



HOW TO GET THERE
 Emirates fly daily to Cairo. From there you can catch a connecting flight to Luxor with Egypt Air. Visit www.emirates.com and www.egyptair.com for prices and further information.

incoherent with lack of sleep and head to bed. We are met in the morning by a weathered character, dressed in a charcoal grey jallabia and checked Egyptian scarf. He leads us along the dusty back streets to the ferry. On the west bank we enter the dirt-floored basement of a house. A lady in an abaya squats in the dark room, boiling tea. Our guide saddles up our donkeys, which look terribly small. One gives a quick snort of fear when it notes my companion's rugby player physique, but takes his weight. There are few things funnier than a large man on a small donkey. To add to my mirth, neither of us have stirrups, so as the donkeys trot along we jiggle up and down. The fun ends when I realise the distance we'll be travelling, but is revived by my companions' donkey braying loudly and bolting for the hills, jolting him from side to side until he slides off. We stop at the Colossi of Memnon, two 18-metre faceless statues that are all that remain of Amenhotep III's funerary temple. Old Gurna village sits picturesquely on a hill in the background. Mixed in with the colourful mud brick houses are hundreds of tombs, lining the barren mound. Next is Medinat Habu, my top pick of temples. The exterior walls are topped with the crumbling remains of a mud-brick village, while the inner areas are well preserved, with much of the original colour still visible. We leave the area and climb higher. There is an air of magnificent desolation that perhaps marks why these

areas were selected as the necropolis of Thebes. Over the crest of the hill we catch our first glimpse of the Valley of the Kings. We leave our donkeys and head off to buy tickets. There are over 60 tombs here, not all of which are open to the public. We select tombs at random, knowing we will not make it through them all. The majority have a long sloping corridor leading to open halls holding the sarcophagus. These tombs are so old that even the graffiti dates back to 278BC. We stand outside the Tomb of Tutankhamun deciding whether to pay the steep additional fee. We vote against it on the advice of our guidebook which suggests that the story of the tomb's treasures outshines its appearance. At our fourth tomb we discover that our tickets only allow access to three tombs. The guard lets us in and we hand over baksheesh. We try this one final time to complete our tomb tour - it works. Our final tomb is the Tomb of Tutmothis III. It is hidden in the hills, accessible by a steep staircase, with passageways built at haphazard angles to deter potential

robbers. It was one of the earliest painted tombs, so the style is quite different with figures of stick men adorning the walls. We wearily climb back to the donkeys for our final stop at the Temple of Hatshepsut. Tombs and intriguing rock openings can be seen all over the surrounding cliffs, but it is the part free standing and part rock cut temple, rising out of the plain in terraces that dominates the valley. Our donkeys breathe a sigh of relief as they trot towards home. My companion is bucked off again in the approach to the house so the journey has come full circle. A family greet us and we sit on an old bench sipping tea as the donkeys, chickens, and a buffalo graze around us. We are reluctant to leave this idyllic pastoral scene as the sun fades over the paddocks. Back on the east bank, we have one final meal. The Hotel Sophia has been recommended and we opt for a selection of mezze, each of which is delicious. The restaurant is part open air, with low brass tables and comfortable lounge chairs. It is the perfect end to our weekend adventure. Three days can only offer a taste of Egypt, but it is well worth sampling a little bit of life in Luxor.

