

Title:

Seeing the Great Pyramids of Ancient Egypt in Cairo

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Summary:

Overview of tourist attractions in Cairo including the Great Pyramids of ancient Egypt.

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Article Body:

Seeing the Great Pyramids, one of the ancient wonders of the world, is a once in a lifetime trip for many people. Because of the travel distances involved for most tourists who go to Egypt, advance planning is definitely required. In many cases, a visa from an Egyptian consulate would be required in advance of a trip. There are many tour agencies located around the world with access to organized trips to Egypt that would make things much easier for many travelers. There are even Egyptian Tourist Authority offices located in Europe, North America and Japan to help with information on travel to Egypt.

Once in the capital city of Cairo, one should be prepared as it is a very large city of 83 square miles with 16 million inhabitants. It is not a picturesque city for tourists but instead it is noisy, polluted, crowded and very chaotic. However, this is the entry point for most travelers to Egypt and the base for some famous sights such as the Great Pyramids. Tourists can travel to other parts of Egypt which will be more pleasant and less busy for other ancient Egyptian ruins but a short stay in Cairo is still warranted in order to catch what's located in the capital. One definitely does not want to drive in Cairo as the traffic is just crazy. Either take organized tours booked in advance or take taxis to leave the driving to the locals. Good hotels are available in Cairo including many of the worldwide chains. Like many other large crowded urban cities, one should be careful especially for pickpockets so take the necessary personal security precautions.

The Great Pyramids and the Sphinx of course are the main attractions here. They are located in the Giza plateau just outside the city. There are three pyramids with the largest being the Great Pyramid built by King Cheops in 2650 BC. The second pyramid was built by King Chephren, Cheops' son and the third by King

Mycerinus, son of Chephren. Of course the photo opportunities at the Great Pyramids and the Sphinx are just wonderful. Sometimes, it is possible to enter the insides of the pyramids for an extra admission charge but this is not a recommended option for those who are claustrophobic. The tunnels leading into the inner burial chambers of each pyramid are not comfortable at all. One pretty well must walk down in a crouching position all the way until the burial chambers are reached since the tunnels are quite long and not very high. The insides of the pyramids are also not air conditioned so temperatures are hot but at least the entire path is now electrically lit. When one makes this trip down to the burial chambers, it is fascinating to think about the conditions the original grave robbers must have went through as there were no lights and it's a long way down. They certainly had their work cut out for them.

Outside on site, there are numerous hustlers offering camel rides. They are a real novelty since there are not many opportunities to ride a camel in the desert with the Great Pyramids in the background. But be warned that some of these hustlers will try and get as much out of the unsuspecting tourist as possible. Negotiate with a few of them before hand. One ride was bargained for the equivalent of \$7 US which is quite reasonable. After the ride was paid for, the camel owner passed over the actual duties of working the ride to his teenage son. During the ride, his son kept hinting that he expected a tip. At the end, a \$2 US tip was offered but the son was expecting a ridiculous amount of \$30 US and got angry when he realized that amount wasn't going to happen. The tour bus driver who was watching the entire incident had to come over to 'rescue' the tourist. The problem with many of these local hustlers is that they think that most tourists have mountains of cash. Polite customer service attitudes are just not priority with many of them.

There are other important Egyptian ruins within the Cairo area as well including Memphis which has the giant statue of Ramses II. Some of the important ancient Egyptian attractions are housed within the Egyptian Museum, another must-see attraction. The treasures of King Tutankhamun including the famous gold mask are at the Egyptian Museum. The treasures are extremely impressive as each object was made with such fine detail and remember that they were made thousands of years ago. It is interesting to note that although Tutankhamun's treasures are impressive, the boy king was not one of the major pharaohs. So one can just imagine what the treasures of the other pharaohs would have been like. It's too bad that the grave robbers got to them first. The other antiquities at the museum are also quite impressive so one can easily spend a good portion of the day here.

Egypt's population is 94% Muslim and 6% Coptic Christian. As expected, there are some marvelous looking mosques in Cairo that are worth seeing and they would

usually be in the agenda of most organized tours. The markets such as the Khan El-Khalili bazaar are interesting experiences too. At these markets, one can shop for spices, perfumes, jewelry, brass, copperware, ceramics, fabrics including Egyptian cotton and many more souvenir items including replicas of ancient Egyptian treasures. Be prepared to shop around and bargain though. Prices for the same items can vary greatly at different shops. Even though many shop owners will tend to be nice at first offering potential customers a soft drink or a cup of tea, the Egyptians are hard sellers and will put on the pressure to buy. Most prices can be brought down even if the sellers appear irritated. Some will even follow customers out the door still trying to get the sale. So be warned that the Egyptian markets are not relaxed places to shop.

To get change of pace, one can take a ride on the river Nile on local sailboats called feluccas. However, if one is going to travel to other parts of Egypt, a ride on a felucca will be even better further away from Cairo since the locations will be quieter and more peaceful. There are some restaurants located in Cairo with surprisingly pleasant outdoor terraces overlooking the city and the Great Pyramids in the distance. The tour guides will know where they are and will likely include one in the tour's itinerary.

One thing that tourists will have to get use to while in Cairo and other parts of Egypt is the sight of many uniformed security personnel armed with machine guns. They are stationed at all the tourist sights including the ancient ruins, airports and the Egyptian Museum. At many locations, they will perform a search on all tourists including their bags before entry is allowed. Tourism is Egypt's main industry and the government vowed to protect it, especially after 9/11. So a trip to Cairo and Egypt will be quite an adventure for any tourist but it is the Great Pyramids of ancient Egypt after all.