



Egypt

POP 83 MILLION

Includes →

Cairo	59
Alexandria	71
Western Desert	74
Sinai.....	77
Suez Canal.....	81
Port Said.....	81
Red Sea Coast.....	81
Nile Valley	82
Luxor.....	83
South of Luxor.....	88
Aswan	88
Understand	92
Survival Guide	94

Best Places to Eat

- Sofra (p87)
- Zöoba (p65)
- Farag (p74)
- Seabride (p79)
- Abou El Sid (p68)

Best Places to Stay

- Shali Lodge (p75)
- Beit Sabée (p86)
- Pension Roma (p63)
- Hotel Longchamps (p64)
- Sinai Old Spices (p77)

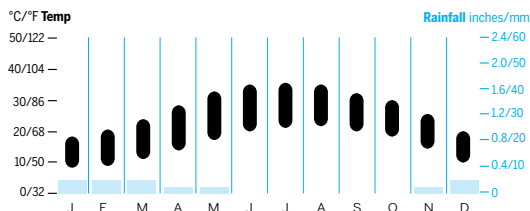
Why Go?

Herodotus let the cat out of the bag in the 5th century BC, leaving the door open for over a millennium of conquerors and adventurers to gawp, graffiti and pilfer Egypt's mammoth racks of pharaonic rubble. Today it may be 'gawping-only' allowed but these ancient monuments still inspire the same reverence in travellers as they have for centuries.

Walk away from the click of a million camera-shutters for a minute though and you'll discover Egypt isn't just mummies and colossal columns. Sink into a meditative stupor of *shisha* (hookah) smoking in a cafe. Bed down on a desert dune. Watch the sun rise over the palm-tree-fringed Nile banks. Stand streetside when the call to prayer wafts over the nightmare symphony of car horns. Modern Egypt can frustrate and confound but it enchants in equal measures. The temples, tombs and pyramids will still be there when you get back to them; basking in their sheer awesomeness as they have done since time immemorial.

When to Go

Cairo



Mar–Apr Dust off your explorer hat and head into the Western Desert while temperatures stay mild.

Jul–Sep Summer's furnace sizzles but underwater conditions are perfect for Red Sea diving.

Oct–Nov In Upper Egypt, the gorgeous painterly light makes a Nile journey a photographer's dream.

CAIRO

📍 02 / POP 20 MILLION

Let's address the drawbacks first. The crowds on a Cairo footpath make Manhattan look like a ghost town. You will be hounded by papyrus sellers at every turn. Your life will flash before your eyes each time you venture across a street. And your snot will run black from the smog.

But it's a small price to pay to visit the city. Cairenes call Umm ad-Dunya – the Mother of the World. One taxi ride can span millenniums, from the resplendent mosques and mausoleums built at the pinnacle of the Islamic empire, to the 19th-century palaces and grand avenues (which earned the city the nickname 'Paris on the Nile'), to the brutal concrete blocks of the Nasser years – then all the way back to the days of the pharaohs, as the Pyramids of Giza hulk on the western edge of the city.

So blow your nose, crack a joke, and learn to look through the dirt to see the city's true colours. If you love Cairo, she will love you back.

👁 Sights

★ Pyramids & Sphinx at Giza

ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITE

(Sharia al-Haram, Giza; adult/student ££60/30; ☀8am-4pm) Built on a desert plateau, encroached upon by the modern city of Cairo, the Giza pyramids are the last remaining wonder of the ancient world. They were built as the mausoleums of pharaohs to help their souls on the path to heaven.

Completed around 2600 BC, the **Great Pyramid of Khufu** (Pyramid of Cheops; adult/student ££100/50; ☀8am-noon & 1-6pm) is the oldest pyramid at Giza, and the largest (146.5m high). Climbing the steep, narrow passage to the heart of the pyramid is an unforgettable, if claustrophobic, experience.

Immediately south of the Great Pyramid is the **Solar Barque Museum** (Cheops Boat Museum; adult/student ££50/25; ☀9am-4pm), displaying one of the pharaoh's funerary barques (boats) unearthed in 1954.

The neighbouring **Pyramid of Khafre** (Pyramid of Chephren; adult/student ££30/15; ☀8am-4pm) was built by Khufu's son. In deference to his father, he built a slightly smaller pyramid but located it on higher ground, giving the impression of greater size.

At a height of 62m, the **Pyramid of Menkaure** (Pyramid of Mycerinus; adult/student ££30/15; ☀8am-4pm) is the smallest of the

three pyramids; it was built by Khafre's son, Menkaure.

Known in Arabic as Abu al-Hol (Father of Terror), the **Sphinx** (☀8am-4pm) is carved from a single piece of wind-eroded limestone. With the face of a man and the body of a lion, it remains one of the most evocative monuments of the ancient world.

★ Egyptian Museum

MUSEUM

(📍 2579 6948; www.egyptianmuseum.gov.eg; Midan Tahrir, Downtown; adult/student ££60/30; ☀9am-6pm Sat-Thu, to 4pm Fri) Home to one of the world's most important collections of ancient artefacts, to walk around the Egyptian Museum is to embark on an adventure through time itself.

On the ground floor some highlights not to miss include the black **statue of Khafre** (Room 42), the builder of the second pyramid at Giza, and the **Amarna Room** (Room 3), which displays many of the artistic achievements of Akhenaten's reign (1352–1336 BC).

The 1st floor's eastern side hosts the famed **Tutankhamun Galleries** with about 1700 items unearthed from the young New Kingdom pharaoh's tomb spread throughout a series of rooms. The **Royal Mummies Halls** (1st fl, Rooms 56 & 46; adult/student ££100/60) houses the remains of some of Egypt's most illustrious pharaohs and queens.

The entire caboodle is planned to be moved to the new state-of-the-art Grand Egyptian Museum being built at the Giza Plateau. The opening is slated for 2015 but construction progress has been painfully slow, so don't hold your breath.

Islamic Cairo

The medieval heart of Cairo, this area was one of the power centres of the Islamic empire and its monuments are some of the most resplendent architecture inspired by Islam.

★ Mosque-Madrassa of Sultan Hassan

MOSQUE

(Midan Salah ad-Din; admission ££25; ☀8am-5pm) The square courtyard of this elegant complex, regarded as the finest piece of early Mamluk architecture in Cairo, boasts soaring walls punctured by four majestic *iwans* (vaulted halls).

★ Al-Azhar Mosque

MOSQUE

(Gami' al-Azhar; Sharia al-Azhar; ☀24hr) **FREE** Founded in AD 970 as the centrepiece of the newly created Fatimid city, Al-Azhar is one of