

# Cairo Tips and Visitors Guide

## 1. People and Interactions

- a. The Egyptian people are well known for their friendliness and willingness to help strangers without hesitation.
- b. A universal greeting of “Assalamu Alaikum” (Peace be upon you) can be used when coming, going, day, or night, hello, or goodbye. This greeting will immediately be responded to by the recipient with “Wa Alaikum Alssalam” (And peace be upon you).
- c. Most Egyptians will be conversant in English and French. Many Egyptians are also conversant in German.
- d. In all hotels and most restaurants, English will be spoken and menus will be in both Arabic and English.

## 2. Geography

- a. Cairo is one of the largest and most dense cities in the world, with a population of 20 million inhabitants. The metro area has expanded dramatically over the last 20 years such that now there are 3 distinct regions. The distance between the western end of the metro area and the eastern end is approximately 30 miles. With very dense traffic every day of the week and pretty much from 7 AM until 11 PM, travelling between regions can be time consuming and frustrating.
  - i. Central Cairo; Zamalek, El Doki, Mohandeseen, El Manial, Giza, Old Cairo, Imbabah, Shobra, El Zaytoun, El Kobba
  - ii. West Cairo; 6 October City, Sheik Zayed City
  - iii. East Cairo; New Cairo City, El Shorouk, Madinaty, Rehab

## 3. Climate

- a. Egypt has an arid, desert climate and the weather in Cairo is typically warm, or hot, and the nights cool. There are only two seasons: a very hot summer, with average temperatures reaching 95°F (35°C) between May and October, and a mild winter from November to April. Cairo is very dry, receiving on average less than one inch of rain a year, but it does have high humidity levels in summer due to its location by the Nile River.
- b. As a result of the heat, particularly between April and October, most activities will start later in the day and run late into the night. Shops, restaurants, entertainment venues will be most active after dark and may be open until the wee hours of the morning.

### c. Average, Max, Min Temperatures, Precipitation, Rain, Sun Hours

WEATHER BY MONTH // WEATHER AVERAGES CAIRO

	January	February	March	April	May	June	July	August	September	October	November	December
Avg. Temperature °C (°F)	13.4 °C (56.1) °F	14.8 °C (58.7) °F	17.9 °C (64.2) °F	21.4 °C (70.5) °F	25.3 °C (77.6) °F	27.9 °C (82.3) °F	29.1 °C (84.4) °F	29.2 °C (84.6) °F	27.4 °C (81.2) °F	24 °C (75.2) °F	19.4 °C (66.9) °F	15.1 °C (59.2) °F

	January	February	March	April	May	June	July	August	September	October	November	December
Min. Temperature °C (°F)	7.8 °C (46.1) °F	8.7 °C (47.6) °F	10.8 °C (51.5) °F	15.8 °C (56.4) °F	17.1 °C (62.7) °F	19.7 °C (67.5) °F	21.3 °C (70.3) °F	21.8 °C (71.3) °F	20.3 °C (68.6) °F	17.7 °C (63.9) °F	15.7 °C (56.7) °F	9.8 °C (49.7) °F
Max. Temperature °C (°F)	19.2 °C (66.5) °F	21.1 °C (70) °F	24.9 °C (76.8) °F	29 °C (84.2) °F	33.1 °C (91.6) °F	35.8 °C (96.4) °F	36.8 °C (98.2) °F	36.6 °C (97.8) °F	34.5 °C (94) °F	30.4 °C (86.7) °F	25.5 °C (77.9) °F	20.8 °C (69.5) °F
Precipitation / Rainfall mm (in)	5 (0.2)	4 (0.2)	3 (0.1)	1 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	1 (0)	2 (0.1)	2 (0.1)
Humidity(%)	54%	47%	42%	37%	36%	40%	45%	47%	48%	52%	54%	55%
Rainy days (d)	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
avg. Sun hours (hours)	7.9	8.8	10.0	11.1	11.9	12.1	11.6	10.9	10.3	9.6	8.6	7.9

#### 4) Accommodations

- a. Global hotel chains all operate and have comfortable properties throughout the greater Cairo metro area. As mentioned above with the size of the city and related commute times, it will be important to understand where you intend to visit prior to making hotel reservations. Rates in central Cairo can be quite expensive during the peak tourist season and occupancy very high; best to book hotels as early as possible.

#### 5) Finances

- a. The Egyptian currency is the “Egyptian Pound” designated as LE. As of March 2022, the exchange rate is approximately 15.7 LE for 1 USD.
- b. While most restaurants, shops, and all hotels accept credit cards, there is still a large segment of society that is cash based. Taxis, Uber/Careem, smaller shops and restaurants all prefer and sometimes only accept cash.
- c. Withdrawing Egyptian pounds is very easy from a large network of ATMs in all but the most secluded areas of Cairo.
- d. Make sure to call your bank credit/debit card providers in advance to indicate that you will be travelling to Egypt and the time period you expect to be there; this will prevent your card being locked for suspicion of fraudulent activity by the provider’s automated fraud detection systems.
- e. The daily withdrawal limit in Egypt is 8000 LE or approximately \$500. However, some ATMs will limit you to a withdrawal of 4000 LE per transaction.
- f. ATM fees will vary by provider/bank and location. ATMs in heavy tourist areas may have higher transaction fees so make sure to check prior to withdrawing cash. Based on experience, the most economical ATM charges can be had at Banque Misr and National Bank of Egypt ATMs.
- g. It is best to keep a handful of small denomination bills (5, 10, and 20 LE notes) to give as tips.
- h. Tips are generally accepted and expected for small courtesies. Below are recommendations:
  - i. Baggage handling in hotel – 10 LE/bag
  - ii. Breakfast for two (200 LE) – 10 LE
  - iii. Dinner for two (600 LE) – 40 LE
  - iv. Taxi/Uber (200 LE) – 20 LE

## 6) Phone and communication

- a. Cairo has 4 GSM mobile networks – Vodafone, Orange, We, Etisalat
- b. The best coverage is provided on the Vodafone and Orange networks
- c. As most of the current generation phones (IOS and Android) have a dual “personality” capability with the ability to load 2 SIM cards/numbers on the same handset, this is the easiest way to have a local Cairo mobile number while utilizing your existing phone. The procedure is as follows:
  - i. Prior to leaving the US and flying to Egypt, ensure your phone is unlocked. If not unlocked, contact your carrier and request that the phone be unlocked.
  - ii. Move your existing US phone number from the physical SIM to the phone’s internal E-SIM. Verizon, T-Mobile, AT&T all have step-by-step procedures on their websites for performing this transition. This will result in the physical SIM slot being free to install another SIM/phone number.
  - iii. During the setup procedure, designate your US number (now in the E-SIM) as the “primary” number.
  - iv. Once in Egypt, procure a prepaid SIM from a retail mobile phone outlet (Vodafone, Orange, etc.). Have the SIM installed in the physical slot.
  - v. In addition to the cost for the new line/SIM (app 100 Egyptian Pounds/LE), you will need to buy a bucket of prepaid minutes and data. 200 LE (which results in 140 LE net worth of minutes and data, after a hefty 30% tax), this should be enough to last 2 weeks for average usage. You will receive a SMS message from the carrier after each call or text indicating the balance left on the prepaid SIM.
  - vi. Designate the new Cairo number as the “secondary” number.
  - vii. For making local calls and SMS (texts) in Cairo or elsewhere in Egypt, you will use the secondary phone number.
  - viii. For making calls and SMS to the US or other international locations, you will use the primary phone number.
  - ix. If necessary, stop by one of the carrier’s retail outlets and “recharge” with an additional 100 LE to ensure you don’t run out of minutes/data.

## 7) Driving and transportation

- a. Rental cars can be leased on a daily basis but driving in Cairo is very challenging and can be dangerous for those unaccustomed to the local driver behavior (“watch out for the other guy”). Rates range from \$30 to more than \$100 per day depending on vehicle type and size. Renting a car is not recommended for anyone visiting for a short duration.
- b. Drivers/chauffeurs can be organized, typically through the larger chain hotels. Rates range from \$50 and up per day dependent on hours, type of car, and perimeter of distance travelled.
- c. Uber and Careem; Mobile apps work exactly as they do in the US. Uber tends to have more drivers and the application is more robust, however Careem can be a good alternative on occasion and less expensive on some routes as well. You will need to register your Cairo phone number in these apps as the drivers will often

try to call/text to verify location, etc. This is a convenient and inexpensive alternative to the other modes of transportation with local trips of 3 or 4 miles generally costing less than 60 LE, and cross town trips from Central Cairo to East Cairo running between 120 and 200 LE depending on the time of day.

#### 8) Groceries

- a. Cairo has several excellent grocery chains that carry virtually everything you could find in a Giant or Wegman's, including prepared foods (hot and cold), deli, bakery, café, etc. Imported items are generally very expensive.
  - i. Carrefour
  - ii. Spinney's
  - iii. Metro
  - iv. Oscar
  - v. El Saudi
  - vi. Mahmood El Far

#### 9) Restaurants

- a. The quality of the food in the following restaurants is almost universally excellent and pretty much every restaurant delivers, with the larger chains having lots of locations throughout the metro area.
  - i. Abou Shakra; Kabab, Kofta, Poultry.
    - 1. Many restaurants throughout Cairo
    - 2. Phone # 19090 (Call Center, will arrange delivery from closest restaurant)
    - 3. Everything on the menu is good
  - ii. El Dahan; Kabab, Kofta, Poultry.
    - 1. Many restaurants throughout Cairo
    - 2. Phone # 16194 (Call Center)
    - 3. Stuffed pigeon (with rice) is excellent
  - iii. Sobhy Kaber; For the experience, dine in.
    - 1. In Shobra just East of the Nile Corniche in Central Cairo.
    - 2. Make sure to order the Molokhia.
    - 3. Open till 5 AM!!!
    - 4. Phone # 0101 598 8898

<https://www.google.com/maps/place/Sobhy+Kaber/@30.0840028,31.2324467,17z/data=!4m5!3m4!1s0x1458405895555555:0x7c04a84ad2086b3b!8m2!3d30.0840313!4d31.234567>
  - iv. Kebdat El Prince; For the experience, dine in (outdoor seating).
    - 1. in El Imbaba (just north of Zamalek).
    - 2. Allow plenty of time to get there as the surrounding area is very congested.
    - 3. Only order one course at a time or they will bring everything at the same time.
    - 4. Make sure to order the kebdah (liver) – house specialty

5. Phone # 02 331 16265

<https://www.google.com/maps/place/El+Prince+Restaurant/@30.08064,31.2166378,17z/data=!3m1!4b1!4m5!3m4!1s0x145840b8c9220f9f:0x8cb71efc2893ffa!8m2!3d30.08064!4d31.2188265>

10) Entertainment

- a. There is a lot to see and do in Cairo, so you will want to pace yourself and not plan too many activities in one day as traffic and congestion will often be the critical factor in managing the time.
- b. The Pyramids and Sphinx
  - i. No visit to Cairo can be complete without a visit to see the grandeur, enormity, scale and engineering marvel of the Pyramids and Sphinx in Giza.
  - ii. Note that desert temperatures can reach 100 or 110 degrees in the middle of the summer day so plan your visit to not occur during the hottest part of the day and bring plenty of water, hat, sunscreen, etc.
  - iii. Best to plan to have breakfast at the 9 Pyramids Lounge as this gives a fabulous and unique vista to see the Pyramids and Sphinx, take pictures, and have an excellent breakfast to start your visit. Reservations are required so book in advance.
    1. Phone # 0121 229 9999
    2. <https://www.google.com/maps/place/9+Pyramids+Lounge/@29.9702436,31.0348584,13z/data=!4m8!1m2!2m1!1scloud+restaurant+near+Giza,+El+Omranaya!3m4!1s0x14584f74545fb4b7:0x5397b82f76e498ad!8m2!3d29.9677887!4d31.1318139>
  - iv. You will be routinely approached by people selling things – souvenirs, offers to describe certain features and history of the monuments, and mostly folks with horses, camels, and carriages offering you around the pyramids for cheap. You will do well to waive these folks off. In the case where you really want to ride a camel, a common trick is to offer you a ride for a low price (e.g. 100 LE) and then pump you like crazy when you want to get off for a big tip (often exceeding the actual price charged). Although it will be difficult, you will want to ensure that everyone has a very clear understanding of the scope and price of the ride to be had in advance of getting onto the animal.
- c. The National Museum of Egyptian Civilization
  - i. Charting millennia of Egyptian civilization, mummies galore, historical artifacts
  - ii. <https://www.google.com/maps/place/The+National+Museum+of+Egyptian+Civilization./@30.0081493,31.2132415,13z/data=!4m5!3m4!1s0x1458476863e39e8f:0xc2e058446f8f145d!8m2!3d30.0081493!4d31.2482604>
- d. Khan El Khalili
  - i. Large souk/bazaar dating back to the 14<sup>th</sup> century with hundreds of shops and restaurants in alleys and small streets.
  - ii. Tourist haven with tons of souvenirs and inexpensive items.

- iii. Great for just having a tea or coffee and people watching, taking pictures.
  - iv. <https://www.google.com/maps/place/Khan+el-Khalili/@30.0477386,31.2600651,17z/data=!3m1!4b1!4m5!3m4!1s0x145840eb2c0e580f:0x1761e0e461027d11!8m2!3d30.0477386!4d31.2622538>
- e. Al Ahla – The Cairo Citadel
  - i. The **Citadel of Cairo** or **Citadel of Saladin** (**Arabic:** قلعة صلاح الدين, **romanized:** *Qala 'at Salāḥ ad-Dīn*) is a medieval **Islamic**-era fortification in **Cairo, Egypt**, built by **Salah ad-Din** (Saladin) and further developed by subsequent Egyptian rulers.
  - ii. It was the seat of government in Egypt and the residence of its rulers for nearly 700 years from the 13th to the 19th centuries.
  - iii. Its location on a clifftop of the **Mokattam hills** near the center of Cairo commands a strategic position overlooking the city and dominating its skyline.
  - iv. From the rear wall, beautiful views of Islamic Cairo, downtown, the Nile river, and the Pyramids in the distance.
  - v. At the time of its construction, it was among the most impressive and ambitious military fortification projects of its time.
  - vi. It is now a preserved historic site, including mosques and museums.
  - vii.
- f. The New Administrative Capital
  - i. 28 miles east of city center, a massive new city on an enormous scale is has been under construction since 2015.
  - ii. The new city (yet to be named) will become the official capital of Egypt and the administrative as well as financial hub of the country.
  - iii. The city will house between 6 and 7 million residents in the first phase.
  - iv. Largest Mosque (Al Fattah Al Aleem) in Egypt and largest Cathedral (Nativity of Christ) in Egypt and the Middle East
  - v. More than 1000 mosques and churches planned
  - vi. Central business district with the “Iconic Tower” rising to 1260 feet and 80 floors, the largest in Africa
  - vii. 90,000 seat stadium
  - viii. New international airport
  - ix. “Capital Park” which is planned to be twice the size of New York’s Central Park
  - x. “Octagon” Ministry of Defense headquarters, similar to the Pentagon
  - xi. Planned “Obilisco Capitale” skyscraper; intended to be inaugurated in 2030 at a height of 1KM and will be the tallest building in the world.
- g. Nile Cruise
  - i. Many operators operate dinner cruises travelling from city center to El Maadi and back. Open buffet with entertainment (belly dancer, band, etc.) is generally offered during the cruise.
- h. Golf
  - i. Excellent golf can be had for \$75 to \$100 per round (including electric cart) throughout Cairo. The following courses are generally in very good condition, tee times easy to get, and staff knowledgeable and friendly.

1. Katameya Dunes; New Cairo. 27 holes with Westin hotel and spa, restaurants, bar. Very challenging course with lots of hazards.
2. Katameya Heights; New Cairo. 18 holes with large clubhouse, restaurants. Very challenging course with doglegs, blind shots, hilly.
3. Madinaty GC; East Cairo. 18 holes, excellent condition, less hazards than Katameya Dunes and Heights.
4. Alegria GC; West Cairo. 18 holes, long and challenging.

#### 11) Shopping

- a. Local and international brands can be found throughout the city, primarily in big malls.
- b. As with groceries, expect locally made and manufactured items to be significantly less expensive than international brands, which will be more costly than if purchased in the US.
- c. Large malls and shopping complexes
  - i. Cairo Festival City; New Cairo City
  - ii. Mall of Arabia; Sheik Zayed
  - iii. City Stars; Medinat Nasr
  - iv. Khan El Khalili

#### 12) Excursions

- a. Excursions within Egypt are easy to arrange and generally reasonably priced. Depending on the time of year, the following destinations are recommended:
  - i. Summer destinations – Mediterranean Sea; beaches
    1. Due to the high daytime temperatures in Cairo and the South, most Egyptians will vacation on the North Coast in resorts dotting the shore from Alexandria in the East to the Libyan border in the West.
      - a. Alexandria
      - b. Marina El Alamein
      - c. Marsa Matrouh
    2. Gulf of Suez
      - a. Ain Sokhna
  - ii. Winter destinations – Sinai Peninsula and Red Sea; beaches, diving
    1. Sharm El Sheikh
    2. Hurghada
    3. Dahab
  - iii. Winter destinations – Upper (Southern) Egypt; archaeology, history, antiquities, ancient civilizations
    1. Luxor
    2. Aswan
    3. Abu Simbel