



Ancient Middle East: Will This Pyramid Draw Crowds?

Article

PART 1

CAIRO, Egypt. Thousands of years ago, the ancient Egyptians built enormous pyramids and entombed their pharaohs inside. Today, many of these monuments are tourist attractions. Soon, visitors to Egypt will be able to explore another of these burial sites—the inner chambers of the unique "Bent Pyramid," a 4,500-year-old monstrosity, which is located in the village of Dahshur and is renowned for its oddly shaped profile.

In March 2009, Egypt's chief of antiquities, Zahi Hawass, said the chambers of the 330-foot-tall (100-meter-tall) pyramid would be open for the first time to tourists within "a month or two."

"This is going to be an adventure," Hawass told reporters.

Everything about the Bent Pyramid connotes adventure, from its atypical shape to the surprises in its interior. Unlike many of Egypt's other giant tombs, the Bent Pyramid's sides rise up at a steep angle but then abruptly taper off to a more gentle slope as they approach the pyramid's apex. Archaeologists believe the builders changed their minds in the midst of constructing the pyramid out of fear the whole structure might collapse, because the sides were too steep. The pyramid is entered through a cramped 250-foot-long (76-meter-long) tunnel that opens into an immense vaulted chamber. From there, passageways lead to other rooms, including one with cedar wood beams believed to have been imported from ancient Lebanon.

Hawass said archaeologists believe that an undiscovered room inside the pyramid is the burial chamber of Pharaoh Sneferu. Sneferu founded Egypt's 4th Dynasty, which began around 2575 BCE and ended around 2465 BCE.

Elsewhere in Dahshur, the inner chambers of the Red Pyramid, also built by Sneferu, are already accessible to visitors. Hawass said several other nearby pyramids will be opened in the next year. One pyramid, built by Amenhemhat III, who ruled during Egypt's 12th dynasty from 1859 to 1813 BCE, has an underground labyrinth.

"It is amazing because of a maze of corridors underneath this pyramid—the visit will be unique," said Hawass. "Twenty-five years ago, I went to enter this pyramid, and I was afraid I would never come back, [so] I had to ask the workmen to tie ropes around my leg so I wouldn't lose my way."

Although Dahshur is only about 50 miles (about 80 kilometers) south of Cairo, Egypt's capital city, its pyramids do not entice many visitors. Only 5 percent of tourists who go to Egypt visit the pyramids of Dahshur.

Officials hope to change that by opening more of Dahshur's pyramids as part of a new sustainable development campaign that is meant to attract more visitors to Egypt without making any changes to the area that will be detrimental to the ancient relics. Hawass pointed to the pyramids of Giza as an example of development that officials are trying to



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Visitors to Dahshur, Egypt, will be able to explore the inner chambers of the unique "Bent Pyramid." The Bent Pyramid is 4,500 years old and is known for its oddly shaped profile.

avoid repeating. Giza's formidable pyramids are now surrounded by Western fast-food restaurants and hundreds of vendors selling souvenirs. This sort of thing will not be permissible in Dahshur, which is currently surrounded by agricultural fields on one side and open desert on the other.

Instead of permitting outside forces to potentially change the landscape of Dahshur, officials will give villagers opportunities to increase local development in a positive way. People will be able to borrow small amounts of money called "microloans," so they can open small businesses, while big chains, such as fast-food outlets, will not be allowed.

The Associated Press contributed to this story.

PART 2

Dig Deeper

One way to get ahead in business is to marry the boss' son or daughter. That may have been the case with Sneferu, the first pharaoh of Egypt's Fourth Dynasty—he may have come to the throne after marrying the daughter of the pharaoh who preceded him.

Sneferu became king around the year 2613 BCE, after the era of great pyramids in Egypt had already begun. During the Third Dynasty, the pharaoh Djoser had ordered the building of a grand funeral monument for himself near the ancient city of Memphis. Sneferu also went on a pyramid-building spree, but unlike Djoser's Step Pyramid, which looked like a series of increasingly smaller blocks stacked on top of each other, Sneferu's Bent Pyramid was built to have smooth, triangular sides. As you read in the Article, the Bent Pyramid didn't turn out as it was supposed to, possibly because the builders made an error. Sneferu eventually got it right, however: The last pyramid he had built, called the Red Pyramid, looks like the familiar, flat-sided pyramids we imagine when we think of Egyptian pyramids.

Pyramids were not Sneferu's only legacy. Some documents from the time indicate that he was a popular king among his people. A friendly man and a kind ruler, Sneferu was also an able leader who helped advance Egypt, though Egypt's neighbors may have had a few complaints. Sneferu's soldiers attacked Nubia, a kingdom located south of Egypt, and they captured a great deal of its wealth. The pharaoh also attacked a western neighbor, Libya, which had precious turquoise in its mines. Sneferu was personally wealthy; he owned a great deal of Egyptian land. In addition, Sneferu ruled over a well-organized kingdom—the first known records of how the Egyptian government was organized date back to his reign. (Older records may have been lost over time.)

When Sneferu died (around 2589 BCE), he left behind a prosperous kingdom, as well as the blueprint for most of the pyramids of Ancient Egypt. The great pyramids at Giza, the most famous of all, would be built by order of the pharaoh Khufu, Sneferu's son.

Dictionary

atypical (*adjective*) not typical or usual

connote (*verb*) to signify or suggest

dynasty (*noun*) line of rulers who come from the same family

Activity

PART 1

Question 1

According to the article, what is the desired effect of opening the Bent Pyramid to tourism?

- (A) Dahshur will become so popular with tourists and new businesses that it will attract the attention of scientists who can uncover new information about the Bent Pyramid.
- (B) Dahshur will become a tourist destination, but it will feature only small businesses that have little effect on the landscape.
- (C) Dahshur will become a tourist destination and will attract the large chain businesses that have made the Giza pyramids a success.
- (D) Dahshur will become so popular with tourists and new businesses that it will draw attention away from the Giza pyramids.

Question 2

Which of these is a statement of opinion?

- (A) Archaeologists have not yet confirmed that Pharaoh Sneferu is buried inside the Bent Pyramid.
- (B) Archaeologists have explored the inner chambers of the Red Pyramid, which is located in Dahshur.
- (C) The Bent Pyramid differs from most other pyramids in that its sides taper off toward the apex.
- (D) The Bent Pyramid is more architecturally interesting than most of the other pyramids from ancient Egypt.

Question 3

The best alternate headline for this article would be _____.

- (A) Egyptian Officials Discuss Attributes of Pyramids in Dahshur
- (B) Egypt Readies Unique Bent Pyramid for Tourists
- (C) Egyptian Officials Speculate on Reasons for Bent Pyramid's Shape
- (D) Egypt Hopes To Differentiate Dahshur From Giza

Question 4

Think about the following statement made by Zahi Hawass:

"It is amazing because of a maze of corridors underneath this pyramid—the visit will be unique. Twenty-five years ago, I went to enter this pyramid, and I was afraid I would never come back, [so] I had to ask the workmen to tie ropes around my leg so I wouldn't lose my way."

The author's purpose for including this quote was to _____.

- (A) Point out one difference between the typical Dahshur pyramid and the typical Giza pyramid
- (B) Explain why some officials are concerned about the safety of tourists who explore one Dahshur pyramid
- (C) Point out one of the intriguing aspects of a Dahshur pyramid that might appeal to tourists
- (D) Explain why some tourists have expressed interest in allowing fast-food outlets near the Dahshur pyramids

Question 5

The article states:

Officials hope to change that by opening more of Dahshur's pyramids as part of a new sustainable development campaign that is meant to attract more visitors to Egypt without making any changes to the area that will be *detrimental* to the ancient relics.

Read the passage above and think about the article. Which would be the closest **synonym** for the word *detrimental*?

- (A) Disconcerting
- (B) Impartial
- (C) Stimulating
- (D) Injurious

Question 6

Which question is **not** answered by the article?

- (A) What changes have taken place in Giza since the area became a tourist destination?
- (B) When did archaeologists' initial explorations of the interior of the Bent Pyramid take place?
- (C) What have archaeologists identified as some of the unique features of one pyramid in Dahshur?
- (D) Where is the village of Dahshur located in relation to the capital city of Egypt?

Question 7

Which is the closest **synonym** for the word *atypical*?

- (A) Exceptional
- (B) Luxuriant
- (C) Whimsical
- (D) Preposterous

Question 8

The reader can infer from the article that _____.

- (A) Egyptian officials probably believe that small businesses will help the economy of Dahshur without having a negative effect on the landscape.
- (B) Egyptian officials will probably try to smooth out the sides of the Bent Pyramid to make it more appealing to tourists.
- (C) Egyptian officials will probably shut down the Giza pyramids while the Bent Pyramid is open to avoid any competition.
- (D) Egyptian officials probably hope that tourists will draw comparisons between the features of the Dahshur pyramids and the features of the Giza pyramids.

Thought Question

Write a summary of the texts you have read. Include information about Pharaoh Sneferu and the development of pyramids during the time that he ruled in Ancient Egypt. Use important facts and details from the lesson in your response.

Type your answer in the text box below.