



USEFUL INFORMATION ABOUT EGYPT

1. SAFETY AND SECURITY

Egypt is generally a safe and friendly country to travelers. Criminality in Egypt is low compared to many other countries. Pick-pocketing is however a problem in Egypt's bigger cities, particularly in Cairo. Violent crime is rare.

The Egyptian security forces remain on alert since terrorist groups have targeted tourist destinations in Egypt. Enhanced security arrangements have been allocated to tourist destinations, larger hotels, and along several transport routes. There remains a risk of indiscriminate attacks including public places frequented by expatriates and foreign travellers, such as hotels and restaurants.

Tensions in the Egyptian society may increase around the presidential elections in 2011. You should avoid political gatherings and demonstrations and keep up-to-date on the developments. It is good to always check latest security advice with your home office / foreign ministry before travelling, and to inform your embassy about your presence in the country. You are recommended to carry some form of photographic ID at all times. A copy of your passport is sufficient.

All border areas should be treated with caution. The area of the border between Egypt and Gaza and the surrounding North Sinai area are often tense. Extreme caution is also recommended if travelling to the south west corner of the country near the Egypt/Sudan/Libya border. The borders in this area are porous and bandits and armed groups operate.

Travelers often complain about being hassled and subjected to scamming attempts while in Egypt. There is no way to avoid hassling, but a polite *la shukran* (no thanks) is helpful.

If you are considering diving or snorkelling in any of the Red Sea resorts be aware that safety standards of diving operators can vary considerably.

Emergency and useful numbers

Police: 122

Ambulance: 123

Fire brigades: 180

Telephone number assistance: 140/141

International calls: 144

The traffic

Road accidents are common in Egypt, mainly due to poor roads, dangerous driving and non-enforcement of traffic laws. Be careful on the roads in Egypt.

2. INSURANCE

Prior to your travels, make sure you have full insurance coverage during your stay in the country. Make sure your health insurance covers you for medical expenses abroad, including possible evacuation.



3. MONEY

The local currency is the Egyptian pound (EGP), divided into 100 piastres. The currency is often written as LE (*livre égyptienne*) or by using the pound sign £. In Arabic the pound is called *guinay*, and piastres are known as *qirsh*.

Many tour operators and hotels will only accept payment in US Dollars or Euros. This can also apply when buying train, ferry or international bus tickets. It is a good idea to bring a modest supply of dollars. Steep taxes will be added to your bill in most up-market restaurants and hotels.

Money exchange

Money can be officially changed at Amex and Thomas Cook offices, as well as commercial banks, foreign exchange bureaus and some hotels. Most hard currencies can be exchanged; US dollars and Euros are the easiest.

ATMs

ATMs are everywhere in the cities and probably the best option overall; they often offer the best rate and many foreign banks have branches in Egypt. Between Cairo and Luxor and out in the oases, it is more difficult to find an ATM.

Credit cards

American Express, Diners Club, Master Card and Visa are accepted. Only bigger hotels and restaurants in Cairo and other tourist areas will accept credit cards as payment. In many places you will be charged a percentage of the sale, anywhere between 3% and 10%, if using credit card.

Visa and MasterCard can be used for cash advances at Banque Misr and the National Bank of Egypt, as well as at Thomas Cook offices.

International transfers

It is possible to have money wired to you through Amex. This service operates through most Amex branches, and can be used by anyone, regardless of whether you have an Amex card or not.

Western Union, the international money-transfer specialist, operates jointly in Egypt with Misr America International Bank and IBA business centres.

Travelers' checks

You can cash well-known brands of travelers' checks at the major banks such as Banque Misr or the National bank of Egypt. Many forex bureaus do not take them. Always ask about commission.

4. VISAS

Egypt is relatively easy to enter and to obtain visas for. There are three types of Egyptian visa:

- Tourist Visa: usually valid for a period not exceeding 3 months and granted on either a single or multiple entry basis.
- Entry Visa: required for any foreigner arriving in Egypt for purposes other than tourism; work, study, etc. Single Entry Visas are normally valid for 6 months and allow a maximum stay of 60 days in Egypt. Multiple Entry Visas are normally valid for 6 months and allow a maximum stay of 90 days in Egypt.
- Transit Visa: rarely needed and only for certain nationalities.



Most foreigners entering Egypt must obtain a visa. There are three ways of doing this: in advance from the Egyptian embassy/consulate in your home country, at an Egyptian embassy abroad or, for certain nationalities, on arrival at the airport. Your passport should be valid for at least six months.

Visas are available on arrival for many nationals. If you intend to buy your visa on arrival in Cairo airport, please make sure you go to one of the bank counters first before going through immigration/passport control when arriving in the terminal. Otherwise you will stand in line and then have to go back and start again.

Processing times and costs for visa applications prior to arrival vary according to your nationality and the country in which you apply. If you are travelling overland, you can get a visa at the port in Aqaba, Jordan, before catching the ferry to Nuweiba in Egypt. If you are coming from Israel, you *cannot* get a visa at the border unless you are guaranteed by an Egyptian Travel Agency. Instead, you have to get the visa beforehand at either the embassy in Tel Aviv or the consulate in Eilat.

As visa rules are subject to change, always check the visa requirements with the Egyptian embassy/consulate in your country before your travels.

Travel permits

Military permits issued by either the Ministry of Interior or Border Police are needed to travel in the Eastern Desert south of Shams Allam, on or around Lake Nasser, off-road in the Western Desert and on the road between the oases of Bahariyya and Siwa. These can be obtained through a safari company or travel agency.

Visa extensions

Six-month and one-year extensions of your visa for tourist purposes can be obtained at passport offices.

Students traveling with AMBergh can receive assistance with the visa extension procedures at the Language Institutes.

5. GETTING THERE AND AWAY

Land

Israel

Travelers can access Egypt by bus from Israel from the bus stations in Jerusalem and Tel Aviv. You will take a bus to Eilat where you can cross over the border into Taba and take a bus to Cairo or into the Sinai. An Israeli visa is not required for most nationalities. Heading back to Egypt, you must have a visa in advance unless your visit is limited to eastern Sinai or you have prearranged your entry with an Egyptian tour operator.

Jordan

The Jordanian state bus company, JETT, operates a direct bus between Amman and Cairo (approximately 19 hours). Be aware that all routes by bus must by necessity cross Israel. Keep this in mind if you plan to travel to Syria, Iran, Libya, or other countries which deny entry to persons with evidence of travel to Israel in their passports.

The Palestinian Territories



The border area between Egypt and Gaza is tense due to the political situation. At the time of writing the Rafah border crossing is closed to individual travellers. The Rafah crossing is jointly policed by the Palestinian Authority and the Egyptian government. You should contact the Egyptian authorities for information on the border situation. Make sure to get up-dated information on the security situation before any travels to Gaza.

Libya

There are bus and service taxis (shared taxi) running between Libya and Egypt, Alexandria and Cairo. Those who have passports indicating travel to Israel will not be allowed to enter Libya. Libyan immigration requirements frequently change without warning. Make sure to check the latest information with the Libyan embassy/consulate in Cairo before travelling, and obtain up-dated information on the security situation of border areas. If entering Egypt from Libya you need to check with the Egyptian embassy how to obtain an Egyptian visa, as this may not be possible at the border.

By car

All private vehicles entering Egypt must have a *triptyque* or *carnet de passage en douane* or pay steep customs duty. The driver must have an International Driver's License.

By plane

If you're heading to Egypt from Europe, the easiest way to get there is to fly direct. If you're coming from any other continent, it can sometimes be cheaper to fly first to Europe and then make your way to Egypt.

- Egypt has several international airports: Cairo International Airport, the primary entry point and the hub of the national carrier Egypt Air
- Alexandria Nozha
- Luxor International Airport: receiving an increasing number of international scheduled flights, mostly from Europe, in addition to charter flights
- Aswan International Airport
- Hurgada International Airport: receives a number of charter flights
- Sharm El-Sheikh International Airport: receives a number of charter flights
- Burg Al-Arab International Airport.

By boat

You can reach Egypt by ferry boat from Cyprus, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, and Sudan. Alexandria and Port Said on the Mediterranean Sea, and Suez and Nuweiba on the Red Sea are ports of entry for visitors.

Cyprus

From May to November, you can catch a boat from Port Said to Limassol in Cyprus. For information and tickets, you can visit one of the many shipping agents in Port Said.

To/from Jordan

There is a ferry service between Nuweiba in Egypt and Aqaba in Jordan. Tickets must be paid for in US dollars. Note that during the hajj, pilgrimage to Mecca, boats fill up weeks prior to departure. Regarding Jordanian visas, check with the Jordanian embassy/consulate prior to your departure.

To/from Saudi Arabia

Telestar Tours runs an irregular service, *El-Salaam* ferry, between Suez and Jeddah, about 36 hours. It is virtually impossible to get tickets during hajj.



There is a ferry running between Hurghada and Duba, about three hours. For more information, contact International Fast Ferries Company: <http://www.internationalfastferries.com>. You will not be allowed to board this ferry unless you have a valid Saudi visa in your passport.

To/from Sudan

The Nile River Valley Transport Corporation in Aswan and in Cairo at Ramses station runs a weekly passenger ferry from Aswan in Egypt to Wadi Halfa in Sudan. No tickets will be issued unless you have a valid Sudanese visa in your passport. Visa arrangements need to be done in Cairo. You will occasionally be asked for a yellow-fever certificate to enter Sudan. The trip between Aswan and Wadi Halfa takes between 16 and 24 hours.

6. TRANSPORTATION WITHIN EGYPT

By taxi

In the cities, taxis are a cheap and convenient way of getting around. Although generally safe, taxis drive as erratically as other drivers, especially in Cairo. Some of the taxis have meters, but they are seldom used. The best way is to ask someone for the prices from point-to-point. Negotiate a price and destination before getting into the car.

By car

You find car rental agencies at most major hotels. Foreigners must have an International Driver's License and generally be at least 21 years of age to rent a car in Egypt.

By bus or coach

Egypt has an extensive long-distance bus network, operated mostly by government-owned companies: Pullman, West Delta, Golden Arrow, Super Jet, East Delta, El Gouna, Upper Egypt Bus Co. Some bus companies allow you to book seats in advance.

By metro

The Cairo Metro is a rail system partly underground. One line runs from al-Marg in the north through the center of the city to Helwan. Another line runs from Shoubra El Kheima, north of Cairo, to Ramses Station in the city center. A third new line runs from Tahrir Square passing by the Cairo Opera House and ending at Cairo University in Giza.

By train

The state-owned Egyptian National Railways (ENR) runs almost all trains in Egypt. The Cairo-Alexandria route has frequent service daily. Overnight trains are available for travel from Cairo to Luxor and Aswan. These are run by a separate private company called Abela Egypt. The deluxe Abela Egypt sleeper must be paid in foreign currency. Train tickets can be bought at booking offices in most major railway stations or at travel agencies. You can check train schedules and prices on: <https://enr.gov.eg/ticketing/public/login.jsf>

By boat

A ferry running between the Red Sea resorts of Hurghada and Sharm-El-Sheikh is available with a journey time of 90 minutes.

By airplane

The domestic air network is fairly extensive and covers most major towns in Egypt. The national carrier, Egypt Air, has the most regular services. They provide services from Cairo to quite a few towns around the country.



7. THE WEATHER

Egypt's climate is easily summarized: hot and dry, with the exception of the winter months of December, January and February when it can be quite cold in the north. Egypt does not receive much rainfall except in the winter months. In the south, destinations like Luxor offers pleasant winter temperatures. December through February see average highs of 23°C to 25°C and lows between 5°C and 7°C. Winter offers around nine hours of sunshine per day in Luxor.

Maximum temperatures for the Mediterranean coast can get up to 31°C and for Aswan 50°C. At night in the winter the temperature is sometimes as low as 8°C in Cairo. In the desert it's even more extreme, often scorching hot during the day and freezing cold at night.

Between March and April the *khamsin* (a dry, hot wind) blows in from the Western Desert. The sky becomes dark orange and choked with dust. Even when closing all doors and windows tightly, you will find a fine dust layer covering the inside of your house after the *khamsin* has passed.

8. FOOD AND DRINKS

Food

Egypt can be a fantastic place to try a unique range of food. As in other seaside countries, Egypt is full of fish restaurants and markets. Frequently, fish markets have some food stalls nearby where you can point at specific fish species to be cooked. Stalls typically have shared tables at which locals are as frequent as tourists.

Among the classic Egyptian dishes, you will find *Foul Medames* (slow cooked and mashed fava beans served with plenty of olive oil, chopped parsley, onion, garlic, and lemon juice), *Ta'miya* (Falafel or deep-fried ground fava bean balls), *Koshary* (a mixture of macaroni, lentils, rice, chickpeas and tomato sauce), and *Taagin* (grated Koshary). Stuffed vegetables, vine leaves and *Shawarma* sandwiches (grilled meat) are common in Egypt as in other countries in the region. Guava, mango, watermelon, *ishta* (small melons) are all widely available from fruit stalls, especially in local markets.

Almost everything you want is available from supermarkets. Prices vary considerably whether you shop at supermarkets like Carrefour or street markets, small shops and street vendors.

Water and drinks

Ensure that you drink plenty of water: Egypt has an extremely dry climate most of the year. Tap water is not safe to drink throughout Egypt. Stick to bottled water or boil water for 10 minutes, use water purification tablets or a filter. When buying water, check that there is a clear plastic seal on it and the neck ring is still attached to the cap by the breakable threads of plastic. Be a little wary with fruit juice, as some sellers may mix it with water. Milk should also be treated carefully as it may not be pasteurized. Tea and coffee are generally fine. It is good to be wary of ice as well.

Juices can be widely found in Egypt; *kasab* (sugar cane), *erk soos* (licorice), *sobiia* (white juice), *tamer* (date) are a few examples. *Karkadel* is also a famous juice, made out of hibiscus tea and sugar. Cold *karkadel* is very nice on a hot day.



Although Egypt is predominately a Muslim country, alcohol is widely available and not prohibited. Drinking in the street and anywhere other than a licensed restaurant or bar is however not allowed. The local beer and wines are good. Quality local spirits (plus designer drinks) have recently come on to the market from the same company and are also good. However, more basic 'home-distilleries', although cheap, are truly appalling and at best will only make you impotent. Please don't even think about drinking them.

9. BUSINESS HOURS

Generally, business hours in Egypt vary according to the time of the year. During the winter, many businesses close for much of the afternoon and reopen for a few hours in the early evening. Typical working hours are 9.00 a.m. to 5.00 p.m. from Sundays to Thursdays. Public sector and services work from 9.00 a.m. to 2.00 p.m., and close only Fridays.

Public holidays in 2011

Banks, shops and businesses close for the following Egyptian National Holidays, and public transport may run only limited services:

Coptic Christmas Day	7 Jan
Birth of the Prophet	15 Feb
Sinai Liberation Day	25 Apr
Coptic Easter	25 Apr
Labour Day	1 May
Evacuation Day	18 Jun
Revolution Day	23 Jul
Flooding of the Nile	15 Aug
Coptic New Year	11 Sep
Bajram Feast (End of Ramadan)	30 Aug
Armed Forces Day	6 Oct
Egyptian Naval Day	21 Oct
Suez Day	24 Oct
Suez Victory Day	23 Dec
Islamic New Year	26 Nov

Ramadan is the ninth month of the Islamic calendar and the most important month for Muslims. During Ramadan, Muslims abstain from eating, drinking or smoking between sunrise and sunset. Some appreciate that non-Muslims do not take meals or smoke in public places. Many restaurants and cafes will open only after sunset. Public transport is less frequent, shops close earlier and business is generally slow. Exactly at sunset minute, the main meal of the day, *Iftar* or breaking-fast, takes place. A couple of hours later, the cities spring to life again. Shopping streets may have continuous rush hours till very early in the morning.

10. ELECTRICITY

Electricity in Egypt is 220 Volts, 50 Hertz. Outlets in Egypt generally accept 1 type of plug: Two round pins

11. TIME

Local time is GMT+2.



12. INTERNET

Internet access is easy to find and cheap. Most cities, both large and smaller tourist towns, have plenty of internet cafés. An increasing number of coffee shops, restaurants, and hotels provide free wireless internet access. Free wi-fi (Mobilnil) is also available at modern coffee shops such and food joints.

13. TELEPHONE/MOBILE

The international dealing code for Egypt is +20. Calling landlines may require a city code such as (2) for Cairo and (3) for Alexandria. Mobile phones generally begin with 010, 012, 011, or 016. It is possible to purchase tourist mobile phone lines for the duration of your stay.

14. STANDARD MAIL/POSTAGE

Egypt Post is the company responsible for postal service in Egypt. The company can be reached on line at: <http://www.egyptpost.org>.

15. CLOTHING

Winter is usually warm during the day but cold at night, with temperatures dipping to single figures, so for 8 – 12 weeks of the year you will need jumpers, cardigans and jackets. For other times of the year when it's hot, smart loose cotton clothing is most comfortable. Due to the conservative nature of the country, you should dress modestly in the city. In Sinai and the Red Sea resorts, wear what you like. This does not mean that in the cities women have to cover up Saudi-style; it just means you have to dress sensibly. There is a huge textile industry in Egypt which is famous for its cotton. As a result reasonably priced casual and smart clothes are widely available. You may also want to bring clothes for more formal occasions. When Egyptians celebrate, they really dress up.

16. WOMEN TRAVELING ALONE

In Egypt, a woman traveling alone is generally safe, but she will be noticed, less in large cities than in the country. However, if problems do occur, seek help from the police or any shop nearby. Take simple precautions as you would anywhere.

17. HEALTH

Medical facilities outside Cairo can be basic and in case of emergency you are advised to seek treatment in Cairo. You should ensure that your medical insurance covers the cost of local hospitalisation and medical repatriation to your country of residence.

For information on vaccinations, make sure to check with the health authorities in your country prior to departure.

In order to avoid contracting schistosomiasis parasite (also known as bilharzia), a flatworm that burrows through the skin, *do not* swim in the Nile or venture into any other Egyptian waterways, even if the locals do so. Avoid walking bare feet on freshly-watered lawns for the same reason. Seek medical attention locally if you think you have been exposed, as they are used to diagnosing and treating it. Symptoms include fever, diarrhea,



abdominal pain and fatigue, making the disease easy to mistake for the flu or food poisoning. The flatworm eggs can be identified with a stool test and the disease can usually be cured with a single dose of Praziquantel. Amebic dysentery, caused by a microscopic amoebae, is ingested with unclean food or drink. Symptoms are similar to upset tummy but the condition persists and can cause serious damage. With proper treatment recovery is quick. Rabies is endemic in Egypt; stay away from stray dogs.

Medicine

Be aware that hygiene may not be of the highest standards everywhere in Egypt. Bring appropriate medications to deal with problems. Pharmacies abound, most medical products are available. Pharmacies are usually open from 10 a.m. to 10 p.m. and are staffed by competent professional. If you have to take special medicines regularly, check with us to make sure they are available or bring a sufficient supply.

Ambulance

Emergency ambulance number: 123

Hospitals

The US embassy provides a list of hospitals in Egypt at: <http://cairo.usembassy.gov/consular/hospitallist.pdf> Egyptian doctors speak good English. Medical facilities are adequate for non-emergency matters, particularly in tourist areas. Emergency and intensive care facilities are limited.