

SUDAN



Leave the distractions of the digital age behind on this epic traverse of Sudan's Bayuda desert. Travelling by foot and camel as the desert nomads have for centuries, you'll follow in the footsteps of the ancient Meroitic civilisations and the desperate military march of the 1885 Gordon Relief Expedition. With hot days and cool nights under a brilliant canopy of stars, in this region transport by camel is still very much a way of life among local people and tourists are virtually unknown. Embracing the silent serenity of the desert, you'll pass sparse acacia forest, vast undulating sand-sheets scattered with rocky outcrops, verdant wadis, and dark volcanic ridges on your journey to cross the ancient Kingdom of Kush.

Aim

The aim of this Redefined Classic expedition is to cross the Bayuda Desert – a journey of around 280km – on foot and by camel, as the desert nomads have done for centuries.

The team will forgo the clutter of modern life to embark on a minimal journey through the desert, carrying everything by camel and pitching camp each night in remote desert under an unspoilt starlit sky. Each member of the team will be allocated their own camel for the duration of the expedition and may alternate between riding and travelling on-foot throughout the day as they wish.

Along the banks of the Nile clasping the southern edge of the Bayuda desert, the team will explore the Meroë pyramids which – along with the Nuri pyramids on the northern edge of the desert – were the termini of the *Bayuda Desert Route*, a hugely important lifeline connecting the northern and southern districts of the Kingdom of Kush in 600 BC.

Highlights

- Journey through diverse Saharan desert scenery.

- Follow in the footsteps of ancient Meroitic civilisations.
- Interact with nomadic tribes-people as you visit desert wells.
- Learn camel riding skills from locals supporting the expedition.
- Explore the pyramids and tombs of the ancient Meroitic civilisation.
- Camp under the stars of the desert night sky.
- Experience the hospitality of a country rarely visited by western tourists.

What our teams say

“Crossing the Bayuda with the Bedouins and their camels was tough but left memories that will last a lifetime. SC did an excellent job on organisation whilst their in-country partner executed it to a 1000%. No corners were cut! Absolutely a killer-trip. I would recommend it strongly. Already browsing on the website for more.” – Adrian de Blecourt, 2017 teammate.

Why Go

Desert landscapes

Part of the larger and better known Sahara, the Bayuda Desert covers an area of 100,000 km² in NE Sudan. Sitting within a huge bend in the river Nile it is encircled on three sides by the river. This journey will traverse ever-changing desert sandscapes, scattered with acacia trees and rocky outcrops, surrounded by a golden-hued colour palette of ochres and chocolate browns. Vast undulating sand-sheets protruded by volcanic mountains and ridges extend to the horizon, dotted with grassy savannahs grazed by nomads.

With the temperature easing and the stars taking centre stage, at night, the desert embodies a totally different tone. Far from the man-made light pollution our lives are so familiar with, the Bayuda desert sits beneath a canopy owned by the Milky Way, sweeping across the sky in a grand, breath-taking spectacle above the sand. There’s nothing like a vivid night sky to add a little perspective.

Sudan and the Sudanese

While Sudan’s reputation for civil war precedes its hundreds of pyramids, there are in fact more pyramids in Sudan than in Egypt. Contrary to popular perception, the Sudanese are among the most hospitable and friendliest people in Africa and are incredibly welcoming to tourists. The meeting point between Africa and the Arab world, Sudan is home to diverse tribes, languages and cultures. Nomads still wander the great desert plains and arid savannahs with their herds of camels and flocks of sheep, their way of life seemingly untouched by industrial civilisation. The largest tribe calling the Bayuda home are the Bisharin. Descendants of the ancient Bejawi people, the Bisharin trade routes, grazing ranges and watering holes are dispersed across the desert. Along this desert traverse, the team is likely to encounter them at wadis and wells, collecting water and tending their flocks.

A route steeped in history

The great bend of the River Nile which confines the borders the Bayuda Desert sweeps in a 600km long meander to the east. For those with sufficient knowledge to venture into its wilderness, the 280km Bayuda Desert route has been an important shortcut, linking the Nile communities either side of the desert for thousands of years. In 600BC, the route through the desert was a lifeline linking the northern and southern districts of the Kingdom of Kush, and the evocative ruins of the Meroë and Nuri pyramids and temples still stand at its southern and northern termini.

More recently, in 1884–1885, the Bayuda Desert route was used as a shortcut by the Gordon Relief Expedition – a desperate military march across Egypt and Sudan to relieve General Gordon and the siege of Khartoum. After a journey of over four months, they arrived just two days too late. On our journey we’ll visit the Jakdul pool, the only open water pool in the Bayuda desert and used by the British team as a base during the relief mission.

Walking the Nile

Follow in the footsteps of adventurer Levison Wood. As part of his epic *Walking The Nile* expedition, Levison walked over 4,000 miles from the source of the Nile in Rwanda to the Nile delta in Egypt where it flows into the Mediterranean Sea, part of which saw him crossing the Bayuda Desert. Making the crossing in March rather than July, this Secret Compass team can expect much cooler temperatures than those experienced by Levison.

Where few have trodden

Since Secret Compass led the first commercial crossing in 2013, to our knowledge, no other commercial teams have made this crossing, putting the 2018 and 2019 teams in the select company of privileged, intrepid Secret Compass explorers to have made this journey.

The Plan

Secret Compass runs expeditions with framework itineraries, rather than guided tours with set daily plans. Read more about [Our Approach](#) here. The following is the outline plan for this Sudan expedition – the ‘substance’ rather than the specifics. A fuller itinerary is provided in the Sudan Expedition Handbook which is available on request or upon application to join the team.

Teammates arrive

All teammates should arrive at the team hotel in Khartoum ready for a team briefing with your Secret Compass Team Leader at 1800. After the team briefing and welcome team dinner head to bed for an early night, the real adventure starts the following day.

After breakfast the next day travel from Khartoum to Metemma by road via the Nile’s sixth cataract at Sabaluka and the town of Shendi on the banks of the Nile. From here cross the Nile by bridge to Metemma on the opposite bank where the team meet their camels and their handlers for a briefing on the art of camel-riding. Then it’s into the desert to make first camp.

On expedition

Equipped with almost no modern technology, for the next nine nights we carry our entire world on camelback and make camp each night in temporary camps. Moving at the steady pace of 4-5 km (2-3 miles) an hour, we cover an average of 30km (18 miles) per day, experiencing the desert in a way nomads have for centuries, a mixture of on foot and on camels.

Goal achieved

Epic desert traverse complete, the team bid farewell to the camels and their handlers. After visiting the pyramids and temples at Nuri and El Kurru, we drive south to Bejraviyya – site of the pyramids of Old Meroë. Smaller than Egyptian pyramids but with steeper sides, these pyramids are the tombs of the ancient Meroitic kings and queens who reigned in Nubia from 300BC to 300AD. We’ll have the opportunity to enter some of the tombs including some which have hieroglyphic inscriptions and murals to rival those in Luxor.

After travelling back to Khartoum, the expedition officially ends after breakfast on the 3 February, but team mates can depart any time as some flights leave early on Sunday morning.

Fitness

Secret Compass expeditions are achievable by anyone with a healthy lifestyle and a good level of general fitness. The trek requires no special technical skills but you need to be capable of travelling in a remote region for the duration of the trek without external support. The most challenging aspect of this expedition will be the heat – with daytime temperatures of 30 – 40 °C. Team members should be willing to be part of a team working together to achieve the goal of the expedition. As a team member, you should have an adventurous and robust spirit.

Applicants will receive a Handbook with further expedition information. View Secret Compass's suggested [Expedition Training Advice](#) and get in touch with any fitness, health, training or kit questions that remain. Teammates who arrive without meeting the agreed minimum fitness requirements can jeopardise themselves and the expedition's goal so do take training seriously, prepare as appropriate and arrive fit and ready to go! Teammates must be comfortable with the following:

Minimum fitness requirements

- Trek or camel ride: up to 30km a day. You can ride or walk as much or little as you want but be aware that camel-riding is not a passive activity and requires fitness and agility.
- Daily activity: up to 8hrs daily on the trek phase.
- Carry: up to a maximum of approx. 5 kg (you will not have to carry your own kit or provisions, but a day pack with your water and immediate requirements is convenient).
- Terrain: a variety of desert terrain including rocky, sandy and sometimes steep terrain.
- Climate: very hot and dry (30 – 40 °C during the day), potential sandstorms, cooler nights.
- Swim: not required.
- Age: 21+

Practicalities

Accommodation

You'll stay in a comfortable mid-range hotel whilst in Khartoum and at the end of your camel trek in Karima. For the expedition phase we will wild-camp in the remote desert.

Food

The team will be accompanied by a cook while in the desert who will prepare basic but filling local dishes. In Khartoum and whilst on the road we will eat in local restaurants and eateries. Buying local produce, eating local food and using local services ensure as much money as possible is retained within the local economy. Though sufficient calories will be provided by Secret Compass, you may wish to bring some of your own snacks to supplement the food provided and to help keep personal morale high.

Transport

International flights are not included. Once in Sudan, transfers between destinations will be made by minibus or 4x4 vehicle. Whilst in the desert, our trek will be on foot and by camel and each person will be allocated their own riding camel (you will not be obliged to handle your own camel).

Kit list

The Sudan Expedition Handbook contains a full recommended kit list. This online Handbook is provided to all potential teammates upon application to join this team. Secret Compass will supply tents and sleeping equipment. As a Secret Compass team member you get discounts at a number of specialist stores, the details of which are provided upon booking.

Getting ready for departure

The [Get Ready](#) section clarifies what you need to consider in advance of departure. It has advice on things like fitness, flights, insurance and kit.

Included

Included

- Professional Secret Compass expedition leader with full medical and communications kits.
- In-country Sudanese guides, support and vehicles.
- All accommodation throughout as described.
- All food (snacks and meals) and soft drinks from dinner on day 1 to breakfast on day 15.
- All transport as outlined in itinerary.
- Special permits and permissions if required.

Not included

- International flights to and from Khartoum.
- [Travel insurance](#) (obligatory).
- Visas as required.
- Tips to local guides (discretionary).
- Personal equipment (full kit list in the Handbook).
- Beverages and any costs of a personal nature.

Exped FAQ

On application to join this epic expedition to Sudan, potential teammates will receive a detailed Expedition Handbook. Here are some expedition-specific questions and our [general FAQ](#) will answer many other questions. Get in touch if your question remains unanswered.

Will there be phone signal or Internet?

There should be signal in Khartoum, however it is very unlikely that you will have signal in the desert. Your Secret Compass expedition leader will have a satellite phone and radios for emergency communications only.

Do I need to cover-up?

Women: Non-Muslim women are not expected to wear a veil or cover their heads, but should dress modestly and respect local customs and sensitivities.

All: Shorts are not appropriate for either male or female team members.

Can I arrive a day late?

Due to group transfers from the start and end of the trek, the start and end dates for this expedition are fixed.

Can we take photos?

Once in Sudan we will arrange all necessary permits for team members. This includes travel and photography permits. However, as in many countries, taking photos of government or military buildings or facilities is not advised and consideration should be taken when photographing people.

Can I charge all my electricals?

There will be no access to power once the trekking section begins. Please ensure that you are self-sufficient in terms of charging your appliances by bringing things like spare batteries, lightweight solar panels or power packs to avoid frustration.

Is alcohol allowed?

No. The sale and consumption of alcohol is illegal throughout Sudan and this prohibition applies to tourists as well.

I'm Israeli / I have an Israeli stamp in my passport – will I be able to visit Sudan?

Unfortunately, Israeli citizens will not be issued an Sudanese visa. Additionally, if your passport has an Israeli visa or Israeli entry/exit stamps you will not be allowed to enter Sudan.

Will my camera work in the heat?

Generally, cameras should not be that affected by the heat and dryness, but if it reaches over 45 degrees they might struggle (note that we do not expect temperatures this high in January). It is advised to keep your camera in its bag until you use it and don't keep in the direct sunlight for too long. The main problem is the sand itself: Grains can easily get into the lens systems, particularly compact cameras with zoom lenses. Ones with electronic lens covers are most at risk. The best cameras to use are sealed waterproof cameras which have no external working lenses so no sand can egress them. If using an SLR, then take care to prevent sand getting into a lens housing. Using Prime fixed focal length lenses can help. Take a small paintbrush, a puffer bottle or, even better, a compressed air canister (probably bought in-country if flying in) to blow away sand and grit from moving parts. Take care around the sensor and never wipe this if sand is on the sensor. Take particular care if the wind is blowing or the sand is very fine.

Will there be toilets or showers?

There will be no toilets or showers available during the trek. You should be prepared to duck behind the nearest sand dune 'al-fresco' and limit yourself to wet-wipe washes. Toilet paper is generally burned or packed out in sealed plastic bags. As we are carrying our own water into the desert here will not be enough to provide showers of any nature. Wet wipes are the way forward: and remember, you'll all be in the same position.

Is it safe to visit Sudan?

Sudan has been embroiled in a civil war in Darfur for several years and the UK Foreign Office advises against travel to certain parts of the country. However, we do not visit any of these areas. In fact, the Sudan is a place where violent crimes are rare and contrary to popular perception, the Sudanese are among the most hospitable and friendliest people in Africa. Whilst Sudan is one of the world's poorest countries, they welcome visitors and our trips generate much-needed income to the region. Secret Compass run a 24/7 operations room and you expedition leader will be carrying a full medical kit, and will have access to 4WD evacuation facilities in an emergency.

Dietary requirements

All meals are included on this trip. Please advise us on booking if you have any special dietary requirements.

How can I find out more?

Apply for this expedition team using the button on this page to receive your Expedition Handbook with fuller details. The Application page explains the joining process. Secret Compass is then on hand to answer any questions or to firm up your place on the team.