

LEVELED BOOK • U

# Egypt



Written by Nate Light

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# Egypt



## Where Is It?

The Arab Republic of Egypt is in the northern part of the continent of Africa. A small part of Egypt, the Sinai (SEYE-neye) Peninsula, is actually in Asia. The Sinai Peninsula shares its eastern border with Israel and the Gaza Strip.

To the north of Egypt is the Mediterranean (MEH-duh-tuh-RAY-nee-uhn) Sea, and to the east is the Red Sea. The country has 2,450 kilometers (1,522 mi.) of coastline. The country of Sudan is to the south of Egypt. To the west is Libya.



Western-style hotels and other modern buildings line the banks of the Nile in Cairo.

Cairo (KEYE-roh), the capital of Egypt, is located in the north, along the Nile River. It is one of the largest cities in Africa. Cairo sits on the same site as it did one thousand years ago. More than eleven million people live there today.

Cairo is a mixture of ancient and modern buildings. Historic buildings and mosques—places of worship for Muslims—stand near other modern buildings. Cairo is also a mixture of bustling city streets and grassy areas. Skyscrapers jut into the sky next to lush, green land. Because fertile land is so scarce, some of these areas are used for farming.

In older areas, the streets are narrow and crowded. Here, people shop at covered **bazaars**. Tea and coffeehouses provide places for people to enjoy local refreshments.



Many farmers along the Nile use animals such as donkeys to help them carry crops and supplies.

## People

More than eighty-six million people live in Egypt. Many people live along the banks of the Nile River, which runs through the eastern part of the country. Many of Egypt's cities and towns are located along the Nile, because it provides much of Egypt's water. People use ground water for cooking, washing, and drinking, and they use river water for **irrigating** crops. The rest of the country contains mainly deserts and a few mountains.

Many farmers grow cotton for Egypt's large **textile** industry in the fertile land near the Nile. Farmers also grow wheat, rice, corn, beans, fruits, and vegetables.

In Egypt's cities, many people work in service industries such as hotels, restaurants, and banks. **Tourism** is an important part of Egypt's economy. In addition, people work in factories to produce cloth and process food.



Muslims attend a sermon at a mosque in Cairo.

Most people in Egypt speak some form of Arabic. Most Egyptians are Arabs descended from people who originally lived in the Arabian Peninsula in Asia. The Arabian Peninsula is where Saudi Arabia and several other countries are now located. Many different groups of Arabs live in Egypt. The form of Arabic they speak depends on where they live. Other Egyptians are of African descent. Many of these groups have their own languages, too.

Although most people live near the Nile, a few groups live in the deserts. The Bedouins (BEH-duh-wenz) herd animals in the deserts throughout the country.

Most Egyptians are Muslims, or followers of the religion of **Islam**. Some Egyptians follow Christian religions.



## Land

Deserts cover most of Egypt. The Western Desert covers two thirds of the country. The Eastern Desert covers a smaller part. The even smaller Sinai Desert covers the Sinai Peninsula. All these deserts are part of the Sahara Desert. However, each desert is different. The Western Desert looks like a sea of sand **dunes** with many sharp rocks. The Eastern Desert has *wadis* (WAH-deez), or beds of seasonal rivers. Wadis only fill up with water after a heavy rain. The Eastern Desert also includes rugged mountains. The Sinai Desert has tall mountains and deep canyons. In all three deserts, green **oases** can be found.



The Nile runs through most of Egypt's cities and towns, including Aswan, shown here.

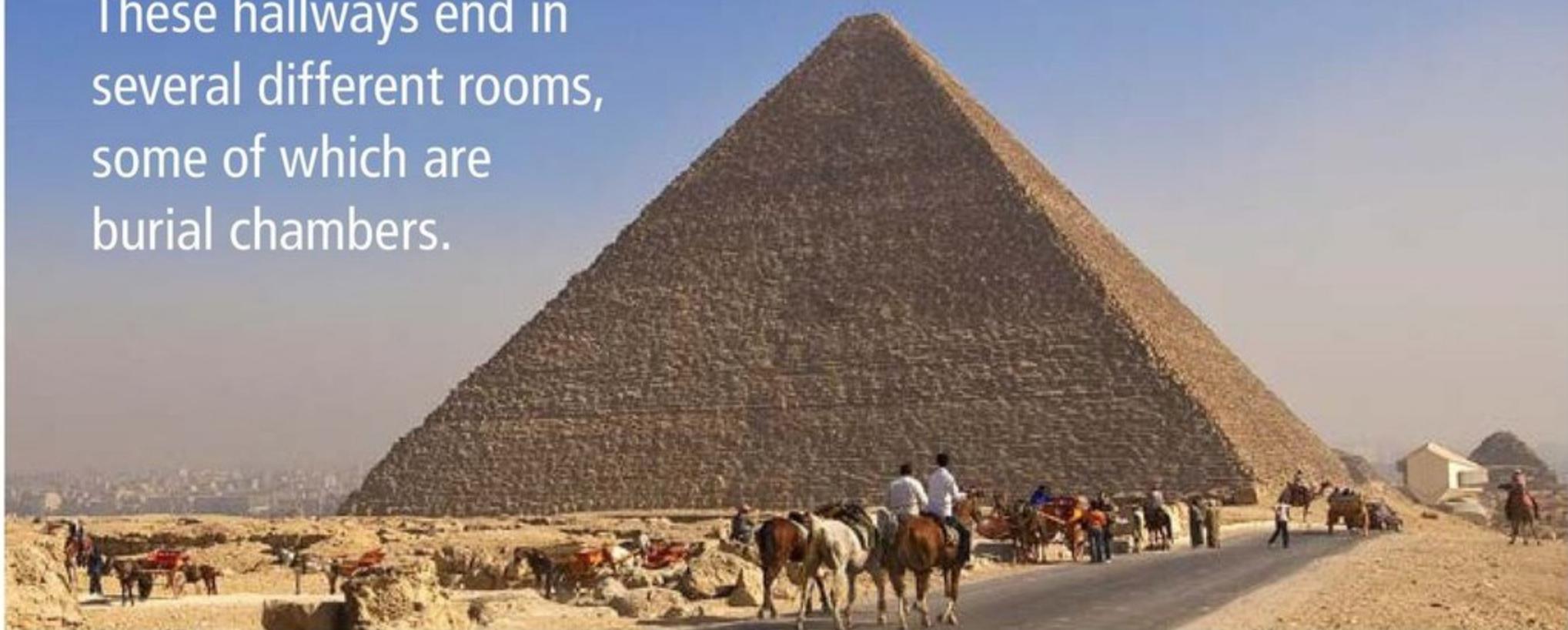
The fertile Nile River Valley lies between the Western and Eastern deserts. The Nile is the longest river in the world. It flows from south to north and ends at the Mediterranean Sea. Near its mouth, the river spreads out into smaller rivers, forming a triangle of fertile land. This area of land around the river's mouth is the Nile Delta. It is some of the most fertile land in Egypt. The Nile Delta stretches for about 160 kilometers (100 mi.) between Cairo and the Mediterranean Sea.

In the south of Egypt, the Nile forms a large lake. Lake Nasser was created in the 1960s when a dam was built, blocking the flow of the Nile. It is one of the world's largest artificial lakes.

# The Great Pyramid

The Great Pyramid of Khufu is the largest and oldest of the Pyramids of Giza. It was built around 2589 BC. About 2.3 million blocks of stone were cut and put together to create the giant structure. Branching hallways lead into the pyramid.

These hallways end in several different rooms, some of which are burial chambers.



## History

Egypt is home to one of the world's first civilizations. The Nile provided rich land for ancient Egyptians. As a result, they were among the first people to grow crops and use a plow.

For about three thousand years, thirty different **dynasties** ruled ancient Egypt. The kings of Egypt were called **pharaohs** (FEHR-ohz). The ancient Egyptians believed the pharaohs were living gods. During these dynasties, pharaohs built huge stone temples and monuments. Some, such as the **Pyramids of Giza**, are tombs for the pharaohs. Between about 2700 and 1000 BC, Egypt was one of the greatest civilizations in the world.



The Suez Canal in Egypt connects the Mediterranean and the Red seas. The French built the canal between 1859 and 1869.

Over the centuries, several outside forces gained control of Egypt. In 332 BC, the emperor Alexander the Great took Egypt. He founded the city of Alexandria, which still sits on the northern coast. Egypt was part of the Greek Empire for more than three hundred years.

In AD 640, Egypt was conquered by armies from the Arabian Peninsula. The Arabs made Cairo the capital city. They also brought the religion of Islam, and many Egyptians became Muslims. Some Egyptians remained Christians.

In the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, Egypt was part of the Ottoman Empire, an empire that began in Turkey. In the eighteenth century, France tried to take over Egypt. This caused the British to become involved in Egypt's government because they did not want France to gain control of Egypt. At the beginning of World War I (1914–1918), Egypt came under the control of the British Empire. Finally, in 1922, Egypt won partial independence from Britain.

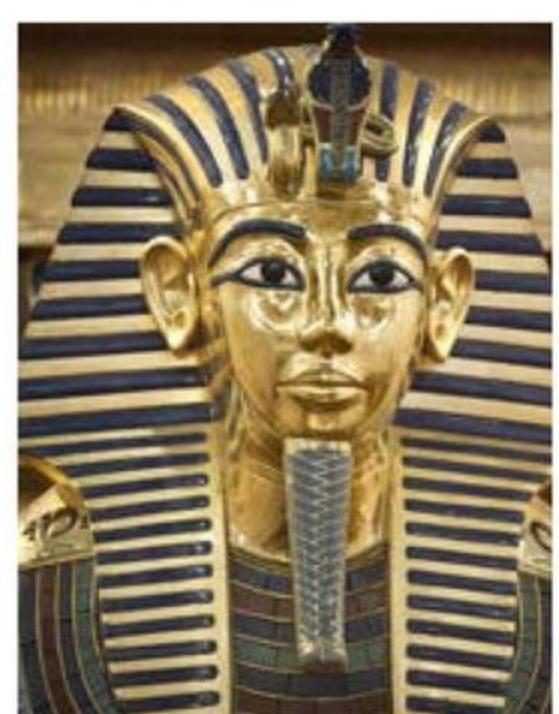


The Great Sphinx has the head of a man and the body of a lion.

## Landmarks

Every year, millions of people visit Egypt to see its ancient landmarks. Some of the most famous ones are the Pyramids of Giza. These are located just outside Cairo. The Great Sphinx, a figure made out of stone, also sits there.

Another popular site is the Valley of the Kings in southern Egypt, near the city of Luxor. Some of Egypt's most famous pharaohs were buried there in more than sixty tombs. Many of the treasures from the tombs were stolen by robbers long ago. The tomb of Tutankhamun (toot-an-KAH-muhn) still had its treasures when it was discovered in 1922. Many of these amazing treasures now sit in the Egyptian Museum in Cairo. Near the Valley of the Kings are other ruins of great temples built by the pharaohs.



Gold mask of Tutankhamun



ibex



## Animals

People in Egypt raise many animals, such as sheep, goats, donkeys, and water buffalo. Some people also raise and use camels for work.

Some wild animals live in the harsh desert environments. Many of them only come out at night when the air is cooler. One desert animal is the fennec, a small fox with large ears. The fennec spends most of its day underground in a burrow. It comes out at night to find food. Many snakes, lizards, and scorpions also live in the desert. One type of lizard is the spiny-tailed lizard. The ibex (EYE-beks), a type of goat, is another desert animal.

The Nile and its valley are also home to many kinds of animals. Fish swim in the river, and crocodiles can be found in the southern part of the Nile.



Some villages in southern Egypt have beautiful and colorfully painted buildings.

## Conclusion

Egypt is an amazing country filled with treasures. Both animals and people live in its deserts. The Nile River cuts through the country, dividing the deserts into two parts. It is a source of water and good farmland for millions of people.

Millions of tourists visit Egypt each year to learn about its fascinating past and see ancient landmarks. This history, along with its people and animals, makes Egypt a fantastic place to learn about.



**Population:** 86,895,099

**Land:** 995,450 sq km (622,272 sq. mi.)

**Capital City:** Cairo

**Primary Language:** Arabic

**Primary Religions:** Islam, Christianity

**Currency:** Egyptian Pound



Source: Central Intelligence Agency (July 2014), World Bank

## Glossary

- bazaars** (*n.*) markets with rows of small shops (p. 5)
- dunes** (*n.*) hills of sand formed by wind (p. 8)
- dynasties** (*n.*) series of rulers from the same family in a country (p. 10)
- empire** (*n.*) a collection of nations or people ruled by one person or government (p. 11)
- irrigating** (*v.*) supplying land with water, especially to help crops grow (p. 6)
- Islam** (*n.*) the monotheistic faith of Muslims, based on the teachings of the prophet Muhammad (p. 7)
- oases** (*n.*) fertile places with water in a desert (p. 8)
- peninsula** (*n.*) a piece of land almost completely surrounded by water (p. 4)
- pharaohs** (*n.*) titles given to kings in ancient Egypt (p. 10)
- pyramids** (*n.*) large buildings with three or more sides shaped like a triangle (p. 10)
- textile** (*n.*) fabric that is woven or knitted (p. 6)
- tourism** (*n.*) the business of providing services for people who travel for pleasure (p. 6)

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Front and back cover: Tourists visit the Pyramids of Giza (GEE-zuh), which are located near Cairo.

Title page: Riding in a small sailing boat called a *felucca* is a popular tourist activity along the Nile River in Egypt.

Page 3: Bazaars hold many different types of goods for shoppers in Cairo.

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