

## EGYPT

**Egypt**, officially the **Arab Republic of Egypt**, is a country mainly in North Africa, with the Sinai Peninsula forming a land bridge in Western Asia. Covering an area of about 1,010,000 square kilometers (390,000 sq mi), Egypt borders the Mediterranean Sea to the north, the Gaza Strip and Israel to the northeast, the Red Sea to the east, Sudan to the south and Libya to the west.

Egypt is famous for its ancient civilization and some of the world's most famous monuments, including the Giza pyramid complex and its Great Sphinx. The southern city of Luxor contains numerous ancient artifacts, such as the Karnak Temple and the Valley of the Kings. Egypt is widely regarded as an important political and cultural nation of the Middle East.

### History

The regularity and richness of the annual Nile River flood, coupled with semi-isolation provided by deserts to the east and west, allowed for the development of one of the world's great civilizations. A unified kingdom arose circa 3200 B.C., and a series of dynasties ruled in Egypt for the next three millennia. The last native dynasty fell to the Persians in 341 B.C., who in turn were replaced by the Greeks, Romans, and Byzantines. It was the Arabs who introduced Islam and the Arabic language in the 7th century and who ruled for the next six centuries. A local military caste, the Mamluks took control about 1250 and continued to govern after the conquest of Egypt by the Ottoman Turks in 1517. Following the completion of the Suez Canal in 1869, Egypt became an important world transportation hub, but also fell heavily into debt. Ostensibly to protect its investments, Britain seized control of Egypt's government in 1882, but nominal allegiance to the Ottoman Empire continued until 1914. Partially independent from the UK in 1922, Egypt acquired full sovereignty with the overthrow of the British-backed monarchy in 1952. The completion of the Aswan High Dam in 1971 and the resultant Lake Nasser have altered the time-honored place of the Nile River in the agriculture and ecology of Egypt.

### Geography

At 1,001,450 square kilometers (386,660 sq mi), Egypt is the world's 38th-largest country. In terms of land area, it is approximately the same size as all of Central America, twice the size of Spain, four times the size of the United Kingdom, and the combined size of the US states of Texas and California.

Nevertheless, due to the aridity of Egypt's climate, population centers are concentrated along the narrow Nile Valley and Delta, meaning that approximately 99% of the population uses only about 5.5% of the total land area.

Egypt is bordered by Libya to the west, Sudan to the south, and by the Gaza Strip and Israel to the east. Egypt's important role in geopolitics stems from its strategic position: a transcontinental nation, it possesses a land bridge (the Isthmus of Suez) between Africa and Asia, which in turn is traversed by a navigable waterway (The Suez Canal ) that connects the Mediterranean Sea with the Indian Ocean via the Red Sea.

Apart from the Nile Valley, the majority of Egypt's landscape is a desert. The winds blowing can create sand dunes more than 100 feet (30 m) high. Egypt includes parts of the Sahara Desert and of the Libyan Desert.

### Climate

Egypt does not receive much rainfall except in the winter months. Temperatures average between 80 °F (27 °C) and 90 °F (32 °C) in summer, and up to 109 °F (43 °C) on the Red Sea coast. Temperatures average between 55 °F (13 °C) and 70 °F (21 °C) in winter. A steady wind from the northwest helps hold down the temperature near the Mediterranean coast. The Khamaseen is a wind that blows from

the south in Egypt in spring, bringing sand and dust, and sometimes raises the temperature in the desert to more than 100 °F (38 °C).

**Population:** 83,082,869

**Currency:** Egyptian Pound LE

### **Living as expat - Housing**

Choosing a neighborhood in Cairo to call home usually depends upon the needs of the family or individual. Couples and singles who will be working downtown might prefer living close to work in Zamalek or Mohandiseen. Those with children generally prefer to live in the El Maadi/Digla area where the American, British and German schools are located, or in Katimaya or Mirage City, gated communities.

In Cairo, expect to pay a minimum monthly rent of \$4,000.00 for a villa and \$2,500.00 for an unfurnished or furnished flat with a modern kitchen, three, or more bedrooms and two full baths. Furnished properties often overflow with the landlord's tired, gaudy and uncomfortable rejects. Since new furniture is a bargain and you can have anything made to your specifications at a reasonable cost, you can augment your furnishings with ones you can actually sit on without being propelled across the room.

If you have a dog and your budget doesn't allow for a villa, you might want to consider leasing a ground floor flat with a private yard. There are few places to walk a dog and some domesticated animals have been poisoned by tainted food left out by those intent upon eradicating the homeless dog and cat population.

Every building comes with a bawaab who is employed by the landlord. A bawaab will carry packages, wash your car each morning, escort visitors to your door, keep the common areas of the building clean, gather the trash, and snoop for the landlord.

### **Getting there and around**

Egypt has quite a few airports, but only seven of these are official international ports of entry: Cairo, Alexandria, Luxor, Aswan, Hurgada, Sharm el-Sheikh and Marsa Alam. With that said, most air travelers enter Egypt through Cairo, Alexandria or Sharm el-Sheikh, while the other airports tend to be used by charter and package-deal flights only.

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. And, of course, there are also the overland combinations of bus, taxi and ferry from other European, African and Middle Eastern countries to consider.

If you enter the country via Cairo International Airport, there are a few formalities. After walking past the dusty-looking duty-free shops, you'll come to a row of exchange booths. If you haven't organized a visa in advance, you'll need to pay US\$25 to receive a visa stamp. You then fill in one of the pink immigration forms available on the benches in front of the immigration officials before queuing to be processed. The whole procedure usually takes about 20 minutes, but this being Egypt, it's probably best to expect delays.

There are countless possibilities for arranging organized tours in Egypt, with a plethora of agencies dealing with everything from guided trips and overland safaris to Nile cruises and dive trips. Egypt has a very extensive public and private transport system, and you can travel just about anywhere in Egypt relatively cheaply. However, it's worth mentioning that most of Egypt lacks street names, which can make navigating on your own difficult. Fortunately, locals – when they do speak

English – are usually more than willing to help you find your way. Buses service just about every city, town and village in Egypt. Ticket prices are generally comparable with the cost of 2nd-class train tickets.

Driving in Cairo is a crazy affair, so think seriously before you decide to hire a car there. Driving in other parts of the country, at least in daylight, isn't so bad, though you should avoid intercity driving at night. And having a car – or better still a 4WD – opens up entire areas of the country where public transport is nonexistent.

Although trains travel along more than 5000km of track to almost every major city and town in Egypt, the system is badly in need of modernisation (it's a relic of the British occupation).

### **More information**

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