



Cairo

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Best Places to Eat

- » At-Tabei ad-Dumyati (p101)
- » Fasahat Soumaya (p101)
- » Sudan Restaurant (p102)
- » Farahat (p105)
- » Citadel View (p105)

Best Places to Stay

- » Pension Roma (p94)
- » Dina's Hostel (p94)
- » Hotel Royal (p94)
- » Cairo Marriott (p90)
- » Mena House Oberoi (p132)

Why go?

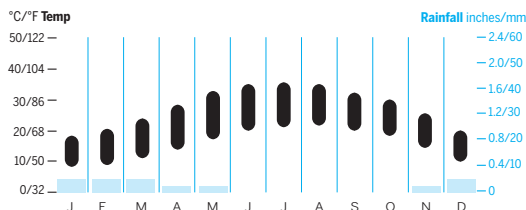
First, the drawbacks: Cairo's crowds make Manhattan look like a ghost town, papyrus sellers hound you at every turn, and your snot will run black from the smog.

But 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. This urban buzz is a product of 20-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 built at the pinnacle of the Islamic empire, grand avenues, and 19th-century palaces. The Pyramids of Giza hulk on the western edge, past Nasser-era concrete towers. A caked-on layer of beige sand unifies the mix of eras and styles.

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

When to go

Cairo



Mar-May In khamsin season the city gets choked with dust.

Jun-Aug Ramadan is a feast every night. Boiling in the daytime.

Oct-Jan Best time to visit: cooler days, lots of cultural events.

How to Blend In

Even if your skin colouring allows it, it's next to impossible to 'pass' as a native Cairene. But you can look more like a resident expat, thus deflecting hustler attention onto the more obvious tourists walking behind you and leaving you free to enjoy the good things about Cairo. Here's how:

- » Carry your stuff in a plastic shopping bag or a generic tote. Nothing screams 'tourist' like a multipocketed, zippered, heavy-duty-nylon backpack with visible water bottle.
- » Wear impractical shoes. This is a city. Fashion counts.
- » Cover your legs – this goes for men and women. Islamic rules aside, Egyptians have a higher level of modesty, and it's clear you haven't been here long if you don't feel embarrassed to show your knees in public.
- » Carry a copy of the *Al-Ahram Weekly* – or the Arabic *Al-Ahram*, if you want to go deep undercover.
- » Learn and use the local nonverbal cues (see boxed text, p481).

PLAYING CHICKEN

It may sound silly, but the greatest challenge most travellers face in Cairo is crossing the street. Traffic seldom stops, so you have to trust the cars will avoid you. Our advice: position yourself so that one or more locals forms a buffer between you and oncoming traffic, then cross when they do – they usually don't mind being used as human shields. Never, ever hesitate or turn back once you've stepped off the sidewalk, and cross as if you own the road. But do it fast!

Top Tips

- » Early-morning, late-night and Friday-afternoon arrivals/departures at Cairo airport are preferable (to avoid traffic).
- » Keep small coins and bills (£5 and under) for change and tips in an easily accessible pocket. See p514 for suggested tip amounts.
- » Strangers who approach you around Midan Talaat Harb, the Egyptian Museum and Khan al-Khalili almost certainly want to sell you something. See p517 for advice on touts.
- » Most Cairo residents drink the tap water. If your system can handle it, help yourself to cold water outside mosques to cut down on plastic-bottle use.

BIG MANGO NIGHTS

Check **Cairo Live Events Guide** (cairoliveeventsguide.blogspot.com) to see what's on when you're in town. Great regular gigs: Al-Tannoura Sufi dancers at Wikalat al-Ghouri and folk music at Makan (p111).

Fast Facts

- » **Area** 86,369 sq km
- » **Population** more than 20 million
- » **Area code** 202

City Reads

- » *Cairo: The City Victorious*, by Max Rodenbeck
- » *Cairo's Street Stories*, by Lesley Lababidi
- » *Understanding Cairo: The Logic of a City out of Control*, by David Sims
- » *Taxi*, by Khalid Al-Khamissy

Resources

- » Cairo 360 (www.cairo360.com) City listings and reviews
- » Yallabina (www.yallabina.com) Movie and events listings
- » Cairoobserver (www.cairoobserver.com) Smart articles on Cairo's urban fabric
- » EGY.com (www.egy.com) 19th- and 20th-century Cairo history