



Egypt

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Why Go?

As Herodotus wrote in the 5th century BC, Egypt 'has more wonders in it than any other country in the world'. But the Pharaonic temples and pyramids that awed the Greek historian are just the beginning.

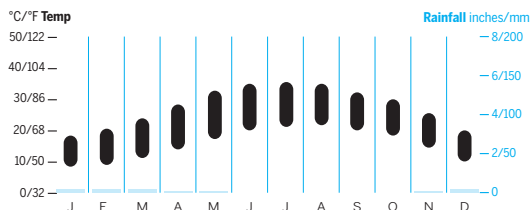
Egypt ruled the Islamic empire from Cairo, the City Victorious, where the medieval core is still a mesmerising warren. In desert monasteries, Egypt's native Christians, the Copts, preserve two-millennia-old rituals.

Out west, sand stretches to the Sahara, dotted with green oases and ghostly rock formations. To the east, the crystal waters of the Red Sea support a vivid frenzy of underwater life. On the Sinai peninsula, visitors can climb the mountain where God had words with Moses, and spend their remaining days at a beach camp Shangri-Las.

With cheap transport, beds and even cold beers, plus a borderline-overwhelming brand of hospitality, Egypt is the Middle East's most traveller-friendly country.

When to Go

Cairo



Dec–Feb Egypt's 'winter' high season is sunny and warm, with chilly nights.

Mar–May Spring brings occasional dust storms that can disrupt flight schedules.

Jun–Aug Scorching heat everywhere but the Mediterranean coast, which is balmy.

Connections

Egypt's borders are open to neighbouring countries: by bus to **Libya** and river ferry to **Sudan**, and, far more common, by bus to **Israel** (from Taba) and by ferry to Aqaba in **Jordan**. Both of these latter options are inexpensive and frequent. The border with **Gaza**, at Rafah, is technically open, but travellers can't carry on into Israel and must return to Egypt by the same border; delays and closures are common. By air, both Cairo and Alexandria receive numerous flights from neighbouring countries, with Alexandria often having cheaper fares.

ITINERARIES

One Week

If you only have a week, focus on **Cairo's** attractions, such as the **Egyptian Museum** and the **Coptic Museum**, plus great coffeehouses, funky bars and live-music venues. Midweek, fly or take the train to **Luxor**, to admire the ancient ruins of Thebes. From there, you can hop a bus to Hurghada for the ferry to **Sharm el-Sheikh** in the Sinai – there are great snorkelling and diving options on either side of the Red Sea.

Two Weeks

In two weeks, you can cover Egypt's main sights. Head out from Cairo on the sleeper train to **Aswan**, where you can soak up Nubian culture. Sail back down the Nile to **Luxor** on a felucca. Train (or fly) back to Cairo, where you can spend two days seeing the **Pyramids of Giza**, the Egyptian Museum and the medieval souq of **Khan al-Khalili**. If you're continuing west towards Libya, stop in **Siwa Oasis** en route. If you're heading east, take a bus to the Sinai and hike up **Mt Sinai**, then spend a few days in **Dahab** to recharge. From here, it's easy to cross into Jordan and Israel.

Essential Food & Drink

- » **Molokhiya** A slippery, garlicky leafy green soup, served with rabbit.
- » **Hamam mahshi** Roast pigeon stuffed with *fireek* (green wheat) and rice.
- » **Kushari** A vegetarian's best friend: noodles, rice, black lentils, chickpeas and fried onions, with a tangy tomato sauce.
- » **Fiteer** The Egyptian pizza, with a flaky pastry base and either sweet or savoury toppings.
- » **Fuul** Slow-cooked fava beans, mashed more than in neighbouring countries.
- » **Ta'amiya** What Cairenes call felafel, packed with herbs and shaped into flat patties.

AT A GLANCE

- » **Currency** Egyptian pound (E£)
- » **Mobile Phones** GSM phone network widespread
- » **Money** ATMs are common
- » **Visas** Available on arrival for many nationalities

Fast Facts

- » **Capital** Cairo
- » **Country code** 20
- » **Language** Arabic
- » **Official name** Arab Republic of Egypt
- » **Population** 82 million

Exchange Rates

Australia	A\$1	E£5.96
Euro Zone	€1	E£7.67
Israel	1NIS	E£1.58
Jordan	JD1	E£8.54
UK	£1	E£9.54
USA	US\$1	E£6.05

For current exchange rates see www.xe.com.

Resources

- » **Lonely Planet** (www.lonelyplanet.com/egypt) Destination info, hotel booking and forum
- » **Egypt Tourism** (www.egypt.travel) Official tourism ministry site
- » **Daily News Egypt** (www.thedailynewsegyp.com) Best English newspaper
- » **Egypt Independent** (www.almasryalyoum.com/en) Respected online news
- » **Theban Mapping Project** (www.thebanmappingproject.com) Archaeological database and news