

Fayoum – a tranquil world just one hour from chaotic Cairo

Ecotourism activities in and around Fayoum Oasis Camel Trekking in Wadi Rayan Protected Area



CAMEL TREKKING IN FAYOUM AND WADI RAYAN PROTECTED AREA

The spectacular Fayoum desert is one of the main reasons visitors come to the Fayoum. Exploring the desert on the back of a camel with a local guide is indeed an excellent way of escaping Cairo.

In the past, the Fayoum was an important point on the traditional caravan routes between the northern areas of Egypt. The most famous traveler in the Egyptian Western Desert was Alexander the Great. On his way back from Siwa to Memphis, he probably cut across the Nile Valley through Wadi Rayan. Today, you can follow the traces of Alexander the Great on camel in Fayoum.

Camels, are an attractive and local alternative to 4x4 cars for traveling in the desert. Even though the traditional camel caravans towards the other oasis of the Western Desert have ceased to exist, camels are still widely used for agricultural purposes.

Within the framework of the Preparatory Phase for Eco-Tourism in Fayoum Project, a family from the village of Qarun in south-western Fayoum has been encouraged to start up its own camel riding business. While the project provided the family with technical assistance in the form of visitor management, tour planning and language training, the camel owners invested in proper riding equipment (saddles). Last but not least, the staff of Wadi Rayan Protected Area introduced the camel owners to the area of Wadi Rayan to make sure that they get to know the area properly and respect the basic management rules of the protected area.

Potential Itineraries

The camels are suitable for various exploration tours that last between 3 hours to 3 days. Visitors can discover the pristine desert and agricultural areas of southwestern Fayoum and of Wadi Rayan Protected Area where they will be able to ride through fields, along dunes, over escarpments and along the shores of the lakes. Short camel tours through the agricultural areas can also be combined with a visit of cultural heritage sites.

3 – 4 hours – half-day itinerary

Historical and Rural Fayoum - Qasr Qarun

Departure from Cairo at 7 am. Drive to Fayoum. Your camel trip will start at the end of the asphalt road that borders the southern shore of Lake Qarun, about 30 km west of the village of Shakshouk. After a short introduction to the camel guides you will mount the camels and approach the Ptolemaic temple of Qarun along a road that used to link the Qarun temple with the shores of Lake Qarun, during ancient times. You continue through beautiful fields, passing small villages and after 2.5 hours, you will reach the temple of Qasr Qarun, where a professional tourism guide will initiate you to the ancient history of the temple and the wider Fayoum area. Return to Cairo is at 1 pm. (For this trip camels can also be replaced by donkeys.)

1 day itinerary

Introduction to Wadi Rayan Protected Area– Camel Tour

This tour takes you to an area of Wadi Rayan that is far away from beaten tourist track to a part of Wadi Rayan Protected Area that is rarely visited, yet unique in its scenic and naturalistic value. It will start south of the spring area of lake Rayan, home to specialized

fauna, including the near-extinct slender-horned gazelles and a rich variety of desert and wetland birds.

Departure is at 7.30 am from the Outpost of Wadi Rayan Protected Area (we recommend that you spend the night in a hotel in Fayoum before the trip). After an introduction to the camel guides, you will ride over extended dunes to the beginning of the spring area, where a permanent water source is keeping alive lush vegetation. You will eat a simple lunch in the shade, before continuing your tour towards an escarpment and later back to the asphalt road. Return to Cairo is at 4 pm along the Assiut – Cairo desert highway.

2-day itinerary

Adventurous Fayoum – Camel trekking through Wadi Rayan

Follow the traces of Alexander the Great, one of the most famous traveler in the Egyptian Western Desert and discover Wadi Rayan Protected Area on the back of a camel. This tour offers a unique introduction to Wadi Rayan Protected Area and is a good opportunity to learn more about flora and fauna of the desert. You will be able to observe birds, monitor tracks of different mammals and reptiles and may even be able to spot a fox. If the weather allows, you will be able to venture out for a swim in the Wadi Rayan lakes.

This 2 day exploration tour starts at 8. 30 am from the Outpost of Wadi Rayan Protected Area (we recommend that you spend the night in a hotel in Fayoum before the trip). You will mount the camels and ride uphill towards the spring area of Wadi Rayan, home to specialized fauna, including the near-extinct slender-horned gazelles and a rich variety of small mammals. After a visit of the first spring, camels will head north over dunes towards the shore of the second Wadi Rayan lake. Whilst the guides will build up the camp and prepare dinner, you can go birdwatching, swimming or simply enjoy the peaceful scenery.

After an early breakfast on day two, you will ride along the beach and over dunes towards a fjord area. The camels will leave the lake and move up towards Gebel Meshgiga, one of the landmarks of Wadi Rayan Protected Area. The stunning rock formation of Gebel Meshgiga can be explored on foot. At 3 pm, the camels will bring you back to the asphalt road. Return to Cairo is at 4 pm through the Assiut – Cairo desert highway.

How can you book a tour?

The Fayoum Ecotourism project has trained a number of guides that belong to the Community Center of the Faculty of Tourism and Hotels in Fayoum. We recommend you contact the Center or the guides to arrange for English speaking guidance and assistance.

If you would like to use your own tour guide, contact the camel owners.

Remember:

Ecotourism means local community benefit so please remember all guides and local service providers are developing their skills through guiding and purchase local goods and services as much as possible.

Most of the camel tours take place inside a Protected Area. Please take special care of the environment and wildlife during your stay by observing the environmental code of the Park.

Camel Service Facts

<i>Contact of the camel owners</i>	Mohamed Someida Khalta Village Qarun, Fayoum Tel: 084 490035 / 010 1160 210 (no direct line, ask for Mohamed Someida or leave a message)
<i>Language skills</i>	Arabic. Mohamed Someida does have basic English skills (presentation, counting, directions etc.)
<i>Minimum/Maximum of persons needed for camel trekking</i>	Minimum number of persons: 3 Maximum number of persons: 7
<i>Equipment provided by camel owners</i>	Riding equipment, basic cooking equipment, traditional Bedouin tent
<i>Fees for camels</i>	LE 70 per day for tours in and around the area of Qarun LE 100 per day for tours inside Wadi Rayan Protected Area
<i>Permits needed to organize a camel trekking</i>	No special permission for ½ and 1 day tours. Permission from the Central State Security Office in Cairo for overnight in desert. The Fayoum Tourism Authority and Wadi Rayan Protected Area can facilitate permission procedures.
<i>Do you need professional and qualified guiding services / Want the help of an operator to arrange the tour?</i>	Community Service Center of the Faculty of Hotel and Tourism Management, Cairo University, Fayoum Branch. Tel: 084 33 776 Osama Abdel Naby, Tour Guide Mobile: 012 790 2448 Email: semsemamon@hotmail.com Ibrahim Abdel Baset, Tour Guide Mobile: 010 542 7679 Email: hemoamon@hotmail.com Abdel Karim Barasy, Tour Operator Mobile: 010 602 3742 Email: kimotaba@hotmail.com
<i>Useful contacts</i>	Fayoum Tourism Authority Mahmoud Mustafa, Manager Fayoum Governorate Tel: 084 343 213 Fax: 084 337 304 Wadi Rayan Protected Area Headquarter Shakshouk Village Tel: 084 572001/2

	Egyptian Environmental Affairs Agency Nature Conservation Sector Tel: 02 5248 792
<i>Hotels in Fayoum</i>	Auberge du Lac Hotel, Fayoum Tel: 084 572 001/2 Panorama Shakhouk Hotel, Shakshouk, Fayoum Tel: 084 830 757
<i>Medical Facilities / First Aid</i>	Do bring your own first aid medical kit! Basic medical facilities are available in Fayoum City.
<i>Suggested readings</i>	<i>The Fayoum: History and Guide. Neil Hewison. AUC Press, 2001. The most comprehensive introduction to the cultural, historical, geographical and social background of today's Fayoum.</i> <i>Egypt's Pocket Guide: The Fayoum and Wadi el Rayan. Alberto Siliotti. AUC Press, 2003. A brandnew pocket guide for visitors that contains on 48 pages a lot of useful information, maps, drawings and photographs.</i> <i>Atlas of Wadi Rayan. Egyptian Italian Environment Program/IUCN. 2002. Atlas containing pictures, texts and maps about Wadi Rayan Protected Area. The atlas can currently not be purchased but is available through the Nature Conservation Sector of the Egyptian Environmental Affairs Agency (02 5248792).</i> http://www.wadielrayan.org/index.htm Official website of the Wadi Rayan Protected Area with plenty of information, maps and photos on the area visited.

This information sheet has been prepared by the Fayoum Ecotourism Project
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