MOUYADA&TSUKARETA

ISSUE 01

EGYPT in 2006

Ethnography on Fatigue

A Beginning

It had been a long, long journey. Finally, it felt like it was coming to an end.

For so long, I'd been searching – how to live each day, what to eat, what to laugh at, who to meet, what work to do, what to wear, what kind of family I might belong to.

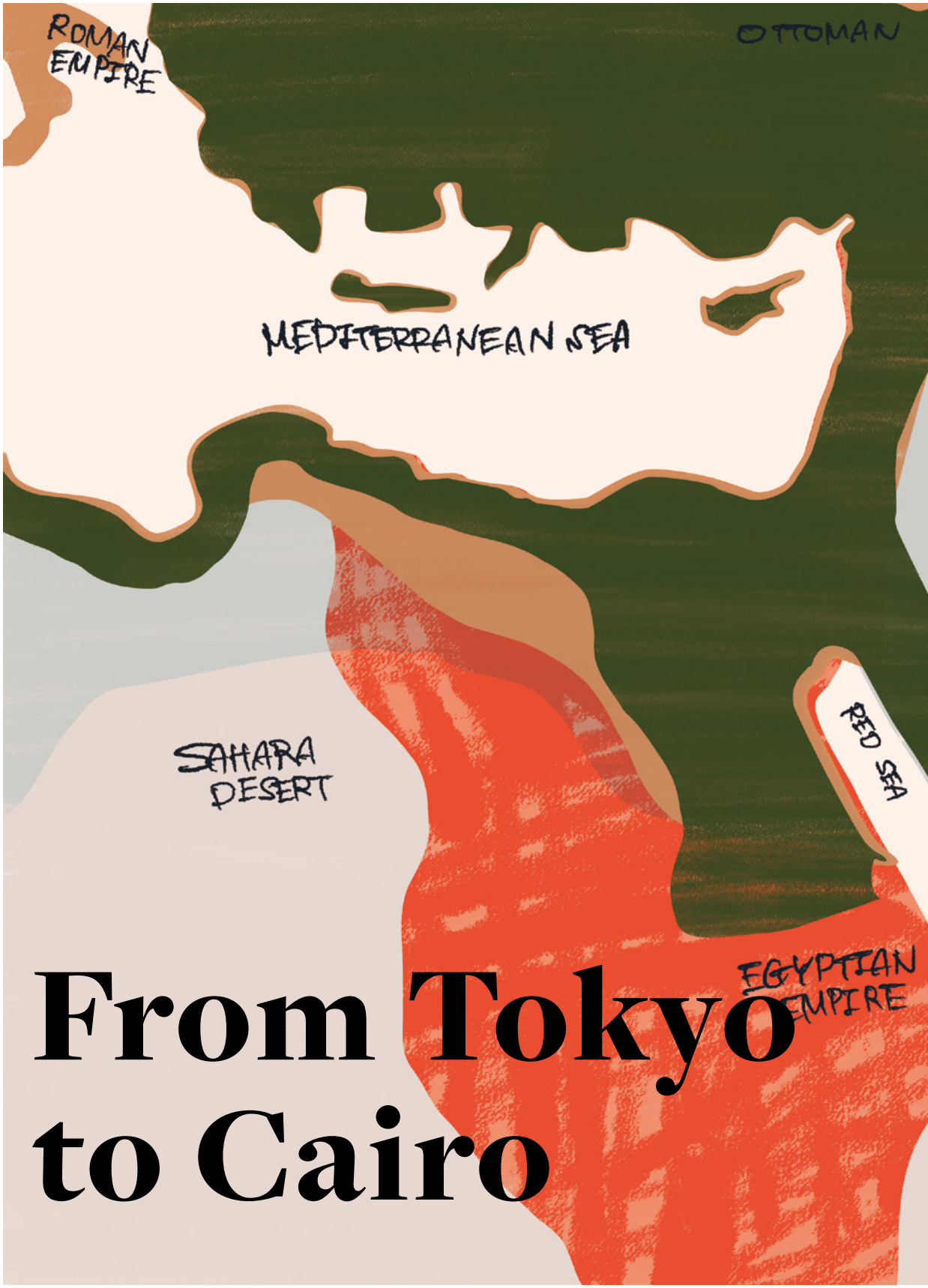
I never really knew what to do. And when my feelings grew too much to bear, I escaped from Japan, hoping the distance might ease my restless mind – even though I knew it wouldn't.

I didn't have a plan. I just wandered unfamiliar streets, as if the answers might reveal themselves along the way.

And now, I think I'll try to put them on paper.

Even though I thought I was looking, I was never really seeing.

The first city was Egypt.



From Tokyo to Cairo


EMPIRE
CASPIAN SEA
UMAYYAD DYNASTY
PERSIAN GULF

August 2006 — The Journey Begins

Day 1

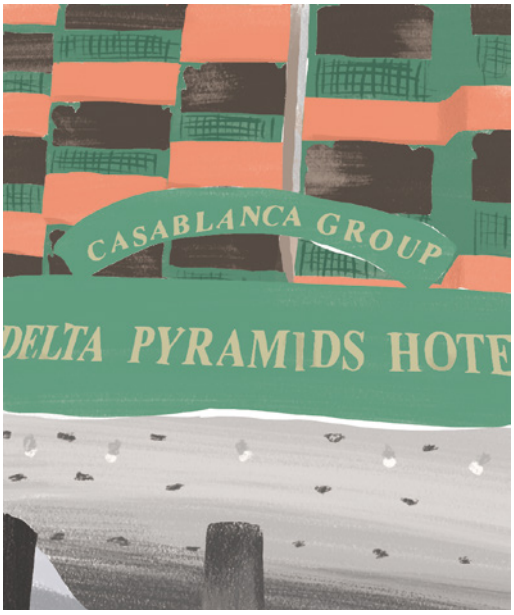
We arrived at Cairo International Airport on September 8, 2006, after a 20-hour journey via Kansai and Dubai. The desert heat hit us as we stepped off the plane, our bodies still chilled from hours of air-conditioning.

We boarded a shuttle to a simple arrival hall adorned with Arabic motifs. Seeing Arabic script in its native context made my heart race.

Near the exit, I spotted a man holding a sign: "The Student Volunteer Program in Egypt: Heritage Conservation and International Exchange." As instructed, we exchanged money, bought visas, and collected our luggage.

Outside, taxi drivers clutched tiny Nokia phones, barking into them. These rugged black devices—no folding, no emojis, just voice—were rare in Japan, but ruled the global market at the time.

As soon as a traveler stepped outside, drivers dropped their phones and shouted "TAXI!! TAXI!!", scrambling to claim customers. The taxis—battered four-door sedans with broken AC and open windows—blended into the heat. Horns blared constantly, like breathing.



The wave of touts surged toward us with the same intensity as the desert wind. Just then, Mr. Mustafa told us the bus had arrived.

There were two guides: Mustafa, who met us at the terminal, and Mr. Islam, already on board. Both spoke English and Japanese, with calm, kind manners.

We pushed through the crowd. "Mustafa" is another name for the Prophet Muhammad, common across the Islamic world—but what stayed with us wasn't his name, but the gentle arc of his eyebrows. We were all instantly charmed.

We boarded the bus and began the 33-kilometer ride to our accommodation.

Cairo is one of the oldest cities in the world, home to an ancient civilization. It lies along the lower reaches of the Nile River. Each summer, the Nile floods, and its waters—along with the abundant sunlight near the river's mouth—nourish the land for agriculture. This is the place Herodotus is said to have called "the gift of the Nile."

Dynasties have risen here one after another, building cities, cultivating culture, and engaging in exchanges with other civilizations. I chose to major in Asian history,

including Egyptian history—though looking back, I'm not sure if there was a clear reason for it. It just seemed to happen. That year marked the 25th anniversary of the Mubarak regime.

As we drove down the highway, half-built houses dotted both sides of the road. The construction seemed almost improvised—walls shaped by hand with bricks, mud, and iron rods. Each boxy building had flat roofs and square windows, stacked three or four stories high. For some reason, rebar sticks jutted up from every rooftop—yet people had already begun living in them. Laundry hung in bundles from the windows.

From the chill of the air-conditioned bus, I watched the workers move slowly under the sun, wondering how these structures stood at all.

We arrived at Delta Pyramids Hotel. The exterior had bold red and green stripes. Each balcony folded like pleats. The marble entrance was cool and dim. Bellhops in red uniforms welcomed us.

Inside the room I shared with Arae, we found a towel shaped into a swan on the bed—a small but charming touch. Still, there were small issues: a crack in the glass by the sink, no hot water in the shower... The plumbing seemed slightly unreliable. I stared at the decorative stars on the wall, wondering how this counted as four stars.

Later that evening, those who had signed up for the optional tour left to see the Pyramid Sound and Light Show.

Car horns blared endlessly. People shouted in the streets. Even with the windows shut tight, the city's clamor seeped in.

I had been curious about the Middle East—I wanted to see it for myself. I remembered when 9/11 happened. Our politics and economics teacher brought up the Middle Eastern issues in class, and we wrote a report over summer break. Adults called it a sensational event, but the news always called everything sensational; I could no longer tell the difference. What struck me most was the fact that there were people defying America—or that neighboring countries were locked in open, long-term conflicts.

In my world, adults avoided confrontation, sidestepping strong opinions. Decisions were made by sensing the majority's will. We chased Tokyo's trends, crammed into inescapable rush-hour trains, and assumed that Tokyo's mainstream represented "correctness."

My hometown's culture felt like it either didn't exist or was something inferior I had to accept. I had never questioned this before. But here, for the first time, a quiet question arose inside me. I couldn't say exactly what it was, but something felt worth questioning.

Cairo overflows with people. Horns sound from every car. I can't tell whether traffic lights exist or not. Drivers honk constantly—not as warnings, but as declarations of their presence. People honk as naturally as they breathe and call out loudly to one another.

This, I thought, is the soundscape of Cairo.

Desert heat. Taxi touts. Cairo's soundscape.

Day 2

The next day, we headed to the Pyramids of Giza. As we stepped off the bus, the sky was faded white with dust, and the sun poured down without pause. The pyramids stood before us—suddenly, plainly.

I had imagined ancient ruins to be distant and solemn. But they were just ten minutes from our hotel. It felt as if they were as close as Disneyland is to the Disneyland Hotel.

We slathered on sunscreen from Japan, wore long sleeves and hats, and carried disposable cameras. The guidebook had warned: compact digital cameras might break or get stolen unless dust-proof. I followed that advice without a second thought.

We rode camels and took photos where all four pyramids fit in the background. The camel handler wore a rose-gray galabeya and a white cap wrapped in a red-and-white scarf.

The saddle was decorated with textiles that looked more Berber than Egyptian to me. The camel—a pale gray dromedary—had a long, graceful neck and a languid gaze. Sometimes it opened its large mouth, as if to threaten.

In the 7th century, dromedaries were introduced when the Sassanid Persians invaded Byzantine Egypt. Suited to heat and flat terrain, they spread across North Africa even before the Arab expansion around the Mediterranean—a historical shift noted by Fernand Braudel in *The Mediterranean*, where he traced the unseen lives behind history's grand narratives.

We boarded the bus again and approached the base of the pyramid. The Pyramids of Giza—ancient stone structures in the endless desert—were the same color as the sand around them.

On TV, they'd always looked towering. But compared to Shibuya's skyscrapers, they felt surprisingly low. I couldn't help feeling a little disappointed.

Still, we smiled for the camera—Kie, Yoshimi, Miki, Mustafa, Islam, and me. Mustafa showed us the "pyramid pose": thumbs and index fingers forming a triangle. We climbed the stones, each about 1.5 meters wide, and posed in three tiers. Mustafa juggled six cameras, checking each before taking a shot. Being a guide was no easy job.

Tourists around us were also snapping photos, hoping to show them to someone someday. Maybe that's a small kind of prayer. Maybe no one will ever see them. Maybe no one will care, even if you take hundreds. Still, we keep pressing the shutter, as if to seal away that creeping doubt.

In Japan, we're used to phones with cameras. Ever since the term *sha-mail* (photo mail) was coined, new models with built-in cameras have come out one after another. We use our 2.2-inch LCD screens to snap pictures and send them by email or upload them to mixi right away. If a photo turns out bad, we just delete it. So we shoot casually, without hesitation. Here, I hardly see any camera phones.

By contrast, I couldn't even remember the last time I'd used a disposable camera. They felt like relics of the Showa era. I hadn't touched one since childhood—souvenir shops, family pools. Now I'd bought an *Utsurundesu* (a Japanese disposable camera) for myself. Just over 1,000 yen. You can't preview, can't shoot endlessly. You pay to develop them. You can only share them in person. They're wildly inconvenient—a tool, really, for emergencies.

After taking photos, Mustafa led us into the Pyramid of Khufu. The entrance was a narrow opening—about 50 cm wide and 140 cm high—just big enough for one person. Inside, a dim passage sloped downward, more plank than stairs. Each step felt uncertain.

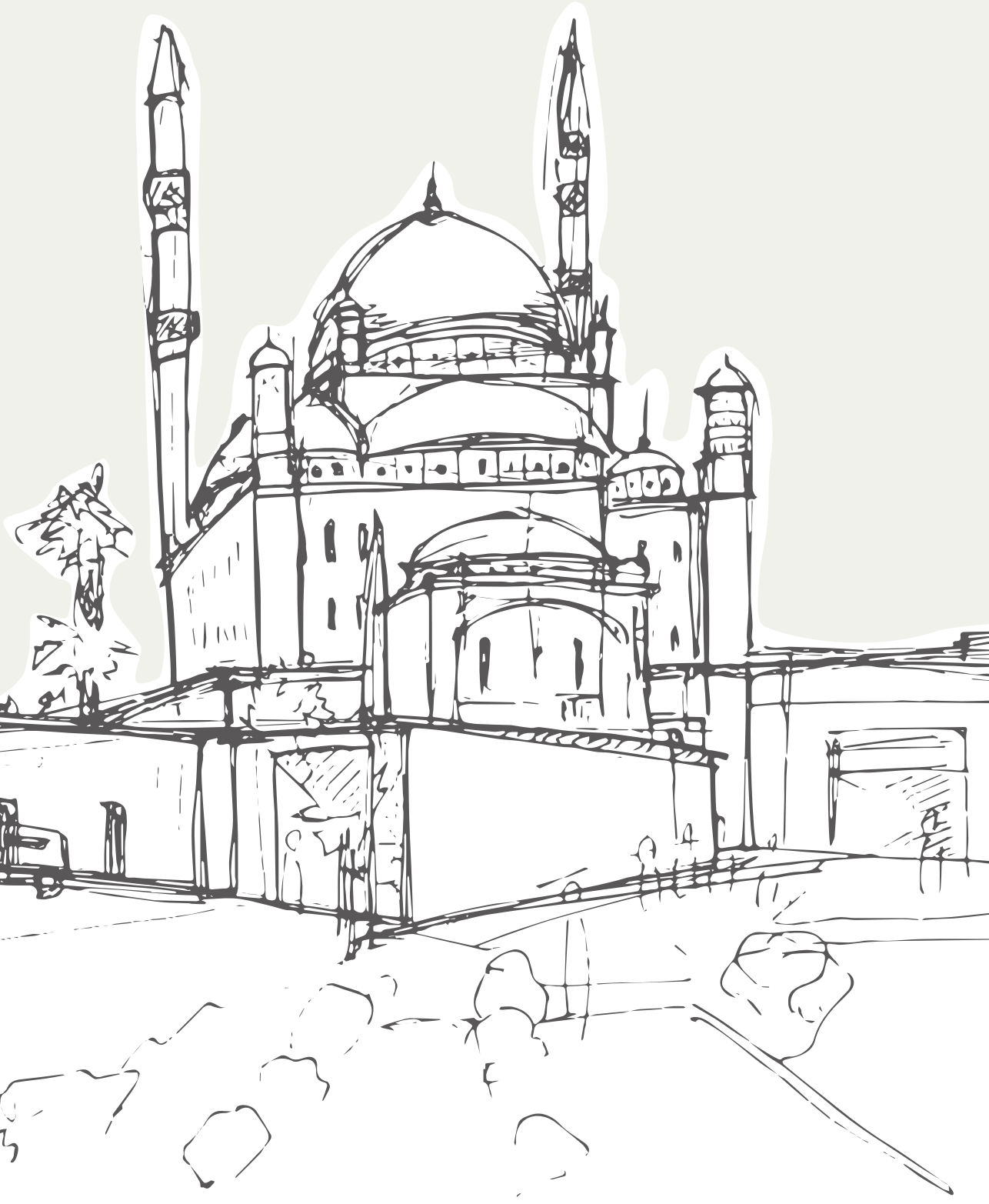
We descended in single file, like a fire drill. Tall tourists stooped awkwardly. It was hot, cramped, and airless. I remember feeling breathless—little else.

Eventually, the line halted. We had arrived at an empty chamber. There was, quite literally, nothing inside. Everyone stood silently, gazing around as if expecting something more. But there was nothing, and I was left with a quiet sense of disappointment, questioning why we had exerted ourselves to come here.

The Giza Necropolis includes four main pyramids:

Khufu, Khafre, Menkaure, and the smaller Queen's Pyramids. Only Khafre retains part of its original casing stones at the top, giving it a pale crown. These were built around 2500 BCE, during Egypt's Old Kingdom.

Pyramids are studied through archaeology—painstaking



The pyramid doesn't need a photo. But we do.
The pyramid says nothing. We fill the silence.

excavation over months. I remembered Professor Yamaguchi once saying such work could cause depression. His word resurfaced unexpectedly as we made our way through the site.

We climbed back out, squeezed through the same narrow path, and emerged into sunlight. Mustafa handed out plastic bags—in line with the tour's preservation efforts. There wasn't much trash, so I filled mine with desert sand, thinking I'd take it home as a souvenir.

Our next stop was the Sphinx. It indeed bore the head of a human and the body of a lion. Compared to the pyramids, it had a sharper, stranger presence. Just as I had seen on television, a KFC stood not far from the Sphinx's nose.

Kie and I decided to pose for a photograph, each pretending to kiss the Sphinx on its cheeks. We handed the camera to Yoshimi. Peering through the viewfinder, Yoshimi instructed us to move closer together. But Kie and I were already so near that we could feel each other's warmth, almost too close for comfort. The resulting photograph captured two awkward profiles beside the Sphinx.

As we returned to the parking area, souvenir stalls lined the path like an open-air market. Shopkeepers called out to us as we passed, using Japanese phrases they had picked up to appeal to tourists: "Yamamoto-yama!" and "Mōkarimakka?"

Back in Cairo, we visited the Egyptian Museum. The ceilings were high, the floors pale stone, the air still and dusty. Artifacts filled the space, many with little or no explanation. Even statues well-known from textbooks were placed with surprising casualness.

Among them were rows of small, soot-darkened bundles labeled simply: "mummy." Children's mummies, perhaps newborns. A chill ran through me. The informal way they were displayed left a strange sense of guilt. Perhaps there are simply too many artifacts to explain everything. It felt less like a museum and more like a storeroom

It was startling—that a country once capable of building such massive, complex structures as the pyramids; a land that had welcomed the Roman Empire, the Islamic world, countless dynasties; a crossroads of so many cultures and peoples—could leave a museum in such a state. And yet, perhaps such casualness comes not from carelessness, but from a deeper sense of time.

I've never known where it's okay to stop. I'm always afraid of the regret that might come if I cut corners and get it wrong. So I keep pushing myself—again and again.

Next, we attended a papyrus demonstration. In a marble-walled, windowless room cooled by air conditioning, papyrus stalks stood at the end of a long table. The presenter peeled away the green outer layer to reveal the white core, soaked and sliced it into strips, then layered and hammered them into sheets. Once dried, the papyrus paper was complete.

The walls were entirely covered with papyrus paintings—portraits of Tutankhamun, pyramids, scenes from Egyptian mythology, and Arabic calligraphy. The works were large—surprisingly so, for souvenirs.

Afterward, Mustafa took us to a perfume shop. Delicate glass bottles lined the storefront, the air heavy with the scent of roses—the typical fragrance of Egyptian perfume. I wasn't fond of it, but others enjoyed sampling bottles and chatting with the shopkeeper. Still, I felt a quiet pressure to buy something "Egyptian." I chose a small bottle of rose perfume in red glass.

About ten centimeters tall, it resembled a wine glass: a rounded chamber atop a slender base, sealed with a lid holding an applicator rod. Each cut-glass bottle was slightly different—no two exactly alike.

With our purchases complete, we headed next to the Mosque of Muhammad Ali, located southeast of the Egyptian Museum in the Citadel district. Its domes were stacked in three tiers between two pointed towers. I remembered reading in class, on a drowsy afternoon, that mosques have minarets from which the call to prayer, the adhan, is sung. So this was a minaret, I thought. Simply following English texts hadn't made the connection clear, but standing before it, something clicked.

Mustafa, standing near the driver's seat on the bus, explained, "It's Friday prayer time, so we can't go inside the mosque. We'll have to view it from the outside. Is that all right?" Exhausted from sightseeing since morning, we nodded silently. I snapped a photo through the window. Still, I felt a twinge of regret, wondering if we might have been able to go inside had we skipped the papyrus or perfume stop.

Later at the hotel, as we settled in, I noticed a melodic sound threaded through the city's car horns. It was the adhan. Hearing it after seeing the minaret, I finally connected the sound to its source. Without seeing it firsthand, I wouldn't have understood. In my mind, I had imagined the adhan as a quiet, sacred chant. But in reality, it was loud and amplified, broadcast across the city by loudspeakers—almost like a kind of noise. And it happened five times a day, filling the streets with its call.

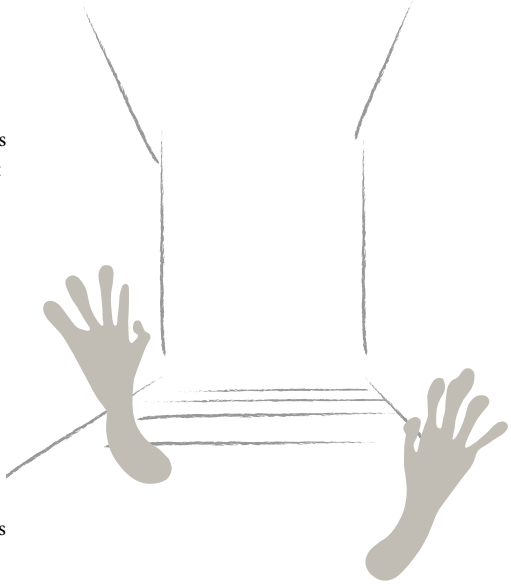
Day 3

At breakfast, the waiter Muhammad snuck bites of food and winked at us. I was still cautious about what I ate in Egypt—partly because of something Karima once said. A popular Arabic instructor from Egypt, Karima had told us half-jokingly, "The Nile's water is the best in the world. Even if food poisoning breaks out on a world cruise, Egyptians are fine. Their daily life toughens them up." Her words stuck with me. I'd been avoiding raw vegetables, fresh fruit, and anything with ice outside the hotel. But the restrictions were starting to wear me down.

We took a bus to Alexandria, a Mediterranean city about 200 km from Cairo. Mustafa mentioned that several people were already showing signs of stomach trouble. Karima's words were starting to feel all too real.

The three-hour ride was a blur. I was preoccupied with a breakup—someone I'd just started seeing had ended things a few days before. What does it even mean to build trust with another person? His words echoed in my head. Between the heartbreak, the air-conditioning, and my effort to avoid getting carsick, I arrived in Alexandria completely drained.

We stopped first at Pompey's Pillar, then visited the Kom el-Shoqafa catacombs—communal underground tombs used between the 1st and 3rd centuries, during Roman rule. A stone staircase led down through bedrock, wide enough to walk upright. As I descended, cool air wrapped around me.



My vision vanished. Ghosts? Maybe. Exhausted? For sure. I was fine with it.

Halfway down, everything ahead suddenly turned white. Completely white—I couldn't see a thing. Yet I felt no panic at all. I wasn't even scared. I simply thought, "Ah, they got me. I can't see. Well, that's just how it is," and found it almost amusing. I was already worn down, and we were in a catacomb, after all; it didn't feel strange to think something might have slipped in. I called out to our tour group nearby. Miki took my hand, and I traced the jagged wall with the other as we made our way back up.

We rested along the seawall by the coast. After a few minutes, my vision slowly began to return. Mustafa's face came into view, his brows drawn with concern. Behind me, the deep indigo of the Mediterranean stretched out, wind tearing across the surf. A couple picnicked nearby. A girl in white walked the breakwater. The landscape was nothing like Cairo.

During the lunch break, I stopped by the restroom. At tourist sites, toilet attendants often stood by the entrance, rubbing their fingers to signal for a tip. Flustered, I fumbled for coins. The unfamiliar setup already made me nervous, and this extra step added to the pressure. In return, attendants handed out toilet paper and kept the area clean. For some reason, they all looked stern.

Back at the hotel, we entered through glass doors facing King Faisal Street. A red carpet led inside, past tall potted plants. Cool air greeted us. The cream marble floor extended to the reception desk, where four clocks marked TOKYO, LONDON, NEW YORK, and CAIRO. Below them, a wall of cubbyholes held the room keys.

Next to reception was a souvenir shop. I wandered in to pass time and was greeted by Ahmad, the shopkeeper. He had round, friendly eyes, a gray-speckled mustache, and wore oval glasses. When he smiled, his perfectly white teeth formed a neat crescent shape. Before long, I found myself saying hello to him whenever I passed.

As the sun set, Mustafa and Islam saw us off, and we took taxis to a Nile dinner cruise. It was our first time in an Egyptian taxi. I rode with Arae in a battered yellow Toyota, clearly a secondhand car. Though taxis have meters and fares are supposed to vary by distance, the meters rarely work. This meant we had to negotiate the fare beforehand. Mustafa had already told us the going rate.

The driver honked constantly. Wind rushed in through the open windows. He cheerfully asked where we were from. When the driver in the next taxi called out, he shouted a reply back. No one seemed to be paying attention to traffic lights, and it was a mystery how they weren't crashing into one another. We simply entrusted our lives to the taxi. The ride took about twenty minutes, but by the time we arrived, we were completely exhausted—despite having done nothing but sit there.

We reached the Nile and handed the fare through the driver's window, just as Mustafa had advised. Somehow, we had survived the life-or-death taxi ride. The other tour members arrived safely too. At the pier, behind a curved white metal railing, the cruise ship *MIS AQUARIUS* was docked—about 50 meters long, with guest rooms below and a deck above. These cruises, run by hotel groups, offered dinner, belly dancing, and Sufi performances.

Inside, a buffet of unfamiliar Egyptian dishes stretched across the tables in dim lighting. I chose only what looked thoroughly cooked. Around a hundred guests had boarded. A small stage stood at the center, where music and dance unfolded as we ate.

The first time I saw belly dancing was at Zakuro, a Turkish restaurant in Nishi-Nippori run by Ari. The professors of the Asian History department traditionally held the welcome dinner for new students there. Guests sat on carpets in a circle, shoes off, eating shared dishes. Several times a week, a belly dancer performed in the center, and under Ari's enthusiastic and persistent urging, delivered in fluent Japanese, the audience often ended up dancing too. It was a lively place where you could end up belly dancing with strangers sitting next to you.

I thought I knew what beauty was. But do I really?

In Japan, belly dancing is often seen as a form of fitness, especially for slimming the waist. The dancer at Zakuro also had a slender figure—the kind of ideal body shape praised in Japan, where slenderness is upheld as a near-sacred standard.

But when a Palestinian friend showed me how she danced, I realized that belly dancing isn't about shaking the belly—it's about how the flesh of the belly moves, how it ripples and sways. According to her, the fuller the body, the more sensual it is.

Until then, I had only known the standard that prized a slim waist. But this was entirely different. Something shifted, even if only faintly. In that context, a thin waist looked almost fragile. I couldn't even find the right words to describe what I was seeing. But the movement of the belly itself started to seem genuinely beautiful to me.

The dancer on the boat, too, swayed her belly with grace, allure, and confidence.

Later, a man dressed in neon yellow-green and pink began spinning in place. It was a Sufi dance—just like the photos in world history textbooks. I knew it involved spinning, but until I saw it with my own eyes, I hadn't realized just how much spinning it actually entailed. That spinning—something I thought I understood—looked completely different when it unfolded right in front of me.

They say "seeing is believing," but maybe it's not just about confirming what's true. Maybe it's about the urge to share something we've seen. What do we really mean when we say we know something, or that we've seen it before? When we share something we've witnessed, what exactly are we trying to communicate?

I started to feel that the desire to "know" might not be about the thing itself, but about the act of sharing it with someone else.

After the dinner cruise, Arae and I went out to buy bottled water. "It's cheaper at the nearby kiosk," Takkun had said.

The city of Cairo at night felt hazy, almost like dawn. The kiosk was narrow, with shelves of spices and snacks, and stacks of bottled water wrapped in plastic. Among the Arabic-labeled bottles were a few familiar brands like Evian and Volvic. We asked the shopkeeper, a quiet man, for the price. I decided to buy a 1.5-liter bottle. I spread out my Egyptian coins on my palm and tried to match the amount he had said.

Even a small purchase in a new country can feel nerve-wracking. You don't want to be taken advantage of, but at the same time, you can't do anything without someone's help. The shopkeeper patiently indicated the right coins, and I managed to complete the transaction without trouble. I said "Shukran" as I left, feeling a quiet warmth rise in my chest.

On the way back, we stopped by the Meridien Hotel—Takkun wanted to exchange some money. The red carpet in the entrance lobby was plush and soft underfoot, and a chandelier sparkled overhead. This was clearly a grand, upscale hotel.

While we waited, I borrowed the restroom. It looked familiar—ordinary, even. Though I'd only been away from Japan for three days, the sight filled me with sudden relief. I remembered how, sitting on a toilet seat at Dubai Airport, I was startled by how high it was—subtly but clearly revealing the height difference.

Once we finished exchanging money, we headed back to the hotel. Families were out for evening strolls—some with school-age children, others carrying toddlers. Perhaps people in Cairo go out at night to avoid the daytime heat.

Teenage street vendors wove between cars, selling tissues and small toys from full baskets. No one waited for traffic lights; instead, people crossed using eye contact and gestures. We followed their lead, doing our best to keep up.

Donkeys hauled produce, camels lounged by the roadside, and mounted police rode by. People sat casually along the curb, chatting—some even picnicking beside the busy three-lane road. The streets of Cairo welcomed everything, embracing it all. Yes, open. With all its roughness, looseness, and chaos—this city was open.

In this place, the rules were unwritten, the rhythm shared.
We followed the people, and the city followed no rules.

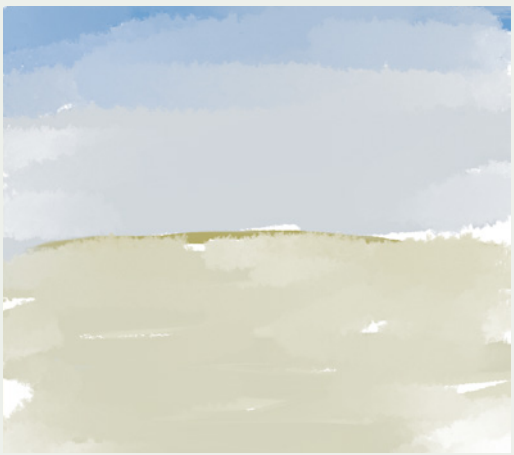
In the emptiness of the desert. Unbound. Undone. Unafraid.

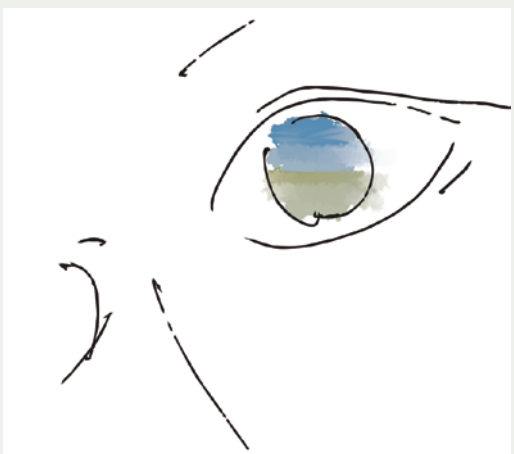
Day 4

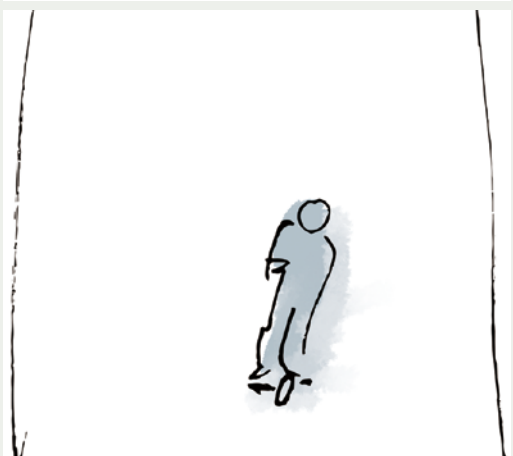
We headed to Dahshur, Memphis, and Saqqara—an hour by bus. Apparently, these pyramids predate those at Giza. I had vaguely assumed there was only one pyramid. Mustafa explained from the front: the Black Pyramid, the Red Pyramid, the Bent Pyramid. I listened, staring through the blue-tinted bus window. But no matter how much explanation was given, they were all just triangular prisms in the sand under a blazing sun. Why see more?

I was already growing bored of these massive structures, once again sinking into a restless tangle of thoughts, worn down. In university, I had started trying to live "properly" in human society—thinking I'd need to fit in at work, at office parties, at karaoke outings with colleagues. I figured I should correct my personality to prepare for that near future. But the result was disastrous: I became utterly disheartened by my inability to get along smoothly with others. No matter how hard I tried, I never quite fit. In some places I was pushed out. In others, I blended in without effort—but feared being cast out again. I longed to lean on someone, yet I feared betrayal. My thoughts looped endlessly in my head.

We arrived at Dahshur. When I stepped off the bus, I was struck speechless. The sunlight poured down, just as hot as ever, straight onto my face. And yet, a chill swept through me from the inside. There was nothing. The







ground stretched endlessly to the hazy horizon—yet still, nothing. No people, no plants, no buildings. I had never seen emptiness like this before.

How—how exhilarating it was. All the tangled human relationships, all the worries that had been tying my thoughts in knots, felt suddenly trivial—things I could just cut away. I thought: maybe outer space feels like this. Free. Unbound.

A sadness so deep it was joyful welled up inside me, and I felt I might cry. Cold, cruel, yet overflowing with joy. Though the other tour participants must have been nearby, I felt as if I were standing utterly alone. I heard nothing. It was perfectly silent.

I didn't take any pictures. I couldn't find anything to focus the lens on. There was nothing to frame. Instead, I just wanted to remember it with my whole body. That felt like the only way to record it. And I thought: I can come back here someday. If things ever get too hard, this place will save me. It was a space so overwhelming, it felt like it might swallow me whole.

The sandy ground gave softly beneath my soles. When I lifted my gaze, the pale brown earth stretched out to the ends of the horizon. Half the blue sky was hazed over with dust. The sun beamed down from directly overhead, unfiltered by clouds. There were no trees, no buildings—nowhere for sound to echo. When the wind blew, fine grains of sand drifted gently downwind, quickly erasing the footprints of those who had walked ahead.

There was no path. How had the merchants of long ago ever found their way through this place? Where did they find the courage to head toward whatever lay beyond?

It felt like another world entirely. I couldn't bring myself to walk. All I could do was stand there, stunned, rooted to the spot.

We entered the Red Pyramid, its cross-section shaped like an isosceles triangle. After that, we visited the Bent Pyramid, then moved on to Memphis to see the colossal statue of Ramses II, lying on its back inside a building. We viewed it from a second-floor balcony. The room was dusty and still. We picked up trash again, though there was barely anything left to collect.

Mustafa then took us to a carpet school in Saqqara. Inside the marble-walled room, it was cool and dim. Though there were rectangular windows, almost no sunlight came through—perhaps to keep out the heat. Colorful carpets hung on the walls and were layered across the floor. Workers wove them by hand on large wooden frames. Downstairs, more carpets were stacked, and other tourists were negotiating purchases. None of us students bought anything.

Just when I thought we were finally heading back to the hotel, the bus came to a sudden stop. Mustafa said it was a break. Under a wide-branched tree shading the bare white earth, a few locals were sitting on a small mat. They handed Mustafa a handful of small fruits, which he passed to us. They were dried dates, commonly eaten in Egypt for their high nutritional value. The one I tried was intensely sweet—it reminded me of the raisins in the dry curry I couldn't eat back in kindergarten. That same cloying sweetness rose in my throat. While others seemed to enjoy theirs, I couldn't finish mine. I just held it quietly in my hand.

They were also selling small souvenirs. Whenever we visited a shop like that, Mustafa would say, "It's run by my brother," as a way of recommending it. There seemed to be 'brothers' everywhere. I wondered how he could call so many people family. Maybe they weren't actually related—maybe he just said so to make us feel at ease.

His world is full of brothers. I'm not sure how many are true.

Back at the hotel, I browsed the souvenir shop in the lobby. As usual, Ahmad greeted me warmly. We chatted a bit—where I'd been, how long I was staying. Then he suddenly showed me a photo of his daughter, Sara. She looked about ten: sharp, cheerful, and full of the same friendly charm as her father.

"You should come visit our home sometime," he said. I was curious, but unsure if it was really okay to visit someone's home in a foreign country. I smiled and replied vaguely, "I'll check my schedule," before moving on.

DAY 5

Between lamps and bargains, a marketplace pulses with centuries of breath.

At dawn, I looked out the hotel window and saw a street-cleaning vehicle slowly passing by, its two large rotating brushes scrubbing the road with water. Trash lining the roadside disappeared in its wake. Though I hardly ever saw people using trash bins in Egypt, there seemed to be a genuine care for cleanliness—a curious contrast.

Mustafa picked us up as usual, and we headed to Khan el-Khalili, Cairo's oldest souk. Near Al-Hussein Mosque, many people sat along the walls and sidewalks. One participant, nicknamed "Leader," was sitting hunched over on the steps of a nearby building—likely from food poisoning. Moments later, Mustafa returned with a white cup of coffee from somewhere. He squeezed a lemon into it and handed it to him. Coffee and lemon—it struck me as an incredibly intense remedy. It's fascinating how folk medicine varies from place to place.

Six students from Cairo University's Japanese language department were waiting—this was the second theme of our trip: cultural exchange. Mustafa introduced them. Four of the women wore hijabs in olive green, coffee brown, or Egyptian blue—silky, sheer, and elegant.

I'd read that hijabs are meant to hide hair, but these women looked like they were adding something instead: a quiet confidence, a daily ritual of color. One woman didn't wear one—she told me she was Christian. We admired the others so much, we decided to buy scarves ourselves.

We entered Khan el-Khalili through a narrow alley by a café. The souk was dimly lit, the shops packed from floor to ceiling: pyramid ornaments, stuffed camels, layered beads, shishas, mannequins in purple and blue kaftans. Above us hung straw-like spheres on metal scaffolding. Caught in the flow of buyers and sellers, we let ourselves drift along.

In Cairo, most shops don't display price tags—you have to speak to the shopkeeper. Even when prices are shown, they're often written in Arabic, which I couldn't read despite a year of language classes.

The university students helped us choose scarves and negotiated with shopkeepers. One woman in our group looked uneasy about the price—it was a tourist shop, where prices varied. I bought a white scarf with a subtle sheen and a woven rose pattern.

The shopkeeper chatted with a neighbor; everyone wore jeans. Shelves overflowed with lamps and perfume bottles, the air thick with spice. At the entrance were tambourines—riq—with jingles and mother-of-pearl inlay. A student asked about them, and the shopkeeper said the skin was from a dog. I wasn't sure if it was true, but the texture was rough and slightly thick. It seemed like it could make an interesting piece of interior decor.

After walking a bit, I found a silver ring shaped like hieroglyphs. At its center was the cross-like Key of Life, 2 cm tall. The band was 8 mm wide. I thought, *If I lost this, could I go on living?*—and bought it anyway.

Back near the mosque, we wrapped our new scarves around our heads. One of the students pulled out sewing pins—thin metal with small silver tips—to fasten the hijabs. I was surprised. Wouldn't they prick the skin? But the women handled the flat cloth with practiced hands, shaping it to fit each of our heads with ease. It was graceful, like watching someone tie a yukata—turning a single sheet of fabric into something that fits the three-dimensional body beautifully. They helped all nine of us, each wearing a different shade: rose pink, scarlet with gold threads, cinnamon brown, black with silver—each scarf a personal choice.We took a group photo in our hijabs.

Back at the hotel, I felt a quiet restlessness. I wanted to visit Ahmad's home but hesitated to go alone. I debated whether to ask someone to come with me. What if they didn't want to go? What if I made it awkward? The uncertainty sat heavily on me. Still, I gathered my courage and asked Arae. I was too nervous to meet her eyes. I didn't know what she really thought, but she agreed with surprising ease and simply asked, "When should we go?" Relieved, I went downstairs and made plans with Ahmad.

After sunset, we stopped by the Meridien Hotel—again. At this point, it had practically become our regular hangout. They offered to make bookmarks from papyrus, inscribed with our names in hieroglyphs. We wrote our names in Roman letters on a sheet of paper. Apparently, they'd be ready the next day.

Not on the Itinerary: A Real Egypt

Day 6

Arae and I went out wearing the scarves we'd bought the day before. We weren't quite sure how to wrap them properly, so we left them loosely draped around our necks. Ahmad had already arranged a taxi. We got in, feeling slightly uneasy, unsure of exactly where we were headed.

When we arrived, his wife and their three children were waiting to greet us. The house was cool and quiet, with stone walls and a simple square layout. Further in, there seemed to be a kitchen—or perhaps a small wash area. A spherical fan with propellers on both sides stood against the wall. A sofa and two armchairs were arranged in an L-shape, and on the cream-colored walls hung a trailing vine and a wedding photo.

Ahmad's wife wore a beige kaftan embroidered with gold thread; her smile was warm and gentle. Their daughter, Sara, wore an orange kaftan printed with Tutankhamun

across the chest, and small gold earrings. I'd seen other children wearing earrings, too—it must be a kind of protective charm in Egypt. She had a graceful presence for her age and spoke English with ease. Her younger brother, maybe six, clung shyly to his mother's side.

We were invited to sit and were served a pale juice—possibly guava—in blue glasses, along with a white-fleshed fruit. I'd been careful to avoid unboiled water, but refusing would have felt rude. I figured this was one of those moments where you just had to smile and let fate take the wheel. The taste was unfamiliar, with no strong scent or flavor.

We gave them small gifts from Japan: pens, origami paper. Sara lit up with delight. Our English was clumsy, but we managed to enjoy ourselves. Later, their eldest son joined us, and before leaving, we took a commemorative photo together.

It was getting late. We promised to write, said our goodbyes, and returned to the hotel by taxi.

On the way back, I wondered—if I were in Japan and met a foreign traveler, would I be able to invite them into my home like that? The warmth of their welcome stayed with me, wrapped in quiet joy and a lingering, unanswerable question.

Day 7

The next morning, my bad feeling proved right—I came down with stomach trouble. Most of the tour group was already sick; only a few had escaped it, and some even had fevers. Maybe this was the power of the Nile water.

It was supposed to be a free day, but I was in no condition to explore. I packed a roll of toilet paper like a survival kit and braced myself for emergencies. And once again, we returned to the Meridien Hotel—this time just to borrow the bathroom. In the middle of this gastrointestinal crisis, the familiar toilet felt like an old friend.

On our way back, I stopped by a few kiosks to look for souvenirs. I needed something I could hand out to the many coworkers at my part-time job. Eventually, I found a pink, individually wrapped sweet that cost about 20 yen each. It looked suspiciously cheap, and I had no idea what it would taste like—but honestly, I was too exhausted to care.

With Egypt's "baptism" still rumbling in my gut, I packed my suitcase, barely able to breathe. I couldn't help but wonder: Can I really get on a plane like this?

Day 8

It was our last day in Egypt, but none of us had the energy to get sentimental—we were too busy managing our digestive meltdowns. I had stuffed a roll of toilet paper from the hotel into my bag as a last-minute souvenir-slash-survival tool. Mustafa drove us to the airport, and we slumped into our seats at the gate, drained and listless, each of us clinging to a fragile sense of composure.

The Cairo–Dubai flight departed on time, to our surprise. Once in Dubai, we settled into our layover—convinced, based on past experience and Egypt's famously flexible sense of time, that the next flight would be fashionably late. Even as boarding time came and went, we lounged in the terminal without a flicker of concern.

But then a staff member suddenly came sprinting toward us, waving her arms and yelling, "Why are you still here?! Board now!"

We'd completely misjudged the situation—this flight was actually on time. We grabbed our bags and bolted toward the gate in a frenzy, laughing breathlessly, "Seriously?!"

We were whisked to the plane at lightning speed, nearly missing it. The moment we stepped onboard, the familiar Emirates scent wrapped around us. Ah, we're finally going home, I thought, as a quiet wave of relief washed over me.

First stop: the bathroom. Again. We barely touched the in-flight meal and spent the long hours suspended somewhere between sleep and survival—half-asleep, half-alive, curled into whatever positions our seats would allow.

We landed at Kansai Airport and said our goodbyes to the participants from the Kansai area, and continued on. By the time we reached Haneda, delays had pushed us right up against the last train departures. Some of us had to run. There was no time for lingering words or tearful hugs—just a quick wave and a disappearing figure down the platform.

Just a short while ago, I was under the scorching sun, swallowed up by Cairo's chaos. And now I was in Tokyo, dazed. It felt too quiet.

My body had made it home. My heart was still in transit.

After Egypt

Not long after we got back, Arae created a community on mixi, and we reconnected online. But she had come down with a fever and was diagnosed with infectious gastroenteritis.

My own stomach troubles hadn't improved even after three days, so I finally went to the neighborhood pharmacy for advice. "It's probably just food poisoning from the trip," the pharmacist said. "Usually, you just need a few days to flush it all out." Then he pulled out a bright yellow box and added, "This is the strongest we've got." On the package, it read: *Food Poisoning from Overseas Travel – Ectole.*

I started taking it, and two days later, I finally began to feel like myself again.

Out of the 23 students on the trip, 22 of us had come down with food poisoning. Oddly enough, that shared ordeal left us with a strange sense of camaraderie.

Directory

Akhnaton carpet School
4 km from the Mit Rahina Museum

Al-Hussein Mosque
Hasan El-Adawy, El-Gamaleya, El Gamaliya, Cairo Governorate 4331330, Egypt

FujiFilm Simple Ace
9-chōme-7-3 Akasaka, Minato City, Tokyo 107-0052, Japan
https://www.fujifilm.com

The Egyptian Museum
El-Tahrir Square, Downtown, Cairo, 4272083, Egypt
https://www.egyptianmuseumcairo.com

Emirates
https://www.emirates.com

Cairo International Airport
https://www.cairo-airport.com

Giza Necropolis
Al Haram, Giza Governorate 3512201, Egypt

KFC
Nazlet El-Semman, Al Haram, Giza Governorate 3514504, Egypt
https://www.egypt.kfc.me

Catacombs of Kom el Shoqafa
Ras at Tin, Alexandria Governorate, Egypt

Zakuro
3-chōme-13-2 Nishinippori, Arakawa City, Tokyo 116-0013, Japan

Red Pyramid
Al Giza Desert, Giza Governorate 3300001, Egypt

Delta Pyramids hotel
End of King Faisal St, Faisal, Giza Governorate 12555, Egypt

Dubai International Airport
Dubai International Airport PO Box 2525. Dubai UAE
https://www.dubaiairports.ae

Khan el-Khalili
El-Gamaleya, El Gamaliya, Cairo Governorate 4331302, Egypt

Egypt Papyrus Museum
1 km from Giza Necropolis

Mosque of Muhammad Ali
Al Abageyah, El Khalifa, Cairo Governorate 4252360, Egypt

Le Méridien Pyramids Hotel & Spa
El Remaya Square 25 Pyramids Cairo, Kafr Nassar, Al Haram, Giza Governorate 12561, Egypt
https://www.marriott.com/en-us/hotels/caimd-le-meridien-pyramids-hotel-and-spa

Statue of Ramesses II
moved to Grand Egyptian Museum (Estimated opening 2023), Kafr Nassar, Al Haram, Giza Governorate 3513204, Egypt
https://grandegyptianmuseum.org

MOUYADA & TSUKARETA
ISSUE NO.1, JULY 2025

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“MOUYADA & TSUKARETA” stems from the Japanese phrase “もうやだつかれた,” a common expression of quiet exhaustion and frustration woven into daily life. This publication reflects an ongoing inquiry—begun in 2006—into how fatigue can be lived with, rather than simply resisted or erased. Drawing on the method of thick description, the work traces events as they unfolded, seeking to preserve the texture of experience. Rather than framing fatigue as a condition to be solved, this project approaches it as a companion in the creative process —something to recognize, carry forward, and integrate into one’s way of being.