



# Cairo's Coast

## Escape the capital city's chaos with a weekend in Ain Sokhna, Cairo's year-round detox destination

By Marwa Helal

With an average year-round temperature of 28 degrees Celsius and only an hour from Cairo, Ain Sokhna is known as the go-to place for Cairenes who need a quick getaway before returning to work on Sunday. Cheap and easy to get to, Ain Sokhna's warm waters are popular with young people and families alike.

Ain Sokhna, Arabic for "hot spring," gets its name from the nearby sulfur springs of Gabal Ataqa located in the Eastern Desert. The region stretches from just south of Suez down the coast for about sixty kilometers and houses a port, a series of resort complexes, a few restaurants, gas stations and other facilities that scatter the coastal road.

The city's turquoise waters are rich in marine life and coral reefs, perfect for divers and snorkelers. Ain Sokhna is popular for its water sports, especially windsurf-

ing, with the constant breeze that flows throughout its beaches. Inland, desert safaris into nearby oases and mountain canyons add to the list of attractions. As an added benefit, visitors get to swim with, or at least observe, dolphins in the Red Sea.

### Buying and Renting

Proximity, convenience and aesthetics aside, the area is considered a smart investment venture and is currently being projected here and abroad as one of the most promising emerging real estate markets. The anticipated growth is around 20 percent per year for the next three years. Adding to real estate value is the fact that the weather is pleasant year-round, making Ain Sokhna a destination for all seasons.

Taking a hotel room in Ain Sokhna can cost anywhere from LE 300 to LE 700 per night. A long-term rental might be a better option, with chalets going for approximately LE 1,000 per month. If looking

to buy, property in the area begins at LE 80,000, with prices increasing depending on location; the better the view or the closer to the water, the more you'll be shelling out. Most homes are two to three stories, adopting a Spanish or hacienda style.

New resorts including Porto Sokhna, Ain Bay and Stella di Mare are the major attractions. Furnished rentals at both Ain Bay and Stella di Mare average at LE 23,200 per month. Buyers should expect to pay at least LE 450,000 for property at Ain Bay and LE 500,000 for property at Stella di Mare. For the extravagant buyer, luxurious properties with a sea view and private pool are available for up to LE 10 million.

Overall, real estate value has jumped significantly from what it was just three years ago when beachfront housing was going for only LE 100,000. As a result, those who invested early in the booming resort town have been seeing a triple and quadruple return on their investments. With such growth, it's no wonder Ain Sokhna is being advertised as the place to be, both here and abroad.

Still, the big knock on Ain Sokhna is that there's precious little to do here other than entertain in your chalet or villa. No wonder, then, that the most awaited resort is Porto Sokhna, said to be one of the country's most ambitious real estate projects to date. Porto Sokhna is unique, being the country's first ever mountain resort, sitting 270 meters above sea level. Accessible by cable car, the resort claims to have the world's longest water slide, as well as the region's first 18-hole mountain golf course. Like its predecessor, Porto Marina, this resort will have its own five-star hotel, yacht marina, numerous swimming pools and five spas. In addition to these regular resort facilities, an authentic old style town will be built on the mountain peak, creating picturesque, old-world ambience for visitors.

As a result of Ain Sokhna's fast growing real estate market, more attention is being paid to developing infrastructure within the area, which in turn has accounted for an increased level of investment. With a history of extraordinary growth and an admirable projected growth, it would behoove all real estate investors to keep a close eye on this profitable piece of paradise. *et*

Porto Sokhna will finally give these residents something to do other than barbeque

