

general information

Egypt

Gift of the Nile



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INTRODUCTION

Egypt is actually a wonderful and delightful mixture of traditions, with a socio-economic structure, which allows, more and more, a gradient of classes. But one must look, and feel with the heart in order to touch this essence of Egypt.

SHARM EL - SHEIKH

The region of Sharm El - Sheikh is actually a series of bays with innumerable and extraordinary coral reefs. It is located on the east shore at the southernmost tip of the Sinai Peninsula.

Sharm El - Sheikh has become the leading tourist spot of the entire Sinai and a Mecca for divers.

Though Sharm El - Sheikh, Ras Mohammad and Tiran Island appear on Spanish maps as early as 1762, the first time Sharm El - Sheikh made its way into the world's media was in 1967, when Egypt's President Gamal Abdel Nasser blocked the Strait of Tiran, cutting off Israel's access to the Red Sea. The blockade of this strategic point led to the 6-Day War and the occupation of the Sinai by Israel. One year later in 1968 the Israelis built the settlement Ophira on the cliff of Ras Um Sidd. This today is the "old city" of Sharm El Sheikh.



SHORT HISTORY OF EGYPT

From the Dynasty of the Pharaohs to Husni Mubarak

Egyptian history is inextricably tied to the Nile.

Around 5000 years ago the independent riverfront states were unified under the rule of Menes, giving rise to the first dynasty of pharaohs. The pharaohs ruled over a highly stratified society. The first pyramid was built in the 27th century BC. Monarchical power was at its greatest during the 4th dynasty. Through the 6th and 7th dynasties power was diffused and small principalities began to appear.

Under Montuhotep II, Egypt again came under control of a single pharaoh. From 1550 to 1069 BC, the New Kingdom bloomed under rulers such as Tuthmosis I, the first pharaoh to be entombed in the Valley of the Kings; his daughter Hatshepsut, one of Egypt's few female pharaohs; and Tuthmosis III, Egypt's greatest conqueror, who expanded the empire into western Asia.



Amenhotep IV renounced the teachings of the priesthood. He and his wife Nefertiti established a new capital called Akhetaten devoted solely to the new god. Akhenaten's son was **Tutankhamun**, who ruled Egypt for nine years then died while still a teenager. Thereafter, Egypt was ruled by generals: Ramses I, II and III (*see picture*), and Seti I. They built massive monuments and temples, but the empire began to crumble and it was in disarray when the Greek conqueror **Alexander the Great** arrived in 332 BC and established a new capital.

Under Ptolemy I, Alexandria became a great city. The Ptolemies ruled Egypt for 300 years. An expanded Roman empire began taking an interest in Egypt and the scene was set for one of the ancient world's more celebrated soap operas



Between 51 and 48 BC, Egypt was ruled by Ptolemy XIII and his sister **Cleopatra VIII** (*see picture*), **Julius Caesar** came to Egypt, threw Ptolemy into the Nile, appointed another of Cleopatra's brothers, Ptolemy XIV, as joint leader, and became Cleopatra's lover

The Roman Empire fell apart in the 3rd and 4th centuries, and Nubians, North Africans and Persians invaded. Despite this, Egypt was relatively stable until AD 640 when the Arabs arrived. The Arabs brought Islam to Egypt and established Fustat (on the site of present-day Cairo) as the seat of an unstable government. Ultimately it was the Fatimids who came to control Egypt, building the city of Al-Qahira (Cairo). Egypt prospered under the Fatimids and Cairo became a thriving metropolis.



Western European Christians seized much of the weakening Fatimid Empire in the Crusades of the 11th century, but in 1187 the **Syrian-based Seljuks** sent an army into Egypt and Salah ad-Din (Saladin) fortified Cairo and expelled the Crusaders from Jerusalem. Salah ad-Din enlisted Mamluks (Turkish mercenaries), but they ended up overthrowing his dynasty and ruled for two and a half centuries before Egypt fell to the **Turks** in 1517. **Napoleon** (*see picture*) invaded in 1798, only to be ousted by the **British** in 1801, which were in turn expelled by Mohammed Ali, a lieutenant in the Albanian contingent of the Ottoman army.

During **WWI** Egypt aligned itself with the Allies, King Fuad I was elected head of the constitutional monarchy and for the next 30 years the British, the monarchists and the Wafdists jockeyed for power.



The **Arab League** was founded after **WWII** by seven Arab countries, including Egypt, but the war had left Egypt in a shambles, and its defeat in Israel's 1948 War of Independence saw the chaos escalate. In 1952 a group of dissident military officers, led by Colonel Gamal Abdel Nasser (*see picture*), orchestrated a bloodless coup. The British and French refused to relinquish control, so they invaded. Nasser became a hero, particularly among Arabs.

Nasser attempted to unite Egypt, Syria, Yemen and later Iraq in the late 1950s, emphasizing Arab unity and demonizing Israel. Following months of heightening tension between Egypt and Israel, the Jewish state attacked on 5 June 1967, starting the **Six Day War**. Israel destroyed the Egyptian air force, captured Sinai and closed the Suez Canal.

Anwar Sadat, Nasser's vice president, took over from Nasser in 1970, and set about improving relations with the west.

On 6 October 1973, **the Jewish holiday of Yom Kippur**, Egypt launched a surprise attack on the Israeli occupiers of Sinai. In 1977 Sadat began making peace with Israel, leading to the 1979 Camp David Agreement. Israel agreed to withdraw from Sinai, and Egypt officially recognized Israel. Many in the Arab world felt Sadat had betrayed them, and he was assassinated on 6 October 1981.

Husni Mubarak, Sadat's vice president, was sworn in and has been the country's leader ever since.

Source: Lonely planet



Egyptian Flag

WHAT TO SEE

Egypt: beyond Beaches, Nature, Culture and Adventure, captures the unique selling proposition that the destination offers. Ancient Pyramids, Temples and Statues, thousands of years old culture, friendly people, seven world heritage sites and much more.

Please read our brochure [Into Culture](#), [Into the Blue](#) and [Into the Desert](#) for more.

ACTIVITIES

Water sports

There are plenty of good opportunities for **swimming** on the many fine beaches along Egypt's Mediterranean and Red Sea coasts. **Diving** and **snorkelling** are by far the most popular organised activities in Egypt, and the Red Sea is said to have some of the best scuba diving in the world. The waters off Egypt teem with underwater life and the corals, crustaceans and fish come in all sorts of vivid colours and shapes..

Trekking

An exciting adventure is a ride out into the desert on camel or horseback or exploring the Sinai by jeep. Jeep **safaris** are also very popular, either in the Western Desert with its fantastic sand landscapes or in the rugged, rocky surrounds of Sinai. The terrific interior of the Sinai desert invites for adventurous

and fascinating trips as hiring quad runners and motorbikes, and partaking in a guided excursion into the desert.

Shopping

You will not find any shopping malls. You can purchase local handcrafts such as jewellery, ceramic, paintings and embroidery in the little shops in the streets in and around any city. Brand name clothing is also available in the more specialized shops.

Bargaining is a part of life in Egypt and virtually everything is open to negotiation. This includes your room for the night, your lunchtime roadside snack and the felucca you ride down the Nile in. The few rules to observe in the bazaars are these: never offer a price that you're not prepared to pay, get a feel for the real price before you begin haggling, take your time and enjoy the friendly sport of it (which might include a cup of tea from the vendor), and remember that you're never obliged to buy anything - you won't offend anyone.

food & Drinks

Restaurants

In Egypt, as in the rest of the world, restaurants are only as good as the cooks they employ, and cooks seem to be continually changing.

Many of the smaller, Egyptian-style restaurants specialize in basic meat and fava-bean dishes. They are simple and inexpensive. Waiters speak little English, so use your phrase book.

Drinks and Alcohol

Although devout Muslims refrain from drinking alcohol, **beer**, **wine**, and hard **liquor** are available in bars, restaurants, and some grocery shops. Imported beer and wine are the most expensive, but the local beer called Stella is a light lager that is quite good. Marzen, a dark, bock beer, appears briefly during the spring; Aswanli is the dark beer made in Aswan.

Brandy is drinkable only when diluted, and the local rum is not much better. However, zibib, the Egyptian version of Greek ouzo or Mexican anasato, is good either on the rocks or diluted with water (which turns it milky). Other hard liquors are imported and therefore are limited. If you drink regularly, plan on stocking up at a duty-free store before you enter Egypt.

local events

The Islamic (or Hejira) calendar is a full 11 days shorter than the Gregorian (western) calendar, so public holidays and festivals fall 11 days earlier each year.

Getting around

You can hire service taxis that shunt car loads of passengers between towns and cities.

There are cars for rent, buses for local traffic (make a price deal in advance) and luxurious coaches with air-conditioning for longer trips.

Nightlife

Every resort has got its own bar with different happy hour offers. An evening stroll along the promenade gives you an insight of what the beach bars of the hotels have to offer for the evening. Some hotels entertain their guests with belly dancing performances and with the ever popular Russian dance shows. After the shows you can dance the night through in one of Sharm s discos. Some hotels offer special evening events which are usually a dinner and disco or show in the desert under the million stars.

Fauna

Camels, buffalo and donkeys are the most prevalent animals to be found in Egypt. As for desert wildlife, the gazelle, jackal, jerboa and desert fox are indigenous to the country, as are lizards and several venomous snakes.



Egypt is also one of the greatest centres of Arabian horse breeding in the world with large government-controlled stud farms under the auspices of the Egyptian Agricultural Organization.

There are about 200 species of migratory birds and 150 species of local birds, including the marsh sandpiper, spoonbill, pink flamingo, hoopoe, heron, stork, quail, egret and golden oriole. Eagles, falcons, vultures, hawks and owls are among the birds of prey to be found. Egypt also has a plethora of insect life, including mosquitoes, flies, fleas and scorpions. There are said to be as many as 190 species of fish in the Nile and many more in the Mediterranean and Red seas.



Flora

Although the lotus and papyrus are symbols of Egypt, it is the date palm that dominates the landscape. The Nile Delta and the Nile River Valley have a rich variety of trees -- some indigenous, some imported -- including the tamarisk, acacia, eucalyptus, mimosa, jacaranda, cypress and sycamore as well as a wide variety of fruit trees from citrus to fig to mango.

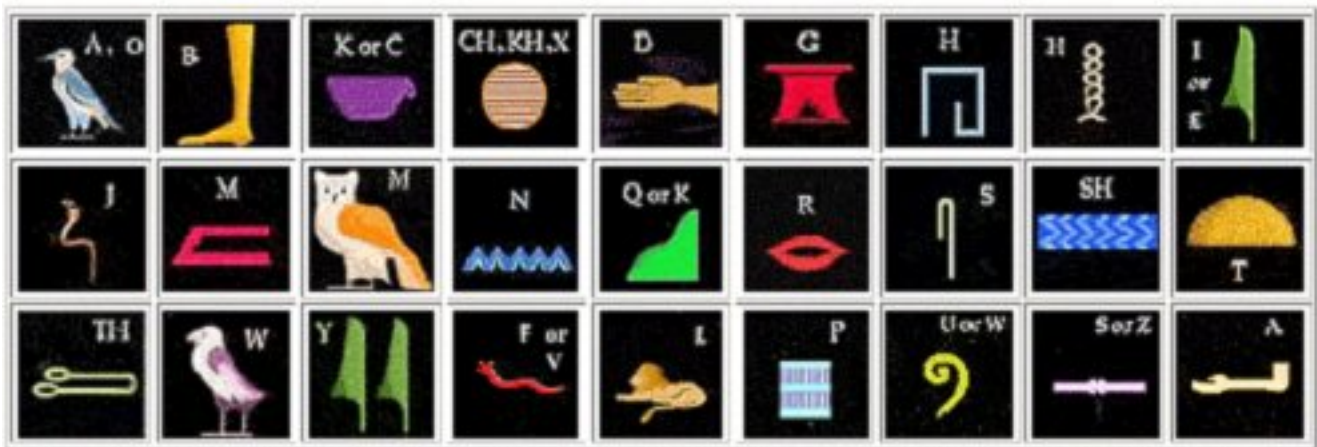
Other fruits and vegetables flourish in the fertile land along the Nile, as well as a vivid array of flowers from the rose, Poinciana, lotus (of course), jasmine, lily and bird of paradise. A multiplicity of grasses grows along the Nile as well.

Natural resources

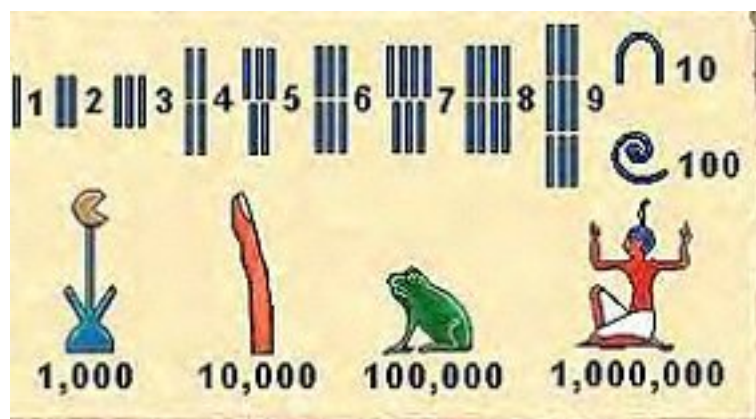
Egypt's most valuable mineral resource is oil, although the country also has gold deposits as well as iron ore, manganese, phosphates and uranium.

Village life

Originally Nubian villages were closely knit, celebrating births and marriages with village-wide festivals, rituals that always included the river. The newborn child was washed in its life-giving flow, and at circumcision his foreskin was tossed as an offering into the river. A bride and groom bathed separately in the fertile waters on the eve of their marriage, then again at dawn, together. After a death, at the end of mourning, the women came to the waters to wash from their faces the mud and blue dye that had been their badge of sorrow, and offer henna and perfume to the spirits of the river. Although the Nubians converted first to Christianity and then to Islam, beliefs in the water angels persist, and the people continue to petition these spirits for favours and blessings



Hieroglyphic Alphabet



Hieroglyphic Mathematics

short fact sheet

Travel Information

Visas

All visitors to Egypt are required to have a visa and a passport valid for six months. Visas can be arranged through Egyptian embassies worldwide. Visitors from the US, Canada, EU and GCC countries may be able to purchase a visa stamp upon arrival at many large airports. One-month visitor's visas can be extended.

Health care

Bilharzia (don't paddle in the Nile!)

See your doctor at least 4-6 weeks before your trip to allow time for shots to take effect.

Hepatitis A or immune globulin (IG).

Hepatitis B if you might be exposed to blood (for example, health-care workers), have sexual contact with the local population, stay longer than 6 months in the region, or be exposed through medical treatment.

Rabies, if you might be exposed to wild or domestic animals through your work or recreation.

Typhoid, particularly if you are visiting developing countries in this region.

As needed, booster doses for tetanus, diphtheria, measles, and a one-time dose of polio vaccine for adults. Hepatitis B vaccine is now recommended for all infants and for children ages 11-12 years who did not complete the series as infants.

To Avoid Getting Sick

Don't eat food purchased from street vendors.

Don't drink beverages with ice.

Don't eat dairy products unless you know they have been pasteurized.

Don't share needles with anyone.

Don't handle animals (especially monkeys, dogs, and cats), to avoid bites and serious diseases (including rabies and plague).

Don't swim in fresh water, including the Nile. Salt water is usually safer.

What You Need To Bring with You

Long-sleeved shirt and long pants to wear while outside whenever possible, to prevent illnesses

Time

GMT/UTC plus two hours

Electricity

220V, 50 Hz

Money & Costs

Meals

Budget: US\$2 4

Mid-range: US\$6 8

Top-end US\$8 and upwards

Lodging

Budget: US\$3 8

Mid-range: US\$8 40

Top-end US\$40 and upwards

Currency

Egyptian pounds

Egypt is terrific value. It is possible to spend as little as US\$15 a day if you're prepared to stay in the cheapest hotels and hostels, eat local vendors' food, limit yourself to one historic site a day and travel on packed third-class trains.

Well-known brands of travelers' cheques will be honored everywhere, although having travelers' cheques in US dollars or UK pounds will prove the most hassle-free. American Express, Visa, MasterCard, JCB and Euro cards are accepted at various stores and hotels displaying the appropriate signage. Visa and MasterCard can be used to obtain cash advances at Banque Misr and National Bank of Egypt branches.

Be aware that pickpockets operate around tourist sites, so avoid carrying money in your back pocket.

A service charge of 12% applies in restaurants and hotels, and a sales tax of 5-7% is also levied.

Additionally, you might find yourself paying a further 1-4% tax on upper-end accommodation, so it is possible to find that a 23% tax has been added

carried by insects (e.g., malaria, dengue, filariasis, leishmaniasis, and onchocerciasis).

Insect repellent containing DEET (diethylmethyltoluamide), in 30percent-35percent strength for adults and 6percent-10percent for children. Unless you are staying in air-conditioned or well-screened housing, purchase a bed net impregnated with the insecticide permethrin. (Bed nets can be purchased in camping or military supply stores.)

Over-the-counter antidiarrheal medicine to take if you have diarrhea.

Iodine tablets and water filters to purify water if bottled water is not available. See Do's above for more detailed information about water filters.

Prescription medications: make sure you have enough to last during your trip, as well as a copy of the prescription(s).

After You Return Home

If you have visited an area where there is risk for malaria, continue taking your malaria medication weekly for 4 weeks after you leave the area.

If you become ill after your trip--even as long as a year after you return--tell your doctor where you have traveled.

to the price you've been quoted for a mid-range or top-end hotel room.

Climate

Deciding when to come to Egypt depends a lot on where you want to go. Everywhere south of Cairo is uncomfortably hot in the summer months (June-August), especially Luxor and Aswan, so winter **December-February is definitely the best time** to visit these areas. Summer is also the time when the Mediterranean coast is at its most crowded, but winter in Cairo can get pretty cool. March to May is the best time to enjoy the warm days without the crush of bodies on the beaches and the midday heat of high summer.

Statistics

Full country name: Arab Republic of Egypt

Area: 1,001,449 sq km (622,272 sq mi)

Population: 69.5 million

Capital city: Cairo

People: Berbers, Bedouins and Nubians

Language: Arabic

Religion: 94% Islam, 6% Christian

Government: Republic

President: Mohammed Husni Mubarak