, one that you wanted to relive. The magic of Egypt was weaving its spell on me already. I felt alive and so happy that I had decided to take this precious week out of my business world to journey to this incredible land.

Gathering around the counter and loaded up with bottles we were all trying to purchase, our guide suddenly blurted out in front of everyone, “This girl (which was me!) is a very special lady. She almost cried before, when I was demonstrating the oils.” I could feel my face going bright red and I did not know where to look. He knew. How on earth did he know? I had certainly been on the verge of tears, hoping with all of my might that he would not ask me about my boyfriend and the perfumes associated with him. He must have skipped over me on purpose! He turned to me in front of everyone and said, “Please, if you need to talk to me while you are here I am available at any time,” and promptly handed me his business card with his contact details. He said he had been working in both Egypt and Singapore and would love to talk to me. I hurriedly paid for my perfumes, stuffed the card in my bag and escaped out into the sunshine breathing a huge sigh of relief and hoping that no one would ask me anything about this odd occurrence. It felt like he knew my deepest darkest secrets. How could he?? Was he psychic maybe? His parting words had been, ‘Do you meditate?’ I did not and told him so. He promptly followed this up with, “You might like to explore that.” I thought nothing more of it as we continued at breakneck speed to fit in as much as we could in the short amount of time that we were there.

Where to next? Before leaving the Great Pyramids and the Giza Plateau, Walid told us we must take a look at “Mena House” especially if we wanted to give our clients the most wonderful treat when visiting Cairo. Perched directly across from the pyramids, surrounded by 40 acres of verdant greenery, this magnificent old palace, now converted into a hotel, stood tall, oozing history from every nook and cranny of its elegant bones. Just imagine sitting on one of the many balconies sipping a cocktail at sunset, looking out across the vast plateau while soaking up the energy of one of the Seven Wonders of the World. Wow! Words could not describe this moment of pleasure. Beautiful pools and gardens, buildings filled with antiques and treasures flowed endlessly in front of us as we were given a fleeting look around the property. If walls could talk I wonder what stories would be shared by this spectacular grand old lady!

It was time to head back to our hotel at the end of our first day; eat and crash. Weary, hungry and not knowing what time zone we were in didn't

matter. What an amazing start to our week in Egypt! I found myself realising how, in one day, I had fallen in love with everything. The colours, the starkness of the desert, the earth tones that were splashed with bursts of bright colour by way of artwork, spices and fabric. The smells of perfume, the food cooking with delicious aromas from the street stalls. The people, the children's smiles as they bombarded you to buy something for a simple dollar and the regal beauty of the Egyptian women and men. The music, oh the haunting and invocative sound of the music, it was mesmerising and impossible to stop yourself from moving to the beat. I would sleep and dream well tonight, of that I was certain.

Up bright and early, devouring a hearty breakfast with a morning view of the pyramids our group gathered together for another day of adventures. Walid had very cleverly assigned us with the name of an Egyptian god or goddess so that when we were at any of the ancient sacred sites and he was explaining and sharing knowledge on the events of history we would have a deeper understanding, having stepped into the character of each of these individuals. There was so much to absorb and retain and this was a perfect way for the group to immerse themselves in the past ancient civilisation. I had been assigned the character of Anubis who was a jackal headed god associated with mummification and the afterlife in ancient Egyptian religion. In the old kingdom he was associated with the burial of the Pharaoh. At this time he was the most important god of the dead but during the middle kingdom he was replaced by Osiris. He was the master of ceremonies, leading the deceased by the hand to the scales in the Hall of Maat during the process of the "judgement day scene." In his left hand he holds the ankh, the symbol of life. I wasn't sure that I liked being associated with the "dead" but as the week progressed I began to understand Anubis and the importance of his role in aiding a soul on its journey as it crossed over into the afterlife.

Today we were flying from Cairo to Luxor to commence our long awaited cruise along the Nile! Back at the airport, passing through lines of official paraphernalia, we boarded the aircraft for our short flight. Up in the air, flying high above the desert with nothing but flat land for as far as the eye could see, we had no idea what to expect. Even in its starkness, the desert oozed beauty and mystery. My imagination was running away with me. What must it have been like to live the life of a Bedouin, a camel trader, or a member of the ancient Egyptian military, coping with the ever-changing physical environment, living each day as it comes? It seemed to me that in one moment the desert was your ally and the next your arch enemy.

Arriving in Luxor, the ancient city of Thebes and home of the famous Karnak and Luxor Temples, it dawned upon me that this was indeed the heart of Egypt. It was no longer a political centre for Egypt but established as a religious centre after the New Kingdom era. The

original name of the city was “Wase” meaning “the scepter of power.”

This is where the homes of the nobles and the offices of the government were found along with the palace of the Pharaoh on the east bank, not far from the city. The west bank was mainly farmland and where the mountains behind the city were used to house the great tombs of pharaohs, queens, nobles and artisans.

Boarding our cruise vessel for the next four days we were greeted by Muhammad, one of the ships stewards, like we were long lost friends. First class, first class, first class. The ship was rather luxurious, oohhh I do love working in the travel industry!! Spoilt rotten, we were, but we needed to experience it from our client’s eyes, didn’t we? Annie and I arrived at our cabin and loved all of the little touches and attention to detail. On opening the door there were our towels shaped into the most exquisite swans sitting proudly on the beds. Dropping our bags we did a quick freshen up and then we were ready to venture out to explore Luxor and the famous Karnak Temple.

You could spend days, just days wandering and exploring and discovering all of the hidden messages, incredible architecture and ancient way of life. Close on Walid’s heels, listening intently and stepping into our assigned characters once again, making sure we did not miss a beat, we entered the great Hall of Pillars at Luxor. Before we knew it, hours had passed by and the night was rolling in. I loved this part of the evening when in so many ways it felt like the city truly woke up and the magic was just starting to be spun. As the sun started to set, throwing rusted oranges and pinks across the sky, the music began to get louder as the stall-holders were touting their wares ready for a night of good business. The distant echo of the drum beat, Nubian style, intertwined with the echoing sounds of the middle-east set the scene. I was in heaven.

Searching the stalls for a bargain or two, enjoying the compliments being delivered by the lovely Egyptian men as they tried to woo me into buying at their stalls, I spotted amongst the sea of colour the perfect galabiya, a traditional Egyptian garment native to the Nile Valley . Royal Blue, braided with gold and red. Yes that would be fabulous for our galabiya night on board the cruise boat. Bartering and making sure I let them have the last word I secured it for next to nothing. This was so much fun. Please don’t let it end.

Hurrying back to the cruise boat, making sure we were not going to be late for dinner on board and the evening of entertainment ahead, we found ourselves deciding what we were going to wear. By day, dust, dirt and practical clothing as you fought the challenges of the environment. By night it was like stepping into another world of lights, magic, sounds, smells, delicious food, entertainment, dancing into the wee hours, laughter and the meeting of new people all over a wine or two. One had to dress accordingly! If this was work then I think I might

sign up for another decade or two!

Politely refusing Muhammad I told him, no more, there is no room left for a morsel more. Joking and laughing with him I reminded him I would not be able to partake in the belly dancing later on if I ate one more thing. Moving across from the restaurant to the entertainment area on board the ship, wine glasses in hand, we secured our table, ready for a night of fun! Even after a few days it felt like we had known each other for many years. Personal stories were being shared and friendships were blossoming. It was game night on the ship and we were being paired off to partake in the hilarity that was about to unfold.

The first game was where two people had to share the eating of a banana, each starting from one end of the banana as the music played. When the music stopped they had to stand still, a little like musical chairs. Thank goodness I was not picked for that one! The extroverts in the group had volunteered. Laughter rang out as they tried to co-ordinate all of their moves, looking sexy at the same time and of course when they met in the middle the music was played for such short spells that the kiss was inevitable!

The next game was the “mummy game” where you had to wrap your partner up in toilet paper as if they were being mummified!! You guessed it, my turn.

Always a little nervous, I stepped out onto the floor hoping not to make a fool of myself but at the same time have a crack at winning. The aim was to be as fast as you could and as neat as you could. I loved it!! What happened when I started wrapping my partner up was amazing, it was like I went into a trance and I just went round and round and round making sure that there were no gaps and that the toilet paper did not break. Wrapped in record time I paused for a moment and an intriguing thought came into my mind. I was Anubis in this group and it was he who discovered embalming and oversaw the mummification process throughout the whole of Egypt as the lord of the underworld. Was it a coincidence that I was chosen for that game and the fact that it seemed like it was second nature to me? It was another mystical moment that was lodged in my memory bank as each day we fell into our beds, tired but exhilarated, ready for the dreamtime and the excitement of the next day and what it might hold.

I am remembered, I am honoured....

What happened next just blew me away. The following day, after a full day of exploring even more of the ancient city of Thebes and the Valley of the Kings, we were promised a special visit to the largest jewellery store in Luxor. On entering the store we were greeted with rows and rows of superb jewellery. There was gold, silver, rings, bracelets, necklaces, statues and much more. A shopper’s delight and the owner’s too as they

saw us eager to purchase. As I entered and walked into the centre of the shop and began to look around, I was stopped in my tracks noticing that all of the young men behind the counter were laughing and it seemed they were laughing at me! I began to feel rather uncomfortable and wondered, was something stuck on my back, did I have my skirt tucked into my undies, what on earth were they laughing at? As I began to feel my face turning red and was not sure where to look I saw an elderly gentleman with a warm smile on his face inviting me over with his eyes. I moved over towards him and asked, "What are they laughing at?" He replied, "They know you." I replied to him, "No, that they could not, as I have never been here before." He then repeated, "They know you!" I in turn said, "No, definitely not, this is my first time to Egypt." He then looked me square in the eyes and said, "Yes, they know you." And at that moment I realised he was indicating that I had been here before. Not in this life but in a past life. What? This did not make any sense to me. I had spent very little time at this stage doing research about past lives even though it was something I wanted to explore. I had, instead, been doing a lot of reading since my marriage break up about the topics of healing and mediumship. He then proceeded to invite me to have a seat and look at some jewellery with him. Calling Walid over, they began conversing in Egyptian as I sat there pondering on what had just happened, still a little dumfounded. Walid turned to me and said the owner of the store, the lovely gentleman I was with, was insisting on giving me some jewellery that he wanted me to wear the following day. I was to wear it and then at the end of the day decide whether I would like to buy it or not. He pulled a ring and a chain out of a cabinet then turned to me, took my hand and called me his queen! This was getting stranger by the minute.

The chain had an Egyptian goddess on it and the ring had the face of a lion. They represented one and the same and that was of the Egyptian goddess Sekhmet. Who was Sekhmet and why did he want me to wear the jewellery? Staring into his lovely kind eyes as he put the chain around my neck and the ring on my finger I felt safe and knew that there was a reason for all of this, I just did not know what it was at present.

Sekhmet's name was derived from the word "Sekhem" which means power or might and is often translated as "the powerful one." She was closely associated with the Hathor, the goddess of joy, music, dance, sexual love, pregnancy and birth and Baast, the goddess of warfare in lower Egypt. It was said that her breath formed the desert and she was seen as the protector of the Pharaohs leading them in warfare. Known as the warrior goddess and the healing goddess she was the patron of the physicians and healers in the ancient city of Thebes. Bearing the solar disk (an aspect of Ra) and the Uraeus (upright form of an Egyptian cobra) this associated her with the wadjet and royalty. She was mentioned in the spells in The Book of the Dead as both a creative and destructive force but above all, she was the protector of Ma'at (balance

or justice), named “The one who loves Ma’at and who detests evil.”

What I found quite incredible was how this beautiful man knew that I was interested in healing work. I had not told him. It was something that I was exploring in my spare time, of which I had very little while running a travel company. I adored it and was devouring many books on the topic. Was there a connection with Sekhmet being the patron of the physicians and healers? I could see some other traits that might be similar. I had very strong beliefs about balance and justice and definitely would stand and fight for the underdog if I thought they were being unfairly treated. In fact, in the world of travel you had to stand up and fight for your team and clients on a daily basis. There was no time for softness, you had to roar like a lion to be heard and to make sure that you were receiving the service needed that matched the service you were expected to provide for your clients. My staff could vouch for this! They had to put up with this behaviour of mine but hopefully most of the time it was protecting them, their clients and their work, rather than offending them. Yes, it was a known fact that when I roared you had to duck for cover as it was frightening. Even my name, Sharon, originally a Hebrew name, means “fertile plain of the desert.” My mind was racing, a million thoughts, questions, pondering, what was this all about? I supposed I would find out the next day when we went back to Karnak Temple and saw what awaited me there. So I finally accepted that I was to take the jewellery and wear it the following day. On leaving the shop, I realised that out of the group of twelve, I was the only one the had singled out and asked to wear the jewellery, so surely it was not a new sales technique!

Up bright and early, another gorgeous breakfast, a walk around the deck to try and feign walking it all off and then back on the coach towards Karnak temple. This place was like a drug, the more you saw, the more you learned about it and the more you wanted. Walid was the best storyteller and he had us in fits of laughter, moments of total concentration and fired many questions seeking answers. Your imagination ran wild as you immersed yourself into the energy of the old city. Every step you took you could feel what it must have been like to live there. The beauty, the sacredness and all of it was steeped in a depth of history that touched the core of your soul; soaking it up not wanting to ever leave. Why was it that I felt so at home there? Maybe I was reconnecting with with one or more past lives. There were unanswered questions to foreign feelings I was experiencing.

Skirting the outside of the temple grounds and wandering off the beaten track, all of a sudden we were in an area where there were very few tourists, only our small group and the guards that Walid was hurriedly paying to allow us to visit a cordoned off area. He turned and beckoned for us to follow. We started to weave our way through a series of gateways, six in total, until we entered the sanctuary of Ptah, then the sanctuary of Sekhmet. Dark and small with very little lighting, you had to adjust your

eyes. Once inside, you realised that there was the most magnificent statue taking up most of the space within the small chapel. Sekhmet stood tall and proud, with her striking slender body contrasting with her massive head that wore a flattened disk with a raised uraeus, the upright form of an Egyptian cobra. This is the symbol of royalty and divine authority in ancient Egypt. In her left hand she held the ankh, symbolic of life. In her right hand she held the lotus sceptre representative of growth.

She was breathtaking and the energy in this small space was intense. Standing in front of her with the light beaming from a gap in the roof, that was specifically located to allow the light of day and the moonlight at night to shine onto her face, I was mesmerised by her eyes. It was as if she was alive and looking directly at me. I stood in silence, looking directly at her and talking to her in my mind and connecting with her on a deep level. It was a precious moment and one that will be with me forever. It felt like an initiation, a reconnection back into the world of healing, as if I had been infused with Sekhmet's strength and knowledge at a deep cellular and soul level. My whole body was buzzing and a whole new world was being triggered within. It felt like it was a remembering of the past and a merging of the present.

Returning to the jewellery shop in Luxor the next day I walked in to find the owner waiting with his beautiful smile and eyes full of wisdom. "Sit down, sit down," he said. "How was your day, did you have any special moments?" Of course, he knew and I did not have to say anything but I proceeded to tell him about my visit to Sekhmet's sanctuary and how powerful it had been. Yes, yes I said, I would like to purchase the jewellery to take home to wear when doing my healing work. This was just the beginning of many unusual experiences with so much meaning, learning and significance that I was to have on my return to Egypt and future travels around the world.

The remainder of our week in Egypt was a whirlwind where we continued cruising down the Nile visiting the temples of Edfu, KomOmbo and Aswan. Along with a day trip to Abu Simbel by air and then back to Cairo for a speedy tour of the famous Cairo museum. Alas, it was over in a blink and we found ourselves at the airport saying our last farewells to Walid, thanking him for the most magnificent week. Apparently, my parting words to Walid were, "I will be back to visit you and it will be with groups in the future." It was something that I cannot remember saying but he enjoyed reminding me of it when I next returned to Egypt.

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