



Alexandria & the Mediterranean Coast

Includes »

Alexandria	318
Around Alexandria	343
Aboukir	343
Rosetta (Ar-Rashid)	343
Mediterranean Coast	345
El Alamein	345
Sidi Abdel Rahman	347
Marsa Matruh	348
Sallum	352

Best Places to Eat

- » Picnic at Agiba Beach (p349)
- » Zephyrion (p343)
- » Farag (p334)
- » Mohammed Ahmed (p334)

Best Places to Stay

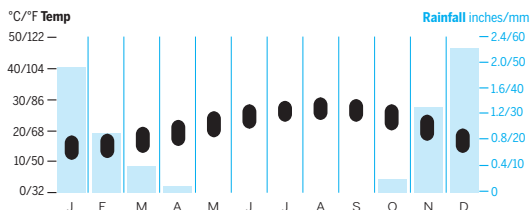
- » Windsor Palace Hotel (p331)
- » Sofitel Cecil Alexandria (p331)
- » Almaza Bay (p350)

Why Go?

Egypt's northern coastline runs for 500km along dazzling Mediterranean shores. Think of it as an Egyptian Riviera, drawing swarms of summertime revellers who come to cool off in the sea air and splash in the water. Along its western stretches, the translucent shades of turquoise and lapis are so pure, so vibrant, you'll hardly believe your eyes.

The once-great port city of Alexandria is the region's hub, with ancient sights, terrific seafood restaurants, and a distinctly different urban pulse than that of Cairo. Further west, historic battlefields are reminders of the intense desert campaigns of WWII's North African front. During peak season, beach resort towns are as much a cultural experience as anything else, as you join throngs of vacationing families on the seashore. At other times, there's a good chance you'll have the irresistibly gorgeous waters all to yourself.

When to Go Alexandria



Jun–mid-Sep

Best beach season; Alexandria and the coast are packed with Egyptians on holiday.

Apr–May & mid-Sep–Oct

Beaches are virtually empty, but it's warm enough to enjoy them.

Nov–Mar

Chilly for a beach break, great for hotel discounts.

ALEXANDRIA

203 / POP 4.1 MILLION

The city of Alexandria (Al-Iskendariyya) is the stuff that legends are made of: it was founded by none other than Alexander the Great; sassy queen Cleopatra made this the seat of her throne; the entrance to its harbour was marked by the towering Pharos lighthouse, one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World; and its Great Library was renowned as the ultimate archive of ancient knowledge. Alas, fate dealt the city a spate of cruel blows: today no sign remains of the great Alexander; the city of Cleopatra's day has been mostly swallowed up by the ocean; the Pharos lighthouse collapsed long ago; and the literary treasures of the Great Library were torched. To add insult to injury, Egypt's consequent Muslim rulers moved the capital to nearby Cairo, ignobly thrusting the once influential metropolis into near obscurity for centuries.

In the 19th century a cosmopolitan renaissance had Alexandria flirting with European-style decadence, but it was cut short in the 1950s by Nasser's nationalism. Today, Alexandria feels ready to forge a new identity. The daring new library of Alexandria is probably the most innovative modern building in the country; it may soon be surpassed if a cutting-edge underwater museum is built nearby in the bay, as planned, to showcase Alexandria's submerged archaeological treasures right where they lay. Meanwhile, the city is swooping in on the role of Egypt's culture vulture, as legions of young artists and writers are finding their voices here. Maybe this is why Alexandria feels like one of the most liberal cities in Egypt, where it's common to see women without headscarves and you may even spot Egyptian couples walking hand-in-hand.

Alexandria, the famed metropolis of the ages, is not always easy to find in the city that bears its name today. And for all its



Alexandria & the Mediterranean Coast Highlights

- 1 Tour the modern incarnation of an ancient wonder at the **Bibliotheca Alexandrina** (p327)
- 2 Stroll the streets and souqs (markets) of soulful **Anfushi** at night (p325)
- 3 Taste the last drops of Alexandria's 19th-century

grandeur at a **period cafe** (p337)

- 4 Stuff your gullet with fresh seafood along the shore at **Aboukir** (p343)

- 5 Wander the dusty, donkey-filled streets of **Rosetta** (Ar-Rashid; p343)

with its restored Ottoman architecture

- 6 Remember the desert battles of WWII's North Africa campaign at **El Alamein** (p345)

- 7 Splash in the stunning aqua waters at the beaches near **Marsa Matruh** (p348)