



Nile Valley: Luxor

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Best Places to Eat

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- » As-Sahaby Lane (p234)

Best Places to Sleep

- » Al-Moudira (p231)
- » Hilton Luxor Resort & Spa (p229)
- » Nefertiti Hotel (p229)
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- » La Maison de Pythagore (p229)

Why Go?

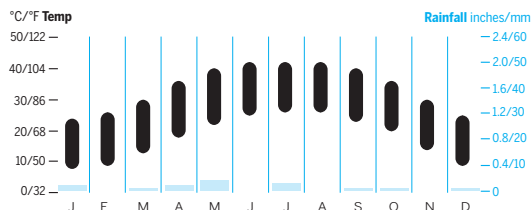
Luxor is often called the world's greatest open-air museum, but that comes nowhere near describing this extraordinary place. Nothing in the world can compare to the grandeur of ancient Thebes.

The setting is still breathtakingly beautiful, the Nile flowing between the modern town and the west-bank necropolis, backed by the enigmatic Theban escarpment. Scattered across the landscape is an embarrassment of riches, from the temples of Karnak and Luxor on its east bank to the many tombs and temples on the west bank.

Thebes' wealth and power, already legendary in antiquity, began to lure Western travellers from the end of the 18th century. Today's traveller risks being surrounded by coachloads of tourists herded through the main sights, but with a little planning it is possible to avoid the crowds and get the most from the magic of the Theban landscape and its unparalleled archaeological heritage.

When to go

Luxor



Apr–May, Oct–Nov Some of the best months to visit with the richest light.

Jun/Jul Sha'aban, the month when the city celebrates its holy man, Youssef Abu al-Haggag.

26 Nov The day Howard Carter opened the tomb of Tutankhamun in 1922.

One City, Two Banks

The monuments of Luxor are divided over both banks of the Nile. The **east bank** (Map p196), has the city of Luxor; the Temple of Luxor, the museums, and the temple complex at Karnak. Just south of the town is Sharia Khaled Ibn Walid, 'Little Britain', with many resort hotels in all price categories, and mostly British-run restaurants and pubs. The more rural **west bank** (Map p206) is scattered with the monuments and necropolis of ancient Thebes. It offers smaller and quieter accommodation, mostly in and around the village of Al-Gezira, near the ferry landing, while the monuments are strung out at the edge of the desert.

DON'T MISS

With so many world-class monuments it is easy to lose sight of contemporary Luxor, particularly when time is limited. Take some time to stroll through the Luxor **souq** (Map p196), and venture beyond the tourist bazaar just off Sharia al-Mahatta, where locals shop for fabrics, food and household goods. There you get a glimpse into a world, far away from the temples. On the west bank, **Souq at Talaat** (Map p206) is a very authentic weekly market, little visited by tourists, held on Tuesday mornings in Taref near the Temple of Seti I. Instead of taking a taxi across the bridge, head for the local ferry opposite Luxor Temple to go across, and take a taxi or a bicycle near the ferry landing on the west bank.

Tackling the West Bank

Take more than a day to visit the west bank. Plan your day in advance as tickets for most sights must be bought from the central ticket office (Map p206), and are only valid for that day. Early morning visits are ideal, but that is unfortunately when most tour groups visit the **Temple of Deir al-Bahri** or the **Valley of the Kings**. So leave these two to the afternoon to avoid the crowds and visit other sights such as **Tombs of the Nobles** or the **Ramesseum** in the morning.

AVENUE OF SPHINXES

A 3km-long alley of sphinxes connecting Luxor and Karnak is being excavated. The buildings covering the sphinxes are being destroyed, leaving an artery of road works right through town.

Need to know

- » **Telephone code** 095
- » **Population** 484,132
- » **Opening hours** Sights on West Bank, 6am-5pm daily

Top Tip

Large numbers of coachloads of day trippers from the Red Sea arrive in Luxor around 10am, heading either for the Valley of the Kings or the Temple of Karnak, so avoid those sights late morning if you don't like being overrun.

Resources

- » Luxor travel guide (www.luxoregypt.org, www.luxor-on-line.com) has information on Luxor
- » Theban Mapping Project (www.thebanmappingproject.com) is an-depth look at the Valley of the Kings
- » Flat rental (www.flatsinluxor.com) Accommodation, guide and tour bookings