



# Egypt

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## Why Go?

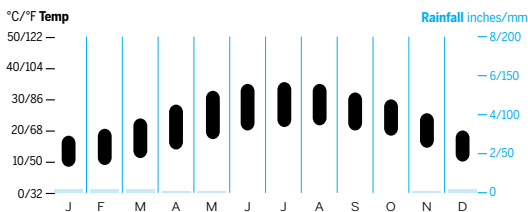
As Herodotus wrote in the 5th century BC, Egypt 'has more wonders in it than any other country in the world'. But the Pharaonic temples and pyramids that awed the Greek historian are just the beginning.

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

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 is said to have had words with Moses, and spend their remaining days at beach camp Shangri-Las.

## 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.

# CAIRO

القاهرة

📍 02 / POP 22 MILLION

Known to its residents as Umm al-Dunya (Mother of the World), modern Cairo is a hotchpotch of recent growth barely covering a dense bed of history. Wander down to Islamic Cairo to tread on medieval stones. Head out west to Giza's famed pyramids and the time warp sets you back a full 4500 years. Meanwhile, the city's main museum bursts at the seams with its priceless wealth of antiquities. But the real allure of Cairo lies in the quiet moments in between: sipping a sugary tea or puffing leisurely on a sheesha while watching the city whirl past you.

## History

Cairo is not ancient, though the presence of the Pyramids leads many to believe otherwise. Its foundations were laid in AD 969 by the early Islamic Fatimid dynasty. Under the rule of subsequent dynasties, Cairo swelled and burst its walls, but at heart it remained a medieval city for 900 years. It wasn't until the mid-19th century that Cairo started to change in any significant way.

The site of modern Downtown Cairo, west of what is now Midan Opera, was then a swampy plain subject to the annual flooding of the Nile. In 1863, when the French-educated Ismail Pasha came to power, he was determined to upgrade the image of his capital, which he believed could only be done by starting afresh. For 10 years the former marsh became one vast building site as Ismail invited architects from Belgium, France and Italy to create a brand-new European-style district, which earned the nickname 'Paris on the Nile'. This building boom has continued until the present day, if with somewhat less aesthetic cohesion, with the city's boundaries constantly expanding into the surrounding desert.

## 👁️ Sights

### 📍 Downtown

#### Midan Tahrir

SQUARE

(Map p62) Midan Tahrir (Liberation Sq) gained world renown in early 2011, when millions of Egyptians converged there to oust then-president Hosni Mubarak. On a regular day, it's just your average giant traffic circle, albeit one where half-a-dozen major arteries

## 📍 NEED TO KNOW

### Fast Facts

- ✦ **Capital** Cairo
- ✦ **Country code** 📞 20
- ✦ **Language** Arabic
- ✦ **Official name** Arab Republic of Egypt
- ✦ **Population** 87 million
- ✦ **Currency** Egyptian pound (E£)
- ✦ **Mobile phones** GSM phone network widespread.
- ✦ **Money** ATMs are common.
- ✦ **Visas** Available on arrival for many nationalities.

### Exchange Rates

<b>Australia</b>	A\$1	E£6.6
<b>Euro zone</b>	€1	E£9.6
<b>Israel</b>	1NIS	E£2
<b>Jordan</b>	JD1	E£10
<b>UK</b>	£1	E£11.9
<b>USA</b>	US\$1	E£7.1

For current exchange rates see [www.xe.com](http://www.xe.com).

### Resources

- ✦ **Lonely Planet** ([www.lonelyplanet.com/egypt](http://www.lonelyplanet.com/egypt)) Destination info, hotel booking and forum.
- ✦ **Egypt Tourism** ([www.egypt.travel](http://www.egypt.travel)) Official tourism-ministry site.
- ✦ **Daily News Egypt** ([www.thedailynewsegypt.com](http://www.thedailynewsegypt.com)) Best English newspaper.
- ✦ **Mada Masr** ([www.madamasr.com](http://www.madamasr.com)) Independent progressive online reporting in English.
- ✦ **Theban Mapping Project** ([www.thebanmappingproject.com](http://www.thebanmappingproject.com)) Archaeological database and news.

converge, and one that's still occasionally taken over by demonstrations. However, the main reason for visiting this square is the lurid pink bulk of the Egyptian Museum.

### Egyptian Museum

MUSEUM

(Map p62; 📞 2579 6948; [www.egyptianmuseum-cairo.org](http://www.egyptianmuseum-cairo.org); Midan Tahrir; adult/student E£75/40, mummy room E£100; 🕒 9am-5pm Sat-Thu, to 4pm Fri) One of the world's most important