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# Egypt



Written by Roxanne Farah

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# Egypt



## Where Is It?

The Arab Republic of Egypt is in the northeastern corner of the continent of Africa. A small part of the country, the Sinai (SEYE-neye) Peninsula, is located in Asia. The Sinai Peninsula shares its 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 of much of the country is the Red Sea. The country has 2,450 kilometers (1,522 mi.) of coastline. Sudan is to the south of Egypt, and to the west is Libya.

Cairo (KEYE-roh), Egypt's capital city, is located in the north. The Nile River flows through it on its way to the Mediterranean Sea. Cairo is one of the largest cities in Africa, with a population of more than eleven million people.

Cairo sits on the same site as it did more than one thousand years ago. Arabs who conquered Egypt in AD 640 named it *Al-Qahirah* (el-KAH-hih-rah), which means "the victorious" in Arabic. Before that time, other ancient civilizations built towns on or near the site.

Cairo is a place where ancient meets modern. **Mosques** and other buildings reflect Egypt's long history. Many buildings date back to the times when Romans, Arabs, and Turks occupied Egypt. Near Cairo are the **Pyramids** of Giza, the monuments of ancient Egypt's **pharaohs** (FEHR-ohz). Modern western-style hotels line the Nile.



The Pyramids of Giza are southwest of Cairo.

## People

More than eighty-six million people live in Egypt. Many of Egypt's cities and towns are located along the Nile, which runs through the eastern part of the country. Because the rest of the country is mainly desert, a large majority of Egyptians live near the Nile. People use ground water for cooking, washing, and drinking, and they use river water for irrigating crops.



Egyptian farmers use hoses to pump water into canals to irrigate their crops.

Many farmers grow cotton for Egypt's large **textile** industry in the fertile land along the banks of the Nile. Farmers also grow wheat, rice, corn, beans, fruits, and vegetables. They dig canals that channel the river water to their crops for **irrigation**.

In Egypt's cities, many people work in service industries, and **tourism** is an important part of the country's economy. In addition, people work in factories to produce textiles and process food.

Most people in Egypt speak some form of Arabic. Most Egyptians are descended from people who originally lived in the Arabian Peninsula in Asia. There are many different Arabic groups in Egypt, and the form of Arabic they speak depends on where they live. Other Egyptians are of African descent, and many of these groups have their own languages as well.

About ninety percent of Egyptians are Muslim and follow the religion of **Islam**. Nearly ten percent follow Christian religions. Christianity was the main religion of Egyptians before Islam spread to the region around AD 640.

Although many Egyptians in cities wear western-style clothing, in villages many Egyptians wear long-sleeved tunics called *galabayas* (gal-ah-BAY-ahs). Men often wear white, blue, or gray ones, while unmarried women usually wear bright colors. In addition, Muslim women typically wear a veil, called a *hijab* (hih-JAHB), that covers their heads.



Muslims attend a sermon at a mosque in Cairo.



## Land

Most of Egypt is covered with deserts, with the large Western Desert covering two thirds of the country. The Eastern Desert lies next to the Red Sea. The smaller Sinai Desert covers the Sinai Peninsula. All these deserts are part of the Sahara Desert.

Each desert has its own unique characteristics. The Western Desert looks like an endless sea of sand **dunes** with many sharp rocks. The Eastern Desert has *wadis* (WAH-deez), or dry beds of seasonal rivers that only fill up with water after a heavy rain. The Eastern Desert also includes rugged mountains in the east. The Sinai Desert has tall mountains and deep canyons. In all three deserts, green **oases** can be found.



Lake Nasser



Sinai Mountains



Western Desert

The fertile Nile River Valley is the border between the Western and Eastern Deserts. The Nile is one of the longest rivers in the world, flowing from south to north and ending at the Mediterranean Sea. Near its mouth, the river spreads out into the triangle-shaped **Nile Delta**. This well-irrigated land holds some of the most fertile soil in Egypt. The Nile Delta stretches about 160 kilometers (100 mi.) between Cairo and the Mediterranean Sea.

In the south of Egypt, the Nile forms the world's largest artificial lake, Lake Nasser. The lake was created in the 1960s when the Aswan Dam was built. Some historical sites were originally located on the land flooded to create Lake Nasser but were moved and reconstructed on safer ground nearby.



## Hatshepsut

The temple of Hatshepsut (haht-SHEP-soot) is located across the Nile from the present-day city of Luxor, near the site of the ancient Egyptian city of Thebes. Hatshepsut is one of the few known female Egyptian pharaohs. She reigned from around 1473 to 1458 BC. Ancient images show her wearing a false beard and traditional male clothing.

## History

Thousands of years ago, one of the world's first civilizations developed along the banks of the Nile in Egypt. The seasonal flooding of the river provided rich land for the ancient Egyptians, and they were among the first people in the world to grow crops and use a plow.

For about three thousand years, thirty different **dynasties** of pharaohs ruled ancient Egypt. The ancient Egyptians believed the pharaohs were living gods, and they built huge stone monuments and tombs for them. The ancient Egyptians were also polytheistic, which means they believed in many gods. The pharaohs led the building of elaborate stone temples to honor different Egyptian gods. Between about 2700 and 1000 BC, Egypt was one of the greatest civilizations in the world.

Over the centuries, several outside forces have conquered or occupied Egypt. In 332 BC, the emperor Alexander the Great invaded Egypt and made it part of the Greek Empire. Egypt was under Greek rule for about three hundred years. Alexander founded the city of Alexandria, which still sits on the northern coast and is the country's main seaport.

In AD 640, an army from the Arabian Peninsula conquered Egypt. Muslim dynasties ruled Egypt until their own military leaders from Turkey overthrew them. Around 1517, Egypt became part of the Ottoman Empire, an empire created by Turkish tribes.

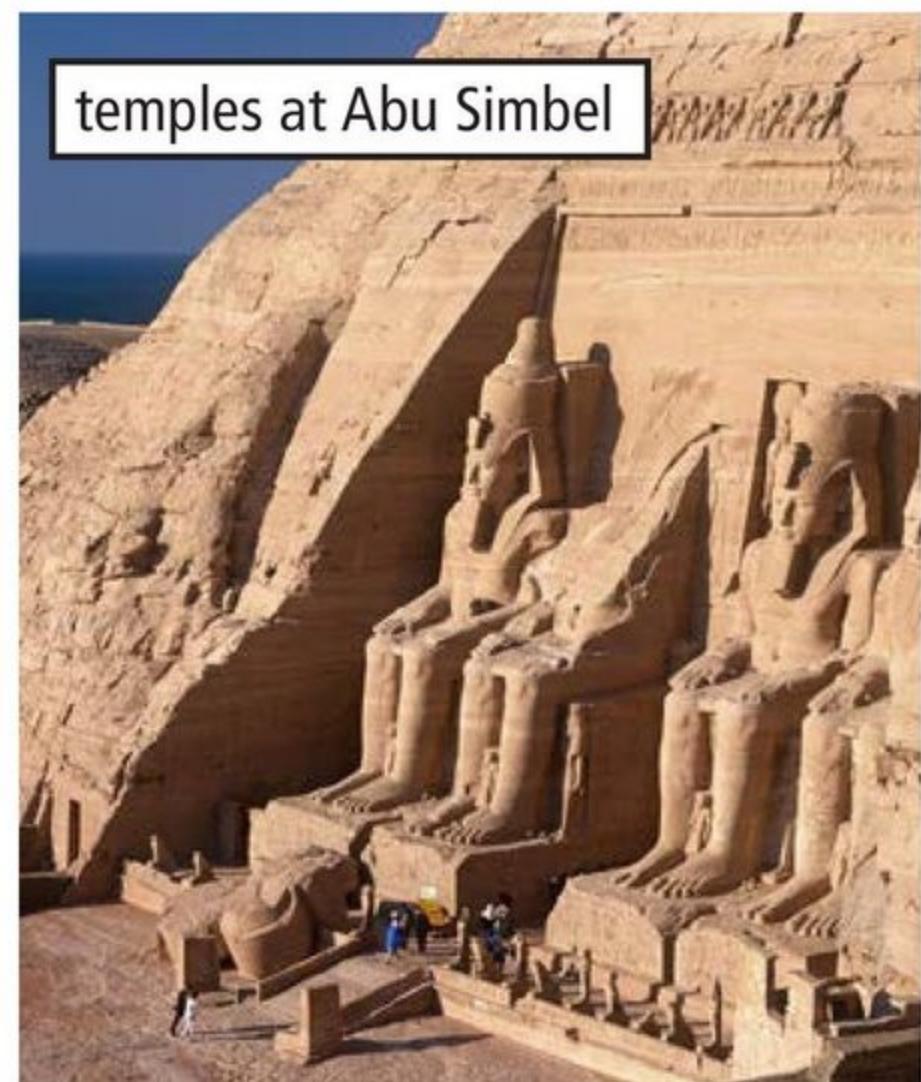
In 1798, France attempted to invade Egypt, causing the British to become involved in Egypt's government—the British did not want France to gain control of Egypt. The Ottoman Empire regained control of Egypt through the next century, but British and French influence remained.

During World War I (1914–1918), Britain made Egypt a British protectorate, or a country that is protected and controlled by another, more powerful country. In 1922 Egypt won its independence from the British.

## Landmarks

Every year, millions of people visit Egypt to see its ancient landmarks. One of the most famous landmarks is the Valley of the Kings in southern Egypt. Some of Egypt's most famous pharaohs were buried here in more than sixty tombs, along with countless treasures. Tomb robbers stole many of these treasures long ago. However, the tomb of Tutankhamun (toot-an-KAH-muhn) still had its treasures when it was discovered in 1922. Many of these amazing treasures are displayed in the Egyptian Museum in Cairo.

The temples at Abu Simbel, along the banks of Lake Nasser, are another popular tourist site. Two of the temples were built by Ramses II, pharaoh of Egypt from 1279 to 1213 BC. Four giant stone statues of Ramses II sit at the entrance to the Great Temple, which was carved out of a cliff. Inside this temple, three hallways extend into the cliff and include more statues and painted scenes. The hallways lead to a shrine at the temple's center dedicated to some of the Egyptian gods.





Camels are particularly well suited to Egypt's desert conditions because they can survive on very little water.

## Animals

People in Egypt's rural areas 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 conditions of the deserts. One desert animal is the fennec, a small fox with large ears. The fennec spends most of its day underground in a burrow and comes out at night to find food. Many snakes, lizards, and scorpions also live in the deserts. The ibex (EYE-beks), a sturdy wild goat, is another animal that can survive in the deserts' difficult conditions.

The Nile and its valley are also home to many kinds of animals. Hundreds of different types of fish swim in the Nile's waters, and crocodiles can be found in the southern part of the river.



Riding in a felucca, or small sailing boat, on the Nile is a popular tourist activity in Egypt.

## Conclusion

Egypt is an amazing country filled with history. Both animals and people live in its rugged deserts. Cutting a path through the desert, the Nile River provides life-giving water and fertile land for crops.

Throughout history, people have battled for control of the land of Egypt. These conquests have shaped its people and culture. Egypt's many historical sites hold secrets and treasures that are important to the rest of the world.



**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

- delta** (*n.*) an area of land shaped like a triangle formed by sediment at the mouth of a river (p. 9)
- 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)
- irrigation** (*n.*) the practice of supplying water to land or crops to promote growth (p. 6)
- Islam** (*n.*) the monotheistic faith of Muslims, based on the teachings of the prophet Muhammad (p. 7)
- mosques** (*n.*) places of worship in the Islamic faith (p. 5)
- oases** (*n.*) fertile places in a desert that have water (p. 8)
- pharaohs** (*n.*) titles given to kings in ancient Egypt (p. 5)
- pyramids** (*n.*) large buildings with three or more sides shaped like a triangle (p. 5)
- textile** (*n.*) fabric that is woven or knitted (p. 6)
- tourism** (*n.*) the business of providing services for people traveling for pleasure (p. 6)

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Front and back cover: Huge statues of Ramses II decorate the outside of the Temple of Abu Simbel near Aswan, Egypt.

Title page: The Temple of Queen Hatshepsut (Hat-shep-SOOT) includes elaborate paintings as well as symbols on its walls.

Page 3: Some villages in Egypt have colorfully painted buildings.

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