



Cairo Outskirts & the Delta

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Top Tips

» Microbuses and trains are the best way to travel just outside of Cairo.

» See p92 for recommended tour guides and drivers for day trips.

Best Reads

» *The Fayoum: History and Guide* by R Neil Hewison

» *In an Antique Land* by Amitav Ghosh, about life in a Delta village

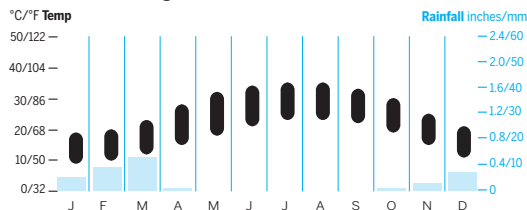
» *Coptic Monasteries* by Gawdat Gabra

Why Go?

Typical Egypt itineraries rarely take in the area right around Cairo because little of it can honestly be put in the 'must-see' category. But with the exception of the ancient site of Saqqara, which lies on the city's southern edge, virtually no tourists visit, and this alone can be a draw. Thanks to speedy minibuses and good trains through the Delta, it's easy to get from Cairo's confines to open green fields; ancient sites you'll have all to yourself; modern Coptic monasteries with roots 17 centuries deep; and the only-in-Africa action of a live camel market. Just as important, if not more so, these spots are places to meet Egyptians who will marvel that you made the journey to their overlooked corner of the country. Every destination in this chapter can be visited as an easy day trip or a leisurely overnight excursion from the capital.

When to Go

Medinat al Fayoum



Dec–Feb The best time to visit shadeless Saqqara and other pyramids.

Jun–Aug Summer heat can be paralyzing. Cool off at Lake Qarun in Al-Fayoum.

Oct The *moulid* (saints' festival) of al-Sayyed Badawi in Tanta draws a million people.



Cairo Outskirts & the Delta Highlights

- 1 Explore the half-buried ruins of sprawling **Saqqara** (p148)
- 2 Penetrate the heart of the Red Pyramid at **Dahshur** (p154)
- 3 Go sandboarding and fossil-spotting in the desert sands of **Wadi al-Hittan** (p159)
- 4 Chill out in the funky arts colony of **Tunis** (p160)
- 5 Immerse yourself in the sights, sounds and smells of the **Birqash camel market** (p165)
- 6 Pile on to a merry boat of day trippers to see the **Nile Barrages** at Qanater (p166)
- 7 Take a comfortable train trip to the Delta city of **Tanta** (p166), just to eat some sweets and enjoy the view