



# Egypt Travel Information



**Activity Level** Travelers should be able to walk about 2-3 miles at a moderate pace, stand for an extended period of time with no difficulty, and tolerate warm to hot temperatures. This tour involves walking over difficult terrain and navigating obstacles (i.e., walking on uneven cobblestones, climbing stairs without handrails, stepping on and off a boat). You should be able to haul your own luggage with no assistance. Luggage pieces with 4 wheels are recommended.

**Air Conditioning** All hotels, vans, and the dahabiya sailing ship provide air conditioning.

**Airport** Arrive at the airport at least 2 hours ahead of your scheduled departure time. The name on your passport must exactly match the name on your airline ticket. All carry-on liquids must be 3 oz. or less and placed in a quart-sized baggie. Upon arrival in Cairo International Airport, you will first go through Visa and Passport Control. Then, collect your luggage and go through Customs. You will be met by a Greeter in the Arrivals Hall with your name on a sign. The Greeter will escort you to your private driver who will chauffeur you to the Mena House Hotel.

**ATM and Credit Cards** ATM's are easily accessible and credit cards are widely accepted in Egypt. Contact your bank in advance of departing to make sure your ATM card will work in Egypt. Confirm with the bank the amount of money you can withdraw from the ATM in one day. Notify your bank and credit card company of your travel dates and countries you will be visiting. Make photocopies of the front and back sides of your ATM and credit card to bring on the trip and one copy to leave with someone at home in the event your cards are misplaced or stolen.

**Cell Phones** Contact your cell phone carrier to determine if your service extends to Egypt. Most cell phone companies have international calling plans for travelers.

**Clothing and Packing** Select a wardrobe that allows for layering. Wear loose, light cottons and linens in layers that can be taken off during the heat of the day and put back on for cool evenings. An Egyptian Gallabeyah or kaftan is perfect for a special dinner – it looks dressy and you can eat as much as you want! Shop for an authentic one in Egypt or bring one with you. So as not to offend local custom, it is inadvisable for women to wear anything short, sleeveless, or too revealing unless by the hotel pool. When visiting churches and mosques, women and men are not allowed to enter without being respectfully clothed. A few recommended items to pack:

- Comfortable walking shoes and sandals, well broken in
- Hat, sunscreen, sunglasses, neck/head scarf
- Insect repellent, eye drops for dust, energy/granola bars
- Antiseptic hand cleanser, face mask, disinfectant wipes
- Extra pair of prescription eyeglasses, prescription and over-the-counter medications
- Bathing suit and cover-up, light jacket for cool nights on the river

Packing cube organizers are highly recommended. You can separate items of clothing for easier unpacking and fit more clothes in your suitcase because they compress the clothing. They come in a variety of sizes. Use the lightweight nylon ones with mesh top panels that are lightweight and allow for ventilation, and the contents are visible.

**Culture** Egyptian culture is Arabic, with an African influence. The majority of Egyptians are Muslim. About ten per cent of the population are Coptic Christians, descendants of the pre-Islamic Christian population. Both groups are proud to call themselves Egyptians. Islam permeates all areas of public and private life. There is no separation of the secular and religious life. Five times a day, a muezzin makes the call to prayer from the minaret of a mosque. Prayer may take place in a mosque, at home, at the office or anywhere; but worshippers stop what they're doing to pray in the direction of Mecca. When there are no formal services taking place, visitors are welcome to cover up, remove shoes, and respectfully enter a mosque.

The "giving of alms" is an important tenant of Islam. The word *baksheesh* literally means "share the wealth". It is payable for all services, however small, and as often as not, is expected for doing nothing at all. Children may pester you for it in the streets, or you may have paid but are pressed for more. The basic rule is to offer *baksheesh* only in return for a service, to not pay until the service has been performed, and to resist firmly any attempt at intimidation.

The outlook and lifestyle of Egypt's urban middle class are not dissimilar to those of people living in Europe. Cairo has many bookshops, cafés, cinemas, shopping centers, cultural societies, universities, and an Opera House. However, life is a struggle for the poor in the city, though many willingly seek the slim promise of a better life in the city rather than endure the monotonous labor of the countryside, largely unchanged since pharaonic times.

Egyptians do not appreciate being photographed unless permission is granted first. When you do ask, people are often happy to be photographed. However, they are sensitive to tourists photographing scenes of poverty or backwardness. Military or government sites should definitely not be photographed.

There's no such thing as a fixed price in an Egyptian bazaar; haggling or bartering is a reality of daily life. First, remember that haggling isn't a battle; it's a time-honored method used to achieve a mutually suitable price. Negotiations should always be polite and good-humored. Express surprise at the vendor's first price. Then counter with a much lower offer. This process continues until a compromise is reached. If the price isn't agreeable, keep smiling and simply walk away.

**Currency and Exchange Rates** The currency in Egypt is the Egyptian Pound (EGP). All exchange places offer the same exchange rate, but not the same exchange fee. Currently, the exchange rate is about 1 USD to 15 EGP, or 1 EGP to 0.05 USD. The hotels can exchange currency and ATM's are available in many locations. Bring cash with you to exchange at the first hotel and use an ATM card to get cash later in the trip. Bring about \$300 - \$500 in cash in \$10 and \$20 newer bills to exchange at the hotels. Approximate values of Egyptian pounds:

£ 1 = 5 ¢	£ 10 = 50¢	£ 50 = \$3.00	£ 200 = \$12.00	£ 1000 = \$ 60.00
£ 5 = 25 ¢	£ 20 = \$1.00	£ 100 = \$6.00	£ 500 = \$30.00	£ 2000 = \$120.00

**Customs and Tax-Free Shopping** Current regulations permit bringing back \$800 worth of items duty-free, as long as you physically have the items with you. For more expensive items, some stores offer to ship the items to your home to avoid paying a duty when arriving back in the US. Egypt levies a 14% VAT (Value Added Tax) on items purchased in Egypt. Tourists can claim a VAT refund for a period not exceeding three months on purchases of taxable goods, provided the value of the purchases in one bill is not less than £ 1500 (app. \$90) and that the purchases exit the country with you. Ask the merchant for the receipt and the VAT form.

**Electrical Current** The electrical current in Egypt and onboard the cruise ship is 220v and sockets take the standard continental European dual round-pronged plug. Travelers whose appliances do not meet this standard will need to bring appropriate converters and adapters.

**Food and Drink** Traditional Egyptian food generally consists of a bean stew, roasted meat, rice, unleavened bread, and Middle Eastern salads such as hummus and tomato-and-cucumber salad. The main meal of the day is lunch. It starts with a soup followed by a wide range of appetizers (i.e., tahini, roasted eggplant, stuffed grape leaves, stewed fava beans). The main course can be grilled chicken or lamb shish kebab. Every meal comes with round loaves of pita-style bread.

Although Egypt is an Islamic country and many Egyptians do not drink alcohol, the country does produce its own beer and wine. Alcohol is served in both hotels (can be charged to your room) and the dahabiya sailing ship (to be paid in cash at consumption). Coffee, *ahwa*, is drunk all day and all night from little cups and is thick, black, and strong. Milk is not an option and it comes with four main sweetness levels. Tea, *shai*, is enjoyed at all levels of Egyptian society. Egyptian tea is served strong and black, in glasses, not cups. Egyptians love it sweet. To be safe, drink water from a sealed water bottle and soda drinks from a bottle or can with no ice.

Though neither a food nor drink, when Egyptians get together to relax with friends, they often do so over a *shisha*. This ornate, glass water pipe is seen everywhere and is enjoyed by young and old alike. *Shisha* tobacco is sweeter than the cigarette variety and can be flavored with fruit or molasses. It's no better for your health, but is said to induce a state of relaxation after a meal.

**Health** All travelers to Egypt should be in reasonably good health. There is a significant amount of walking on this tour and archaeological sites and temple floors are far from even. The sailing ship does not have an elevator, and you will need to navigate one flight of stairs to access guest cabins and public areas. Emergency medical care, though perhaps not the same standard as US care, will be available during this tour. Pharmacies are professional and widely available.

Tap water in hotels, restaurants, and aboard the ship is not potable. Use caution when eating salad items that may have been washed in tap water. Always drink bottled water with an unbroken seal. It is advisable to clean your teeth with bottled water. Avoid having ice in drinks. Eating uncooked vegetables should be avoided. Eat only fruit that you can peel. The hotels on this tour and their restaurants have a high level of cleanliness and safe water but be cautious.

Proof of a Covid-19 vaccination will be required for entry to Egypt. No other vaccinations are required but suggested vaccinations are Hepatitis A, Hepatitis B, tetanus, and typhoid. Insect repellent is necessary for traveling on the Nile. Recommended medications: antibiotics, anti-diarrheal, Less Drowsy Dramamine, pain reliever, sleep aid, vitamins, etc.

**Luggage** Recommended luggage: one backpack or shoulder bag; one 20-inch carry-on; one 24-inch check-in. For your international flight, check in the larger luggage piece and keep the carry-on and backpack/shoulder bag with you containing all vital personal items and an extra change of clothing in the event your checked-in luggage is delayed. Due to limited space on the sailing ship, you will leave the larger check-in luggage at the Mena House to be transferred to the Sofitel and stored until our arrival at the end of the cruise. The medium carry-on and backpack should be able to hold all clothing and personal items needed for the 5-day cruise. Keep important, valuable items with you at all times or locked up in your hotel room safe.

**Safety** Egypt is generally very safe from petty crime, but always be aware of your surroundings and potential for pick-pocketing. Currently, the threat to personal safety from political instability is quiet. There is a potential for problems with home-grown terrorist attacks and large demonstrations, but it has been several years since there's been an incident in Cairo. Heavily guarded tourist sights discourage these attacks and give visitors an assurance of security. The Cairo hotels in this itinerary also have safety measures in place so it is safe to wander the hotel grounds. During all tours on this itinerary, we will be escorted by a local guide and will only visit protected, guarded tourist sights. If you do go off the hotel grounds on your own, use common sense, stay away from demonstrations, and avoid badly lit places after dark. Upper (southern) Egypt, the location of the cruise, is a generally safe area and all tourist areas are protected. Expect security guards, metal detectors, bag checks and x-rays at airports and tourist sights.

**Time Zone** Egypt is 9 hours ahead of California time during March and April

**Tipping** Due to low wages and a struggling economy, Egypt has an active tipping culture. Everyone wants a tip and will let you know if you didn't tip enough. On this tour, tips for private guides, drivers and wait staff at group meals will be covered. You will be responsible for tipping the housekeepers and porters at the hotels and the crew tip box at the end of the cruise. Egyptian Pounds are preferred. Only tip with dollars if you have no choice, but never tip with US coins. They are valueless in Egypt. Here are some guidelines for your personal tipping expenses:

- Hotel housekeeper – E£ 40 (\$2) / night
- Hotel porter – E£ 20 (\$1) / bag
- Hotel breakfast wait staff – E£ 20 (\$1) / person / meal
- Boat crew tip box – E£ 500 (\$30) / passenger at end of cruise
- Personal cabin steward – E£ 200 (\$12) / cabin at end of cruise
- Waiter at a restaurant – 10% of bill (not including taxes and service charges)
- Public restroom attendant – E£ 10 (50¢)

Of course, an extra tip for exceptional service is always appreciated.

**Travel Documents** Your passport must have at least two blank pages and an expiration date of at least six months beyond the completion of this tour. Make at least two copies of the photo page of your passport: one copy for someone at home and one for a traveling companion. Proof of Covid-19 vaccination and a tourist Visa is also required for entry into Egypt. The Visa can be obtained on-line at [www.visa2egypt.gov.eg](http://www.visa2egypt.gov.eg) before traveling to Egypt for a cost of \$25.

**Travel Insurance** You will need to purchase a travel insurance policy for this trip. For reasons stated in the policy, you would be reimbursed for expenses incurred in the event of illness of yourself, a family member, or a traveling companion; cancellation of the trip due to a covered event specified in the policy; flight delays and cancellations; medical expenses and evacuation, etc. What it does not cover is "fear of travel" so you may want to add the "Cancel for Any Reason" option which will reimburse 50% - 75% of your expenses if you cancel for any reason. You can compare policies at [www.travelguard.com](http://www.travelguard.com) or [www.travelinsured.com](http://www.travelinsured.com).

**Weather** Egypt has one of the hottest and sunniest climates in the world. The heat is often relieved by a northerly breeze with temperatures dropping during the night. During the month of March, a brief sandstorm can occur. Rainy days are few and far between in Cairo and unknown in Upper (southern) Egypt. March temperatures in Cairo average a high of 82° and a low of 58°. In Luxor, temperatures average a high of 92° and a low of 64°.

