

I will never forget my first class which was about electricity. In my consistently failing attempt to understand the teacher, I was staring intensely at him to stay very concentrated. I must have seemed extremely interested in 'the plug', but in fact I only realized that he was talking about one when he pointed at a picture of it on the overhead projector. To take down some notes, I had to copy them down letter for letter from the girl next to me as I had no idea how to spell all those "technical" words like power point. To my surprise, the whole class was paying attention, or at least I thought they were as they were constantly asking questions and didn't talk when the teacher told them not to. My thoughts about continuing those days of sitting backwards talking to people about that day's gossip ended right there.

Somehow, I learned to adjust to this new environment. Slowly, the structured school system started to make sense to me. I went from being totally confused when trying to understand someone, to one of those chaotically chatting people. I learned to be familiar with all the rules of the uniform which used to be a complete confusion making me feel a number instead of a person. It surprised me that you can still be an individual while appearing to the outsider as indistinguishable. I felt home in

Australia, but Holland was still my home.

Two years later, I was staring at The Netherlands beneath me. In between the clouds, bits and pieces of the land were visible that was supposed to be my home country. When the plane descended out of the clouds, the neat grass fields with grazing cows and little canals came in sight. These tiny bits of fresh nature were surrounded by cities and grey highways jammed with cars which lay grim in the morning fog.

Cycling to school with my old friends was like I had never left. The buses still roared past us leaving about 30 centimeters in between and several cars honked at us as we went through the orange traffic light. By the time we got to school, our jeans were soaked from the drizzling rain and cars splashing waves of water onto us making our mascara turn into dark smudges under our eyes. We just laughed at each other wiping off the stains and sprinted up the stairs not to be late for our first class.

Days passed by as I visited friends, family and as I did all the things I hadn't been able to do anymore. I went from my old senior school to my best friend's school, to watching my cousin's hockey match and seeing my old hockey team, to rowing with some guys and ballroom

dancing like before. I saw family in my home town and on the other side of the country or they visited us. Days filled with seeing people and doing things, evenings of having a drink or catching up with those who were already at university, so that I'd return home early in the morning, in order to get up a few hours later to cycle with my friends to school.

Yet, it felt different. We had all spent two years in a completely different environment while growing up, which shapes our different responses. Everyone went about their lives in the same way and people looked the same, but when we looked at each other, they saw me as Australian and I saw them as Dutch. They weren't able to understand what I meant by certain things as they lacked the experience. On the other hand I couldn't always relate to them as I had gotten used to such different circumstances and forgotten about the old ones.

The last night of my stay in Holland, I cycled home from my best friend's house. The lamp posts spread a yellow light onto the deserted streets. The wind had settled down, so that I could see the reflection of the stars in puddles on the food path. The moon peeked through the clouds. I would miss it all, but knew it was better to go back to the other side of the world.

They say once you drink from the Nile River, Egypt is in your heart and soul forever. My husband's job as a geophysicist took us there in late 2001 from New Orleans, Louisiana in the United States. Our family enjoyed the four and a half years we lived in Cairo and will always fondly remember Egypt and it's people.



Whirling dervish dancer performing on a Nile River party boat.

### SEEING IS BELIEVING:

We lived south of Cairo in a vibrant suburb called New Ma'adi and our neighbours included both expatriates and Egyptians. Our neighborhood was a simple, tree-lined street with rows of "villas" (duplexes) whose carports and garages faced the street. Our house had two stories; pink marble floors, two balconies, a patio and a garden. The desert climate made the garden usable most months of the year since it was always warm and sunny. Our house was very convenient to shopping and school and many of Egypt's attractions, including the Giza Pyramids, were only twenty minutes away.

Most properties in Cairo come with a "boab", which loosely translated means doorman. Our boab, Rabia, acted as guard and gardener. He chased off unwanted solicitors and otherwise made sure our villa was secure. Rabia was both our boab and the neighborhood boab. He was everywhere all the time and had two helpers, usually younger relatives in need of a job. Rabia

# THE SENSORY EXPERIENCE OF EGYPT

JENNIFER GOODWIN

Jennifer Goodwin lives with her husband Erik and two children, Joseph and Kelly in Wassenaar, NL. She enjoys reading, bicycling and doing volunteer work in her spare time. Jennifer is a petroleum geologist but currently is busy with her expatriate lifestyle and family. Her family lived in Egypt from 2001 until 2006.

worried about us if he didn't see us for a day or two, helped us haul in groceries, sorted out small repairs on the villa, planted flowers in the garden to brighten it up and brought us flowers on Christmas. Rabia was helpful and always there.

### HEARING IS EDUCATIONAL:

Daily life in Egypt starts with the call to prayer before dawn. The call to prayer quickly blends with the sounds of everyday life: the flute player selling handcrafted flutes; the sounds of a rickety donkey cart making its way up the street; the molasses vendor yelling "Assal eswed, assal eswed!" in Arabic to sell his thick brown molasses syrup; the continual din of car and bus traffic; and the laughter of young people talking, yelling, and playing football in the street.

In a city of 15,000,000 people there is a variety of nightlife. If you wanted a loud party and lots of noise, downtown Cairo was the place to be. A few times, we ventured out to the clubs near the Nile Hilton and in Zamalek, but the loud, wild, Cairo nightlife was not for us. The party boats were fun, though, with the folkloric dancing, whirling dervish entertainment. The whirling dervish dancers are very athletic indeed! For quieter nights, nothing can compare to being out on the Nile River at sunset on a felucca. These picturesque sailboats have sailed the Nile since the Pharaoh's time.

Our children attended primary school at Cairo American College (CAC). The school was a hub of activity because of its huge playgrounds, two soccer fields and swimming pool. The grounds were used extensively for soccer, baseball, holiday crafts fairs and cultural events such as Egyptian Culture Day. Demographically, the school population was roughly 50% American, 35% Egyptian with many other nationalities represented including Canadians, British, Japanese and South Koreans. It was multi-cultural, academically rigorous, and socially fun. Our

children learned a lot at CAC and have fond memories of school and people they met. The teaching staff made learning fun for the children.

### TASTING IS DELICIOUS:

Nothing can beat the fruits and vegetables grown in the Nile River Valley for taste and freshness. The produce is picked daily, brought to the vegetable stand and purchased immediately. It was always fresh and tasty! We disinfected vegetables and fruit before eating them to avoid amoebic dysentery. Disinfecting became a chore that was automatic and I had a big bucket, lots of water, small disinfecting tablets and rubber gloves to protect my hands to do the job.

We also shopped at one of the world's oldest bazaars, El Khan Khalili. Food vendors there sold tamaaya. This fried, bean-puree patty is stuffed along with lettuce and tomato into delicious Egyptian bread. In other parts of the Middle East, tamaaya is called falafel. At the Khan Khalili, there also was a restaurant named after a famous Egyptian author, Naguib Mahfouz. This restaurant served delicious chicken shoarma sandwiches, tasty tahini and babaganoush dips and the famous Egyptian dessert Om Ali.

### SMELLING IN EGYPT:

Around noon every day the kitchens in our neighbourhood would come alive with the beginnings of the evening meal. These smells were pleasant and made my appetite soar. It inspired me to cook a lot while in Cairo and I enjoyed learning about and experimenting with different foods and spices of north Africa. I was particularly fond of the Arabian spice mixture for meat that contains allspice, cinnamon, nutmeg, cloves and ginger.

In addition to the fragrant smells of cooking, there was also the background smells of car exhaust, cooking fires and the cement factories south of Ma'adi. Cairo is a big congested city that

became even more congested during our stay there. While we were there, the economy improved and the tariff on cars was reduced so that the number of cars on the road increased. With this came additional air pollution and traffic congestion.

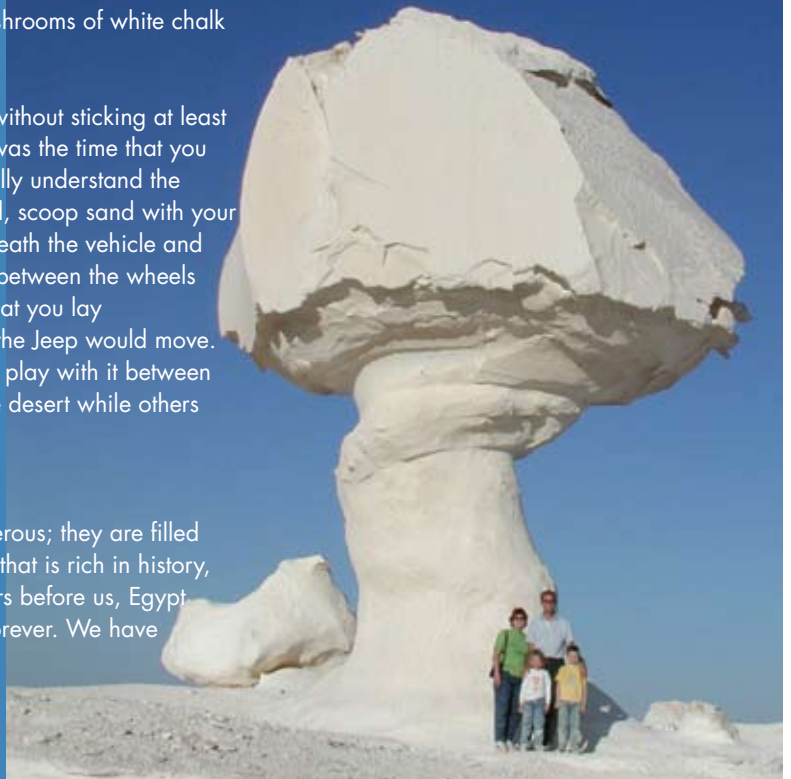
### TOUCHING IS DRY AND GRITTY:

My husband's favorite "leisure" activity was desert camping. It was a sandy and gritty experience but great fun too. With a four-wheel drive Jeep and friends, we made nearly 20 trips into the desert and took in some very diverse sights. Whale Valley, where ancient whalebones are found, was a favorite destination as were the ancient Roman ruins of Dimeh near the Fayoum Oasis. At Dimeh, you can see old bathhouses, a causeway, Roman arches and the typical mud brick construction. Of all our family trips, our favorite camping experience was in the White Desert where huge mushrooms of white chalk jut out of the desert.

No desert trip was complete without sticking at least one vehicle in the sand. This was the time that you came to feel the sand and really understand the desert. You would shovel sand, scoop sand with your hands, kick sand from underneath the vehicle and eventually lie out sand plates between the wheels and the sand (metal boards that you lay on top of the sand) and pray the Jeep would move. You could also sit in the sand, play with it between your fingers and marvel at the desert while others freed the four-wheel drive.

### CONCLUDING THOUGHTS:

Egyptians are warm and generous; they are filled with joy and live in a country that is rich in history, culture and religion. Like others before us, Egypt will be our hearts and souls forever. We have drunk from the Nile River.



Chalk "mushrooms" in White Desert, western Egypt.

When planning a trip, the last thing you want to think about is becoming ill, but depending on the destination, season, age, length of stay, health status and activities, there will be a risk, particularly for children. Read on to find out which are the most common travel health problems in the young and how to prevent them.

# TRAVEL HEALTH AND CHILDREN



## GENERAL PRE-TRAVEL HEALTH MEASURES

To reduce the risk of illness or injury abroad, both adults and children should consult a health-care provider, ideally 4-6 weeks before travelling. In general, an individualized assessment tailored to the specific risks will include evaluation of underlying medical problems, previous vaccinations, current medications and previous travel. During the pre-travel health visit, vaccinations should be reviewed with an update on routine vaccinations (recommended even if you do not travel) and recommendations on vaccinations to the specific travelling itinerary (e.g. hepatitis A, typhoid, yellow fever, rabies or Japanese encephalitis).

Adults and children older than 10 may consider taking a course in basic first aid (you can add CPR/resuscitation as well) prior to travel; it will be handy to have even at home.

Travellers are advised to check current travel notices for disease outbreaks and safety (you can visit [www.fco.gov.uk](http://www.fco.gov.uk) and [www.nathnac.org](http://www.nathnac.org)), health insurance cover and healthcare facilities on their destination. Safety statistics for airlines can be found at [www.aviation-safety.net](http://www.aviation-safety.net).

## CHILDREN'S TRAVEL HEALTH PROBLEMS

The most frequently reported health problems are diarrhoea and dehydration, motor vehicle (leading cause of death in children who travel), water-related accidents (second leading cause of death) and malaria. Injuries from insect and animal bites and sun exposure are also common.

## DIARRHOEA AND DEHYDRATION

Children and infants are at high risk for diarrhoea and other food- and waterborne diseases because of limited immunity and behaviour such as frequent hand-to-mouth contact. They can also become dehydrated more quickly than adults.

## PREVENTION AND TREATMENT

For young infants, breastfeeding is the best way to reduce the risk of food and waterborne illness. Use only purified water for drinking, preparing ice cubes, brushing teeth, and mixing infant formula and foods. Attention should be given to hand washing and cleaning pacifiers, teething rings, and toys that fall to the floor or are handled by others. An alcohol-based hand sanitizer can be used as a disinfecting agent.

## ASSESSMENT AND TREATMENT OF DEHYDRATION

The greatest risk to the child with diarrhoea and vomiting is dehydration. Fever or increased ambient temperature increases fluid losses and speeds dehydration. Medical attention is required for an infant or young child who has signs of moderate to severe dehydration, bloody diarrhoea; a fever higher than 38.5° C (101.5° F) or persistent vomiting.

Dehydration is best prevented and treated by using ORS (Oral re-hydration solution), offered by spoon in frequent small sips (1 teaspoon/5ml every 2-3 minutes) or by oral syringe, in addition to the usual food when possible. Foods that are high in sugars or fat should be avoided.

## MEDICATIONS

The use of anti-motility agents (e.g., Imodium®) in children younger than 2 years of age is not recommended and because of side effects they should be used with caution in older children. Anti-nausea medications are not routinely recommended. Data regarding the use of antibiotics for travellers' diarrhoea in children and available options are limited.

## PAEDIATRIC TRAVEL HEALTH KIT

- First Aid guide
- Thermometer
- Scissors and tweezers
- Bandages (different sizes), gauze pads
- Plasters, Hypoallergenic first aid tape
- Alcohol wipes
- Non-stick dressing (Melolin<sup>®</sup>)
- Latex-free disposable gloves
- Syringes for administration of oral medications
- Instant cold pack
- Povidone iodine (Betadine<sup>®</sup>) preferably swab sticks
- Aloe Vera gel for sunburn and scalds
- Saline drops
- 1 % Hydrocortisone cream
- Waterless Antiseptic hand gels
- Child safe Antiseptic wipes
- Paediatric paracetamol and ibuprofen
- ORS packets
- Sunscreen
- Insect repellent
- Nappy rash cream
- Antibiotic cream
- Water proof ground sheet to play outside

### *If appropriate:*

Baby formula and sterilizing equipment  
Medications specific the child e.g. Epipen,  
asthma medication (copies of all prescriptions  
should be carried, including the generic names  
for medications) or according to destination e.g.  
antimalarials

## MALARIA

Malaria is one of the most life-threatening diseases affecting children travelers. Children with malaria are at increased risk for severe complications, including shock, seizures, coma, and death. Initial symptoms of malaria in children (chills, fever, sweating, irritability) may mimic many other common causes of febrile illness and therefore may result in delayed diagnosis and treatment. If going to a region where there is the risk of malaria follow your doctor instructions for medications that should be taken to prevent malaria.

## INSECT BITES PROTECTION

Protection against mosquitoes, ticks, and biting flies is an important part of prevention against malaria, yellow fever, and other diseases for which no other prophylaxis is available, such as dengue fever. Outdoors, children should wear as much protective clothing (long sleeves and long pants) as they can tolerate. They should sleep in rooms with air conditioning or screened

windows or under bed nets. Mosquito netting should be used over infant carriers. Many species of mosquitoes bite between dusk and dawn; try being indoors during these hours. From all the products tested for repellent activity DEET seems to have the highest efficacy and has been evaluated regarding potential toxicity. Most botanical products provide relatively limited or no protection. The American Academy of Pediatrics supports the recommendation that DEET concentrations up to 30% can be used on children. DEET should not be used on infants younger than 2 months of age.

Precautions when using insect repellents:

- Apply repellents only to exposed skin and or clothing.
- Never use repellents over cuts, wounds or irritated skin.
- An adult should apply it to his or her own hands and then rub them on the child. Avoid the child's eyes and mouth and apply sparingly around the ears.
- Do not apply repellent to children's hands.