

The Egyptian Museum: Cairo, Egypt

by Cheryl Pendry, PassPorter Featured Columnist

The world is full of **amazing museums**, and we've been lucky enough to visit our fair share of them.

Some of them are interactive heaven for youngsters, others are dedicated to specific areas of interest, while some are real gems for history lovers. **Cairo's Egyptian Museum** is definitely one that falls into the latter category.

The **Egyptian Museum dates from the late 19th century**, just a few years after an organisation was created to supervise and monitor all the archaeological excavations taking place across Egypt. The museum grew at a frightening pace, as more and more antiquities were uncovered, and that's continued over the intervening years. Today, the Egyptian Museum, putting it brutally, is far too small to properly display all the amazing treasures it contains.

A solution is at hand, but sadly it seems it is still some way off. A **new, and much larger, Egyptian Museum is due to be built at Giza**, near the pyramids, to help deal with the problem. Sadly, despite promises that it would be open by now, many opening dates have already passed, with little work undertaken on the site. When we passed by, all that had been done was some excavation of sand, so it seems that it's still some time off.

For the moment, the **only Egyptian Museum remains at its original site**, just a couple of minutes' walk from the now internationally famous Tahrir Square, where all the demonstrations against Mubarak's reign took place, earlier this year. Fortunately, despite early horror reports of looting, very little inside the museum has been damaged, which is a relief indeed, as it's home to an unbelievable collection.

The **top attraction at the Egyptian Museum is the section devoted to the treasures that came from the tomb of King Tutankhamen**, and understandably so. We had already seen some of these items when the tour came to London a few years ago, and that was breathtaking. Having had that introduction, I honestly thought I knew what to expect. How wrong one can be!

The second we walked into the rooms housing these treasures, **my breath was literally taken away**, such was the beauty of what was laid out in front of us. As you enter, you're watched over by two life-size statues, made of wood, and finished with black resin and gilding. It's

appropriate, as they were the first things that greeted Howard Carter when he first discovered the tomb.

Immediately in front of us were **thrones, again wooden, but looking exquisite in their gold leaf finish**. Each was decorated with animals who would protect the young king on his dangerous journey into the afterlife. This theme carried on with the funeral beds, one of which had the head of a cow, another with the head of a hippo, and the final with the head of a lion. Each would play their role in helping to protect and support the pharaoh.

The room showcased **everything that a King would need in his next life**, including tiny mummies of all his slaves. The lower servants had tiny mummies, all complete with full detail on them, of no more than six or seven inches tall. As you moved up the servant chain, through supervisors, the mummies became taller. All in all, there must have been 200, just waiting to help the pharaoh in any way they could.

The most famous treasures are, understandably enough, in a separate area that's under tight security. It was probably this security that helped to save them from any looting during the protests. It's here that you **find the death mask** that you'll no doubt have seen photos of. It's just as stunning in reality as in the photos, and I was entranced by the detail in it, and what a good condition it was in. You can tell it's the real thing, as you can even see dried blood on it. I was staggered by that, and a little horrified, but fascinated at the same time.

Also in here are the **two sarcophaguses that contained Tutankhamen's body**. Once again, the detail on these were just breathtaking, with the innermost one made out of pure gold. The opulence in front of us was just staggering, made more amazing by the fact that what we were seeing was thousands of years old. The collection is rounded out by all types of jewellery, including necklaces, bracelets and sheathes for knives.

Another major collection at the Egyptian Museum is the **Royal Mummy Room**, which is an extra charge on top of regular admission. Fascinating as I'm sure it was, as someone with a weak stomach, I bailed on visiting it. Despite that, there was still plenty of other things to see here. You really do need a guide here, and we visited as part of a guided tour, although we had some free time at the end. Frustratingly, that was spoilt by the lack of signage in some of the galleries, which made it impossible to know what we were seeing. As we wandered around on our own, we could see just how congested the building is with artefacts from thousands of years ago. It's thought that around 120,000 items are on display, while another 150,000 are reputed to be stored in the

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basement!

Some of the highlights in the museum are the **Narmer Palette**, just inside the entrance, an intricately decorated stone that is one of the oldest items in the museum, dating from 3,000 BC. It tells the story of King Narmer's defeat of the princes of the Delta and the images carved on it are very graphic! You're left in no doubt as to what happened.

Toward the back of the Egyptian Museum's ground floor is another highlight, a **massive unfinished head of Queen Neferiti**. It was refreshing to see something that wasn't complete, and it certainly showcased her natural beauty.

Elsewhere, there were entire **rooms dedicated to sarcophaguses and tombs of the pharaohs, nobles, and high priests**, complete with hieroglyphics or rows of sphinxes. At the entrance to the museum are statues, some up to 15 feet tall, dating from the Old Kingdom, around 2,500BC. It felt very humbling to stand there and stare up to the stone faces of kings and queens as they keep a watch over the museum.

I really wish that we'd had a lot longer to explore the museum, and it's a shame that the museum shop, as happens all too often, is at the exit, as earlier **I could have done with the guidebook** we bought at the end! I think any visitor could easily spend the whole day in the museum and still not see everything. Whatever you see, it's still hard to take it all in, there's just so much of it.

Sadly, **no photographs are allowed inside the museum**, although you're free to take photos in the grounds. The museum is open daily, year round, and has an admission charge of 60 Egyptian pounds, which works out to around \$17. It's certainly worth every penny!

About The Author: Cheryl and husband Mark live in England and love to travel, particularly to America. They are in the process of visiting every Disney theme park around the world, having already been to Disneyland Resort Paris, Hong Kong Disneyland and both American Disney resorts. They are now planning for their trip to Japan in the spring to visit the Tokyo Disney Resort. [Click here to view more of Cheryl's articles!](#)

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