

# *Sudan In The Eyes Of An European Lady*

The first thing that impresses a visitor upon arrival is the warmth of the Sudanese sun - an almost tangible burning heat, followed by the warmth of the Sudanese people. Their gentle manners and hospitality are legendary: distinctly Sudanese, you encounter it wherever you go, in the many cultures that form this diverse nation.

Another overwhelming impression is the physical vastness of Sudan. Bordering the Sahara Desert, sandy dunes drift over a stony landscape in the north. The harsh barren deserts give way to fertile clay plains, rich grass land, swaths of savannah, mountains and forests in the south. In the hot and arid climate, life depends on a short rainy season and the Nile transforming the desert into fertile soil through annual floods. This river of life with its unpredictable temperament is revered. It is central to many rituals, people invoke its blessing and offer food to the deities believed to live in it.

From among the sophisticated ancient cultures and religions that rose along its banks, Sudan is home to hundreds of tribes and languages. The lifestyles you encounter reflect its different environments, varied ethnic origins and religious beliefs, creating a blend of people and contrasts that stirs you to ask: who are the Sudanese?

## *A LAND WITHIN ITS PEOPLE*

Civilization in Sudan dates back millennia and is laden with history. Temples, tombs and fortresses tell of ancient Nubian kingdoms and matriarchal societies, followed by the Greek, Roman, and Coptic Christian past that predates the arrival of Islam. You find their traces in Sudanese prose, customs and faces. People of Arab descent have over many generations mixed with the indigenous people in northern areas blending Islam with African roots and traditions, while further south people have retained their African social and religious heritage and some have also embraced Christianity.



Trade attracted people from India, Libya and Mauritania and they too, over the centuries, have left their footprints on the cultural landscape turning Khartoum into a cosmopolitan place where once, Syrians, Jews, Armenians, Europeans and Africans rubbed shoulders, intermarried and shared cultures. In today's Sudan, a common Sudanese identity sometimes flickers out from behind the diversity that shaped it, and then again recedes and hides.



Located in the cultural region that spans the entire stretch of land between the Niger and the Nile, across the Sahara down to the savannah, a product of its ancient history and diversity, one can only assume that the Sudanese soul is as spacious as this land. Descendants of pharaohs, the sons of whirling dervishes and the daughters of black African Queens have blended into a space more inclusive and bigger than a mere country or territory, somewhere original and infinite. In that space, within patterns that each kind of people manifests in their typical behaviour and subconscious memory, their ancestors continue to exist.

### *ORAL NARRATIVES*

The Sudan maintains its cross-generational continuity through the rich and varied ways it speaks and is spoken of by fire-sites. In oral narratives customs, superstitions, rituals, manners, beliefs and experiences are handed over from one generation to the next, whilst tales and verses have been adapted from the interaction with other nations throughout history, embracing their cultural

elements, in an ever-welcoming gesture, absorbing them into a shared Sudanese experience.

Traditional narratives - mythological, historical or modern, are mirrors of society: a multitude of Sudanese moments, fragments of existence. The rest has to be left to the imagination - as only human imagination is capable of grasping, or perhaps sensing, the myriad facets of a people. (...)

