



Egypt

POP 94.7 MILLION / 2020

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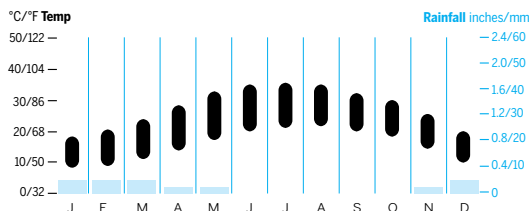
Why Go?

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 (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 measure. 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

POP 22 MILLION / 20

The urban buzz felt in this extraordinary city is a product of 22-or-so million inhabitants simultaneously crushing the city's infrastructure under their collective weight and lifting its spirit up with their exceptional charm and humour. One taxi ride can pass resplendent mosques, grand avenues, and 19th-century palaces, with a far away view of the pyramids of Giza. A caked-on layer of beige sand unifies the mix of eras and styles.

But, Cairo's crowds make Manhattan look like a ghost town, papyrus sellers and would-be guides hound you at every turn, and your snot will run black from the smog. It's a small price to pay to tap into the energy of the place Egyptians call Umm ad-Dunya – the Mother of the World.

Blow your nose, crack a joke and look through the dirt to see the city's true colours. If you love Cairo, it will definitely love you back.

👁️ Sights

★ **Pyramids of Giza** ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITE (adult/student ££80/40; ☀️ 8am-4pm) The last remaining wonder of the ancient world; for nearly 4000 years, the extraordinary shape, impeccable geometry and sheer bulk of the Giza Pyramids have invited the obvious questions: 'How were we built, and why?' Centuries of research have given us parts of the answer. Built as massive tombs on the orders of the pharaohs, they were constructed by teams of workers tens-of-thousands strong.

Today they stand as an awe-inspiring tribute to the might, organisation and achievements of ancient Egypt.

🦖 **Sphinx** ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITE Known in Arabic as Abu al-Hol (Father of Terror), this sculpture of a man with the haunches of a lion was dubbed the Sphinx by the ancient Greeks because it resembled their mythical winged monster who set riddles and killed anyone unable to answer them. A geological survey has shown that it was most likely carved from the bedrock at the bottom of the causeway, during this Khafre's reign, so it probably portrays his features.

★ **Egyptian Museum** MUSEUM (Map p74; ☎️ 02-2579 6948; www.egyptian-museumcairo.org; Midan Tahrir, Downtown; adult/student ££75/35, entry after 5.30pm ££120/60, mummy room ££100/75, after 5.30pm ££150/75, photography ticket ££50; ☀️ 9am-9pm Sun-Thu, to 4pm Sat-Fri; 🕌 Sadat) One of the world's most important collections of ancient artefacts,

the Egyptian Museum takes pride of place in Downtown Cairo, on the north side of Midan Tahrir. Inside the great domed, oddly pinkish building, the glittering treasures of Tutankhamun and other great pharaohs lie alongside the grave goods, mummies, jewellery, eating bowls and toys of Egyptians whose names are lost to history.

To walk around the museum is to embark on an adventure through time.

★ **Khan al-Khalili** MARKET (Map p70; off Sharia al-Azhar & al-Gamaliyya) The skinny lanes of Khan al-Khalili are basically a medieval-style mall. This agglomeration of shops – many arranged around small courtyards – stock everything from soap powder to semiprecious stones, not to mention toy camels and alabaster pyramids. It's open from early morning to sundown (except Friday morning and Sunday), although many shops are open as long as there are customers, even on Sunday.

★ **Al-Azhar Mosque** MOSQUE (Gami' al-Azhar; Map p70; Sharia al-Azhar; ☀️ 24hr) **FREE** Founded in AD 970 as the centrepiece of the newly created Fatimid city, Al-Azhar is one of Cairo's earlier mosques, and its sheikh is considered the highest theological authority for Egyptian Muslims. The building is a harmonious blend of architectural styles, the result of numerous enlargements over 1000 years. The tomb chamber, located through a doorway on the left just inside the entrance, has a beautiful mihrab (a niche indicating the direction of Mecca) and should not be missed.

★ **Mosque-Madrassa of Sultan Hassan** MOSQUE (Map p70; Midan Salah ad-Din; combo ticket with Mosque of ar-Rifa'i ££40; ☀️ 8am-4.30pm) Massive yet elegant, this great structure is regarded as the finest piece of early-Mamluk architecture in Cairo. It was built between 1356 and 1363 by Sultan Hassan, a grandson of Sultan Qalaun; he took the throne at the age of 13, was deposed and reinstated no less than three times, then assassinated shortly before the mosque was completed. Beyond the striking, recessed entrance, a dark passage leads into a peaceful courtyard surrounded by soaring walls.

★ **Coptic Museum** MUSEUM (Map p70; ☎️ 02-2363 9742; www.coptic-cairo.com/museum; 3 Sharia Mar Girgis; adult/student ££60/30, audio guide ££10; ☀️ 9am-4pm; 🕌 Mar Girgis) This museum, founded in 1908, houses Coptic art from the earliest days of