Essential Information

Cairo is the largest city in Africa and one of the most densely populated ones on the continent. It certainly shows, but don’t be put off by the omnipresent chaos, noise, pollution and busy atmosphere of the streets. The city is full of history. You will soon be taken away by the majestic medieval sights, Giza pyramids and fascinating collections of the Egyptian Museum.

Islam now makes up a significant portion of culture shaping life in the city. The rhythm of urban life is marked by muezzin calls to prayer, and during Ramadan, the entire city calms down and street life seems somewhat more peaceful.

When in Cairo, don’t just tick off the main sights – take your time and explore the city on foot by wandering the narrow streets, haggling for good prices on the lively markets overflowing with goods and trying out the local food. This is the only way to get to know Cairo.

Time Zone
EET (UTC/GMT +2 hours), no daylight saving time

Currency: Egyptian Pound (EGP/guinay) = 100 piastres (pt/qirsh)

The best places to exchange money in Egypt are the forex offices. The rates at banks are slightly higher and a commission fee is charged. Avoid exchanging money with the street moneychangers.

Always check that the notes you get are not heavily damaged. Also, carefully check the notes you are given back not to mistake EGP with piastres – a popular way to rip tourists off.

There’s a severe shortage of small change. Make sure you use large bills at supermarkets and keep as much change as possible – you will need it for tips.

Tax Refunds
The VAT is 10% on all goods except for tourist services. You might claim the refund if you spend USD 50 or more in the shops associated with any VAT refund company. You will need to fill out several forms and present them together with the goods at your departure at the airport customs desks.

Prices
Egypt is a fairly inexpensive destination.
- Meal, inexpensive restaurant – £E 48
- Meal for 2, mid-range restaurant, three-courses – £E 183
- Combo Meal at McDonalds – £E 30.90
- Bottle of water at supermarket – £E 1.69
- Domestic beer (0.5 liter, draught) – £E 15.30
- Souvenir t-shirt – £E 15.00
- Gasoline (1 liter) – £E 1.94
- Hostels (average price/night) – £E 45

Tipping
Tipping makes up an important part of service workers’ wages. It is almost always expected for this reason. Save your small bills for this purpose. It is important to note, though, that it is not a way to exploit tourists – the Egyptians tip among themselves as well. The expected amounts vary: £E 1 toilets, £E 1 bellhops (for all luggage), 5-10% restaurants, 10% taxi drivers.

Money

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Electricity
The standard electricity supply in Egypt is 220/240V/1.0A 50Hz. The plugs are of Europlug, Schuko (round pin attachment plug) type commonly used throughout Europe.

Languages
Egyptian version of Arabic is mostly in use but people in the tourist and retail industry should be able to communicate in English or French. The effort to pick up basic Arabic phrases to get by is not necessary but it will be appreciated by the locals.

Mobile Phones
The whole country is fairly well covered with the standard European mobile network (GSM/GPRS/3G). Check your cell phone for compatibility if coming from non-GSM standard country.

Internet
In the tourist cities, Internet is easy accessed in Internet cafés (5-10 £E/hour) and free Wi-Fi hot spots are becoming quite common in hotels, cafeterias and restaurants.

Internet Resources
- Cairo Tourist Board (www.egypt.travel)
- Egyptian Tourist Authority (www.touregypt.net)

Fixed dates:
- January 7 – Coptic Christmas Day (not official, observed only by the Christians)
- January 25 – Egyptian Revolution Day
- April 25 – Sinai Liberation Day
- May 1 – Labour Day
- July 23 – Revolution Day
- October 6 – Armed Forces Day

Flexible holidays according to the Coptic or Islamic calendar:
- Sham El Nessim (Spring festival)
- Islamic New Year
- Birthday of the Prophet Muhammad
- Eid al-Fitr (last three days of Ramadan)
- Eid al-Adha (four days)

Opening Hours
The usual business hours of banks and offices are from 8 AM to 3 PM in summer, 7 PM in winter, Monday to Thursday. The majority of offices close on Fridays and holidays.

The shops are open throughout the week, usually from 9 AM to 2 PM and 4 PM to 8 PM, though some close on Fridays or Sundays.

Keep in mind that the opening times can be disrupted or shortened during Ramadan, ninth month of the Islamic calendar and a period of austere fasting. Some of the shops may remain open well into the night, though. The museums and monuments open every day.
Public Transportation

- **Subway** – two lines, two cars of each train are reserved for women. Cheap and convenient way to travel around the city. Fast but not very extensive.
- **Trams** – run only in some parts of the city. The vehicles are rather historical; it is a nice experience to ride them.
- **Buses** – the bus system covers the entire city. Cheap but usually very crowded and chaotic (especially the mini-buses). Get on the bus at the main stations or hail them on the street. You need to tell the driver your destination. Don’t be afraid of getting lost, the driver or passengers are willing to help you.

Taxis

- **White taxis**: equipped with meters, can be hailed from the street, most comfortable and with the smallest chance of getting ripped off.
- **Yellow taxis (City Cabs)**: need to be reserved by phone and are equipped with meters.
- **Black-and-white taxis**: older, vehicles don’t use meters and the ride can be adventurous. Always agree on the price beforehand and have enough change. There can be some additional surcharges for luggage, the number of passengers or late-night traveling.

Regional Transportation

- **Trains** – mostly operated by **Egyptian National Railways**, the routes connect the main cities. The tourist traveling by trains may encounter restrictions due to security reasons.
- **Buses** – extensive long-distance network operated by state-owned provider and complementary private companies. Check the company you travel with in advance – the small and non-licensed ones may have careless drivers and may not be serviced.

Driving

- Limit speed in towns/on highways: 50/100 km/h.
- Blood alcohol limit – .00 bac (zero tolerance)
- Wearing a seatbelt is mandatory and the use of cell phones when driving is forbidden.
- Driving in Cairo is definitely not recommended. The traffic situation is very chaotic, traffic rules ignored and the streets regularly congested. Sign-posting is equally bad. It is not common to use lights even at night and extra caution is recommended. It is also difficult to find a proper place to park as there is a scarcity of official parking lots.

Walkability

The city center is quite vast and the sights relatively remote. Despite this, walking is strongly recommended for exploring the metropolis from a different angle.

Food

- **Ful Medames** – slow-cooked beans eaten with Egyptian bread.
- **Ta’imiya** – Egyptian variant of falafel
- **Koshary** – lentils, rice and chickpeas in tomato sauce
- **Molokhiya soup** – made of the lettuce-like Egyptian vegetable
- **Kufta** – ground lamb meatballs roasted like kebab

Due to the dubious hygienic situation, it is not uncommon to suffer from parasite or bacterial infections. There are very few ways to avoid it – but don’t drink tap water, avoid ice and dairy, regularly disinfect your hands with sanitizer and check that your food is fully cooked. Follow your common sense and eat in places that look reasonably clean.

During Ramadan, Muslims are allowed to eat only after the sun sets. The shops and restaurants may be closed. It is reasonable to respect the local culture and avoid eating and drinking in public during that period.

Legal Age

The legal drinking age is 18 for beer and 21 for wine and spirits.
EVENTS DURING THE YEAR

January
- Cairo International Book Fair (www.cairobookfair.org)
- Cairo Biennale (www.cairobiennale.gov.eg)

March
- Cairo International Fashion Show (defiledegypte.com)

April
- Egyptian National Film Festival

June
- Belly Dancing Festival

August
- Cairo International Song Festival

September
- The Experimental Theatre Festival

November
- Arab Music Festival

December
- Cairo International Film Festival

THINGS TO DO

Free Things To Do
- Khan el-Khalili Bazaar – wander around the colorful stalls and enjoy the busy atmosphere
- Al-Azhar Mosque
- Qarafa – two cemeteries, a showcase of Mamluk architecture
- Wikala al-Ghouri – Sufi dancing show. Mondays, Wednesdays and Saturdays at 8.30 PM
- Townhouse Gallery – contemporary Egyptian art

Shopping
Souvenirs – carpets, backgammon sets, Egyptian cotton clothes, cartouche jewelry, papyrus, perfume, Turkish delight

Prepare to bargain for everything.
DOS AND DO NOTS

- **DO** expect to bargain when shopping in Egypt.
- **DO** watch out for the cars – the traffic is erratic and there are many accidents.
- **DO** tip even the toilet attendants.
- **DO** go to the Egyptian Museum – it is a must see.
- **Women, DO NOT** wear sleeveless tops or short skirts.
- **DO NOT** forget that the Egyptian week starts on Sunday and Friday is a prayer day with shops, banks and offices closed.
- **DO NOT** forget to bring a flashlight with you; it will come in handy in pyramids and temples.
- **DO NOT** drink the tap water.

Safety

Even if it may not seem so, Egypt is a fairly safe country. Nevertheless, there are a few things you should take into account.

- **Pick-pocketing:** very common problem especially in big cities and tourist destinations. Always take care of your belongings and never put your wallet into easily-reachable pockets or backpacks.
- **Scams:** you may be approached by people speaking generally good English who offer to show you around, engage in a friendly chat or give you some “useful” information such as that the museum is closed (usually not true). They are probably just trying to lure you someplace to spend your money or will later require money for the “guide service” they provided. The best way to avoid this situation is to politely decline even if it gets annoying. Always take into account that the sellers and “guides” try to squeeze out of you as much money as they can – use your common sense and always check the banknotes you are given back. Also, watch out for scam papyrus museums at which you will likely be talked into purchasing genuine papyrus goods at discount price that will be many times higher than on the streets. The taxi drivers, hotel staff and guides usually get provisions for luring tourists there.
- **Lone female travelers:** Egyptian men are used to making compliments even if you’re accompanied. If alone, you might encounter serious harassment. The best way to avoid this is to retain reasonable distance and not to be overly friendly.
- **Don’t** let yourself be put off by the presence of armed forces at the pyramids and other tourist spots – the risk of terrorist attack is statistically very small. The police are there to ensure that tourists are safe – tourism is very important for Egyptian national income. Also, safety concerns regarding the political situation tend to be a little exaggerated by Western media. Avoid joining any kind of demonstration or march even if peaceful – the situation can change rapidly. The main happening site in Cairo is Tahrir Square and its surroundings.
- **The tap water is safe to drink, but it is advised not to do so** – it may cause bacterial infection. Drink the bottled water but always check that the seal is not broken – some sellers refill the bottles and sell them as new.
Egyptian Museum / Al-Mathaf al-Masri
Museum displaying tremendous collections of ancient Egyptian antiquities including mummies. Definitely a must see.

GPS: N30.04669, E31.23365
Phone: +20 25782448
Opening hours:
Daily: 9 a.m. – 7 p.m.
Ramadan: 9 a.m. – 5 p.m. daily.
Admission:
General Admission: EGP 60 (EGP 30, students)
Royal Mummies Room: EGP 100 (EGP 50, students)
Centennial Gallery: EGP 10 (EGP 5, students)
Admission fees for Egyptians are lower.

Great Sphinx of Giza / Abū al Hūl
This stupendous 45 m long sandstone statue seems to watch over the pyramids of Giza. The origin of the monument is entangled with mystery.

GPS: N29.97515, E31.13767
Opening hours:
1 May – Ramadan: daily: 7 a.m. – 7 p.m.
1 Ramadan – 30 Apr: 8 a.m. – 5 p.m.
Admission:
General Admission to the Giza Plateau: EGP 50
Students: EGP 25

Khan el-Khalili Market / Souk Khanel-Khalili
This busy market is the real heart of the city and a major attraction for both tourists and Egyptians. Buy everything from clothes to coffee.

Gohar Al Kaed, El-gamaleya, Qism El-gamaleya, Cairo, Egypt
GPS: N30.04711, E31.26210
Opening hours:
Opening hours of sellers vary.
**Pyramid of Khafre / Herm khef’re**
Seemingly higher than Khufu pyramid, easily recognisable by its limestone cap. The burial chambers are open to public.

GPS: N29.97597, E31.13308  
**Opening hours:**
1 May – Ramadan: daily: 7 a.m. – 7 p.m.
1 Ramadan – 30 Apr: 8 a.m. – 5 p.m.

**Admission:**
General Admission to the Giza Plateau: EGP 50  
Students: EGP 25
Tickets to the pyramid are sold separately.
General Admission to the Pyramid: EGP 25  
Students: EGP 15

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**Citadel of Cairo / Qalaat Salā ad-Dīn**
Even if only for its astonishing views, this majestic fortress is well worth visiting. Also houses several museums and mosques.

GPS: N30.02948, E31.26117  
**Opening hours:**
Daily: 8 a.m. – 5 p.m.
Restricted access to the mosques on Fridays.

**Admission:**
Regular: EGP 40  
Student: EGP 20

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**Al-Azhar Park / Metnezh Al-Azhar**
This modern park situated in the heart of Cairo is a relaxing place and also a perfect viewing spot as it is located on a small hill.

GPS: N30.03970, E31.26345  
**Opening hours:**
The park is open 24 hours a day.

**Admission:**
Admission to the park is free.  
Some attractions require extra fees.

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**Step pyramid of Djoser / Kbhw-ntrw**
This extraordinary stepped pyramid is a centrepiece of Saqqara necropolis and draws as much tourists as the pyramids of Giza.

GPS: N29.87066, E31.21661  
**Opening hours:**
1 May – Ramadan: 7 a.m. – 7 p.m.
1 Ramadan – 30 Apr: 8 a.m. – 5 p.m.

**Admission:**
General admission: EGP 50  
Students: EGP 25

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**Pyramid of Menkaure / Herm menkawer’e**
The smallest pyramid in Giza. There are traces of dismantling attempts on the north side that the pyramid easily endured.

GPS: N29.97248, E31.12950  
**Opening hours:**
The pyramid is currently closed to public.

**Admission:**
Entrance to the mosque is free.

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**Al-Hakim Mosque / Masjid Al-Hakim**
One of the oldest mosques that hasn't been used as one for the majority of time. Note its propylon-like minarets.

GPS: N30.05399, E31.26435  
**Admission:**
Enterance to the mosque is free.
Memphis and its Necropolis / Memfes
Remains of what once was a capital of the Old Kingdom and a chief cult city of Ptah. A must see. Great Temple of Ptah is the main highlight.
GPS: N29.84939, E31.25143
Opening hours:
Daily: 8 a.m. – 5 p.m.
Admission:
General admission: EGP 30
Students: EGP 15

Mosque of Ahmad Ibn Ṭūlūn / Mesjed Ahmad Ibn Ṭūlūn
This mosque from 8AD that is preserved in its original form is a must see. Also noteworthy for its unique spiral minaret.
Al Dahdora, Tolon, El-sayeda Zainab, Cairo, Egypt
GPS: N30.02940, E31.24888

Coptic Museum / Alemthefaleqbeta
This museum holds an extensive collection of Egyptian Christian artefacts with rich variety of objects on display.
Mari Gerges, Misr El Kadima, Cairo, Egypt
GPS: N30.00594, E31.23069

Abdeen Palace Museum / Qesr ‘eabedyen
Probably the only presidential residence that works as a museum at the same time. Its collection are related to the state affairs.
Mosque, Rahbet Abdeen, Abdeen, Cairo, Egypt
GPS: N30.04167, E31.24834
Phone: +20 2 391 0042

Mosque-Madrassa of Sultan Hassan / Alesletan hesn mesjed
An eye-candy for the lovers of Islamic architecture as it features many unusual elements – large wooden dome or twin minarets.
GPS: N30.03197, E31.25584

Baron Empain Palace / Qasr el Baron
This showy concrete palace was inspired by Angkor Wat and Hindu temples. It is worth stopping by as any reminiscent structure is nowhere else to be seen.
Passage Inside Military Area, El-montaza, Hliopolice, Cairo, Egypt
GPS: N30.08619, E31.33066

Khan al-Maghraby
This gallery featuring a young Egyptian artist is an interesting stop breaching the link of traditional art and archaeological museums.
El-mansour Mohammed 18, Abo El Fada, Zamalek, Cairo, Egypt
GPS: N30.06325, E31.21821
Phone: +202 7353349