

# BIG FIVE<sup>®</sup>

TOURS & EXPEDITIONS

*Enriching Lives Through Distinctive Journeys*

## Destination Information Guide

# Egypt



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## Welcome to the World of Big Five!

*The following general outline offers practical information, suggestions and answers to some frequently asked questions. It is not intended to be the definitive guide for your trip.*

Big Five Tours & Expeditions is pleased to welcome you on this exciting adventure. We take great care to insure that your travel dreams and expectations are well met. Our distinctive journeys allow you to experience the finest aspects each destination has to offer. We also aim to provide you with a deeper understanding of and appreciation for the places you'll visit and the people you'll meet.



**Cairo** ~ Elevation: 243 feet / Latitude: 30 08N / Longitude: 031 24E

| Jan.    | Feb.    | Mar.    | Apr.    | May     | Jun.    | Jul.    | Aug.    | Sep.    | Oct.    | Nov.    | Dec.    |
|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| 66 / 48 | 70 / 48 | 75 / 52 | 90 / 62 | 90 / 62 | 95 / 64 | 95 / 71 | 95 / 71 | 89 / 68 | 86 / 64 | 75 / 57 | 70 / 50 |

**Luxor** ~ Elevation: 289 feet / Latitude: 25 40N / Longitude: 032 42E

| Jan.    | Feb.    | Mar.    | Apr.    | May      | Jun.     | Jul.     | Aug.     | Sep.     | Oct.    | Nov.    | Dec.    |
|---------|---------|---------|---------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|---------|---------|---------|
| 73 / 43 | 77 / 45 | 84 / 52 | 93 / 61 | 102 / 70 | 104 / 73 | 104 / 73 | 105 / 73 | 100 / 72 | 95 / 84 | 84 / 55 | 75 / 46 |

## WEATHER

There is very little rain at any time of year in Egypt, but there is a considerable variation in temperature during the year and also between night and day. The climate is less extreme on the Mediterranean coast, where it is always cooler than in the rest of the country. Rain is most common in January & February in Cairo and November-February in Aswan.

March and April can bring the *kbamaseen*, a strong hot wind that carries dust and sand from the Sahara Desert. Cairo, which is actually part of Lower Egypt because the Nile flows from south to north, is extremely hot from June to September, but is more bearable at night. It can be quite cold in winter months, often with rain around Christmas. The air is drier and hotter toward the south, which is Upper Egypt. Southern areas are hot even in winter, with surprisingly cold nights.

The tourist season is traditionally from the end of November to February, but Cairo and even Luxor are quite chilly at that time. The best time is either May when the heat is still bearable, or October-November when the long, hot summer comes to an end.

## TIME ZONES

Egypt time is EST + 7 hours, which is two hours ahead of GMT (Greenwich Mean Time).

## PASSPORTS & VISAS

**PASSPORTS:** For international travel, U.S. and Canadian passports must be valid for at least six months from date of departure, and contain at least 3 blank pages.

**VISAS:** Many countries require travelers to obtain visas prior to arrival. **U.S. residents:** Big Five Tours & Expeditions has appointed Trivisa to process required visas. You will find the necessary forms from Trivisa's website at: [www.trivisa.com](http://www.trivisa.com). Please use account code JP1551, and follow directions. **Canadian residents:** please contact the nearest consulate.

**Important:** Even if you do not need a visa prior to departure, please check your passport well in advance of departure to insure:

- 1) It is valid for at least six months after the date of travel.
- 2) You have sufficient blank pages for visa/entry stamps that will be added as you travel in and out of various countries.

Please note: pages reserved for amendments and endorsements cannot be used for visas.

**Note:** Travel with photocopies of all important documents in a safe place in the event your passport or other documents are lost or stolen. Also, it's a good idea to have an extra passport photo with you. As a tourist, you will need to produce your passport when checking into hotels, changing money or travelers' checks and to prove your identity when requested by authorities.

## AIRPORT FORMALITIES

Once you pass through customs and immigration, you will be welcomed by a Big Five representative who will escort you to your hotel.

## EGYPT CUSTOMS

**Duty-Free Items:** 200 cigarettes or 25 cigars or 200g tobacco; 2 liters of alcoholic beverage; a reasonable amount of perfume or eau de cologne; gifts up to £E500. All cash, travelers' checks, credit cards and gold over £E500 must be declared. Persons traveling with expensive electronic equipment such as cameras, video cameras, or computers may be required to list these items in their passports to ensure that they will be exported upon departure.

**Prohibited Items:** All narcotics (hemp, opium, cocaine, morphine, heroin, etc.), firearms, obscene literature, pictures, or articles. Penalties for possession, use or trafficking in illegal drugs are strict and convicted offenders can expect jail sentences and heavy fines.

## US CUSTOMS

Returning U.S. residents are allowed to bring back \$800 worth of merchandise duty-free. There are limits on some items. Regulations frequently change, however, so check with your nearest customs office for a list of limited and exempt items, or write the **U.S. Customs Service, Box 7407, Washington, DC 20044**. Or, visit their web site [www.customs.ustreas.gov](http://www.customs.ustreas.gov).

## CANADA CUSTOMS

Returning to Canada, declare all of goods acquired while outside Canada, such as purchases, gifts, prizes or awards that you are bringing with you or are having shipped to you. Include goods that are still in your possession that you bought at a Canadian or foreign duty-free shop. For more information, within Canada call the **Border Information Service at 1-800-461-9999, or visit CBSA Web site at [www.cbsa.gc.ca](http://www.cbsa.gc.ca).**

## HEALTH

All international travelers should be in generally good health. Talk with your personal physician about your personal needs and any shots or boosters recommended depending on your health profile and your itinerary. Tetanus and polio vaccines should be up to date. Be prepared to take precautions against sunburn with sunscreen and lip balm.

**Yellow Fever:** Yellow fever inoculation is required if one of the following applies:

- If you are coming from any area other than the United States, Europe, or Canada.
- If you plan on visiting more than one African country.

Currently, no vaccinations are necessary for entry into Egypt if you are arriving from North America. If, however, you are entering from cholera area, inoculation is mandatory. Your inoculation information must be displayed on an International Vaccination Certificate. Updated vaccinations for tetanus with diphtheria, Gamma globulin Hepatitis A, and inactivated polio are recommended. If traveling to rural Nile/Delta areas, anti-malaria precautions are also highly recommended. If you are arriving in Egypt from Kenya or Tanzania, you will require a vaccination against Yellow Fever. The sun is hot year-round so use a high-factor suntan lotion and wear a hat and sunglasses. Take antiseptic cream for cuts as flies can spread infections. Take insect repellent as mosquitoes can make life a misery and may carry malaria.

**Please note:** If you are on medication, be sure to bring enough for the duration of the trip. Prescription medicines should always be carried in their original containers in your hand luggage.

**Health insurance is strongly advised during any foreign travel.** Your medical insurance may not be valid abroad. US Medicare programs do not provide payment for medical services outside the country. Uninsured travelers, who require medical care overseas, may face extreme difficulties.

**US residents:** Check the latest regulations with your local health office or the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention hotline for international travelers at 1-877-FYI-TRIP (1-877-394-8747); fax: 1-888-CDC-FAXX (1-888-232-3299), or their main telephone number in Atlanta, 404-332-4559. Or, visit the CDC Internet home page at <http://www.cdc.gov>.

**Canadian residents:** Check the latest regulations with your local health office or the Public Health Agency of Canada visit the PHAC Internet home page at <http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/index-eng.php>.

**SAFETY:** Rarely do we run into safety concerns on any of our journeys. If, however, you have concerns about safety issues while traveling, contact the appropriate governmental agency.

**US residents:** Contact the Bureau of Consular Affairs: <http://travel.state.gov>, or the U.S. Department of State, (202)647-4000, website: [www.state.gov](http://www.state.gov).

**Canada residents:** Pamphlets addressing safety issues abroad are available from Consular Affairs Bureau's website <http://www.voyage.gc.ca>. Or, by phone at (800) 267 6788

## CLOTHING

*For general clothing information, please review the **Travel Handbook** in your pre-departure materials. See pre-departure information for general packing check list.*

**Please remember that Egypt is predominantly a Moslem country with conservative standards of dress.** These apply particularly to women. Women will be more accepted touring mosques and old churches if their head is covered. Do bring a bathing suit to use at hotels and onboard cruise ships, however, except onboard ships and poolside, women should not wear bare-backed dresses, shorts and short skirts. Bare shoulders are also taboo. It is acceptable, however, for men to

wear shorts. Clothes should be washable and loose-fitting with the emphasis on comfort. Visits to temples and excavations involve a considerable amount of walking, some of which may be in hot and dry weather. Therefore, cotton and cotton-synthetic combinations are preferable to pure synthetics that retain heat. During the winter months between December and March, nights and early mornings can be cold. Bring a warm sweater. A light nylon windbreaker may come in handy early mornings or late afternoons. For April, May, October and November, a light wrap for evening is recommended. A comfortable, well-broken-in pair of walking shoes with closed toes is vital. You will be doing a great deal of walking. The floors of tombs and temples are frequently uneven, and require quality footwear. Sneakers, running shoes or lightweight desert boots are ideal. During the day, dress is informal. Jeans or slacks and sport shirts are fine for ladies or gentlemen. Ladies may wear skirts or dresses if they prefer. At night, however, coats and ties for men and dresses for women are appropriate in many places. Gentlemen should pack one or two sport coats or suits, with two or three pairs of slacks, dress shirts and ties. Ladies should bring two or three dresses - lightweight between June & September, medium weight in April, May, October & November, and warm between December & March. On Nile cruises, you might want to pack something that you can wear to the costume party held on board.

Laundry service is very good and done the same day, except Fridays. Also remember, the rooms on the Nile cruise ships are small compared to larger, ocean-going liners.

## **LUGGAGE**

*For general baggage information, please review the **Travel Handbook** in your pre-departure materials.*

**Internal flights:** On internal Egyptair flights and all flights from Egypt to other countries, and on flights from Nairobi to Cairo, your baggage will be weighed. Please pay close attention to baggage restrictions. Excess baggage charges are steep and strictly enforced. Your carry-on bag should hold important documents, prescriptions, cameras, valuables, etc. All luggage should be locked and have identification inside as well as secure baggage tags on the outside.

## **MONEY**

The Egyptian pound (LE) is divided into 100 piastres (PT), and has notes for 25 and 50 piastres, 1, 5, 10, 20, 50, 100 and 200 Egyptian pounds. *It is now possible to purchase Egyptian currency abroad, however, only a maximum of 100 Egyptian pounds may be carried into or out of Egypt*

We recommend that you take some cash dollars in small denominations, since US dollars are widely accepted, along with major credit cards. Do not plan on using personal checks, and in some areas you may have difficulty using traveler's checks. Do not exchange money with any of the many people who will offer to do so on the street. Beware of those, too, who will try to escort you to a shop. If you go, you will be subjected to a very sophisticated, genteel, hard sell.

## **LANGUAGE**

The official language is Arabic, but English and French are very widely spoken, especially in tourist centers. Signs on major streets are usually in Arabic and Roman. It is a good idea to become familiar with numerals as it is often used for prices. English is taught in the schools and there is usually someone who is happy to practice with you.

## **ELECTRICITY**

The electrical voltage in Egypt is 220 volts, 50 cycle AC. You will need a transformer unless your equipment has one built in. You will also need an adapter for the round, two-pin European plug used in Egypt. Many hotel rooms also have outlets that permit using American electric shavers without adapters and transformers, but it is better to bring a non-electric razor as well.

For more information, visit World Electric Guide: <http://www.kropla.com/electric2.htm>

## **FOOD & DRINK**

A certain amount of caution should be exercised in Egypt. Although the water and food in Egypt are generally safe, mild stomach upsets and traveler's diarrhea (TD) do occur, as they will in any foreign country. Visitors usually adjust to the differences in climate and diet in a few days if they rest, stick to plain food, and drink plenty of fresh lime juice and mineral water. You may wish to talk to your doctor about a general antibiotic to take to treat TD or take Pepto-Bismol. To be on the safe side,

we suggest that you purchase bottled water in sealed containers. Risk of dehydration due to the heat is possible so do drink plenty of fluids but avoid very cold drinks during the heat of the day, and wait until after sunset to consume alcoholic drinks. Mineral water is cheap and readily available. ***Please note that water is a precious commodity in most areas of the world, and you will most likely be charged extra for bottled water.*** In hotels, restaurants, and aboard cruise ships, foods are usually well prepared, but, as a general rule in international travel, it's best to eat only foods that have been well cooked and fruits that can be peeled. Generally speaking, avoid salads and raw vegetables. Overall, Egyptian food is very tasty so eat and enjoy. Egyptian food reflects the country's rich history and varied influences with elements modified from Greek, Turkish, Lebanese, Palestinian, and Syrian cuisine. Simple dishes are created using naturally ripened fruits and vegetables, and seasoned with fresh spices. Food in the Upper Egypt region is closely linked to North African cuisine, and is spicier than that found in the north, but neither is especially hot. Breads, rice and native beans are staples at Egyptian meals.

## **TIPPING**

Tipping should be done at your discretion and as a reward for good or exceptional service.

For general tipping guidelines please refer to: [www.cntraveler.com/travel-tips/travel-etiquette/2008/12/Etiquette-101-Tipping-Guide](http://www.cntraveler.com/travel-tips/travel-etiquette/2008/12/Etiquette-101-Tipping-Guide)

An exception to tipping -- please do not offer tips to professionals, businessmen, or others who would consider themselves your equal. You may seriously offend them by your act. In Egypt, you are a foreigner and, therefore, thought to be rich. As such, you are supposed to have *baksheesh* (literally: share wealth) for everyone.

Obviously, you tip a waiter, porter or taxi driver, but the guard who opens a tomb or switches on the light "especially for you" will also expect a tip. Children whose picture you take and even people who didn't do anything at all will ask for money. Alms for the poor are called *baksheesh*, too. Everyone seems to want something from you, and while this can be monumentally annoying, please understand that is very much a part of the culture.

***Maintaining a good humor about this aspect of travel is essential to your enjoyment of the trip.*** So you might as well get used to paying something if someone makes your life easier. Indeed, this type of bribery is often necessary just to get something done. But do resist giving money to people who haven't done anything.

## **SHOPPING**

Whether in bazaars and markets, retail shops, or department stores, Egyptians love to shop and to sell. Wherever you decide to shop, plan on spending some time. Bazaars and markets are the most enjoyable, but also time consuming and nerve racking. The rule is -- bargain hard. First, look around to get a feel for prices. Decide what a particular item is worth to you. Always bear in mind that bargaining is a way of life and a great game, and Egyptians are wonderful players. When walking through bazaars, your eyes should linger only on the items that are truly of interest to you. Make eye contact only with a vendor if you wish to stop and look. Once you are drawn into a shop, be ready to bargain. In small retail shops, prices are fixed and usually written in Arabic, so try to become familiar with numerals. Department stores also have fixed prices and usually accept credit cards.

**Handicrafts:** Egypt has been famous for its handicrafts, but unfortunately the overall quality has deteriorated and many products are now made to be sold cheaply. The main crafts to look for are carved woodwork, mother-of-pearl inlay work, pottery, alabaster, glass, and the obligatory painted papyrus.

**NOTE:** Most of antiquities offered to tourists are fakes, which is just as well because genuine articles require a license from the Department of Antiquities for exportation.

Carpets are not an Egyptian specialty, but camelhair rugs are cheap and colorful. Gold jewelry and silver Bedouin jewelry are available. International clothing chains have recently opened up shops in Cairo and sell good quality, cotton clothes made in Egypt. Appliqué work, traditional Egyptian clothes, cotton sheets & towels are all available. Spices, incense, perfumes, glass, wood, ceramics and leather are some of the favorite buys.

Cairo has been known for its brass and copper works for years. Brass trays of all sizes can be purchased. The larger ones that can be used as tables are more popular.

## **EGYPT TRADITIONS**

When Egyptians meet, they don't just say hello. Greetings are elaborate, and very often they will force one another to stop for tea. The farewells will be as elaborate as the greetings. Foreigners who take time to ask after people's health are always appreciated. Whether Muslim or Copt, Egyptians are deeply religious and religious principles govern their daily lives. Combined with religious belief is commitment to the extended family. Each family member is responsible for the integrity of the family and for the behavior of other members.

All visitors to mosques, mausoleums, and madrasas must remove their shoes. Most Muslims walk around in their stockings but those mosques that are major tourist attractions have canvas overshoes available. Here, a tip of 50PT to LE1 is in order for the people who put them on for you. Women must cover bare arms and should also have a hat or other head covering. Muslims are scrupulous about washing before prayer. They are just as scrupulous about eating and will only use their right hand, the left is reserved for cleaning themselves. Feet are also considered unclean, so when a Muslim enters a mosque he takes off his shoes and when he sits down facing someone, he makes sure the soles of his feet are not showing.

Egyptian men walk hand in hand down a street, but it is rare to see males and females touch in public. Physical contact between foreign couples is also frowned upon. If you want to feel at ease, don't kiss or embrace in the street. For men, speaking to an unknown Egyptian woman is a breach of etiquette.

Ticket lines are occasionally segregated by gender. Women should line up with other women (especially since the lines are usually shorter). On buses, the driver may ask a woman to be seated in the front with other women. On the metro lines, the first car is usually reserved for women. Unlike most Westerners, most Egyptians require little

personal space and will stand within inches of you to talk. You will find that whenever you start talking with an Egyptian, you will inevitably draw a crowd, and often the Egyptians will start discussing among themselves over the correct answer to a question. Egyptians, if offered anything, will refuse the first invitation, which is customary. Therefore (unless you're dealing with Egyptians used to Western frankness) you should do the same. If the offer is from the heart, and not just politeness, it will be repeated. If you're invited into a home, especially in small villages, and have to refuse, the householder will often press for a promise from you to visit in the future, usually for a meal. If you make such a promise, keep it, for having foreign guests is often considered a social coup. If you fail to arrive, your would-be host will be humiliated. To repay invitations, you may host a dinner in a restaurant.

As with travel to any destination, common sense should be the prevailing guide to avoid problems. In major cities in Egypt as elsewhere, it is strongly suggested that visitors not walk alone at night. While violent incidents in Egypt are rare, purse snatching, pick-pocketing and petty thefts are not uncommon. Aggressive panhandling is common.

Unescorted women are vulnerable to sexual harassment and verbal abuse. Women should be confident when walking in the streets, and not react to verbal obscenities. In public places, there is often a section reserved for women. Cairo is generally safer than most European capitals, but tourists are considered wealthy and some Egyptians cannot resist the temptation

During the day, take only the indispensable in your backpack or fanny pack. Do not take your passport, airline tickets, or all your money on day trips. Leave these and other valuables in hotel safes, and always ask for a receipt. Do not leave cash, travelers' checks, airline tickets, etc. in an unattended room, even in a locked suitcase. Carry copies of your documents and only the amount of money you think you will need. Leave your jewelry at home!

## **SUGGESTED READING LIST**

Many comprehensive and readily available guides are produced by Lonely Planet, Fodor, Insight, The Rough Guide, etc. Here are a few selections we thought might interest you. Barnes and Noble, [www.barnesandnoble.com](http://www.barnesandnoble.com), and Longitude Books, [www.longitudebooks.com](http://www.longitudebooks.com), have collections of books, searchable by country.

### **ANCIENT EGYPT: LIFE, MYTH, AND ART**

**Joann Fletcher**

Ancient Egypt is a richly illustrated introduction to this extraordinary culture, presenting the art in all its glory, ranging from the breathtaking pyramids and monumental temples to wall paintings, magnificently sculpted statues of kings, queens, and deities, and royal jewelry of exquisite intricacy. The book covers themes, including: the enigmas of the pyramids and the Sphinx; pharaohs, incarnations of the mighty god Horus, son of Isis and Osiris; the religious mysteries of the great temples of Karnak, Luxor and elsewhere; and the secrets of the hieroglyphs, which remained undeciphered for fourteen hundred years. These major themes, and many more, are interpreted visually through iconography, pattern, motif, and symbolism, as well as in terms of their underlying historical and spiritual significance.

### **ANCIENT EGYPT: ART AND ARCHAEOLOGY OF THE LAND OF THE PHAROAHS**

**Giorgio Agnese, Maurizio Re**

One of the most fascinating regions of Africa, the land that saw the rise and fall of the longest and most enigmatic of the Mediterranean civilizations, Egypt is full of landscapes of breathtaking beauty and artistic masterpieces, from the pyramids of Giza to the Valley of the Kings, from the Temple of Philae to Abu Simbel. Thrilling images combined with original text describe the myriad facets of a colorful and surprising land which the Ancients appropriately called "The Red and the Black," evoking the sharp contrast between the red of the scorching desert wastes and the black silt left by the flooding Nile. Within the pages of this book is an enthralling journey through a country with enduring appeal, savoring the complexity, mystery, and formidable wealth of the land of the pharaohs.

### **EGYPT: PAST AND PRESENT**

**Isabella Brega**

*Egypt: Past and Present* allows you to explore both ancient Egypt and the modern country. This beautifully illustrated photographic journey crosses river and desert to show you the wonders of Egyptian civilization. An illustrated history leads to discussion of modern Egypt, and life in this beautiful country.

### **ANCIENT EGYPT: ITS CULTURE AND HISTORY**

**J. E. Manchip White, Jon Ewbank White**

Fascinating account of Egypt, pre-dynastic civilization through Ptolemies: social and political structure, daily life, international relations, religion and cult of the dead, arts and crafts, science and medicine, sacred writing. Full reference to recent excavations.

### **GUIDE TO THE PYRAMIDS OF EGYPT**

**Alberto Siliotti, Preface by Zahi Hawass**

The Guide to the Pyramids presents a comprehensive and in-depth description of all the principal pyramids and the great Memphite necropolises of the Old Kingdom in light of the most recent excavations and research. This invaluable guide explores the very heart of the pyramids and unravels the mysteries that surround these great Wonders of the World.