

Understand Egypt

EGYPT TODAY 410

In the last few years Egypt has been undergoing massive social and political changes. We chart the major movements.

HISTORY 412

From the rising of the Nile and death of pagan culture to the coming of the Arabs and the many centuries of foreign occupation, we follow the long and winding road towards independence.

ANCIENT EGYPT & THE PHARAOHS 430

All the significant moments and key players in the 3000-year rollercoaster that was ancient Egypt.

THE EGYPTIANS 448

Things you need to know about the people, including the role of women, religious divides, the black economy and a love of football.

THE ARTS 454

Revolution has been good for the arts, freeing the tongues and minds of Egyptian writers, singers, filmmakers and visual artists.

EGYPTIAN CUISINE: BI-L HANA WA-SHIFA! 460

Egypt's home-grown culinary traditions are often overlooked. We guide you to the best of the country's dishes and drinks, including its thriving wine industry.

ENVIRONMENT 466

There's such variety in Egypt's landscape, from desert to rich farmland and marine parks to one of the world's great artificial lakes. And there's just as much variety in the creatures that inhabit it.

Egypt Today

Egypt was long seen as the land of eternity, where nothing ever changed. That image has been shattered by recent events, but some things remain: Egypt's location, its huge population and its control of the Suez Canal ensure that it is still a major player in the region. Even with the turmoil following the downfall of two presidents in as many years, it still enjoys great prestige in diplomacy, the arts and as a moderate Islamic country.

Best on Film

Death on the Nile (1978) Agatha Christie's story about Poirot investigating the murder of a heiress on board a Nile cruiser, showing off Nile scenery at its best.

The Yacoubian Building (2006) Blockbuster Egyptian movie adapted from Alaa Al Aswany's novel, portraying the stories of the residents of one block of flats in downtown Cairo.

Ruby Cairo (1992) A wife tracks down her missing husband to a hideaway in Egypt.

The Spy Who Loved Me (1977) The Pyramids, Karnak and Islamic Cairo all provide glamorous backdrops for the antics of James Bond.

Best in Print

Taxi (Khaled Alkhamissi) Bestselling novel, and now also a play, of 58 fictional monologues by Cairo taxi drivers.

The Cairo Trilogy (Naguib Mahfouz) This epic trilogy tells the story of three generations of a Cairene family in the early decades of the 20th century.

The Yacoubian Building (Alaa Al Aswany) Bestselling exposé of Egyptian society during the 1990s.

Maryam's Maze (Mansoura Ez-Eldin) Brilliant story of an Egyptian woman trying to find her way in the confusion around her.

You Say You Want a Revolution...

It's all change in Egypt at the moment. After three decades of President Hosni Mubarak's regime, and almost another three before that under Presidents Nasser and Sadat, Egyptians broke the mould. There had been elections under President Mubarak, but they were severely compromised and designed to preserve the power of the ruling National Democratic Party. The election campaign that followed Mubarak's departure was dominated by the *felool* (Mubarak supporters) and the Muslim Brotherhood, the only other group that had country-wide organisation. In June 2012, Mohammed Morsi, a Muslim Brotherhood leader, became Egypt's first democratically elected president, winning 51.7% of the vote to defeat Ahmed Shafik, Mubarak's last prime minister.

Morsi's presidency was supposed to be a new beginning but he disappointed many Egyptians, failing to take measures to improve the economy, but giving himself unlimited powers. He also forced through a contentious Islamist constitution, which also gave more autonomy to the military. As the financial and security situation deteriorated, Egyptians took to the streets again and many demonstrations turned violent. At the end of June 2013, with millions attending some of the protests, the head of the military, Field Marshal Abdel Fattah al-Sisi, overthrew Morsi. Although Sisi declared that he did not seek power, in May 2014, he won a landslide victory in the presidential election. Whatever happens next, one thing is clear: if Egyptians fall out of love with Sisi, they will demand more change.

Even in revolutionary Egypt, some things remain unchanged, such as lingering over coffee in one of Alexandria's cosmopolitan cafes or sipping a calming glass of *shai* (tea) after a frenzied shopping episode in Cairo's Khan al-Khalili. Magnificent monuments are everywhere – the pointed perfection of the Pyramids and the