

## Amazing Egypt – More than Just the Wonders of Antiquity

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This report features an overview of Egypt. Find out why this extra ordinary country is today the favorite vacation spot for many, just like it was in the days of the early Greeks and Romans.

Home to probably the world’s oldest civilization, Egypt offers an amazing abundance of historical treasures- temples, pyramids and museums. The visitor too can take a cruise down the Nile or head for the first class beach resorts of Sinai and the Red Sea..



Valley Of The Kings - Egypt

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## **1. Amazing Egypt – More than Just the Wonders of Antiquity**

Egypt is one of the most fascinating destinations on the world tourist map. This extra ordinary country is today the favorite vacation spot for many, just like it was in the days of the early Greeks and Romans. The thoroughly cultured Greeks, in particular, were fascinated by this civilization that predated theirs by at least 2000 years. The biggest draw continues to be the amazing abundance of historical treasures- temples, pyramids and museums –contained in this one country. But the destination offers more than just the wonders of antiquity. Your visit to Egypt can be rounded off by a cruise down the Nile and a beach vacation at the top notch Red Sea and Sinai resorts.

The unification of the Kingdoms of Lower and Upper Egypt around BC 3180 marks the point from when Egypt became a significant power. This event is credited with Menes, who thus became the first Pharaoh. Menes went on to establish a new capital at Memphis, just to the south of where Cairo stands today. For the next 3000 years and under 30 dynasties of the Pharaohs, a dynamic and culturally sophisticated civilization flourished. It was not however smooth sailing for the descendants of Menes and power was for short periods in the hands of foreigners. Historians as usual want to simplify things and have now divided up the reign of the Pharaohs into three periods: the Old Kingdom (2575-2134 BC), Middle Kingdom (2040-1640 BC) and New Kingdom (1550-1070 BC).

It is a curious fact that most monuments of the Pharaohs relate to death. Though moderns may see this as an unhealthy preoccupation with death, some scholars see it as an indication of the ancient Egyptians great love for life and desire for continued existence. The pyramid was the highest evolution in the practice of preparing elaborate tombs for the departed. Pyramids were the final resting place, from where the Pharaohs enjoyed the afterlife. The most famous of these edifices are the Pyramids of Giza, built in the 4th Dynasty (2575-2465 BC), when the power of these ancient kings was at its peak.

Religion was another reason for the great monuments of ancient Egypt. The deities found deserving of worship were truly diverse. And many, many temples were built in honour of these gods. Temples for the most esteemed gods were quite elaborate and were administered by high priests. Auxiliary buildings housed libraries, granaries, and what may today be considered as research laboratories for astronomers, biologists and other scientists. Most gods were linked with specific animals and to whom special powers were attributed. Some gods came

and went but the sun god was one of the most enduring. It has been suggested that the design of the pyramids had some association with practices of the sun cult. The Pharaoh was considered to be a living god.

The Greeks, in the name of Alexander the Great finally brought the Age of the Pharaohs to an end in 332 BC. He founded that city that bears his name, Alexandria. The Greeks ushered in a period of comparative prosperity and stability under descendants of Ptolemy. Ptolemy was the Macedonian general who was appointed by Alexander as governor. The Pharos Lighthouse, one of the seven wonders of the ancient world and the Great Library of Alexandria were built in this era.

As the Greeks declined, so did the Romans rise, and they too cast a covetous eye upon Egypt. The last of the Ptolomies was the notorious Cleopatra, lover to both Julius Caesar and Mark Antony. The Roman Empire too declined Egypt was torn apart by foreign armies. The most significant event at this time was the invasion of the Arabs in 622 AD. Though other foreigners including Ottoman Turks, French and British, subsequently ruled the country, it is the Arabs who brought Islam whose legacy has been the most enduring.

Egypt is today a modern vibrant nation that carries the burden of its 5,000-year history graciously. Just like in ancient times, the Nile sustains the country and upto 95% of the population live in close proximity of the river. The rest of the country is desolate desert, mitigated only by a few isolated oases and the habitable narrow strips along the African Red Sea and the Mediterranean coastlines. According to the tourism ministry, Egypt for the visitor is best seen as six tourist super-sites. This covers the most popular destinations and excludes off-the-beaten-track locations. The six super-sites are anchored on: Cairo, Alexandria, Luxor, Aswan, Hurghada on the Red Sea and Sharm El Sheikh in Sinai. Except for Luxor, none of these destinations relies entirely on ancient monuments to attract visitors. See the [Egypt Tours and Vacations](#) page of our website to view info and make a reservation for these destinations.

Cairo is a huge, sprawling and chaotic metropolis. It has all the amenities of a modern city and is the usual gateway for the visitor to Egypt. Cairo is a young city relative to nearby Heliopolis, Giza and Memphis that are associated with the Pharaohs. The city began as a Roman trading post called Babylon- in the area now referred to as Coptic Cairo. This area was a settlement of one of the world's first Christian communities. This predominantly Christian locale houses a museum that is a repository of religious art, manuscripts, paintings and pottery.

But it is the Arab invaders who arrived in the 7<sup>th</sup> century who can be said to have founded the city. They settled just north of the area referred to as Old Cairo. The medieval district of Islamic Cairo is densely packed with people and lots of

mosques and temples. This is where many still go during the month of Ramadan to eat and spend the night after a days' fast. Giza on the Nile's west bank is where you will find the Great Pyramids. These truly magnificent monuments were one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World. You will appreciate the achievement of the builders of these edifices when you reflect on the fact that until the 19<sup>th</sup> century they were the world's largest buildings.

The visitor to Cairo will easily tuck in trips to see museums, mosques and monuments such as Pyramids and the Sphinx. To commemorate your visit to this unforgettable city, visit the Khan el-Khalili Bazaar. The wide array of souvenirs on sale here includes jewelry, brass, silver and copperware, carpets, perfumes, alabaster and soapstone carvings. You will also find reproductions of antiquities, which you are advised to buy as opposed to anything presented as original. Such "originals" are usually counterfeit, and it is in any case illegal to export the real article.

Alexandria, monument to Alexander the Great, is located 180 km to the northwest of Cairo. The city has a Mediterranean temper and compared to the hothouse of Cairo has a cooler and more pleasant climate. The Greco-Roman Museum is within central Alexandria and has on display artifacts from the period 300 BC to AD 300. You will see mummies, sarcophaguses, pottery, tapestries and the granite sculpture of the bull god Apis. Other sights in this area include the Roman Amphitheater, the Royal Jewelry Museum and the Roman era catacombs of Kom el-Shukafa.

The island of Pharos, near the harbour is the site of the Great Lighthouse, one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World. Today, what remains on the site is a 15<sup>th</sup> century fortress. After immersing yourself in antiquity, you take a dip at some beach resorts within 20 km to the west of the city. At the resort of Marsa Matruh, 230 km further on, you will find some excellent beaches and an opportunity for reef diving. This area right from Alexandria along the coast is part of Egypt's Med. It is still relatively undeveloped despite long stretches of white sand beaches and turquoise waters.

If your primary interest is ancient Egypt, bear in mind that about 80% of Egyptian antiquities are in the vicinity of Luxor. The city sits on the site of the ancient city of Thebes and together with the surrounding areas carries magnificent treasures of antiquity such as palaces, temples and royal tombs. The royals of those times whiled their afterlife at what is referred today as the Valley of the Kings, Valley of the Queens and Tombs of the Nobles. The tombs contained treasure that has been plundered over the centuries. Some of the more famous tombs are those of the boy king Tutankhamen and the queen Nefertari.

On the east bank of the Nile you find the Temple of Luxor and the Temple of Karnak, packed with obelisks, wall murals and statues with heads of gods. If you overnight here, enjoy the evening sound-and-light show at the Temple of Karnak. Temples on the west bank are Queen Hatshepsut's Temple and The Ramesseum, a once massive edifice that is today mostly a ruin. You need to spend at least two days here for your trip to be worthwhile. You are also advised to hire a guide who can explain the historical context of each artifact or monuments. Start out early each day before the airlifted day-trippers arrive to crowd you out.

Aswan, a scenic town by the Nile lies 680 km to the south of Cairo, in the region that was so long ago known as Lower Egypt. Though not as numerous as elsewhere, you can find temples and tombs at those two islands in the Nile- Elephantine and Kitcheners islands. You can get to the islands by sailing in a felucca. The Nubian Museum celebrates the history and culture of the Nubian people. Aswan is also important in the history of Coptic Christians and the ruins of the 7th-century Coptic monastery of St. Simeon laze in this area. In today's Egypt, Aswan is important as the location of the High Dam that finally put an end to the annual bursting of the banks of the Nile.

The Red Sea is well known to readers of the Bible as the sea that God parted with his own hand so that Moses and his people could cross over to Sinai. So named because of its red tint mountain ranges, it is home to a number of resorts, the biggest of which is Hurghada. The underwater world of the Red Sea is alive with over 800 fish species and the deep-sea fishing is excellent. Snorkellers can explore the coral reef that is reputed to be one of the finest in the world. Hurghada aside, there are other resorts in the area that have good beaches, coral reefs and some golfing too. The modern day traveler escaping the city will empathise with the early Christian hermits who built their monasteries here as they sought to get away from it all. Hurghada lies 380 km to the southeast of Cairo.

Sinai is where Africa meets Asia. Like the Red Sea coast, it has top resorts and is great for water sports. Sharm El Sheikh, towards the southern tip of the Sinai Peninsula is the most developed resort town. Here you will find entertainment in the form of casinos and nightclubs and also some good shopping malls. The marine life is abundant and the coral reefs are great. Sinai is also where the three great monotheistic religions meet. You can make an excursion to Mt. Horeb, said to be Mt. Sinai where Moses received the Ten Commandments. For Roman Catholics, emulate Pope John Paul II who visited nearby St. Catherine's Monastery in 2000. The monastery is supposed to sit on the site of Moses' burning bush.

The people of Egypt from antiquity to the present day have always built their lives around the Nile. It is no coincidence therefore, that probably the best way to see the major sites is by taking a Nile Cruise. There are several luxury cruise ships offering Nile Cruises. The longer cruise goes all the way from Cairo to Aswan in two weeks. There is however not much to see between Cairo and Luxor and you will have better value if you take the shorter cruise between Luxor and Aswan. This cruise, which normally takes six days, goes in both directions and you can embark at either Aswan or Luxor. You can get to Luxor or Aswan from Cairo by taking a flight or the overnight sleeper train. The adventurous and thrifty can also sail along the Nile by using traditional boats, feluccas.

The summer in Egypt, which falls between April and October, is hot and dry. The winters are mild with cold nights. The best time to visit is between November and March, outside the intolerable summer season. Light clothing is generally recommended though you may need a sweater and jacket for winter evenings. Remember that this is a Muslim country and dress for women in particular is expected to be modest. All the same, immodest western style holiday dress is acceptable in nightclubs, beaches and hotels in Cairo and other locations frequented by tourists.

In the cities and locations popular with tourists, you will find a wide variety of accommodation ranging from 5-star luxury to budget lodging. This in particular covers: Cairo, Alexandria and the north coast, Luxor, Aswan and at the Red Sea and Sinai resorts towns. During the popular winter season, advance booking is advised. Egypt is very good value and you will find accommodation cheaper here than the equivalent in most other destinations. See our [Egypt Hotels & Resorts](#) page to view info and book accommodation for your stay in Egypt.

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## **2. Destination Facts: Egypt**

**Full Country Name:** Arab Republic of Egypt

**Area:** 1,001,450 sq km

**Population:** 66.5 million (2001)

**Capital City:** Cairo

**Other Major Towns:** Alexandria, Luxor, Aswan, Port Said

**Peoples:** Eastern Hamitic -Egyptians, Bedouins, and Berbers - 99%, Greek, Nubian, Armenian, other European - 1%

**Language:** Arabic (official), English and French - widely understood

**Religion:** Muslim (mostly Sunni) -94%, Christian (Coptic) and other - 6%

**Government:** Republic

**Time:** GMT + 2 hours (GMT + 3 for May to September)

**Currency:** Egyptian Pounds (LE)

**Electricity:** 220 V, 50Hz

**Weights and Measures:** Metric

**Economy:** Agriculture, mining, oil, tourism, industry (cement, textiles, fertilizer, rubber)

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### **3. Travel Basics: Egypt**

#### **Health**

Visitors over 1 year of age entering Egypt from yellow fever infected areas require yellow fever international certificate of vaccination. Such areas include: all countries in Africa south of the Sahara with the exception of Mauritania and a few counties in southern Africa and some selected countries in central and southern America. Cholera is a health risk in the country and precautions are essential. There is limited risk of malaria in the El Faiyoum area, particularly in the period June to October. Cairo and Alexandria are considered Malaria free.

It is recommended, that you take vaccinations against hepatitis B, polio and typhoid. The Nile Valley and Nile Delta are associated with risk of Bilharzia. You are advised not to swim or paddle in these areas except in well-chlorinated and maintained swimming pools. There are good hospitals and chemists in all the major towns.

#### **Visas**

All visitors require a visa except for citizens of some selected countries staying for various defined periods, up to a maximum of 6 months. Those covered by this conditional exemption include nationals of the Arab countries of Yemen, Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, Libya, Kuwait, Jordan, Bahrain, Oman and Yemen. Other countries are Djibouti, Macau, Guinea and Malaysia.

Airport visas may be available for citizens of the UK, Australia, Canada, New Zealand, and the United States. This may however result in delays upon arrival and your airline may in any case not allow you to board without a visa. Whenever possible it is advisable to obtain visas in advance. Visa requirements vary from time to time and you are advised to check on prevailing status well ahead of travel.

Your passport should be valid for 6 months from date of entry and at least 1 week beyond the expected date of exit.

#### **Peoples & Culture**

By far, the majority of the people of Egypt are of Eastern Hamitic stock. Nubians, whose homeland is in the south of the country, Greeks, Armenians other Europeans represent the remainder. Though somewhat simplistic, four cultural groups can be delineated - Egyptian peasants or fellahin, Copts, Bedouins and Nubians. Fellahin is a rather dated classification as the majority of such people have immigrated to cities and transformed themselves. The traditional fellahin can however still be found in rural areas eking out a living from the land as they have done from the days of the Pharaohs. Copts are Christian adherents of the Eastern Orthodox Church. But they are of the same race and culture as other

Egyptians.

Bedouins are a nomadic people who search the deserts for grazing and water for their camels and other livestock. Nobody really knows the desert more than the Bedouin. They know where to find water and get around by navigating by the stars. Like all nomads, they live a free and hardy lifestyle, and consider the sedentary ways of their compatriots as lacking in grace and dignity. But they also realize the advantages of a settled life and they have increasingly responded to efforts to ground them and give their children an education.

The Nubian are a dark skinned people whose ancestral land is to the south of Aswan. They have little relationship, cultural or genetic with other dark skinned Africans. Back in the days of the Pharaohs, they served very well in the military. In more recent times, they farmed the banks of the Nile River. Their lands have been mostly been inundated by the raising of the Aswan High Dam. Most Nubians have now migrated to towns and their lifestyle has changed.

Islam is the single most important influence on culture in Egypt. And this applies even for non-adherents like Coptic Christians. Perhaps for this reason, crime is virtually nonexistent. The society is conservative, especially on issues related to women. Women are expected to be modest in dress and manner- no flimsy attire or loud talking and laughing, for example. The men are very happy with their position in this patriarchal society. The people are generally friendly, hospitable and very accommodating especially towards visitors. But visitors need to keep their religion to themselves- proselytizing is illegal here.

The Lingua Franca is Arabic. But there are two versions- classical Arabic, the language of the Koran and the colloquial Arabic used in the street. English and French are widely used for business and by educated urbanites. In terms of culture, is important in the Arab world. And books, movies, music and TV programs produced here are popular throughout the Arabic speaking nations of the Middle East. The prolific Naguib Mahfouz gained worldwide fame and prestige when he won the literature Nobel Prize in 1998 for his book "The Cairo Trilogy". His works are however not very popular with religious radicals and an attempt was made in 1995 to rub him out.

Egyptian cuisine is to the best tradition of Middle East cooking. You are advised to try local specialties such as roast pigeon, grilled aubergines, kebabs and chickpeas. The hotels in the tourist areas serve cosmopolitan fare. Though this is a Muslim country, imbibers of alcohol will not go thirsty. Beers, wines and other drinks are available in bars and restaurants, especially at hotels catering for tourists. But you should defer to local sensitivities and avoid drinking in daylight hours in the month of Ramadan.

### **Communications**

Telephone, fax, telegram, and post services are available in the principal urban centers. International direct dialing to most countries is available. You will find Internet cafes in the main urban centres and at tourist hotels. The country code for Egypt is 20.

Mobile phones are based on GSM 900 network. Coverage tends to map the population and therefore extends to Alexandria, Cairo, Luxor, Aswan, and the main towns along the Nile and parts of the Red Sea area from Suez to Sharm el-Sheikh. You are however advised to check beforehand whether your GSM phone is usable if you are traveling outside any of the areas specifically mentioned here. Network service providers include Vodafone Egypt ([www.vodafone.com.eg](http://www.vodafone.com.eg)) and ECMS-MobiNil ([www.mobinil.com](http://www.mobinil.com)).

### **Accommodation**

Tourism is a serious business in Egypt. You will find a wide variety of accommodation ranging from 5-star luxury to budget stay in the main cities and locations popular with visitors. This in particular covers: Cairo, Alexandria and the north coast, Luxor, Aswan and at the Red Sea and Sinai resorts towns. Approved campsites are few in the country. During the popular winter season, advance booking is advised. Egypt is very good value and you will find accommodation cheaper here than the equivalent in most other destinations. See our [Egypt Hotels & Resorts](#) page to view info and book accommodation for your stay in Egypt.

### **Money**

The local currency is the Egyptian Pound (LE). There are no restrictions on the import and export of foreign currency. The export of local currency is however prohibited.

Major currencies such as US dollars and Euro and travelers cheques can be converted at banks and forex bureaus in the main towns and tourist areas. You will get best exchange rates for cash or travelers cheques if you are dealing in US dollars, Euro or Pound Sterling. Visa, Mastercard, American Express and Diners Club are accepted at various stores and hotels. Your Visa and Mastercard can be used to access cash at a limited number of bank outlets –particularly for Banque Misr and Bank of Egypt.

### **Climate**

The summer, which falls between April and October, is hot and dry. The winter months are mild with cold nights. You will be surprised to learn that there is virtually no rain in this country. The best time to visit is between November and March, outside the intolerable summer season. Beware of the khamsin, the hot dry wind that blows from the Sahara around April. This treacherous wind creates

dust storms that can reduce visibility to less than 30 metres. In terms of weather, the Red Sea coast is most favoured and it is pleasant year round. In Cairo, winter temperatures range from lows of 9°C at night to highs of 25°C, while summers vary between 9°C and 35°C.

### **International Travel**

All the main air carriers, including Air France, British Airways, JAT, KLM, Lufthansa and SWISS, compete for the more than 4 million tourists who visit Egypt annually. The national airline is Egypt Air. There are a small number of charter flights flying in not only to Cairo but also to Alexandria, Luxor, and Sharm el-Sheikh directly from European airports.

There are ferry services connecting Egypt to Saudi Arabia, Jordan and also the Sudan. Some cruise ships stop over at Egypt as part of their African sailing itinerary. You can travel to Libya and Israel by road from Egypt. There is a coach service operating between Tel Aviv and Jerusalem in Israel and Cairo via El Arish and Rafiah in Sinai. You can also use a private vehicle to reach Israel through Eilat via Suez and Taba.

### **Local Travel**

Virtually every significant town in the country can be reached by bus. This is the cheapest way to travel around Egypt. Some of the buses have onboard videos that play Indian and Arabic movies at top volume, presumably to entertain customers. This can be quite an annoyance for visitors. This is why you may consider using the luxury shuttle services, which operate to and from Cairo, Alexandria, the Nile Valley and the Red Sea, Sinai, and Suez Canal cities.

You can also get to most towns in the country by standard trains, whose hub is Cairo. Luxury air-conditioned trains run from Cairo to Luxor and Aswan and are used as an alternative to flying to these popular tourist locations. Alexandria too can be reached from Cairo by using luxury trains. Within Cairo, you can use the metro, which is clean, reliable and inexpensive. Luxury ferry service links Aswan and Luxor along the Nile. The adventurous and thrifty can also sail along the Nile by using traditional boats, feluccas.

Rental cars can give you some freedom from the schedule of bus and train services. If you pick this option, it is advisable that you rent a car together with a driver. Driving in Egypt is very aggressive and few visitors within their short stay are able to gain the necessary experience to drive around safely. Generally, road links are good throughout the main population centres. Driving is on the right.

Egypt Air operates daily flights linking Cairo with the main locations popular with tourists. This includes Alexandria, Luxor, Aswan, Abu Simbel, and Hurghada. Air Sinai, flies to Sinai and Red Sea towns and resorts, particularly Eilat, Hurghada,

St Catherine, Sharm el-Sheikh and Taba.

### **Travel Insurance**

Health and travel insurance are recommended. Ensure your travel insurance includes emergency evacuation.

### **What to Wear**

Light clothing is generally recommended for Egypt's warm climate. You may however need a sweater and jacket for winter evenings. Remember that this is a Muslim country and dress should be conservative. Women in particular are expected to dress modestly. All the same, immodest western style holiday dress is acceptable in nightclubs, beaches and hotels in Cairo and other locations frequented by tourists.

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## **4. About Africa Point**

**Africapoint.com** is an Africa specialist travel agent, offering travel services through the company website -Africapoint.com and also offline. This pioneering Africa travel website has been assisting travelers make bookings online since early 1999.

The company was started in 1997 has its central reservations office strategically located in Nairobi, Kenya. The company is supported by a network of partner offices in the leading destinations in Africa. This includes Cape Town (South Africa), Arusha, Dar es Salaam (Tanzania), Cairo (Egypt), Kampala (Uganda), Victoria (Seychelles), Harare (Zimbabwe). We are members of the American Society of Travel Agents (ASTA).

### **What services do we offer?**

We provide reservation services for hotels, airline tickets, rental cars, tours and safaris to the top destinations in Africa. Among the countries we are currently covering are Kenya, South Africa, Egypt, Tanzania, Seychelles, Zimbabwe, Uganda and Mauritius.

We have special discounts for most of the services we offer and some of our prices are upto 50% off standard rates. Please visit our website to view the links of all the services we offer.

## How do we make your Africa travel planning easier?

Ours is one of very few websites offering one-stop travel booking and information service to a number of different African countries. In addition:

- We know our destinations and our products **very well**. We are in a position to give you good advice on the best hotel, rental car, tour or safari to suit your particular requirements.
- We are committed to working to the highest industry standards. We have many our past clients who are happy to share their experiences with you. Please visit the [Client Profile & Testimonials](#) page and see what some of our clients have to say.
- Our patience is the stuff of legend! We will patiently seek to answer all your queries until you are ready to pick what is most suitable for your needs. For high value items such as safaris we have communicated with our clients for 6 months and even longer before they are ready to buy.

Others have come back to and said: "Do you remember that tour we discussed 2 years ago? I am now ready to travel." And of course we remember. We always remember!

- Together with our partners, we are based in the African destination whose travel services we are selling. For this reason we are usually able to get you very good prices. For some products our prices are **40-50%** below standard rates.
- As members of **ASTA (American Society of Travel Agents)** we are committed to upholding **ASTA's** motto of "Integrity in Travel" and operate to those same standards you would expect from an ASTA member anywhere in the world.

One of our North American clients for whose 36 person missionary group we provided an air charter, hotel booking, safari and road transport to 2 African countries had this to say.

*"My experience with Africapoint.com was good as any service that I've received any where in the USA. Not only were they helpful before and during, but they went out of their way to also be helpful afterwards.*

*I'm using them again for an upcoming trip in November and will look forward to using them for years to come."*

In addition our membership of ASTA assures you of a **neutral and trusted** arbitrator in the event that a disagreement occurs between us.

### **What is the experience of other travelers with us?**

We continue to serve the many needs of travelers who seek our services. From straight forward single night hotel bookings to short and long term **car rental, tours and safaris** for individuals and groups, international conferences.

## **5. Forward This Report**

If you've found this report to be informative and useful please forward it to your family and friends. We're sure they will like it as much as you did!!