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ACCOMMODATION

Egypt offers visitors the full spectrum of accommodation: hotels, flotels (Nile cruisers), all-inclusive resorts, pensions, B&Bs, youth hostels, camping grounds and even ecolodges.

Prices cited in this book are for rooms available in the high season and include taxes. Breakfast is included in the room price unless indicated otherwise in the review. We have roughly defined budget hotels as any that charge up to E£120 for a room, midrange as any that charge between E£120 and E£600 and top end as those that charge E£600 or more for a room. However, there is some variation

in pricing brackets throughout the book as certain destinations are pricier than others.

Be advised that rates often go up by around 10% during peak times, including the two big feasts (Eid al-Fitr and Eid al-Adha; see p514), New Year (20 December to 5 January) and sometimes for the summer season (running approximately 1 July to 15 September).

Also note that just because a hotel has its rates displayed it doesn't mean they aren't negotiable. In off-peak seasons and during the middle of the week, haggling will often get you significant discounts, even in midrange places.

Resorts in Egypt typically offer half board (two meals), full board (three meals) or all-inclusive rates that usually include most drinks as well as some activities. Although prices are given throughout the book for all-inclusive resorts, it's worth booking these accommodation options in advance as considerable discounts are sometimes available.

Hotels rated three stars and up generally require payment in US dollars, which officially is illegal though no one seems to be paying much attention. Upmarket hotels are increasingly accepting credit-card payments, but you shouldn't take this as a given. A number of hotels, particularly along the coasts, list prices in euros, which is in response to the weakening dollar and the large European clientele. You can pay in other currencies but be advised that exchange fees sometimes apply.

Most top-end hotels and a few midrange hotels in Egypt offer nonsmoking rooms, though you can't always count on one being available. The smoking culture is extremely pronounced in Egypt, which is something that nonsmokers will be forced to get used to quickly.

Camping

Officially, camping is allowed at only a few places around Egypt, such as at Harraniyya near Giza in Cairo, Luxor, Aswan, Farafra and Ras Mohammed National Park. A few private hotels around the country also allow campers to set up in their backyards, such as at Abu Simbel, Al-Kharga, Nuweiba, Basata, Qena

PRACTICALITIES

- *Egyptian Gazette* (50pt) is Egypt's flimsy and embarrassingly bad daily English-language newspaper. *Al-Ahram Weekly* (££1) appears every Thursday and does a much better job of keeping English readers informed of what's going on. There's an online version at <http://weekly.ahram.org.eg>. *Egypt Today* (££15) is an ad-saturated general-interest glossy with good listings.
- You can pick up the BBC World Service on various radio frequencies, including 1323AM in Alexandria, the Europe short-wave schedule in Cairo and the Middle East short-wave schedule in Upper Egypt. See www.bbc.co.uk/worldservice for details. In Cairo, 95FM broadcasts on 557kHz between 7am and midnight daily, including news in English at 7.30am, 2.30pm and 8pm. Nile FM (104.2kHz) is an English-language music station broadcasting out of Cairo.
- Satellite dishes are common in Egypt, and international English-language news services such as CNN and BBC World can be accessed in hotel rooms throughout the country.
- Electrical current is 220V AC, 50Hz in most parts of the country. Exceptions are Alexandria, and Heliopolis and Ma'adi in Cairo, which have currents of 110V AC, 50Hz. Wall sockets are the round, two-pin European type.
- Egypt uses the metric system for weights and measures.

and Abydos. Facilities in most of these places, including official sites, are extremely basic. In Sinai the most popular budget choices are beach-side camps – all have electricity and 24-hour hot water unless noted in our reviews.

Hostels

Egypt has around a dozen hostels recognised by **Hostelling International** (HI; www.hihostels.com) in destinations including Cairo, Alexandria, Luxor and others. Having an HI card is not absolutely necessary as nonmembers are admitted, but a card will save you a bit of cash depending on the hostel.

Generally speaking, HI hostels tend to be noisy, crowded and often a bit grimy. In some there are rooms for mixed couples or families but on the whole the sexes are segregated. Most of the time you'll be much better off staying at a budget hotel instead. Reservations are not usually needed.

Hotels

BUDGET

The two-, one- and no-star hotels form the budget group. Of course, often the ratings mean nothing at all as a hotel without a star can be as good as a two-star hotel, only cheaper. Clearly, luck of the draw often applies – you can spend as little as ££25 a night for a clean single room with hot water, or ££80 or more for a dirty room without a shower. Generally, the prices quoted include breakfast, but don't harbour any great expectations –

more often than not, it's usually a couple of pieces of bread, a frozen patty of butter, a serving of jam, and tea or coffee.

Competition among the budget hotels in cities such as Cairo and Luxor is fierce, which is good news for travellers as it leads to an overall improvement in standards and services offered. Increasingly, hotels are offering rooms with private bathrooms and air-con (this costs an extra ££20 or so), improving the quality of their breakfasts and providing welcoming lounges with satellite TV, internet access and backgammon boards.

Some hotels will tell you they have hot water when they don't. They may not even have warm water. Turn the tap on and check, or look for an electric water heater when inspecting the bathroom. If there's no plug in your bathroom sink and you forgot to bring your own, then try using the lid of a Baraka mineral-water bottle – according to one cluey traveller, they fit 90% of the time.

Many budget establishments economise on sheets. If you aren't carrying your own sleeping sheet, just ask for clean sheets – most hotels will oblige. Toilet paper is usually supplied, but you'll often need to bring your own soap and shampoo.

MIDRANGE

Egypt has a great range of budget and top-end hotels, but midrange options are surprisingly limited. This is particularly so in Cairo and Alexandria, where foreign investment is