

# Egypt

مصر



NAME:	Arab Republic of Egypt
CAPITAL:	Cairo
LANGUAGE:	Arabic
RELIGION:	Muslim
CURRENCY:	Egyptian Pound

## Getting Started

### When to Visit

[Egypt](#) can be visited any time of the year depending on your itinerary (as long as there aren't protests in the streets). The weather tends to be hot and dry (73-110° F (23-40° C)) with the exception of December-February, when temperatures cool slightly and nights can be chilly (as cold as 45° F (8° C)).

The winter months of December-February are the best time to visit the southern Nile River since summers there can be miserable. [Cairo](#), the Mediterranean coast, and the Sinai peninsula can easily be visited year round, but for sunbathing and snorkeling the spring and fall are the best months to visit since the summer can be very hot and winters can be too cold for relaxing on the beach.

Travel plans can be disrupted if you haven't booked ahead during local holidays, especially during Ramadan (ninth month of the Islamic calendar, which rotates every year compared to the Gregorian calendar). This month also tends to close shops, restaurants, and coffee shops.

A final point to consider before planning your travel is local holidays. Holidays can make travel either more attractive, such as for large festivals, or less attractive, due to tourist site closings and more expensive transportation options so make sure you look into this before booking your trip.

### Weather

Although weather can be generalized based upon years past, for more up to date weather patterns and predicted future weather patterns, visit weather websites like [weather.com](#); many local news sources also have information for international weather forecasts.

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## Tours & Cruises

If you're looking for a pre-arranged trip, that involves little effort on your part, then you should consider going on an organized tour. Organized tours vary from all expenses included to only daily tours and perhaps hotels included in the price, but all the options below will help you arrange all the details so you don't have to worry about finding the best deal or right hotel.

[Contiki Tours](#): A tour company that only offers tours to 18-35 year olds; known as offering fun and social tours for young singles and couples.

[Gap Adventures](#): Known best among young adults, Gap Adventures provides local transportation, housing, and food, which cuts costs and introduces the local culture, but can also be challenging for those seeking luxury.

[Holland America Cruises](#): Cruises for all ages and families.

[Intrepid Travel](#): Boasts more "off the beaten track" destinations; do your research though since some tours are very adventurous and involves camping and local hotels.

[Road Scholar](#): For older adults, Road Scholar offers tours with an educational emphasis; formerly known as Elder Hostel.

## Guidebooks

If you are just traveling on business and have little free time or are already familiar with [Egypt](#), you may not need anything more than this guide! However, if you need more detailed and up to date information, there are a number of great country-wide, region-wide, and city-wide guidebooks available for travel in Egypt.

[Eyewitness Guides](#): Incredible pictures and detailed maps of popular tourist sites including museums. Those living abroad can't put these books down.

[Fodor's](#): Good maps and information for the major tourist locations, but has little information for anyone heading off the beaten track. Great for those on organized tours.

[Lonely Planet](#): Great maps and updated often with comprehensive housing information, restaurants, & transportation options. Backpackers and adventurers love these guidebooks.

[National Geographic Traveler](#): Almost more of an information book about Germany, than a guidebook; offers great pictures, maps, history, and culture. Popular with armchair travelers and history buffs on organized tours.

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# Culture

## Personality, Culture, & Identity

[Egypt](#) is the Nile River itself; it's life and death, the coming and going of seasons, it's fleeting, yet permanent. Like Alexandria, Egypt is not the result of their history or the Pharaohs, but rather is the creation of the people who came and went over the centuries.

While most Egyptians don't claim any relation to the ancient Egyptian civilization, the link to their past is inevitable. The Pharaohs came and went, then Cleopatra and the Romans, the Greeks with Alexander the Great, and the Islamic Arabs. Each of these groups influenced modern Egyptian culture, which today is primarily Muslim, yet maintains a Christian minority and bridges the Islamic world with [Europe](#) through their roots and connections.

Like the Nile's rising and falling with the seasons, the [Egyptian](#) people have adapted to numerous changes in power. Today the people are friendly and outgoing, willing to offer help, but also eager to sell you a Taiwanese-made souvenir of the [Pyramids](#). Life appears to move quickly, but the opportunity to buy a goat on the streets of [Cairo](#) will always create pause.

Today's [Egyptians](#) primarily see themselves simply as Egyptian, but what that means is defined differently by each individual. One person might see that as being a liberal Muslim, another as a member of the Arab world, as a bridge between east and west, as the future, or simply as a gracious host.

## History

[Egypt](#)'s history begins and ends with the location of the country along the Nile River. This river, and its flooding each year provides water to sustain life and grow crops. The monuments of Egypt's past Pharaohs

are present along the river from Aswan to Alexandria and everywhere in between. The ancient Egyptians invented stone buildings and became architectural masterminds and leaders. They created an advanced civilization and government, with each Pharaoh him or herself acting as a god on earth. Many aspects of ancient Egypt have maintained value and meaning in today's society. Perhaps the most significant being that the river means life, and the desert death. This is exemplified with funeral monuments of the ancients being in the desert, and even today the flag of Egypt symbolizes this (black represents the fertile soil of the Nile flood plain and life, whereas red symbolized the sands and death).

In 45 Christianity arrived in [Egypt](#) with St. Mark. Religious differences were welcomed in Egypt at the time, but under Roman rule many Christians were persecuted in Egypt until Rome adopted Christianity as their official religion in 324. This Egyptian sect of Christianity held a great deal of influence for a number of years. Today, there are regions, particularly in [Cairo](#) that remain Coptic Christian, a group that consists of about 10% of the country's population.

In about 640 Mohamed invaded [Egypt](#). The Muslims took the region without much effort and forced taxes on non-believers, encouraging most of Egypt's population to convert to Islam. This event brought with it the ethnic Arabs and the Muslim religion, which is how most Egyptians today identify.

Although [Egypt](#) changed continually over the next few centuries, the country experienced no major changes until the [French](#) and [English](#) fought for power around the turn of the 18th century. Neither group took complete control, which allowed Mohammed Ali to take power in Egypt. During Mohammed Ali's reign he modernized the army, improved the country's infrastructure, advanced education, and altered the country's economy.

Shortly after Mohammed Ali's rule the Suez Canal was completed (1869) and provided the quickest transportation route from [India](#) and

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the Far East to [Europe](#). This event placed [Egypt](#) in the middle of the trading world, however the cost of the canal caught up to Egypt and in the 1870s the country was forced to sell the Suez Canal to the [British](#). Soon after, the British took control of the country.

In 1952 the [Egyptians](#) overthrew the [British](#) and later that same year, they overthrew the monarchy (which had essentially been a facade, ruling under British power). After some turmoil, particularly surrounding control over the Suez Canal, the new Egyptian government solidified their claim on power.

The new and independent government of [Egypt](#) immediately put themselves in conflict with their relatively new neighbor, Israel. The 1960s saw battles between the Egyptians and Israelis, with Egypt on the losing end of all major battles. In 1973 fortunes turned when the Egyptians launched a surprise attack on Israel.

In 1977 [Egypt](#) and Israel signed a truce. This truce gave Egypt the land they lost in earlier battles (the Sinai Peninsula) in exchange for Israel's official recognition by Egypt. This recognition sent shock waves throughout the Arab world and Egypt lost much of its influence in the Middle East, while gaining influence as an ally of [Europe](#) and [North America](#) (the locations of Israel's major allies). This turn towards Europe led to Islamic extremists becoming more active and aggressive, eventually leading to a number of bombings at tourist locations. These attacks backfired as the economy, with a strong base in tourism shrunk and the people stood up in defense of the government.

Recently, in 2011 political unrest again escalated as protesters took to the streets demanding the resignation of President Hosni Mubarak. The protesters eventually won, however the economy has stalled yet again as tourism has stopped and many local shops were forced to close as the shop owners began protecting their businesses from protesters and looters.

## Dress & Behavior

As a primarily Muslim country, there are a number of religious laws which should be obeyed by everyone in [Egypt](#), including tourists.

It is considered inappropriate for women to leave their hair uncovered, however this is slowly changing in [Egypt](#), especially among foreigners. Women covering their heads will show great respect to their culture, however most Egyptians understand if you don't cover your hair. For many women in Egypt, showing one's hair is a sign that she is ready to marry and is looking for an available man.

Both women and men are expected to cover their legs and shoulders; showing your knees can be very offensive. 3/4 length pants, like Capris and short sleeve shirts are only looked down upon by strict Muslims, however wearing full length pants and long sleeves at all times is the best course of action. Staying at a seaside resort often times allows these rules to be ignored, but follow the example of locals in these places.

Islamic law forbids pork products and alcohol. Being a fairly liberal Muslim country, drinking alcohol is not completely unheard of by the locals, but public drinking or intoxication is strictly forbidden. Pork products are difficult to find in Egypt since there is little market for pork. Avoiding these foods is easy due to its inaccessibility. To learn more about dining etiquette in [Egypt](#), continue reading below.

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# Food

## Dining Etiquette

[Egypt](#)'s dining etiquette is similar to many of the [Middle East](#)'s dining. Dress conservatively, including long pants even if it's too hot to step outside. Bring a small gift of desserts, such as chocolates or sweet pastries. Upon arrival remove your shoes and let your host show you to your seat.

Once served, you will notice there is no pork on the menu, since the people are primarily Muslim. Also, never season your foods or ask for seasonings like salt and pepper, since this is a great insult to your host. Only eat with your right hand and if your neighbor's glass is empty fill it up, but never fill your own glass.

If you have eaten enough food, leave a little of each kind of food on your plate to symbolize this. If you want more food, a great compliment, finish all of your food and graciously accept more food. After the meal you're welcome to stay, but being served a cold beverage is a subtle sign that it's time for you leave.

If you're dining in a restaurant, never address or directly look at anyone else's food. This is considered rude and a means of coveting, which is not well accepted. It may also force the bearer of the meal to offer you some of his or her foods and by custom you are obliged to accept. Also, if dining in a restaurant, the inviter is expected to pay the entire bill and guests are expected to offer to assist, but this offer will be turned down.

## History & Influences

As with their history, [Egypt](#)'s cuisine must begin with antiquity. A number of fruits and vegetables were easily accessible and became

very popular, including dates, figs, and grapes. Bread, rice, and beer were also popular in ancient times as wheat and barley were common.

The first lasting influence was with the Arab invasion and the conversion of the people to Islam. This religion has dietary restriction, most particularly not allowing pork or alcohol to be consumed.

After the Arabs arrived, the Persians, [Italians](#), Ottoman [Turks](#), and others have arrived as traders or settlers and with them came new foods and spices. However, despite these groups, it was the Levantine food from the [Middle East](#) that had the longest lasting, and most influential contribution to [Egypt](#)'s food today.

Despite these outside influences, [Egypt](#) continues to maintain some of their ancient roots as bread and rice continue to be popular and the minority Christian population still enjoys their beer.

## Staple Foods

**Bread:** commonly served with meals; breads can come in multiple forms

**Rice:** regularly served with some dishes, but not typically served with dishes that come with bread

## Regional Varieties & Specialties

**Alexandria & the Mediterranean Coast:** uses a great deal of fish and other seafood

**Baba Ghannoush:** thick sauce or paste consisting of eggplant, chickpeas, and other ingredients

**Hummus:** similar to baba ghannoush, but without the eggplant

**Mahshi Hamam:** roasted or grilled pigeon stuffed with rice or wheat

**Shawarma:** shredded beef, lamb or chicken served on pita bread with tahina

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## Drinks

In [Egypt](#), tea is the national drink and is served at all times of the day. It is difficult to go through a day without being offered a glass of tea, which is usually sweet black tea.

The Christian population drinks beer and other alcohols, but this is a minority of the population and alcohol is not served in most restaurants or sold in stores.

# Practical Information

## Visas

Many foreign nationals need a visa to enter [Egypt](#), however the requirements for citizens of different nationalities varies. To learn more about who need visas, what type of visa is needed, what requirements are needed to obtain a visa, and visa costs, please visit [Egypt's Ministry of Foreign Affairs Official Website](#).

## Health & Insurance

Every part of the world has different health concerns and diseases, including [Egypt](#). Before traveling, consult with a physician to learn more about your destination and what steps you can take to prevent illness. At the time of writing, Egypt didn't have any health immunizations that are required prior to arrival, although a number of immunizations are strongly recommended.

Many health insurance providers don't cover health care that is provided outside your home country. Before going abroad check with your health insurance to see if they cover international care. If not, consider purchasing an international medical insurance option, preferably from a company that specializes in international medical insurance.

## Transportation

Unless you're on an organized tour or working with a travel agent, you will have to arrange some transportation. The below links can greatly help you start your planning, first by finding a flight to [Egypt](#), then with domestic airlines and car rental agencies. If you don't know where to begin, try the "Flight & Rental Car Search Sites" to learn competitor's prices during your trip.

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**Largest International Airlines:** [Air France](#), [American Airlines](#); [British Airways](#); [Cathay Pacific](#); [China Southern Airlines](#); [Delta](#); [Emirates](#); [KLM](#); [LAN](#); [Lufthansa](#); [Qantas](#); [Singapore Airlines](#); [United Airlines](#).

**Largest Egyptian Airline:** [Egypt Air](#).

**Largest Rental Car Agencies in Egypt:** [Budget](#); [Europcar](#); & [Payless](#).

**Flight & Rental Car Search Sites:** [Expedia.com](#); [Farecast.com](#); [Kayak.com](#); [Orbitz.com](#); & [Travelocity.com](#).

## Housing

Housing options are numerous in most tourist destinations, but every individual seeks out something different when it comes to housing. The below links should help you get started, with low- to high-end hotels, hostels, and camping options.

**Popular International Hotel Conglomerates:** [Accor Group](#) (various price ranges); [Choice Hotels](#) (low- to mid-price range); [Hilton](#) (various price ranges); [Hyatt](#) (high-end to resorts); [InterContinental Group](#) (mid- to high-price range); [Marriott Family](#) (various price ranges); [Starwood Hotels](#) (high-end); [Wyndham Hotels](#) (low- to mid-price range).

**Hotel Search Sites:** [Expedia.com](#); [Kayak.com](#); [Orbitz.com](#); & [Travelocity.com](#).

**Hostels:** Although there are many hostel websites, some of the most popular and reputable include [hostels.com](#), [hostelworld.com](#), & [hostelbookers.com](#).

**Camping:** Camping is still a foreign concept in Egypt, plus camping is not safe in most locations. The desert is unforgiving and there are a

lot of extremists outside the major cities so setting up a tent is not a good idea.

## Opening Hours, Expenses, & Tipping

[Egypt](#)'s local shops, restaurants, and stores open and close much later than their [European](#) and [North American](#) equivalents. Perhaps to avoid the intense heat, Egyptians wake later and this shifts their entire schedule. Many Egyptians don't begin work until noon and finish at 8:00 pm or even as late as midnight. Lunch tends to take place in late afternoon and dinner begins after work. Restaurants don't begin to fill up until 9:00 pm or later and they rarely clear out before midnight. In tourist locations, restaurants and shops tend to be open all day to cater to the foreigners. Egypt typically follows a Friday-Saturday weekend.

The one time of the year that shops and restaurants are closed more often than not is during Ramadan (ninth month of the Islamic calendar, which rotates every year compared to the Gregorian calendar), when fasting is required from sunrise to sunset. Due to this Islamic requirement, most shops close down and it can be difficult to find an open restaurant anywhere outside major hotels catering to tourists.

[Egypt](#) tends to be on a two-tiered admission fee system and foreigners are forced to pay higher entrance fees for most tourist locations. These magnified fees however aren't overly expensive and most of the sites are still a good value for the cost. However, visiting the [Pyramids of Giza](#), the Egyptian Museum, and other tourist sites can quickly add up and seeing just the "must sees" in [Cairo](#) will cost nearly \$75. Plus a couple extras like a Nile River cruise or a trip to the [Pyramids at Sakkara](#) will push that total to over \$100 in admission fees alone.

Saving money in [Egypt](#) is best undertaken in hotels and food. Hotels can range from 125 Egyptian pounds (\$20) for a private room to well over 1,200 Egyptian pounds (\$200) in business hotels in [Cairo](#) or beach resorts on the Mediterranean or Red Seas. Food prices also vary greatly; grabbing a shawarma at a local street-side market will only cost about 20 Egyptian pounds (\$3), but eating in a nice hotel

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restaurant can cost up to 300 Egyptian pounds (\$50). Transportation in Egypt is also fairly reasonable, particularly if you travel by bus, but good deals by plane can be found as well.

Tipping (*baksheesh*) is a way of life in [Egypt](#). Wages in Egypt are extremely low and tipping is the only way many Egyptians survive above the poverty line. At restaurants catered to tourists, a tip is usually included in the bill, but if not, about 10% is standard. Guides are plentiful at most tourist destinations and they always expect a tip. Other services that may be offered to you (with or without your request) also require a tip, such as getting directions from someone on the street, using a toilet, being told what a random building is, and translating a menu for you.

The general rule is that if you ask for assistance or the person actually gives you some sort of benefit (like translating a menu), be prepared to give a small tip (5 EGP (\$0.85)), but if someone just follows you around pointing at buildings and telling you what they are, they don't need to be tipped. Tipping them will only encourage them to follow you around and wait outside your hotel to be your unwelcomed tour guide for your entire stay.

## Crime & Safety

**\*NOTE** - [Egypt](#)'s political situation is currently unstable and all travelers should look into travel warnings posted by their home government prior to departing for Egypt.

[Egypt](#) is a country of political extremes and there are pockets of Islamic extremists who like to target hotels catered to foreigners, especially in the Red Sea and Mediterranean Sea beach resorts. There are also certain cities to entirely avoid due to this same extremism so before departing for Egypt check with your country's foreign (State) department for any travel warnings to Egypt.

Despite the targeting of some foreign resorts, staying in [Cairo](#) is generally safe and organized tours along the Nile River and along the

coasts are typically organized by locals who know what areas to avoid and they typically provide protection.

Pick pocketing is not extremely common except on crowded public transportation, so use street smarts wherever you are in [Egypt](#). Often times fellow travelers in youth hostels pose a bigger threat than the locals.

The biggest "threat" to most tourists in [Egypt](#) is from feeling pressured into parting with your cash. Many locals are extremely friendly and more than willing to help you with directions, buying tickets, finding a hotel, and anything else, however this help often times comes with a line about their friend's spice shop, papyrus shop, or souvenir shop. If you're looking for papyrus then go along (so long as the shop is in a public location), but if you're not interested, say no by being firm, but polite. If these people ask for a tip and they provided a service to you, it is expected you tip them (see above).

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