

Cairo



Let's address the drawbacks first. The crowds on a Cairo footpath make Manhattan look like a ghost town. You will be hounded by papyrus sellers at every turn. Your life will flash before your eyes each time you venture across a street. And your snout will run black from the smog.

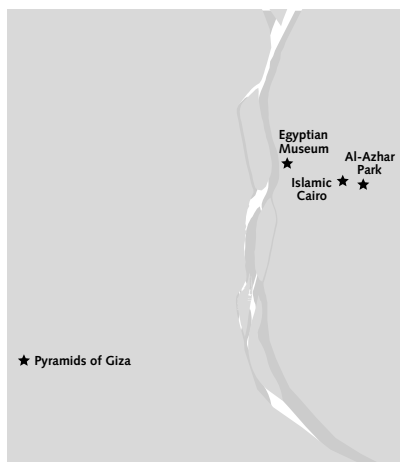
But it's a small price to pay, to visit the city Cairenes call Umm ad-Dunya – 'the mother of the world'. This city has an energy, palpable even at three in the morning, like no other. It's the product of its 20 million inhabitants waging a battle against the desert and winning (mostly), of 20 million people simultaneously crushing the city's infrastructure under their collective weight and lifting the city's spirit up with their uncommon graciousness and humour.

One taxi ride can span millennia, from the resplendent mosques and mausoleums built at the pinnacle of the Islamic empire, to the 19th-century palaces and grand avenues (which earned the city the nickname 'Paris on the Nile'), to the brutal concrete blocks of the Nasser years – then all the way back to the days of the pharaohs, as the Pyramids of Giza hulk on the western edge of the city. The architectural jumble is smoothed over by an even coating of beige sand, and the sand is a social equalizer as well: everyone, no matter how rich, gets dusty when the spring khamsin blows in.

So blow your nose, crack a joke and learn to look through the dirt to see the city's true colours. If you love Cairo, she will love you back.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Tip your head back and gape at the **Pyramids of Giza** (p143); cross an item off your life list
- Give your regards to Tutankhamun and his cohorts in the mazelike **Egyptian Museum** (p185)
- Visit the great medieval mosques of **Islamic Cairo** (p125) – or just get lost in the narrow alleys (p155)
- Relax to the click of backgammon and the bubble of the water pipe at an Egyptian coffeehouse, or **ahwa** (p169)
- Escape the city noise in the greenery of **Al-Azhar Park** (p140) with its splendid sunset view



■ TELEPHONE CODE: 02

■ POPULATION: 20 MILLION (APPROX)

HISTORY

Cairo is not a Pharaonic city, though the presence of the Pyramids leads many to believe otherwise. At the time the Pyramids were built, the capital of ancient Egypt was Memphis, 20km southeast of the Giza Plateau.

The core foundations of the city of Cairo were laid in AD 969 by the Fatimid dynasty, but the city's history goes further back than that. There was an important ancient religious centre at On (modern-day Heliopolis). The Romans built a fortress at the port of On, which they called Babylon, while Amr ibn al-As, the general who conquered Egypt for Islam in AD 642, established the city of Fustat nearby. Fustat's huge wealth was drawn from Egypt's excessively rich soil and the taxes imposed on the heavy Nile traffic. Descriptions left by 10th-century travellers tell of public gardens, street lighting and buildings up to 14 storeys high. Yet in the 10th century, when the Fatimids marched in from modern-day Tunisia, they spurned Fustat and instead set about building a new city.

Construction began on the new capital, probably on purpose, when the planet Mars (Al-Qahir, 'the Victorious') was in the ascendant; thus arose Al-Madina al-Qahira, 'the city victorious', which Europeans corrupted to Cairo.

Many imposing buildings from the Fatimid era remain today: the great Al-Azhar Mosque and university is still Egypt's main centre of Islamic study, and the three great gates of Bab an-Nasr, Bab al-Futuh and Bab Zuweila still straddle two of Islamic Cairo's main thoroughfares. The Fatimids were not to remain long in power, but their city survived them and, under subsequent dynasties, became a capital of great wealth, ruled by cruel and fickle sultans. This was the city that was called the Mother of the World.

Cairo finally burst its walls, spreading west to the port of Bulaq and south onto Rhoda Island, while the desert to the east filled with grand funerary monuments. But at heart it remained a medieval city for 900 years, until the mid-19th century, when Ismail, grandson of Mohammed Ali, decided it was time for change. During his 16-year reign (1863–79), Ismail did more than anyone since the Fatimids to alter the city's appearance.

Before the 1860s the future site of modern central Cairo was a swampy plain subject to

the annual flooding of the Nile. When the French-educated Ismail came to power, he was determined to remake his capital into a city of European standing. This could only be done by starting afresh. For 10 years the former marsh became one vast building site as Ismail invited architects from Belgium, France and Italy to design and build a new European-style Cairo beside the old Islamic city.

Since the revolution of 1952 the population of Cairo has grown spectacularly – although at the expense of Ismail's vision. Building maintenance fell by the wayside as apartments were overcrowded. In the 1960s and 1970s, urban planners concreted over the sparsely populated west bank of the Nile for desperately needed new suburbs. In more recent decades, growth has crept beyond Muqattam Hills on the east and the Pyramids on the west. Luxe gated communities, sprawling housing blocks and full satellite cities, complete with malls and megastores, spring up from the desert every year: 6th of October City, New Cairo and others are the new Egyptian dream. Whether the desert and the economy can sustain them remains to be seen.

ORIENTATION

Finding your way around Cairo's sprawl is not as difficult as it may at first seem. Midan Tahrir is the centre. The noisy, busy Downtown area, where most cheap eating and sleeping options are, lies northeast of Tahrir, centred on Midan Talaat Harb. Midan Ramses, location of the city's main train station, marks the northernmost extent of Downtown. Beyond are teeming middle- and working-class suburbs such as Shubra, perhaps the true soul of modern-day Cairo.

Downtown's eastern edge is Midan Ataba, where Islamic Cairo takes over. This is the medieval heart of the city, still beating strong today. At its centre is the great bazaar of Khan al-Khalili and Al-Azhar Mosque and university. Further east are the Northern and Southern Cemeteries, vast necropolises now inhabited by both the living and the dead.

South of Midan Tahrir, the tree-lined streets of Garden City are prime embassy territory. Then you're out of central Cairo and into a succession of ramshackle neighbourhoods loosely termed Old Cairo, the site of Roman Babylon and Arab Fustat. Buried in here is

CAIRO IN...

Two Days

Start day one with the magnificent exhibits at the **Egyptian Museum** (p185). When you've reached Pharaonic overload, leave the museum and wander around the Downtown area, stopping to grab a cheap and delicious lunch at **At-Tabei ad-Dumyati** (p162). In the afternoon, make your way to historic **Khan al-Khalili** (p128) and practise your haggling skills with the cheerful stall owners. While there, don't forget to have a mint tea and a *sheesha* (water pipe) at **Fishawi's** (p169). Return Downtown to eat a simple but delicious Levantine meal at the long-running **Greek Club** (p163) or dine like a pasha at Zamalek's glamorous **Abou el-Sid** (p166).

On day two make an early start and hire a taxi for the day to take you to **Dahshur** (p206), **Memphis** (p196) and **Saqqara** (p200). Bring a picnic to eat at the foot of the **Step Pyramid** (p201) or have a late outdoor lunch at **Andrea** (p167). In the afternoon visit the only remaining Ancient Wonder of the World, the **Pyramids of Giza** (p143). After this, it's on to the **Citadel View** (p165) in Al-Azhar Park for a lavish dinner overlooking the medieval city.

Four Days

For days one and two, follow the Two Days itinerary.

Start day three by taking a taxi to the **Mosque of Ibn Tulun** (p138) and the **Gayer-Anderson Museum** (p138) in Islamic Cairo. Indulge in a bit of shopping at **Khan Misr Touloun** (p176) before catching a taxi to Midan Hussein to visit historic **Al-Azhar Mosque** (p127) and the **Al-Ghouri Complex** (p133) before stopping at **Abd el-Zaher** (p176) and **Al-Khatoun** (p176) to buy a stylish souvenir or two. Have a late lunch at **Egyptian Pancakes** (p165) in the Khan al-Khalili, then rest up before strolling through **Garden City at twilight** (p155). At sundown, take an hour's **felucca ride** (p154), then head to dinner at **Estoril** (p163); if you're up for more, cap it off with a beer at the **Odeon Palace Hotel bar** (p170).

On your last day take the river bus to **Coptic Cairo** (p123) in the morning, then catch the metro back to Midan Tahrir. Walk over the Qasr el-Nil Bridge to Gezira and check out the **Museum of Modern Egyptian Art** (p141) and the **Mahmoud Mukhtar Museum** (p142) before strolling along the bank of the Nile to the neighbourhood of Zamalek for a late lunch at one of its many cafés and restaurants, and perhaps some shopping. After a rest at your hotel, bid farewell to the city by having a late dinner and watching the best belly dancers in the world shake their stuff on the **Nile Maxim boat** (p174) or at the wonderfully sleazy **Palmyra** (p174).

the small, walled enclave of Coptic Cairo, a feature on many tourist agendas. Well beyond that is the green residential suburb of Ma'adi, an expat enclave.

West of all these districts is the Nile, obstructed by two sizable islands. The more central of these, connected directly to Downtown by three bridges, is Gezira, home to the Cairo Tower and the Cairo Opera House. The northern half of Gezira is an affluent district called Zamalek, historically favoured by the city's European residents and home to many embassies. The southern island is Rhoda, although its northern part goes by the name of Manial.

The west bank of the Nile is newer (lots more concrete) and more residential than areas along the east bank, but it's also the wealthier, trendier part of the city. The

primary districts from north to south are Mohandiseen, Agouza, Doqqi and Giza, which stretches 10km out to the foot of the Pyramids.

Maps

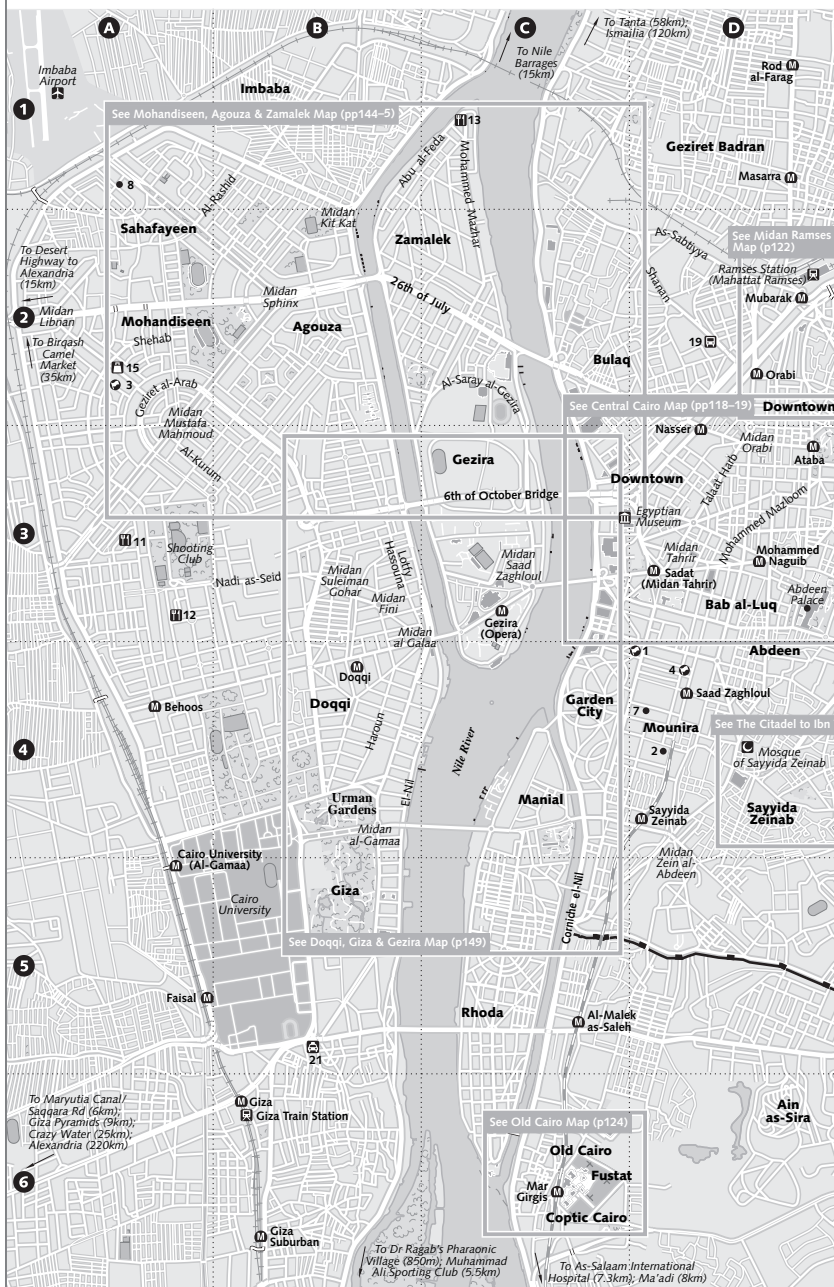
The American University in Cairo (AUC) Press publishes *Cairo Maps: The Practical Guide* (£30), a book-sized but lightweight collection of 40 street maps, with index.

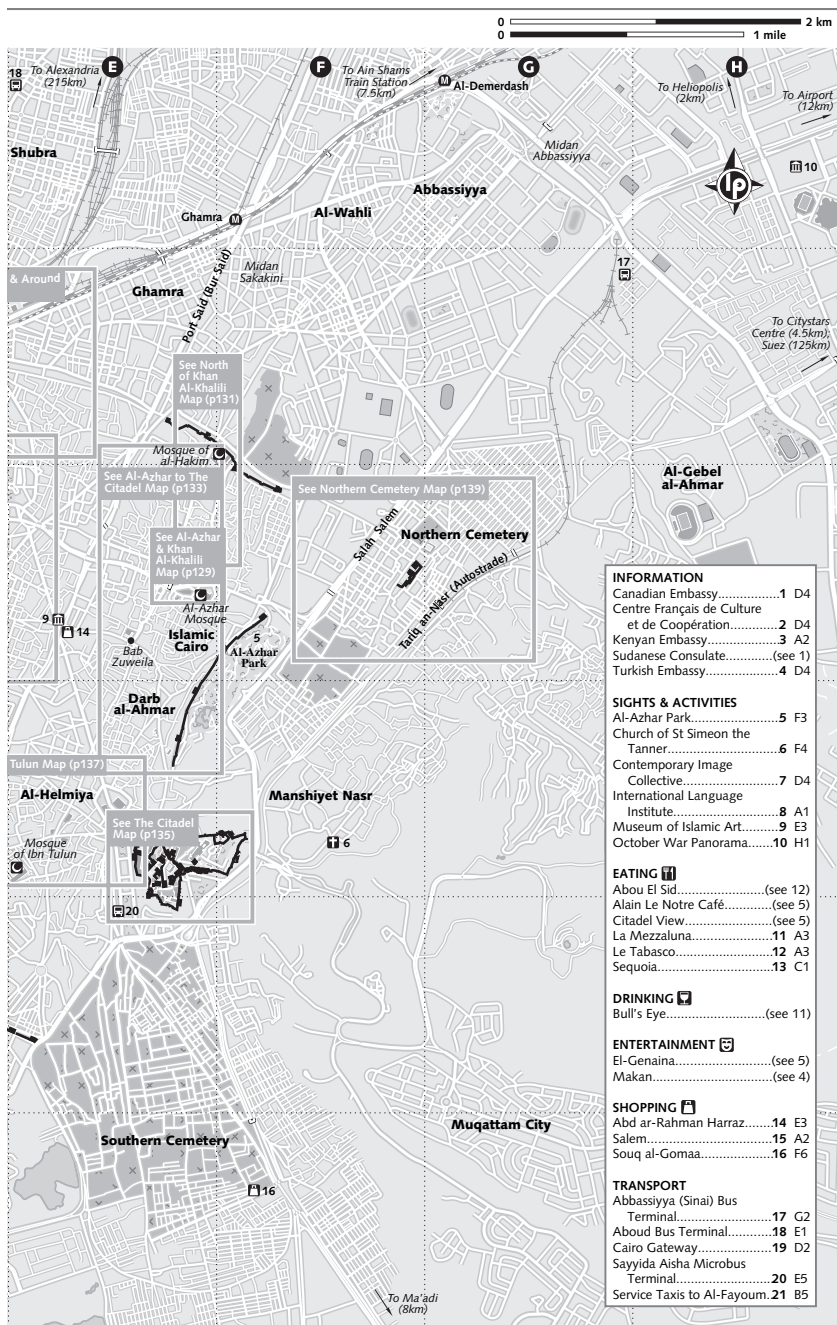
INFORMATION

Bookshops

American University in Cairo (AUC) Bookshop
Downtown (Map pp118-19; ☎ 2797 5370; Sharia Mohamed Mahmoud; ☎ 9am-6pm Sat-Thu); Zamalek (Map pp144-5; ☎ 2739 7045; 16 Sharia Mohammed Thakeb; ☎ 10am-6pm Sat-Thu, 1-6pm Fri) The best English-language bookshop in Egypt, with stacks of material on

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the politics, sociology and history of Cairo, Egypt and the Middle East. Plenty of guidebooks and some fiction.

Anglo-Egyptian Bookshop (Map pp118-19; ☎ 2391 4337; 165 Sharia Mohammed Farid, Downtown; ☎ 9am-1.30pm & 4.30-8pm Mon-Sat) Good selection of books on Egypt and the Middle East.

Diwan (Map pp144-5; ☎ 2736 2578; 159 Sharia 26th of July, Zamalek; ☎ 9am-11.30pm) Fabulous: English, French and German titles, from novels to travel guides to coffee-table books. It also has a kids' section, large music wing and a small café.

Lehnert & Landrock (Map pp118-19; ☎ 2392 7606; 44 Sharia Sherif, Downtown; ☎ 10am-7pm Mon-Sat) A good place for maps, books about Cairo and Egypt (some second-hand), vintage postcards and reprints of old photographs. Branches opposite the Egyptian Museum (Map pp118-19) and outside the Sphinx-side entrance to the Pyramids (Map p150).

Shorouk (Map pp118-19; ☎ 2393 0643; 1 Midan Talaat Harb, Downtown; ☎ 10am-10pm) Arabic and English bestsellers, plus a lot of magazines at this two-storey shop.

Zamalek Bookshop (Map pp144-5; ☎ 2736 9197; 19 Sharia Shagaret ad-Durr, Zamalek; ☎ 9am-8pm Mon-Sat) Small but packed with magazines, English-language crime fiction and airport-style novels.

NEWSSTANDS

Cairo's best newsstands face each other on the corner of Sharias 26th of July and Hassan Sabry in Zamalek (Map pp144-5). You can get just about anything (except nudity) from these stands. Downtown, good newsstands are situated on Sharia Mohammed Mahmoud opposite AUC (Map pp118-19) and on Midan Tahrir (Map pp118-19). The bookshops at the Nile Hilton (Map pp118-19), the Cairo Marriott (Map pp144-5) and the Semiramis InterContinental (Map pp118-19) are also decent.

Cultural Centres & Libraries

Many centres will ask for ID (preferably your passport) before they will allow you in. For event schedules, check *Al-Ahram Weekly* and the monthly *Egypt Today*, but don't expect much activity during the summer, when many institutions keep limited hours.

British Council & Library (www.britishcouncil.org.eg) Agouza (Map pp144-5; ☎ 3300 1666; 192 Sharia el-Nil; ☎ 8am-8pm Sun-Thu, 9am-4.30pm Sat); Heliopolis (Map p153; ☎ 19789; 4 Sharia el-Minia, off Sharia Nazih Khalifa; ☎ 9am-8pm Sun-Wed, 9am-4.30pm Thu) Organises performances, exhibitions and talks and has a useful library; its Agouza office has a strong collection of modern British art.

THE NUMBERS GAME

In mid-2007, Cairo land lines expanded from seven to eight digits – we mention it here because business cards and signs might be slow to update. Neighbourhoods on the east bank and in Zamalek got a 2 stuck at the front of their numbers, while Giza, Mohandiseen and Doqqi got a 3. Mobile numbers were unchanged.

Centre Français de Culture et de Coopération (www.ambafrance-eg.org/cfcc) Heliopolis (off Map p153; ☎ 2419 3857; 5 Sharia Shafik al-Dib, Ard al-Golf; ☎ 10am-10pm Sun-Thu); Mounira (Map pp110-11; ☎ 2794 7679; 1 Sharia Madrasat al-Huquq al-Fransiyya; ☎ 11am-7pm Sun-Tue, Thu & Fri, 11am-8pm Wed) Regularly puts on films, lectures and exhibitions, opens its libraries to the public and screens French-language news from TV5. The Mounira branch also runs French- and Arabic-language courses.

Egyptian Centre for International Cultural Cooperation (Map pp144-5; ☎ 2736 5410; 11 Sharia Shagaret ad-Durr, Zamalek; ☎ 10am-3pm & 4-9pm Sat-Thu) Organises concerts of Egyptian composers, as well as good classical and colloquial Arabic classes.

El Sawy Culture Wheel (El Sakia; Map pp144-5; ☎ 2736 8881; www.culturewheel.com; Sharia 26th of July, Zamalek; ☎ 9am-9pm) Excellent lively space that hosts concerts, art exhibitions, theatre, films and even yoga classes and children's puppet shows. Tickets for shows are on sale at Cilantro coffee shops around town.

Goethe Institut (www.goethe.de/eg) Doqqi (Map p148; ☎ 3748 4501; 5 Sharia Hussein Wassef); Downtown (Map pp118-19; ☎ 2575 9877; 5 Sharia al-Bustan; ☎ library 1-7pm Sun-Wed) Seminars and lectures in German on Egyptology and other topics, plus visiting music groups, art exhibitions and film screenings. The library has more than 15,000 (mainly German) titles. The Doqqi location focuses on language classes.

Great Cairo Library (Map pp144-5; ☎ 2736 2271; 15 Sharia Mohammed Mazhar, Zamalek; ☎ 9am-4pm Sat-Thu) The city's best public library, stocked with a collection of art, science and other reference books, mainly in English. It also has English-language magazines for browsing. Show your passport to enter.

Instituto Cervantes (Map p148; ☎ 3337 1962; www.elcairo.cervantes.es; 20 Sharia Boulos Hanna, Doqqi; ☎ 9am-4pm Sun-Thu) Spanish language and cultural institute, screening films and organising lectures.

Istituto Italiano di Cultura (Map pp144-5; ☎ 2735 8791; www.iiccairo.esteri.it; 3 Sharia Sheikh al-Marsafy, Zamalek; ☎ library 10am-4pm Sun, Tue & Thu) A busy programme of films and lectures (sometimes in English) and art exhibitions, plus a library.

Netherlands-Flemish Institute (Map pp144-5; ☎ 2738 2520; www.nvic.leidenuniv.nl; 1 Sharia Mahmoud Azmy, Zamalek; ☎ 9am-2pm Sun-Thu) This centre hosts art exhibitions and is well regarded for its high-quality weekly lectures, delivered on a wide variety of topics and usually in English.

Emergency

In the case of an accident or injury, call the As-Salam International Hospital (right). For details on lost credit cards, see p513. For anything more serious, contact your embassy (see p507).

Ambulance (☎ 123)

Fire service (☎ 180)

Police (☎ 122)

The **tourist police office** (Map pp118-19; ☎ 2390 6028, emergency 126) is on the 1st floor of a building in the alley just left of the main tourist office in Downtown. This should be your first port of call for minor emergencies, including theft; there are other offices by the Pyramids, across from Mena House (Map p150) and in Khan al-Khalili (Map p129).

Internet Access

There are internet cafés scattered throughout town, but they're not exactly plentiful. The most conveniently located:

4U Internet Café (Map pp118-19; ☎ 2575 9304; 1st fl, 6 Midan Talaat Harb, Downtown; per hr E£5; ☎ 24hr) Under the Lialy Hostel.

Five St@rs Net (Map pp118-19; ☎ 2574 7881; 1st fl, 6 Midan Talaat Harb, Downtown; ☎ 24hr) Opposite 4U Internet; dodgier computers.

Hany Internet Café (Map pp118-19; ☎ 2395 1985; 16 Sharia Abdel Khalek Sarwat, Downtown; per hr E£2; ☎ 10am-2am) Across from Koshary el-Tahrir; bargain rates and open windows, so relatively smoke-free.

InterClub (Map pp118-19; ☎ 2579 1860; 12 Sharia Talaat Harb, Downtown; per hr E£5; ☎ 8am-2am) Nice flat-screens, with printing, faxing and scanning services; in alley next to Estoril restaurant.

Memories Net (Map pp118-19; ☎ 018 169 6471; 12 Sharia Mahmoud Bassiouni, Downtown; per hr E£5; ☎ 10am-2am) Cool cave ambience; down the alley leading to Mahran *ahwa* (coffeehouse).

Sigma Net (Map pp144-5; ☎ 2738 0516; Sharia Gezirat al-Wusta, Zamalek; per hr E£8; ☎ 24hr) Opposite Flamenco Hotel. Fast connections and good air-con.

Zamalek Center (Map pp144-5; ☎ 2736 4004; 25 Sharia Ismail Mohammed, Zamalek; per hr E£5; ☎ 24hr) A bit smoky, but the best rates in the area; offers other business services too.

Internet Resources

Cairo, Egypt (www.cairotourist.com) Virtual tours of Pharaonic, Coptic, Islamic and modern Cairo; hotel and restaurant listings are not kept up-to-date, however.

cairolive.com (www.cairolive.com) Online news aggregator and magazine with views on Cairo's cultural events, political developments and general news. Useful kids' section.

Egy.com (www.egy.com) A great website by Egyptian social historian and journalist Samir Raafat: articles on architecture, events and people in 19th- and 20th-century Cairo, with an interesting section on the city's Jewish community.

Guardians Egypt (www.guardians.net) Great site covering the Giza, Dahshur and Saqqara pyramid sites. Has photos, articles about recent discoveries, and bulletins from Dr Zahi Hawass, the Secretary General of the Supreme Council of Antiquities.

Yallabina (www.yallabina.com) Devoted to the Big Mango's nightlife: restaurant and bar reviews, plus listings for concerts, events and films.

Media

The monthly magazine *Egypt Today* (E£15; also online at www.egypttoday.com) covers major social and economic issues and also includes basic listings. The *Daily Star Egypt* comes as an insert in the *International Herald-Tribune* (E£10); a spin-off of the quality Beirut paper, it's the most informative news in English. The flimsy daily *Egyptian Gazette* (50pt) and the more substantial *Al-Ahram Weekly* (E£1) are the other English-language rags. For a hipper perspective, pick up a free copy of the *Croc*, a monthly listings flyer found at many restaurants and galleries; it includes restaurant reviews and other informative articles.

Medical Services

HOSPITALS

Many of Cairo's hospitals suffer from antiquated equipment and a cavalier attitude to hygiene, but there are several exceptions. Your embassy should be able to recommend doctors and hospitals. Other options:

Anglo-American Hospital (Map p148; ☎ 2735 6162/5; Sharia Hadayek al-Zuhreyya, Gezira) West of the Cairo Tower.

As-Salam International Hospital Ma'adi (Map pp110-11; ☎ 2524 0250, emergency 2524 0077; Corniche el-Nil); Mohandiseen (Map pp144-5; ☎ 3303 0502; 3 Sharia Syria) The Ma'adi branch has a better reputation.

PHARMACIES

In Egyptian pharmacies almost any medicine can be obtained without prescription. The pharmacies operate 24 hours, have English-speaking staff and will deliver to your hotel.

Al-Ezaby (Map pp144-5; ☎ 19600)

Ali & Ali Downtown (☎ 2365 3880); Mohandiseen (☎ 3302 1421)

Delmar (☎ 2575 1052; Downtown) At the corner of Sharia 26th of July and Sharia Mohammed Farid.

New Victoria Pharmacy (☎ 2735 1628; Zamalek)

Seif Pharmacy (☎ 19199)

Money

For general information about money, foreign exchange bureaus and transferring funds, see p512. For banking hours, see p503. The Banque Misr branches located at the Nile Hilton and Mena House Oberoi hotels are open 24 hours. Hotel branches of the big banks are happy to change your cash, but rates are slightly better at independent exchange bureaus of which there are several along Sharia Adly in Downtown and on Sharia 26th of July in Zamalek. These tend to be open from 10am to 8pm Saturday to Thursday.

American Express (Amex; www.americanexpress.com .eg; ☎ 9am-5pm Sat-Thu) Downtown (Map pp118-19; ☎ 2574 7991; 15 Sharia Qasr el-Nil); Downtown (Map pp118-19; ☎ 2578 5001; Nile Hilton); Heliopolis (off Map p153; ☎ 2418 2144; 33 Sharia Nabil al-Wakkad, Ard al-Golf) All offices will hold mail for cardholders and give cash advances on gold and platinum cards.

Citibank (www.citibankegypt.com) Garden City (Map p148; ☎ 2795 1873; 4 Sharia Ahmad Pasha); Zamalek (Map pp144-5; ☎ 2736 5622; 4A Sharia al-Gezira)

Diners Club (Map pp118-19; ☎ 2578 3355; Nile Hilton, Midan Tahrir, Downtown)

Thomas Cook (☎ emergency hotline 010 140 1367; www.thomascookegypt.com; ☎ 8am-4.30pm Sat-Thu) Airport (☎ 2265 4447); Downtown (Map pp118-19; ☎ 2574 3776; 17 Sharia Mahmoud Bassiouni); Heliopolis (Map p153; ☎ 2416 4000; 7 Sharia Baghdad, Korba); Mohandiseen (Map pp144-5; ☎ 3344 0008; 10 Sharia 26th of July); Zamalek (Map pp144-5; ☎ 2735 9223; 3 Sharia Abu al-Feda)

ATMS

ATMs are located on all major streets, in shopping malls and in the foyers of five-star hotels. The only place they're hard to find is in Islamic Cairo – the most convenient machine here is below El Hussein (Map p129) in Khan al-Khalili. The ones in hotels are the most reliable.

Post

Marked with green-and-yellow signs, post offices are numerous, though not all have signs in English explaining which window is meant for what business.

Express Mail Service (EMS; Map pp118-19; ☎ 2390 5874; fax 2390 4250; ☎ 24hr) Opposite the poste restante office. Most post offices also have an EMS counter.

Main post office (Map pp118-19; Midan Ataba; ☎ 8am-10pm Sat-Thu)

Poste restante (Map pp118-19; ☎ 8am-2.30pm Sat-Thu) On the side street to the right of the main post office, with the entrance on the cross street one block down.

Mail is usually held for three weeks. It's divided into three sections: letters (window 10), packages (window 1) and registered mail (upstairs). Take your passport.

Post traffic centre (Map p122; Midan Ramses; ☎ 8.30am-3pm Sat-Thu) Come here to send packages abroad. Bring your passport. Leave your package unsealed, to be inspected; someone will then wrap the parcel for you for a small charge, or you can supply your own tape. The process is bureaucratic, but not utterly maddening.

Zamalek post office (Map pp144-5; Sharia Brazil; ☎ 8am-3pm Sat-Thu)

Telephone & Fax

Card phones Menatel card phones are all over the city, although the practice of placing them on street corners (or streets, for that matter) can make it hard to hear.

Faxes These can be sent to/from the telephone centrales on Midan Tahrir, Sharia Adly and Sharia Alfay. You can also send and receive them from the EMS main office in Ataba (see above) and from a couple of internet cafés (see p113).

Telephone centrales Downtown (Map pp118-19; fax 2578 0979; 13 Midan Tahrir; ☎ 24hr); Downtown (Map pp118-19; fax 2393 3903; 8 Sharia Adly; ☎ 24hr); Downtown (Map pp118-19; fax 2589 7635; Sharia Alfay; ☎ 24hr); Downtown (Map pp118-19; Sharia Ramses; ☎ 24hr); Zamalek (Map pp144-5; Sharia 26th of July) The branch on Sharia Alfay is next to the Windsor Hotel. The Sharia Ramses branch is opposite Sharia Tawfiqiyya.

Tourist Information

Cairo International Airport tourist office Terminal I (☎ 2265 3642; ☎ 24hr); Terminal II (☎ 2265 2269; ☎ 24hr)

Main tourist office (Map pp118-19; ☎ 2391 3454; 5 Sharia Adly; ☎ 8.30am-7pm)

Pyramids tourist office (Map p150; ☎ 3383 8823; Pyramids Rd; ☎ 8.30am-5pm) Opposite Mena House Oberoi.

Ramses Station tourist office (Map p180; ☎ 2579 0767; ☎ 9am-7pm) Next to the Abela Sleeping Train office.

Travel Agencies

The streets around Midan Tahrir teem with travel agencies, but don't expect amazing deals. Instead, watch out for dodgy operators (see p506). Amex and Thomas Cook (see opposite) offer reliable service. Other recommendations:

Egypt Panorama Tours (☎ 2359 0200; www.eptours.com; 4 Rd 79, Ma'adi; ☎ 9am-5pm) Opposite Ma'adi metro station, this is one of the best and most reputable agencies in town, though it's a long way from Downtown. Fortunately it will book tickets, tours and hotel rooms over the phone and courier the documents to you, if necessary, for a reasonable fee. Efficient staff speak excellent English. It's good for cheap air fares, four- and five-star hotel deals and tours within Egypt and around the Mediterranean. Small surcharge for credit cards.

Misr Travel (Map pp118-19; ☎ 2393 0259; 7 Sharia Talaat Harb, Downtown) The official Egyptian government travel agency, which also has offices in most of the luxury hotels.

Travco (Map pp144-5; ☎ 2736 2042; www.travcoeg.com; 13 Sharia Mahmoud Azmy, Zamalek) The highly regarded Zamalek branch of an Egypt-wide travel group.

Visa Extensions

All visa business is carried out at the **Mogamma** (Map pp118-19; Midan Tahrir, Downtown; ☎ 8am-1.30pm Sat-Wed), a 14-storey Egypto-Stalinist monolith that is rumoured to be closing by 2009. In the meantime, foreigners should go to the 1st floor and confirm the following details at the information desk before proceeding. On the 1st floor, go to window 12 for a form, fill it out and then buy stamps from window 43 before returning to window 12 and submitting your form with the stamps, one photograph, and photocopies of the photo and visa pages of your passport (photos and photocopies can be organised on the ground floor). The visa will be processed overnight.

DANGERS & ANNOYANCES

You can walk almost wherever you like in Cairo, at any time of day or night, as long as you are properly dressed and a little street-wise. That said, single women should still be careful when walking alone at night.

Theft

Theft is not a big problem, but it pays to be safe. We regularly receive letters from readers who have had items stolen from locked hotel rooms and even from safes, so think about keeping money and valuables on you or

locked in a suitcase. Pickpockets are rare, but do sometimes operate in crowded spots such as Khan al-Khalili, the Birqash camel market, the metro and buses. If anything does get stolen go straight to the tourist police (p113).

Scams & Hassles

Scams in Cairo are so numerous that there's no way to list them all. There are roughly four types: hotel scams (see p158), overcharging on tours to elsewhere in Egypt, shopping cons and funny business involving tickets to monuments.

The worst scams afflicting Cairo are associated with tours. Rather than making arrangements in Cairo, you are almost always better off booking tours in the place you'll be taking them. Reputable agencies (see left) are nearly outnumbered by dodgy operators. Despite the steady pressure you'll receive, we can't emphasise enough that it's *not* a good idea to book flights, felucca cruises and the like through Cairo hotels – you will inevitably pay more to cover their commission on the transaction. Also be wary of travel agencies in the Downtown area. Many rent space to unscrupulous types who will charge well over the odds for arrangements they make. If you return to complain, the agency will say that you booked through a freelance agent unassociated with the company. And finally: never, *ever* book a tour through a tout you meet on the street or in a souvenir shop.

Shopping scams are nearly as prevalent, but less nefarious. For the most part, they are conversation-starters to lure you into stores. Most of these routines would be dully obvious, if not for the special conviction with which the more talented con men deliver them. Around the Egyptian Museum, for instance, a charming chap approaches foreigners and asks if they are looking for the museum entrance or the bus to the Pyramids. If the answer is yes, he asserts that it's prayer time/lunchtime/any-inventive-reason time and that the museum is temporarily closed and the bus isn't running. Then he suggests that while they're waiting, they may be interested in going to the nearby 'Government Bazaar', which happens to be having its annual sale on that day. Needless to say, there's a sale every day, it's not much of a sale at all, the bazaar isn't government-run and he'll collect a commission on anything you purchase...

When you're in Downtown or Islamic Cairo, locals may start walking next to you, offering help or chatting. These are usually touts who want to direct you into shops where they'll earn a commission. They can be persistent, but telling them you just want to walk and know where you're going, with a joke thrown in to keep everything amicable, will save you a lot of hassle.

Other shopping scams include the old 'two for five pounds' hard sell (when you go to pay, the stallholder will say that he meant five *British* pounds), the dried-banana-leaf-instead-of-papyrus con and the safflower-not-saffron spice trade.

When visiting monuments in Islamic Cairo, it pays to know that, with two exceptions, all mosques are free to enter, as they are places of worship. But some caretakers will claim an admission price – if you're not sure it's legit, ask if there is a ticket ('fee taz-kar-a?') and politely refuse payment if there is none. In officially ticketed monuments, some guards will attempt to resell a previous visitor's ticket (caded by another guard inside, assuring the visitor it's 'normal' to hand it over). If it is not torn out of the book in front of you, it's reused. As it doesn't affect what you pay, it's up to you whether you object, but doing so might send a larger signal that tourists prefer business on the up-and-up.

Most common is a stream of people asking for *baksheesh* (alms, tip); this is legitimate and expected, but be firm and don't pay more than you want to (£5 per monument is reasonable, plus another £2 or £3 if you climb a minaret).

Finally, be aware that fake International Student Identity Cards (ISIC) are sold by scam artists in Downtown. For more information on ISIC cards see p507.

SIGHTS

Cairo's sights are spread all over the city, so it makes sense to do things in one area before moving on to the next – but don't try to cram too much into one day, or you'll soon be overwhelmed. The awe-inspiring but cluttered Egyptian Museum requires at least half a day, but could easily merit a second visit. Khan al-Khalili and most of the medieval monuments are in Islamic Cairo, and you'll need a full day or several shorter visits to appreciate them. Definitely allow a few hours of aimless wandering in this area (even if it comes at the

expense of 'proper' sightseeing), as the back lanes give the truest sense of the city. The Pyramids and tombs of Giza, Saqqara and Dahshur require a whole extra day. Coptic Cairo can be toured in a morning – made especially easy by Metro access – and you'll likely soak up Downtown's atmosphere just by going to and from your hotel, or by hanging out there in the evenings.

Central Cairo

Though the Egyptian Museum is found here, the part of town between Midan Ramses and Midan Tahrir, which locals call Wust al-Balad, is better known for its practical offerings: budget hotels, eateries and a dazzling stream of window displays (don't use that shoe store/lingerie shop/prosthetic-limbs dealer as a landmark; trust us – there's another one just a block away). Occasionally try to look away from the traffic and fluorescent-lit shops and up at the elegant Empire-style office and apartment buildings that drip faded glamour (or is that an air-conditioner leaking?). It's a wonderful part of town to explore – just be prepared for total sensory overload after a few hours.

MIDAN TAHRIR & AROUND

With half-a-dozen major arteries converging, Midan Tahrir (Liberation Sq) is the fulcrum of modern-day Cairo, and as a result the site of some serious traffic and pedestrian jams. But the square is one of the few central spaces that isn't hemmed in by buildings and overpasses, making it an excellent spot to have a look around and orient yourself.

One of the most distinctive location aids is the Nile Hilton (p160), the blue-and-white slab that stands between Midan Tahrir and the Nile. When it was built in 1959 it was the first modern hotel in Cairo, replacing a former British Army barracks. Due north is the neo-classical bulk of the Egyptian Museum (p185), painted a lurid shade of pink, while south is the **Arab League Building** (Map pp118–19), the occasional gathering place of leaders from around the Middle East.

Continuing around Midan Tahrir anti-clockwise, the ornate white palace is the **Ministry of Foreign Affairs**. Adjacent **Omar Makram Mosque** (Map pp118–19) is the place where anybody who's anybody has a funeral. The rest of the south side is occupied by the monstrous **Mogamma** (Map pp118–19), home to

18,000 semisomnolent civil servants – this is where you come for visa extensions (see p115). If the Soviet-funded Mogamma symbolises Egypt's quasi-socialist past, then the next building around, across four-lane Qasr al-Ainy, represents the current energy of private enterprise: the **American University in Cairo** (AUC; Map pp118–19), the college of choice for the sons and daughters of Egypt's stratospherically wealthy. As of autumn 2008, most students will be at a new campus in the eastern suburbs, but that won't stop average Egyptians from imagining the Western-inspired debauchery that goes on behind the tall fences. This campus has an attractive courtyard and a good bookshop (see p109). You must hand over your passport to enter at the gate on Sharia Mohammed Mahmoud, opposite the enterprisingly sited McDonald's.

The buildings then break for Sharia Tahrir, which leads 300m east to a busy square (Midan Falaki) with the indoor veg-and-meat **Souq Bab al-Luq** to one side. Continuing east brings you to Midan al-Gomhuriyya, a scraggly grass square skirted by speeding traffic. The great building to the east, dominating the square, is Abdeen Palace, former residence of the rulers of Egypt.

Abdeen Palace

Begun in 1863 and employing Europe's most lavish architects and designers, **Abdeen Palace** (Qasr Abdeen; Map pp118–19; ☎ 2391 0042; Midan al-Gomhuriyya; adult/student E£10/5; 🕒 9am–2.45pm Sat–Thu) was a centrepiece of Khedive Ismail's plan for a modern Cairo, inspired by Paris' recent makeover; the khedive even called in mastermind French planner Baron Haussmann as a consultant. He wanted the palace finished for the 1869 opening of the Suez Canal, to impress visiting dignitaries, but its 500 rooms weren't completed until 1874. It was the royal residence until the monarchy was abolished in 1952, then became the presidential palace. President Mubarak prefers his digs in Heliopolis, but uses Abdeen for official occasions. One section, though not the ritzy royal chambers, is open to the public (enter on Sharia Mustafa Abdel Raziq); its halls are filled with a vast array of weaponry, ranging from ceremonial daggers to howitzers.

DOWNTOWN

In the commercial heart of Cairo, glitzy shops and thousands of small businesses are wedged

into the ground floors of glorious (if dust-caked) buildings that represent every architectural fantasy of the 19th and early 20th centuries. The two main streets, Sharia Talaat Harb and Sharia Qasr el-Nil, intersect at the traffic circle of Midan Talaat Harb, where cars whiz around a statue of tarboosh-sporting Mr Harb, founder of the National Bank. On the square is Groppi's (p168), in its heyday one of the most celebrated patisseries this side of the Mediterranean, the venue for ritzy society functions and concert dances. Gold mosaics around the doorway are, alas, the only remaining glitter.

Just south of the square on Sharia Talaat Harb, Café Riche (p163) was once a hang-out for Egyptian writers and intellectuals. Nassar allegedly met with his cronies here while planning the 1952 Revolution.

North of the square, shops along Sharia Qasr el-Nil sell a drag queen's dream of footwear. The street itself boasts some particularly fine architecture, notably the **Italian Insurance building** (Map pp118–19), on the corner of Qasr el-Nil and Sharia Sherifeen, and the Cosmopolitan Hotel (p160), a short block off Qasr el-Nil. The area around the hotel and the neighbouring **Cairo Stock Exchange** has been pedestrianised, so you can savour both the turn-of-the-century architecture and some relative quiet.

Over on Sharia Talaat Harb, **Cinema Metro** (Map pp118–19) is a 1930s movie palace: when it first opened, with *Gone with the Wind*, it boasted a Ford showroom and a diner. One block east of the cinema, along Sharia Adly, **Shar Hashamaim Synagogue** (Map pp118–19) is one of the few remaining testaments to Cairo's once-thriving Jewish community. Resembling a set from *Tomb Raider*, its ornate Babylonian exterior was being restored in 2007; when it's done, the place may once again be open on Saturday, the Jewish holy day. Further east on Adly is the faded Groppi Garden (p168) – actually the first Cairo outpost of Italian chocolatier Giacomo Groppi, and site of the city's first outdoor cinema. During WWII it was known as a place where Egyptians and Europeans mixed easily – particularly Allied troops and the local ladies.

A block north of Adly is Sharia 26th of July, named for the date Egypt's last king, Farouk, abdicated. As far as Cairenes are concerned, the street's major attraction is El-Abd Bakery (p164), packed out morning

CENTRAL CAIRO





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4U Internet Café.....(see 55)	Ramses Hilton Mall.....	44 B2
American Express.....	Shar Hashamaim	
American Express.....	Synagogue.....	45 F2
American University in Cairo.....	Souq Bab al-Luq.....	46 D5
American University in Cairo	Townhouse Gallery.....	47 D3
Bookshop.....		
Anglo-Egyptian Bookshop.....	SLEEPING	
AUC Library.....	Carlton Hotel.....	48 E1
Delmer Pharmacy.....	Cosmopolitan Hotel.....	49 D4
Diners Club.....(see 56)	Garden City House.....	50 B5
Express Mail Service.....	Grand Hotel.....	51 E2
Five St@rs Net.....(see 55)	Hotel Luna.....	52 D3
Goethe Institut.....	Hotel Osiris.....	53 E6
Hany Internet Café.....	Hotel Select.....	54 E2
InterClub.....	Lialy Hotel.....	55 D3
Lehnert & Landrock.....	New Minerva Hotel.....(see 59)	
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Newsstand.....(see 83)	EATING	
Newsstand.....(see 56)	Abu al-Hassan al-Haty.....	62 F2
Newsstand.....	Abu Samra.....	63 E1
Poste Restante.....	Abu Tarek.....	64 C3
Shorouk.....	Akher Sa'a.....	65 D2
Telephone Centrale.....	Akher Sa'a.....	66 F1
Telephone Centrale.....	At-Tabei ad-Dumyati.....(see 115)	
Telephone Centrale.....	Bird Cage.....(see 84)	
Telephone Centrale.....	Café Riche.....	67 D4
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Tourist Police Office.....(see 15)	El-Abd Bakery.....	69 E2
US Embassy.....	El-Abd Bakery.....	70 D3
Western Union.....	Emara Hati al-Gish.....	71 D5
Western Union Money	Estoril.....	72 C4
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	Felfela Restaurant.....	74 D4
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	Gad.....	76 E2
SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES	Gomhouriya.....	77 D4
Abdeen Palace.....	Greek Club.....(see 78)	
Abdeen Palace Museum	Groppi's.....	78 C4
Entrance.....	Koshary El Tahrir.....	79 C5
Arab League Building.....	Koshary Goha.....	81 F1
Arabic Language Institute.....(see 3)	Le Bistro.....	82 D4
Cairo Atelier.....	Nile Hilton Deli.....(see 86)	
Egyptian Museum.....	Pottery Café.....	83 C5
Ezbekiyya Gardens.....	Sabaya.....	84 A5
Italian Insurance Building.....	Sayed Hanafy.....	85 E1
Karim Francis Art Gallery.....		
Mashrabia Gallery of	DRINKING	
Contemporary Art.....	Abu Aly Café.....	86 B4
Ministry of Foreign Affairs.....	Cafeteria Horreyya.....	87 D5
Omar Makram Mosque.....		
Postal Museum.....	Cafeteria Port Tawfiq.....	88 E1
	Cafeteria Stella.....	89 D4
	Cairo.....	90 E1
	Cap d'Or.....	91 E3
	Cilantro.....	92 C5
	Groppi Garden.....	93 F2
	Kawkab ash-Sharq.....	94 E2
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	Odeon Palace Hotel.....	97 D3
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	Zahret al-Bustan.....	98 D4
	ENTERTAINMENT	
	After Eight.....	99 C4
	Cairo Puppet Theatre.....	100 H2
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	Latex.....	102 A4
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	SHOPPING	
	Ezbekiyya Book Market.....	105 H1
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	L'Orientale.....	107 B4
	L'Orientaliste.....	108 C4
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	Mobaco.....	109 A6
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	Osman Ahmed.....	110 F2
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	Air France.....	116 D4
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	EgyptAir.....	118 C4
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	Local Buses & Minibuses.....	124 B3
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	Terminal.....	126 A2
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	SyrianAir.....	131 D3
	Yellow Taxis.....	132 B5

to midnight with locals jostling for cakes, sweets and delicious pastries (there's also a branch on Sharia Talaat Harb).

Another block north, pedestrianised Sharia Saray al-Ezbekiyya and Sharia Alfay are Downtown's nightlife centre, with kebab joints, seedy bars, dubious belly-dancing joints, countless opportunities for sidewalk *sheesha* (water pipe)-smoking and a 24-hour eating

place in Akher Sa'a (p162). Nearby **Tawfiqiyya Souq** (Map pp118-19) is a blocks-long fruit-and-vegetable market, open late, with good coffeehouses in the surrounding alleyways.

East along Sharia 26th of July leads to **Ezbekiyya Gardens** (Map pp118-19), which look nicer than they ever have – but are open only to those who pay (E£2). The famous Shephard's Hotel was once located opposite –

it was the preferred accommodation of the British colonial classes for a century, until it was destroyed by Black Saturday rioters in 1952 (see p41). Next to the gardens Midan Opera marks the site of the old opera house, which burnt down in 1971 – and rebuilt as a towering car park. Beyond the car park, to the east, is Midan Ataba.

MIDAN ATABA

Here, ‘modern European’ Cairo runs up against the old medieval Cairo of Saladin (Salah ad-Din), the Mamluks and the Ottomans. A mass of buses and hawkers, the area seems like one traffic-clogged bazaar – though the goods now are vinyl shoes and acetate ball gowns, not fine silks and gold as in centuries past. Off the southwest side, past the flyover, the domed **main post office** (Map pp118–19) has a pretty courtyard. A window immediately on your right is where you buy tickets to the neighbouring **Postal Museum** (Map pp118–19; ☎ 2391 0011; 2nd fl, Midan Ataba; ££2; ☎ 8am–3pm), a beautifully maintained collection of stamps, uniforms and even tiny scale models of great post offices throughout Egypt.

On the north side of the square, behind the modernist white **Puppet Theatre**, are the stalls of the Ezbekiyya Book Market (p175). North beyond that is Midan Khazindar, dominated by **Sednaoui** (Map pp118–19), one of Cairo’s prime early-20th-century department stores. Nationalised in 1961, its display cases are now stocked with a weird, almost tragic assortment of third-rate goods. But the place still sports its gorgeous three-storey atrium interior. Running north from Khazindar is Sharia Clot Bey (aka Sharia Khulud) named after a French physician who introduced Western ideas about public health to Mohammed Ali’s Egypt. That didn’t stop the street from becoming the diseased heart of Cairo’s red-light district, known as ‘the Berka’ (‘the blessing’, with ladles of irony), an area of brothels, peepshows and cabarets. These days it’s a shabby but charming street with arcades over the pavements sheltering sepia-toned coffeehouses and eating places. It eventually emerges onto Midan Ramses.

MIDAN RAMSES & AROUND

The northern gateway into central Cairo, Midan Ramses (Map p122) is a byword for bedlam. The city’s main north–south access collides with overpasses and numerous

arterial roads to swamp the square with an unchoreographed slew of minibuses, buses, taxis and cars. Commuters swarming from the train station add to the melee.

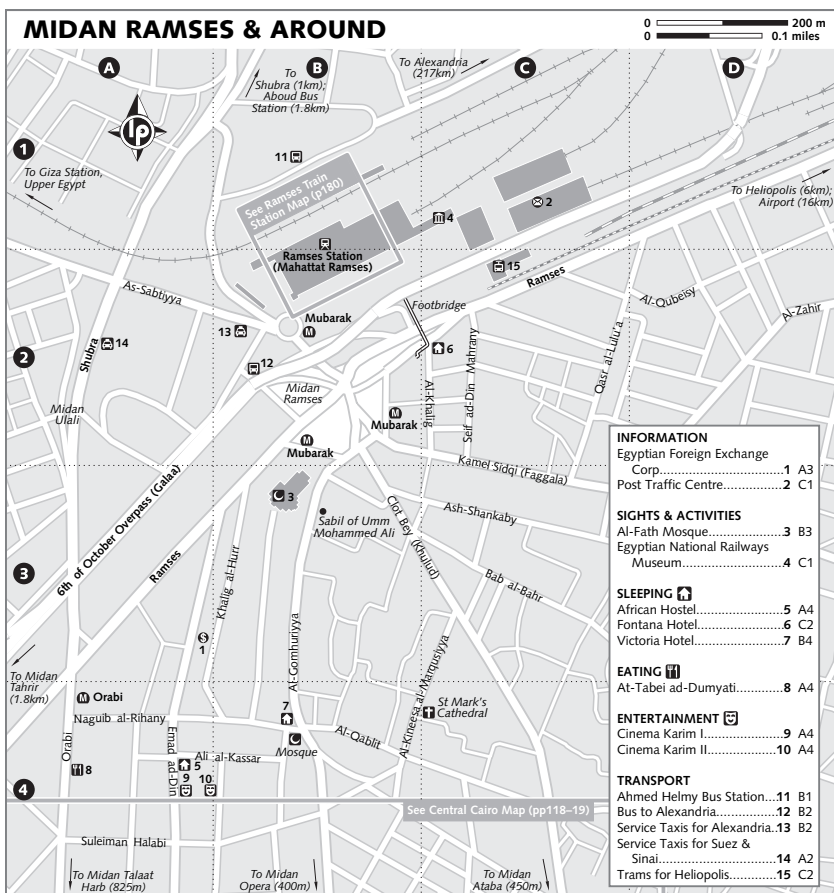
The eponymous Ramses, a multistorey Pharaonic colossus of red granite, stood sentinel amid the traffic to greet new visitors to the city until 2006, when he was removed to protect him from further pollution damage – a process that required major machinery and road closures. He will stand at the entrance of the Grand Egyptian Museum in Giza, slated to open (perhaps) in 2010. **Ramses Station** (Mahattat Ramses; Map p122) is an attractive marriage of Islamic style and industrial-age engineering. At its eastern end it houses the **Egyptian National Railways Museum** (Map p122; ☎ 2576 3793; Midan Ramses; admission ££10, Fri & public holidays ££20; ☎ 9am–2pm Tue–Sun) with a beautiful but somewhat dilapidated collection of old locomotives, including one built for Empress Eugénie on the occasion of the opening of the Suez Canal.

On the south side of the square is Cairo’s pre-eminent orientation aid, **Al-Fath Mosque** (Map p122). Completed in the early 1990s, the mosque’s minaret is visible from just about anywhere in central and Islamic Cairo.

GARDEN CITY & RHODA

Garden City was developed in the early 1900s along the lines of an English garden suburb. Its curving, tree-lined streets were designed for tranquillity, while its proximity to the British embassy was no doubt intended to convey security. Many of the enclave’s elegant villas have fallen prey to quick-buck developers, but enough grand architecture and lush trees survive to make a wander through the streets worthwhile – at sunset, the air of faded romance is palpable (see p155).

Or you can walk directly (if a bit less scenically) south along the noisy Corniche el-Nil. It takes only 20 minutes to walk from Tahrir to the small Manial Bridge. Crossing this, you arrive at the **Manial Palace Museum** (Mathaf al-Manial; Map p148; ☎ 2368 7495; Sharia al-Saray, Manial; adult/student ££10/5; ☎ 9am–4pm, during Ramadan 9am–3pm). Once one of Cairo’s most eccentric tourist sites, the palace and its overgrown grounds were being restored at last pass and will likely reopen sometime in 2008 with a less ramshackle feel (and a higher ticket price). The uncle of King Farouk, Prince Mohammed Ali built the palace in the early 20th century.



Apparently he couldn't decide which architectural style he preferred, so he went for the lot: Ottoman, Moorish, Persian and European rococo. The palace contains, among other things, Farouk's horde of hunting trophies and the prince's collection of medieval manuscripts, clothing and other items. The gardens are planted with rare tropical plants collected by the prince on his travels. If you don't want to walk to the museum, a taxi from Midan Tahrir should cost ££4.

A 15-minute walk south along the eastern side of the island, past lush plant nurseries, takes you to its southern tip, home to Monastirli Palace, the Umm Kolthum Museum and a Nilometer. From there, it's an easy walk on to Old Cairo.

Monastirli Palace & Umm Kolthum Museum

Set in a peaceful Nile-side garden, **Monastirli Palace** (Map p124) was built in 1851 for an Ottoman pasha whose family hailed from Monastir, in northern Greece. The *salamlık* (greeting area) that he built for public functions is now an elegant venue for concerts, while the other part is now the **Umm Kolthum Museum** (Map p124; ☎ 2363 1467; Sharia al-Malek as-Salih, Rhoda; admission E£2; ☎ 10am-5pm). Dedicated to the most famous Arab diva, the small museum is more like a shrine, given the reverence with which the singer's signature rhinestone-trimmed glasses and glittery gowns are hung under spotlights in display cases. There's a multimedia room where you can listen to her

music, and a short film shows key moments of her life, from the beginning when she performed disguised as a Bedouin boy, to her magnetic performances that brought Cairo to a standstill, to her funeral, when millions of mourners flooded the streets.

Nilometer

Built in AD 861, the **Nilometer** (Map p124; Sharia al-Malek as-Salih, Rhoda; E£10; ☎ 10am-5pm) was designed to measure the rise and fall of the river, and thus predict the fortunes of the annual harvest. If the water rose to 16 cubits (a cubit is about the length of a forearm) the harvest was likely to be good, inspiring one of the greatest celebrations of the medieval era; any higher, though, and the flooding could be disastrous, and lower levels presaged hunger. The Turkish-style pencil-point dome is a Farouk-era reconstruction of an earlier one wrecked by Napoleon's troops. The measuring device, a graduated column, sits below the level of the Nile at the bottom of a flight of precipitous steps, which the guard will cheerfully let you descend for a little baksheesh.

Old Cairo

Broadly speaking, Old Cairo (Misr al-Qadima, with a glottal-stop 'Q'; Map p124) incorporates the area south of Garden City down to the quarter known to foreigners as Coptic Cairo. Most visitors head straight to the latter. From there, you can also visit the Mosque of Amr ibn al-As.

In this traditional part of Cairo appropriate dress is essential. Visitors of either sex wearing shorts or showing their shoulders will not be allowed into churches or mosques. The liveliest time to visit is on a Sunday, when Cairene Copts come for services; but if you want a quiet wander, avoid Sunday and Friday as well. The churches do not charge admission, but most have donation boxes.

The easiest way of getting here is by metro: trains run every few minutes, and Mar Girgis station is right outside the Coptic Cairo compound. It's much better than a crowded bus (though the trip back to Tahrir isn't as bad because you can board the bus at the terminal, beside the Mosque of Amr ibn al-As, and be sure of a seat). A slow but pleasant option is to take the orange-and-green river bus (*autobees nahri*) from the Maspero dock (Map pp118-19) to its last stop at Misr al-Qadima in Old Cairo.

From there it's a 10-minute walk east to the main cluster of churches. The service runs at 8am, 2pm and 9pm and costs E£1.

COPTIC CAIRO

Coptic Cairo (Map p124) is the heartland of Egypt's indigenous Christian community, a haven of tranquillity and peace that reveals layers of history. Archaeologists have found traces of a small Nileside settlement on this site from as early as the 6th century BC. In the 2nd century AD the Romans established a fortress here, called Babylon-in-Egypt. The name Babylon is most likely a Roman corruption of 'Per-hapi-en-on' (Estate of the Nile God at On), a Pharaonic name for ancient Heliopolis.

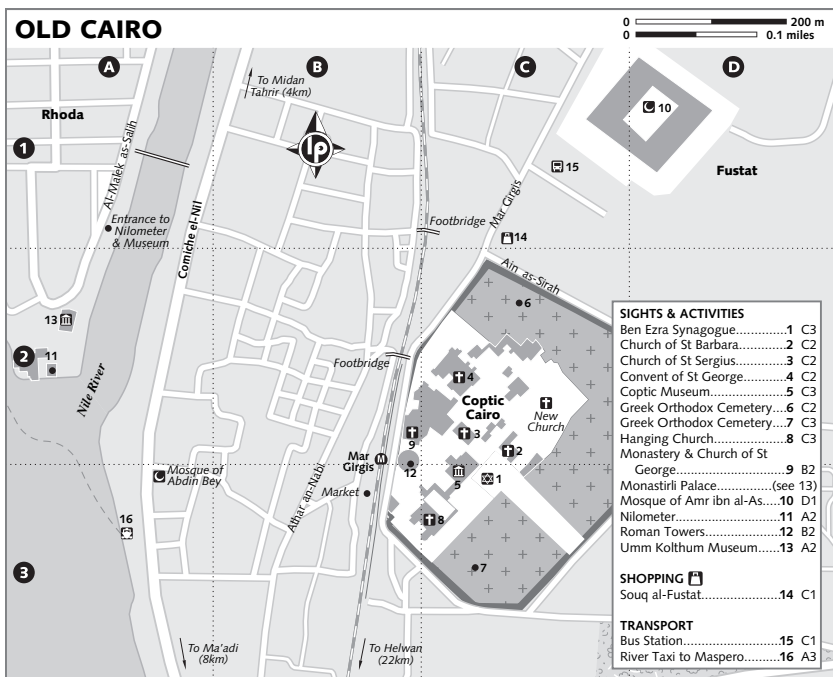
Babylon has always been a stronghold of Christianity. At one time there were more than 20 churches clustered within less than 1 sq km, though just a handful survive today. They are linked by narrow cobbled alleyways running between high stone walls: the place feels similar to parts of Jerusalem's Old City. That might not be mere coincidence, because when Jews were exiled from their holy city in AD 70, some found refuge in Egypt; the country's oldest synagogue is here in Coptic Cairo. There are three entrances to the Coptic compound: a sunken staircase beside the footbridge over the metro gives access to most churches and the synagogue; the main gate in the centre is for the Coptic Museum; and another doorway further south leads to the Hanging Church.

Roman Towers

The main entrance to the Coptic compound lies between the remains of the two round **towers** (Map p124) of Babylon's western gate. Built in AD 98 by Emperor Trajan, these were part of riverfront fortifications: at the time, the Nile would have lapped right up against them. Excavations around the southern tower have revealed part of the ancient quay, several metres below street level. The Greek Orthodox Monastery and Church of St George sit on top of the northern tower.

Coptic Museum

This **museum** (Map p124; ☎ 2363 9742; www.coptic-museum.gov.eg; Sharia Mar Girgis; adult/student E£40/20; ☎ 9am-4pm), founded in 1908, houses Coptic art from Greco-Roman times to the Islamic era in a collection drawn from all over Egypt.



Reopened after thorough renovation in 2006, it is a beautiful place, as much for the elaborate woodcarving in all the galleries as for the treasures they contain. These include a sculpture that shows obvious continuity from the Ptolemaic period, rich textiles and whole walls of monastery frescoes. There's a pleasant garden out front; a small café was not yet open at the time of research.

Hanging Church

Just south of the museum on Sharia Mar Girgis (the main road parallel with the metro), a stone façade inscribed with Coptic and Arabic marks the entrance to the **Hanging Church** (Al-Kineesa al-Mu'allaqa; Map p124; Sharia Mar Girgis; ☞; Coptic mass 8-11am Fri, 9-11am Sun). Still in use for Mass and by parishioners who come to pray over a collection of saints' relics and an icon of Mary, this 9th-century (some say 7th-century) structure is called the Hanging or Suspended Church as it is built on top of the Water Gate of Roman Babylon. Steep stairs lead to a 19th-century façade topped by twin bell towers. In a small inner courtyard, vendors sell taped liturgies and videos of the Coptic pope, Shenouda III.

With its three barrel-vaulted, wooden-roofed aisles, the interior of the church feels like an upturned ark. Ivory-inlaid screens hiding the altar have intricate geometric designs that are distinguishable from Islamic designs only by the tiny crosses worked into the pattern. In front of them, a fine pulpit used only on Palm Sunday stands on 13 slender pillars that represent Christ and his disciples; one of the pillars, darker than the rest, is said to symbolise Judas. In the baptistry, off to the right, a panel has been cut out of the floor to reveal the Water Gate below.

Monastery & Church of St George

Back on the street, the first doorway north of the museum gate leads to the Greek Orthodox **Monastery and Church of St George** (Map p124). St George (Mar Girgis), is one of the region's most popular Christian saints. A Palestinian conscript in the Roman army, he was executed in AD 303 for resisting Emperor Diocletian's decree forbidding the practice of Christianity. There has been a church dedicated to him in Coptic Cairo since the 10th century; this one dates from 1909. The interior has been gutted

by fires, but the stained-glass windows and blue-green tile ceiling remain bright and colourful. The neighbouring monastery is closed to visitors. The Coptic *moulid* (saints' festival) of Mar Girgis is held here on 23 April.

Convent of St George

Down a sunken staircase by the footbridge, along the alleyway, the first doorway on your left leads into the courtyard of the **Convent of St George** (Map p124). The convent is closed to visitors, but you can step down into the main hall and the chapel. Inside the latter is a beautiful wooden door, almost 8m high, behind which a small room is still occasionally used for the chain-wrapping ritual that symbolises the persecution of St George during the Roman occupation. Occasionally, visitors wishing to be blessed are wrapped in chains by the resident nuns, who intone the requisite prayers. Usually, though, the nuns will merely offer to show you a chain that they claim was used to bind early martyrs.

Churches of St Sergius & St Barbara

To get to the **Church of St Sergius** (Abu Serga; Map p124; ☞ 8am-4pm), walk down the lane that the Convent of St George is on, following it around to the right. Duck under the low arch and walk a few steps more to the entrance, below street level. This is the oldest church inside the walls, with 3rd- and 4th-century pillars. It is said to be built over a cave where Joseph, Mary and the infant Jesus sheltered after fleeing to Egypt to escape persecution from King Herod of Judea, who had embarked upon a 'massacre of the first born'. The cave in question (now a crypt) is reached by descending steps to the left of the altar. Every year, on 1 June, a special mass is held here to commemorate the event.

Further along the alley, a passage leads to the left, where another church dedicated to St George is being restored; the passage ends at a shiny new church – a surprise in the middle of all the ancient stones (as are its superlative restrooms). Returning to the main walkway, the **Church of St Barbara** (Sitt Barbara; Map p124) is at the corner; she was beaten to death by her father for trying to convert him to Christianity. Her relics supposedly rest in a small chapel left of the nave.

Beyond the church an iron gate leads to the large, peaceful (if a bit litter-strewn) **Greek Orthodox cemetery** (Map p124). Women on their

own should be careful – we've heard reports of flashers lurking among the gravestones.

Ben Ezra Synagogue

To the right of the cemetery entrance, the 9th-century **Ben Ezra Synagogue** (Map p124; admission free, donations welcome) occupies the shell of a 4th-century Christian church. In the 12th century the synagogue was restored by Abraham Ben Ezra, rabbi of Jerusalem – hence its name. Tradition marks this as the spot where the prophet Jeremiah gathered the Jews in the 6th century after Nebuchadnezzar destroyed the Jerusalem temple. The adjacent spring is supposed to mark the place where the pharaoh's daughter found Moses in the reeds, and where Mary drew water to wash Jesus. In 1890, a cache of more than 250,000 papers, known as the Geniza documents, was uncovered in the synagogue; from them, researchers have been able to piece together details of the life of the North African Jewish community from the 11th to 13th centuries.

MOSQUE OF AMR IBN AL-AS

Sharia Mar Girgis leads north past Souq al-Fustat (p177), a covered market with quality crafts shops and a pricey café, to the **Mosque of Amr ibn al-As** (Map p124; Sharia Sidi Hassan al-Anwar, Old Cairo), the first mosque built in Egypt, constructed in AD 642 by the general who conquered Egypt for Islam. On the site where Ibn al-As pitched his tent, the original structure was only palm trunks thatched with leaves. It expanded to its current size in AD 827, and has been continuously reworked since then – most recently, a wood roof was installed to mimic the original style more closely. The oldest section is to the right of the sanctuary; the rest of the mosque is a forest of some 200 different columns, the majority taken from ancient sites. There's little else to see, but the vast space is a pleasant place to rest.

Islamic Cairo

If you can, walk from Downtown Cairo east to this district, the core of the medieval city. In just 1.5km, centuries fall away – as you near Midan Hussein, traditional *galabiyas* (men's full-length robes) begin to outnumber modern suits, buildings and crowds press closer on all sides, and the din comes less from car traffic and more from the cries of street vendors and the creak of cart wheels. Here the aromas of mint and cumin mix with the

ISLAMIC CAIRO HIGHLIGHTS

- Soak up the atmosphere in Al-Azhar Mosque (opposite), the centre of Sunni Islamic education for more than a millennium.
- Take in the view from the south end of Bein al-Qasreen (p132) – with a few camels, you could be in a 19th-century etching.
- Compare the Mosque of Ibn Tulun (p138) to its image on your £5 bill, and pop into the adjacent Gayer-Anderson Museum (p138), a private home furnished with quirky art and collectibles.
- Sip tea at the Platonic ideal of the *ahwa* (coffeehouse), Fishawi's Coffeehouse (p169) – a great place to rest before or after trawling Khan al-Khalili for deals.
- Climb the minarets at Bab Zuweila (p134) to survey the view over the whole medieval district.

stink of livestock, petrol and sewage – the real smell of the city. The effect can be disorientating and the casual visitor can lose not just a sense of direction but also a sense of time. Of all Cairo's districts, this is undoubtedly the most fascinating.

Although the atmosphere is different from Downtown, and certainly there is a profusion of minarets on the skyline, the term 'Islamic Cairo' is a bit of misnomer, as this area is not significantly more religious than other parts of the city. But it is Islamic in the sense that for many centuries, it was one of the power centres of the Islamic empire, a nexus of commerce and political intrigue. And the monuments that remain are some of the most resplendent examples of architecture inspired by the glory of Islam.

The Ministry of Culture is in the middle of an ambitious, costly and slow restoration programme. Some conservation architects are concerned that monuments are being superficially rebuilt, with lashings of cement and no vision as to how the spaces will be used and maintained. Likewise, the new emphasis on tourist-friendliness and tidiness could transform the district from an architecturally significant and intact precinct with a vibrant human presence to a sanitised heritage theme park. Certainly the complaints have merit, but it's also true that some parts of Islamic Cairo are receiving much-needed help in the process. Vast Al-Azhar Park (p140), once an enormous rubbish heap, is hard to argue with as an improvement.

The best way to explore is to spend a couple of days wandering through the narrow streets and twisting alleyways – ideally once on a weekday to feel the throng of commerce at its height, and again on a quieter Friday

morning or Sunday, when most shops are shut (see p155 for a suggested walk) and you can pause to admire a delicately carved minaret without being run down by an overburdened donkey cart.

VISITING ISLAMIC CAIRO

With more than 800 listed monuments and few signposts or other concessions to the visitor, Islamic Cairo can be a daunting place. We've divided it into six segments with maps, each taking about half a day to cover – plus Al-Azhar Park, which borders the district and makes a good place to rest after touring. The magnificent Museum of Islamic Art (p134) deserves another half-day, but it is not due to reopen for a long time. Al-Azhar Park borders the district and is a good place to rest after touring.

Al-Azhar & Khan al-Khalili (opposite) The geographical and symbolic centre of medieval Cairo.

North of Khan al-Khalili (p130) A monument-studded walk to the old city gates and back.

Al-Azhar to the Citadel (p133) Through the Darb al-Ahmar district to Mohammed Ali's seat of power.

The Citadel (p135) Home to Egypt's rulers for 700 years.

The Citadel to Ibn Tulun (p137) Two magnificent mosques and a couple smaller gems.

Northern Cemetery (p138) Cairo's famous City of the Dead.

Al-Azhar Park (p140) Great views from this green space.

Appropriate dress in this traditional part of Cairo is not just polite but necessary if you want to enter mosques, where legs and shoulders must be covered. Shoes must be removed before entering prayer halls, so bring footwear that can be easily slipped off but that is robust enough to survive potholes and odd puddles. Caretakers at mosques and museums expect

tips, so bring plenty of small change – ££5 should be sufficient at each place, but throw in a little extra if someone takes you up a minaret. Some enterprising people have taken to claiming entry fees at mosques, but except for Sultan Hassan and Ar-Rifai, this is not sanctioned – see p115 for how to handle this and other scams.

Caretakers are usually around from 9am until early evening, but may follow their own whims. Mosques are usually closed to visitors during prayer times.

To prepare, check out www.cim.gov.eg or, more thoroughly, the 5th edition of *Islamic Monuments in Cairo: The Practical Guide*, by Caroline Williams (££75), or *Historic Cairo: A Walk Through the Islamic City*, by British architect Jim Antoniou (££75). Those serious about their architecture may like to splurge ££300 on Nicholas Warner's *The Monuments of Historic Cairo: A Map and Descriptive Catalogue*, which covers 500 buildings, complete with historical data and renovation details. All are published by AUC Press.

GETTING TO ISLAMIC CAIRO

Islamic Cairo covers a large area. The centre of the action, and the easiest place to reach, is Al-Azhar and Khan al-Khalili. The best approach is on foot from Downtown, so you can see the transition from the modern city; head for Midan Ataba then bear east under the elevated motorway along Sharia al-Azhar, or throw yourself into the crowds on Sharia al-Muski. Or hail a taxi and ask for 'Al-Hussein' – the name of the *midan* (square) and the mosque at the mouth of the bazaar (pay ££6 from Downtown). Most places in the following pages can be reached from there, although for the Citadel and Mosque of Ibn Tulun it may be easier to take a taxi (££10 from Downtown) to the Citadel entrance.

AL-AZHAR & KHAN AL-KHALILI

The best place to become acquainted with Islamic Cairo is the area around Al-Azhar Mosque and the great bazaar, Khan al-Khalili (Map p129), which panders shamelessly to Western preconceptions of the Orient.

Al-Azhar Mosque

Founded in AD 970 as the centrepiece of the newly created Fatimid city, **Al-Azhar Mosque** (Gami' al-Azhar; Map p129; Sharia al-Azhar; ☎ 24hr) is one of Cairo's earliest mosques and its sheikh is

the highest theological authority for Egyptian Muslims. A madrassa was established in AD 988, growing into a university that is the world's second-oldest educational institution (after the University of al-Kairaouine in Fez, Morocco). At one time the university was one of the world's pre-eminent centres of learning, drawing scholars from Europe and across the Arab world, and it is still the most prestigious place to study Sunni theology.

The mosque is a harmonious blend of architectural styles, the result of numerous enlargements over a thousand years. The central courtyard is the earliest part, while, from south to north, the three minarets date from the 14th, 15th and 16th centuries; the latter, with its double finial, was added by Sultan al-Ghuri, whose mosque and mausoleum stand nearby. The tomb chamber, located through a doorway on the left just inside the entrance, has a beautiful mihrab (a niche indicating the direction of Mecca) and should not be missed.

Midan Hussein

The square between the two highly venerated mosques of Al-Azhar and Sayyidna al-Hussein was one of the focal points of Mamluk Cairo and remains an important space at feast times, particularly on Ramadan evenings and during the *moulids* (see the boxed text p509) of Hussein and the Prophet Mohammed, when people throng the brightly lit *midan*, where music and Sufi chanting blares until the early morning. The square is a popular meeting place at other times too, and the *ahwas* with outdoor seating at the entrance to the khan are often packed with equal parts locals and tourists.

One of the most sacred Islamic sites in Egypt, the **Mosque of Sayyidna al-Hussein** (Map p129) is the reputed burial place of the head of Hussein, the grandson of the Prophet whose death in Karbala, Iraq, cemented the rift between the Sunni and Shiite branches of Islam. Never mind that the Umayyad Mosque in Damascus claims the same Shiite relic, and that both mosques were established by Sunnis – the site is still so holy that non-Muslims are not allowed inside. Most of the building dates from about 1870, except for the beautiful 14th-century stucco panels on the minaret. The modern-looking metal sculptures in front are elegant Teflon canopies that expand to cover worshippers during Friday prayer times.

NEIL HEWISON

Associate director for editorial programs, The American University in Cairo Press, one of the most respected publishers in the field of Egyptian history, archaeology, arts and literature in translation.

How long have you lived in Cairo?

I first came to Cairo in 1979 on my way to Al-Fayoum, where I taught English for three years. Then I came to live here in 1982.

Has the city changed a lot since then?

Cairo is an everchanging, never-changing city. On the surface, it changes all the time: the bridges, the metro, the satellite dishes, the plotter-printed ads and shop signs. But its underlying rhythm – or its multiplicity of rhythms – is the same: the overall chaos that can't possibly work but does, the intense disregard of regulations and immense good humour of the inhabitants, the 24-hour street life...

You know Islamic Cairo very well. What's your favourite building there?

May I have two? The Sabil-Kuttub of Abdel Rahman Katkhuda (p132) is perfectly sited and perfectly proportioned on a fork in the street. And the Mausoleum of Qaitbey (p139), which has a carved stone dome so exquisite I can look at it and forget to breathe.

Where's your favourite place to walk or relax in the city?

Walk: from Bab Zuweila to the Citadel via Darb al-Ahmar (p135). And relax? In Cairo?

Any restaurant recommendations for that part of the city? Or an ahwa?

Farahat (126A Sharia al-Azhar, Islamic Cairo; ☎ noon-5am), in an alley off Al-Azhar St, serves great stuffed or grilled pigeon. The *ahwa* (coffeehouse) I like best is in Downtown, the one on Bustan between Nubar and Mohammed Farid with the beautiful calligraphy inside. It's clean and quiet, the clientele are old and old-fashioned, and it serves the best *subya* (cold, sweet, fermented-rice drink) in town.

What do you like best about Cairo?

It's the safest city I know. How many Western cities can you walk in alone at any time of day or night, in any part of the city, and feel completely safe?

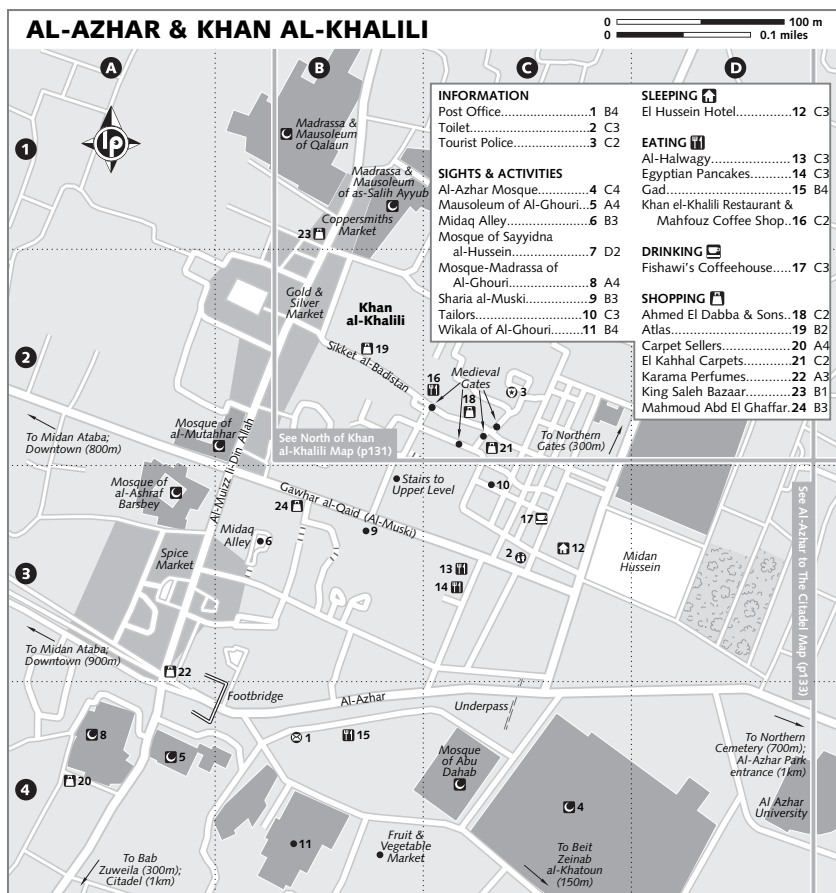
Do you have a favourite word in Egyptian colloquial Arabic?

I like words that travel. For example: *tuuba* (brick) came into Arabic from Coptic and then was passed on to Spanish as *adobe* (from *at-tuuba*, the brick), which has been adopted directly in English for a style of building in...mud brick. One that's come full circle is the Arabic word the travel companies use to describe an off-road adventure trip in their programmes: *safaari*, from the English *safari* (a hunting trip in the African savannah), from the Swahili *safari* (a journey), from...the Arabic *safar* (journeying).

Khan al-Khalili

Jaundiced travellers often dismiss **Khan al-Khalili** (Map p129) as a tourist trap, and there's no ignoring the flotillas of tour buses parked on the square, and all the touts and tat that come with them. But it's worth remembering that Cairenes have plied their trades here since the khan was built in the 14th century, and parts of the market, such as the gold district, are still the first choice for thousands of locals to do business.

Open from early morning to sundown (except Friday morning and Sunday), the agglomeration of shops – many arranged around small courtyards, in the original medieval 'minimal' layout – stock everything from soap powder to semiprecious stones, not to mention stuffed-toy camels and alabaster pyramids. The khan used to be divided into fairly rigid districts, but that has been lost since the tourist trade became paramount; the only distinct areas are now



the gold-sellers, the coppersmiths and the spice dealers (see Map p129). Apart from the clumsy 'Hey mister, look for free' touts, the merchants of Khan al-Khalili are some of the greatest smooth-talkers you will ever meet. Almost anything can be bought here and if one merchant doesn't have what you're looking for, he'll happily find somebody who does.

There are few specific things to see in the khan but **Fishawi's Coffeehouse** (Map p129; ☎ 24hr except during Ramadan), in an alley one block west of Midan Hussein, is an absolute must. Hung with huge mirrors and packed day and night, it claims to have been open continuously for the last 200 years, except during Ramadan, when everyone is fasting.

Entertainment comes in the form of roaming salesmen, -women and -children who hawk wallets, carved canes, pistol-shaped cigarette lighters and packet after packet after packet of tissues.

The other landmark, in the southwest area of the khan, is **Midaq Alley** (Zuqaq al-Midaq; Map p129). The title of one of Naguib Mahfouz' best-known works, the tiny stepped alley may not be populated with the same colourful characters as the novel, but the way of life here is little changed from his 1940s depiction. Such is the alley's fame that the street sign is kept in the coffeehouse at the foot of the steps and is produced only on payment of baksheesh.

Sharia al-Muski

Congested and fabulous, the market street known as **Sharia al-Muski** (Map p129) begins in the khan (where it's formally called Sharia Gawhar al-Qaid) and runs parallel to Sharia al-Azhar to Midan Ataba. It's the 'real life' counterpoint to Khan al-Khalili's touristy maze, lined with carts selling cheap shoes, plastic toys, bucket-sized bras and some truly shocking lingerie.

NORTH OF KHAN AL-KHALILI

From Midan Hussein walk up the road that leads along the western side of the Mosque of Sayyidna al-Hussein. Stick to it as it doglegs left into the district known as the Gamaliyya. This avenue, **Sharia al-Gamaliyya** (Map p131), was an essential thoroughfare in medieval Cairo; today it looks more like a back alley, with many of the Mamluk-era buildings obscured by restorers' webs of wooden scaffolding.

The 1408 **Mosque of Gamal ad-Din** (Map p131) is a monument that has received the somewhat overzealous restoration attention. It's raised above a row of shops, the rent from which was intended for the mosque's upkeep. Adjacent (go left down the lane) is the fully restored – yet empty – **Wikala al-Bazara** (Map p131; Sharia al-Tombakhiyya; adult/student ££15/10; ☎ 8am–6pm summer, 9am–5pm winter), one of about 20 remaining *wikalas* (merchants' inns) in the medieval city, down from about 360 in the 17th century, when this one was built. The Gamaliyya was the medieval warehouse district, with many of these *wikalas*, all built to the same plan: storerooms and stables surrounding a courtyard, with guestrooms for traders on the upper floors; heavy front gates protected the merchandise at night.

Further north on Sharia al-Gamaliyya, on the opposite side of the street, the Mamluk **Khanqah & Mausoleum of Sultan Beybars al-Gashankir** (Map p131) is distinguished by its stubby minaret, topped with a small ribbed dome. Built in 1310, this is one of the city's first *khanqahs* (Sufi monasteries). Thanks to a multipart 'baffled' entrance, it is serene inside. Beybars al-Gashankir is entombed in a room that shimmers with black-and-white marble panelling and light from stained-glass windows. He ruled for only a year, then wound up strangled – his name was excised from the building façade by order of his successor.

Northern Walls & Gates

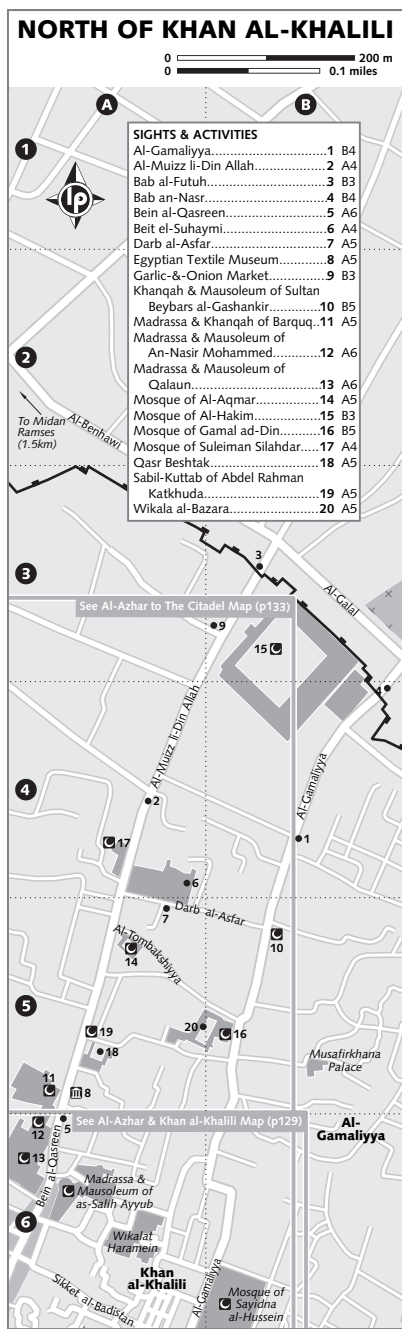
The square-towered **Bab an-Nasr** (Gate of Victory; Map p131) and the rounded **Bab al-Futuh** (Gate of Conquests; Map p131) were built in 1087 as the two main northern entrances to the walled Fatimid city of Al-Qahira. Walk along the outside and you'll see what an imposing bit of military architecture the whole thing is. When current renovations are done (any year now), visitors should be able to get access to the top of the walls and inside the gates themselves, and see inscriptions left by Napoleon's troops as well as carved animals and Pharaonic figures on the stones scavenged from the ruins of ancient Memphis.

Mosque of Al-Hakim

Al-Hakim became the sixth Fatimid ruler of Egypt at the age of 11. His tutor nicknamed him 'Little Lizard' because of his frightening looks and behaviour. Hakim later had the man murdered, along with scores of others in his 24-year reign. Those nearest to him lived in constant fear for their lives: a victorious general rushing unannounced into the royal apartments was confronted by a bloodied Hakim standing over a disembowelled page boy. The general was beheaded.

Hakim would often patrol the streets in disguise, riding a donkey. Most notoriously, he punished dishonest merchants by having them dealt with by a well-endowed black servant. His death was as bizarre as his life. On one of his solitary nocturnal jaunts up onto the Muqattam Hills, Hakim simply disappeared; his body was never found. To one of his followers, a man called Al-Darizy, this was proof of Hakim's divine nature. From this seed Al-Darizy founded the sect of the Druze that continues to this day.

Completed in 1013, the vast **Mosque of Al-Hakim** (Map p131) is one of Cairo's older mosques but it was rarely used for worship. Instead it functioned as a Crusaders' prison, a stable, a warehouse, a boys' school and, most appropriately, considering its notorious founder, a madhouse. An Ismaili Shiite group restored the mosque in the 1980s, but with its open-plan square and spare decoration, it's not particularly interesting. The real masterpieces are the two stone minarets, the earliest surviving in the city (thanks in part to a postearthquake restoration in 1304 by Beybars al-Gashankir).



Sharia al-Muizz li-Din Allah

Sharia al-Muizz (its shortened name; Map p131), which takes its name from the Fatimid caliph who conquered Cairo in AD 969, is the former grand thoroughfare of medieval Cairo, once chockablock with storytellers, entertainers and food stalls. These days the street is getting totally redone, from new pavement on up to the tips of the minarets of the monuments along its length. During morning vehicle-free hours, visitors may comfortably gawk at the sites without fear of being flattened by traffic. The drawback, though, is that this is now more squarely a tourist destination and touts have found their way up from the khan. First-timers will likely be impressed at the streetscape; return visitors may be taken aback at the extent of the changes.

Heading south from the gates, a **garlic-and-onion market** (Map p131) gives way to a variety of small places selling *sheeshas*, braziers and pear-shaped cooking pots for *fuul* (fava beans). Soon the stock expands to crescent-moon minaret tops, coffee ewers and other copper products, hence its more popular name, Sharia an-Nahaseen (Street of the Coppersmiths). On the right, about 200m south, is the **Mosque of Suleiman Silahdar** (Map p131), built comparatively late, in 1839, during the reign of Mohammed Ali. It's distinguished by its thin, Turkish-inspired minaret and the graceful, curvaceous lines along its façade, with a rounded *sabil-kuttab* (water fountain and school) on the corner.

Darb al-Asfar & Beit el-Suhaymi

Just south of Suleiman's *sabil*, the narrow lane **Darb al-Asfar** (Map p131) runs east. Its new paving stones and elaborate *mashrabiyya* (ornate carved wooden) are a sample of the renovation goals for the whole area. Walking down here conjures the Middle Ages – if the Middle Ages were clean. The first few buildings you pass are part of **Beit el-Suhaymi** (Map p131; Darb al-Asfar; admission E£25; ☎ 9am-5pm), a family mansion and caravanserai (merchants' inn) built in the 17th and 18th centuries. From the street, it's nothing; after jogging through a narrow hall, you arrive at a peaceful courtyard surrounded by a warren of reception halls, storerooms and baths. It has been thoroughly restored, though barely furnished (fire extinguishers, a precaution required by the extensive new woodwork, are the most prominent item on display). As a result it

feels a bit ghostly – especially considering some 30 families were evicted to make way for the renovation.

The changes on Darb al-Asfar have been heavily debated. One definite benefit has been that the street has been reclaimed for residents. As on Sharia al-Muizz, many of the ground-floor spaces used to be small workshops and factories – noisy and sometimes unsafe for kids. Now those who still live here, at least, can enjoy the privacy of the lane as it was originally built.

Back on Sharia al-Muizz, just 50m south of the junction with Darb al-Asfar, is the petite **Mosque of Al-Aqmar** (Map p131). Built in 1125 by one of the last Fatimid caliphs, it is the oldest stone-façaded mosque in Egypt. Several features appear here that became part of the mosque builders' essential vocabulary, including *muqarnas* (stalactite) vaulting and the ribbing in the hooded arch.

Sabil-Kuttab of Abdel Rahman Katkhuda

Further south along the street, where the road splits, the **Sabil-Kuttab of Abdel Rahman Katkhuda** (Map p131) is one of the iconic structures of Islamic Cairo, depicted in scores of paintings and lithographs. Building this fountain-school combo was an atonement for sins, as it provided two things commended by the Prophet: water for the thirsty and enlightenment for the ignorant. This one was built in 1744 by an emir notorious for his debauchery. There's nice ceramic work inside, so it's worth trying to find the caretaker with the key. He often sits in **Qasr Beshtak** (Palace of Amir Beshtak; Map p131), down the little alley to the east, then through the archway at the bottom. The palace is a rare example of 14th-century domestic architecture, originally five floors high, now largely ruined but with splendid rooftop views.

Bein al-Qasreen

The part of Sharia al-Muizz immediately south of the *sabil-kuttab* is known as **Bein al-Qasreen** (Between the Two Palaces; Map p131), a reminder of the great palace complexes that flanked the street during the Fatimid era. The palaces fell into ruin and were replaced by the works of subsequent rulers. Today three great abutting Mamluk complexes line the west of the street, providing one of Cairo's most impressive assemblies of minarets, domes and striped stone façades.

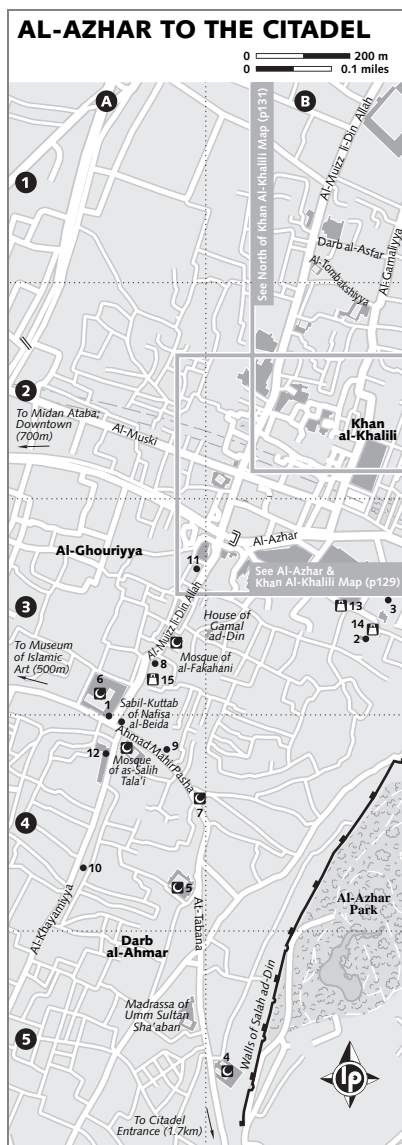
First comes the **Madrasa & Mausoleum of Barquq** (Map p131). Barquq seized power in 1382, when Egypt was reeling from plague and famine; his Sufi school was completed four years later. Enter through the bold black-and-white marble portal into a vaulted passageway. To the right, the inner court has a colourful ceiling supported by four porphyry Pharaonic columns. Barquq's daughter is buried in the splendid domed tomb chamber; the sultan himself preferred to rest in the Northern Cemetery (see p140), surrounded by Sufi sheikhs. Directly across the street from the madrasa, the **Egyptian Textile Museum** (Map p131) is slated to open in 2008.

Barquq's neighbour to the south is the **Madrasa & Mausoleum of An-Nasir Mohammed** (Map p131), built in 1304 by a Mamluk sultan both despotic and exceedingly accomplished. The Gothic doorway was plundered from a church in Acre (now Akko, Israel) when An-Nasir and his army ended Crusader domination there in 1290 – note how the word 'Allah' has been inscribed at the point of the arch. The lacy pattern on the carved stucco minaret, a North African style, reveals more foreign influence. Buried in the mausoleum (on the right as you enter but usually locked) is An-Nasir's mother and favourite son; An-Nasir Mohammed is interred next door in the mausoleum of his father, Qalaun.

Built in just 13 months, the 1279 **Madrasa & Mausoleum of Qalaun** (Map p131) is both the earliest and the most splendid of the three buildings. It was still closed for restoration at the time of writing – an early 2008 opening looked likely, however. The mausoleum, on the right, is a particularly intricate assemblage of inlaid stone and stucco, patterned with stars and floral motifs and lit by stained-glass windows. The complex also includes a *maristan* (hospital), which Qalaun ordered built after he visited one in Damascus, where he was cured of colic. The Arab traveller and historian Ibn Battuta, who visited Cairo in 1325, was impressed that Qalaun's hospital contained 'an innumerable quantity of appliances and medicaments'. He also described how the mausoleum was flanked by Quran reciters day and night chanting requiems for the dead within.

Bein al-Qasreen to the City Centre

Soon a last cluster of copper workshops gives way to gold jewellers, signifying re-



entry into the precincts of Khan al-Khalili. At the junction with Sharia al-Muski, beside two mosques, a left turn leads back to Midan Hussein, while heading right will eventually take you to Midan Ataba (1.2km); straight ahead is Sharia al-Azhar, the easiest place to find a taxi.

SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

Bab Zuweila.....	1	A4
Beit al-Harrawi.....	2	B3
Beit Zeinab al-Khatoun.....	3	B3
Blue Mosque.....	4	B5
Mosque of Al-Maridani.....	5	A4
Mosque of Al-Mu'ayyad.....	6	A3
Mosque of Qijmas al-Ishaqi.....	7	A4
Sabil of Muhammed Ali Pasha.....	8	A3
Sharia Ahmed Mahir Pasha.....	9	A4
Studio Shosha.....	10	A4
Tarboosh (Fez) Maker.....	11	A3
Tentmakers Market.....	12	A4

SHOPPING

Adb El Zahr.....	13	B3
Al-Khatoun.....	14	B3
Said Delta Papyrus Center.....	15	A3

AL-AZHAR TO THE CITADEL

South of Sharia al-Azhar, Sharia al-Muizz li-Din Allah continues as a market street 400m down to the twin-minareted gate of **Bab Zuweila** (p134). From there two routes lead to the Mosque-Madrassa of Sultan Hassan: east along Sharia Ahmed Mahir Pasha, or south through Sharia al-Khayamiyya. Either way, it's a long (at least 40 minutes), dusty, interesting walk to the main entrance of the Citadel.

Ottoman Houses

Leaving Al-Azhar Mosque, turn left and then left again into an alley between the southern wall of the mosque and a row of shops housed in the vaults of a 15th-century merchants' building. At the top of this road lies **Beit Zeinab al-Khatoun** (House of Zeinab Khatoun; Map p133; ☎ 2735 7001; Sharia Mohammed Abduh; admission ££10; 🕒 9am-6pm), a small but interesting Ottoman-era house with a rooftop affording superb views of the surrounding minaret-studded skyline. Across a peaceful little plaza, **Beit al-Harrawi** (Map p133; ☎ 2510 4174; admission ££10; 🕒 9am-6pm) is another fine 18th-century mansion, but too sparse inside to warrant the admission charge. It is sometimes used as a concert venue and houses the Arabic Oud House; you may hear rehearsals. Between the two houses is Al-Khatoun (p176), one of the city's better shops for stylish handicrafts and homewares.

Al-Ghuri Complex

On the south side of Sharia al-Azhar, opposite the khan, the grand **Mosque-Madrassa of Al-Ghuri** (Map p129), with its red-chequered minaret, and the elegant **Mausoleum of Al-Ghuri** (Map p129) together form an exquisite monument

to the end of the Mamluk era. Qansuh al-Ghuri, the penultimate Mamluk sultan, ruled for 16 years. At the age of 78, he rode to Syria at the head of his army to battle the Ottoman Turks. The head of the defeated Al-Ghuri was sent to Constantinople; his body was never recovered. His mausoleum (dating from 1505) contains the body of Tumanbey, his short-lived successor, hanged by the Turks at Bab Zuweila. The mausoleum, which has been under restoration for a number of years, may reopen as a cultural centre. Across the street at the mosque, don't be put off by the scaffolding: the interior, small but with soaring ceilings, is beautifully decorated; it's also possible to climb the minaret (for baksheesh; ignore claims of 'tickets'). Also part of the complex, the **Wikala of Al-Ghuri** (Map p129; ☎ 2511 0472; admission E£10; 🕒 9am-8pm Sat-Thu), 100m east, is another of the doomed sultan's legacies. Similar to the Wikala al-Bazara (see p130) but more sympathetically restored, the upper rooms are artists' ateliers while the former stables are craft shops. The courtyard serves as a theatre for Sufi dance performances (see p174).

Carpet & Clothes Market

The street between the mosque and the mausoleum, as well as the alleys just west and south of the mosque-madrassa, were historically the city's silk market, and the small passageways are still filled with **carpet sellers** (Map p133). Heading south into the district called Al-Ghuriyya, Sharia al-Muizz becomes a busy market for household goods and cheap clothing. On the right, less than 50m south of the mosque, Cairo's last **tarboosh maker** (Map p133) shapes the red felt hats on heavy brass presses. Once worn by every *effendi* (gentleman), the tarboosh is now mainly bought by hotels and tourist restaurants. They sell for between E£15 and E£60. Further down on the left is the delicate Ottoman-style **Sabil of Muhammed Ali Pasha** (Map p133). The 1820 fountain was the first in Cairo to have gilded window grilles and calligraphic panels in Ottoman Turkish. Although it has been meticulously restored, it was closed to the public at last pass; check if it's open, as there is also access to a cistern below. Across the street, the red-and-white-striped **Mosque of Al-Mu'ayyad** (Map p133), built on the site where its patron Mamluk sultan had earlier been imprisoned, displays a particularly grand entrance portal,

dripping with stalactite vaulting. The interior is equally lavish.

Bab Zuweila

Built at the same time as the northern gates (10th century), beautiful **Bab Zuweila** (Map p133; adult/student E£10/5; 🕒 8.30am-5pm) is the only remaining southern gate of medieval Al-Qahira. Visitors may climb the ramparts, where some intriguing exhibits about the gate's history are in place. The two minarets atop the gate, also open to visitors, offer one of the best available views of the area. In Mamluk times, the space in front of the gate was the site of executions, a popular form of street theatre, with some victims being sawn in half or crucified. The spirit of a healing saint was (and still is) said to reside behind one towering wooden door, which supplicants have studded with nails and teeth as offerings over the centuries.

From here, you can detour to the Museum of Islamic Art or continue to the Citadel by two possible routes.

Museum of Islamic Art

West of Bab Zuweila 500m, the **Museum of Islamic Art** (Map pp110-11; ☎ 2390 1520; Sharia Bur Said) holds one of the world's finest collections of Islamic applied art: a trove of manuscripts, woodwork, textiles and astronomy instruments. Unfortunately it has been shut for restoration for several years, with no end in sight. Should it reopen, consider it nearly as essential viewing as the Egyptian Museum. Coming from Midan Ataba, the museum is 700m southeast, straight down Sharia al-Qala'a. Midan Tahrir is 1.5km west along Sharia Sami al-Barudi (passing by the Mohammed Naguib metro station). Pay E£4 for taxi to or from Downtown.

Sharia al-Khayamiyya

The 'Street of the Tentmakers', Sharia al-Khayamiyya, takes its name from the artisans who produce the bright fabrics used for the ceremonial tents at funerals, wakes, weddings and feasts. They also make appliqué wall hangings and bedspreads, and print original patterns for tablecloths. The highest concentration of artisans is directly after Bab Zuweila, in the covered **tentmakers market** (Map p133). About 800m south, Sharia al-Khayamiyya intersects Sharia Mohammed Ali; a left turn here will take you directly to the Mosque-Madrassa of Sultan Hassan and

to the Citadel, but the detour along Darb al-Ahmar passes more monuments.

Darb al-Ahmar

This district grew up during the 14th and 15th centuries and is named for its main thoroughfare, **Darb al-Ahmar** (Sharia Ahmad Mahir Pasha; Map p133), or 'Red Road'. In the district's heyday Cairo had a population of about 250,000, most of whom lived outside the city walls in this tightly packed residential district of twisting streets and dark cul-de-sacs. As the area inside the walls of Al-Qahira was built-up, patrons of new mosques, palaces and religious institutions were forced to build outside the gates. Most of the structures around here date from the late Mamluk era. One of the best examples from this period is the 1481 **Mosque of Qijmas al-Ishaqi** (Map p133). Don't be deceived by the plain exterior: inside are beautiful stained-glass windows, inlaid marble floors and stucco walls.

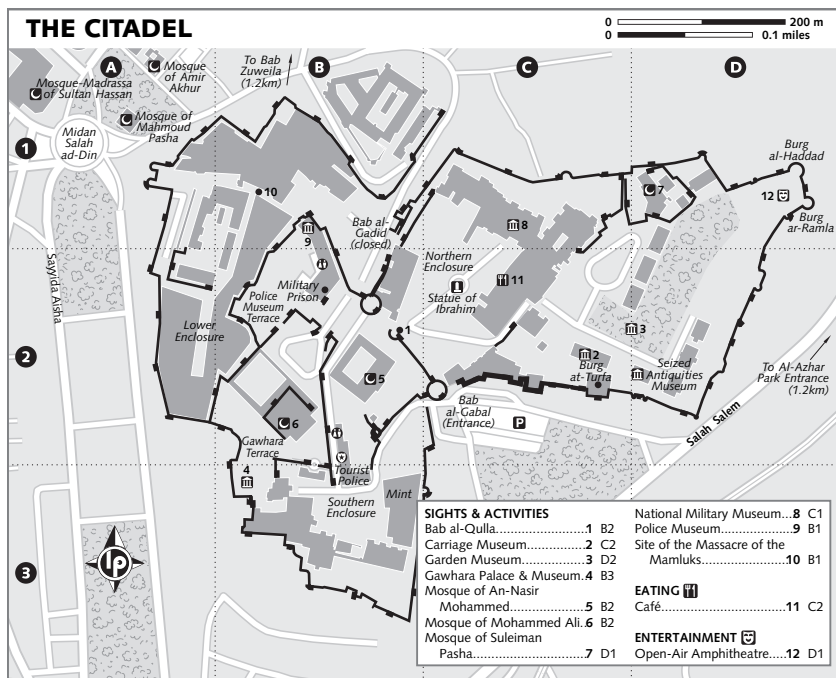
About 150m further on the right, the 1339 **Mosque of Al-Maridani** (Map p133) incorporates architectural elements from several periods: eight granite columns were taken from a

Pharaonic monument; the arches contain Roman, Christian and Islamic designs; and the Ottomans added a fountain and wooden housing. Trees in the courtyard, attractive *mashrabiyya* and a lack of visitors make this a peaceful place to stop.

The **Blue Mosque** (Mosque of Aqsunqur; Map p133), built in 1347, gets its popular name from the combination of blue-grey marble on the exterior and the flowery Ottoman tiling, not applied until 1652, inside. The minaret affords an excellent view of the Citadel, while over to the east, just behind the mosque, you can see the remains of Saladin's city walls, being excavated as part of the Al-Azhar Park project.

THE CITADEL

Sprawling over a limestone spur on the eastern edge of the city, the **Citadel** (Al-Qala'a; Map p135; ☎ 2512 1735; Sharia Salah Salem; adult/student E£40/20; 🕒 8am-5pm Oct-May, 8am-6pm Jun-Sep, mosques closed during Fri prayers) was home to Egypt's rulers for 700 years. Their legacy is a collection of three very different mosques, several palaces (housing some underwhelming museums; admission



fee included) and a couple of terraces with views over the city. Though this is one of the most popular tourist attractions in Cairo, it is relatively unimpressive and decidedly overpriced, not to mention a slog to get to (see right).

Saladin began building the Citadel in 1176 to fortify the city against the Crusaders, who were then rampaging through Palestine. Following their overthrow of Saladin's Ayyubid dynasty, the Mamluks enlarged the complex, adding sumptuous palaces and harems. Under the Ottomans (1517–1798) the fortress expanded westwards and a new main gate, the Bab al-Azab, was added, while the Mamluk palaces deteriorated. Even so, when Napoleon's French expedition took control in 1798, the emperor's savants regarded these buildings as some of the finest Islamic monuments in Cairo. This didn't stop Mohammed Ali – who rose to power when the French left – from demolishing them. The only Mamluk structure left standing was a single mosque, used as a stable. Mohammed Ali completely remodelled the rest of the Citadel and crowned it with the Turkish-style mosque that currently dominates Cairo's eastern skyline.

After Mohammed Ali's grandson Ismail moved his residence to the Abdeen Palace (p117), the Citadel became a military garrison. The British army was barracked here during WWII, and Egyptian soldiers still have a small foothold, although most of the Citadel has been given over to tourists.

Mosque of Mohammed Ali

The fortress is dominated by the **Mosque of Mohammed Ali** (Map p135). Modelled along classic Turkish lines, with domes upon domes upon domes, it took 18 years to build (1830–48), and its interior is all twinkling chandeliers and luridly striped stone. Perhaps the most evocative description of it is in Olivia Manning's *The Levant Trilogy*: 'Above them Mohammed Ali's alabaster mosque, uniquely white in this sand-coloured city, sat with minarets pricked, like a fat, white, watchful cat'. Other writers have called it unimaginative and graceless and compared it to a toad. Beyond criticism, the mosque's patron lies in the marble tomb on the right as you enter. Note the glitzy clock in the central courtyard, a gift from King Louis-Philippe of France in thanks for the Pharaonic obelisk that adorns the Place

de la Concorde in Paris. It was damaged on delivery and has yet to be repaired.

Dwarfed by Mohammed Ali's mosque, the 1318 **Mosque of An-Nasir Mohammed** (Map p135) is the Citadel's sole surviving Mamluk structure. The interior is a little sparse because the Ottoman sultan Selim I had it stripped of its marble, but the old wood ceiling and *muqarnas* shows up nicely, and the twisted finials of the minarets are interesting for their covering of glazed tiles, something rarely seen in Egypt.

Facing the entrance of the Mosque of An-Nasir Mohammed, a mock-Gothic gateway leads to a grand terrace, with superb views all the way to the Pyramids at Giza. Immediately below, in the Citadel's Lower Enclosure (closed to the public), the steep-sided roadway leading to Bab al-Azab was the site of the infamous massacre of the Mamluks (see p37). The flyblown **Police Museum** (Map p135), located at the northern end of the terrace, includes displays on famous political assassinations, complete in some cases with the murder weapon.

South of Mohammed Ali's mosque is another terrace with good views. Beyond, the dull **Gawhara Palace & Museum** (Map p135) is a lame attempt to evoke 19th-century court life, and it's often closed anyway.

Northern Enclosure

Entrance to the Northern Enclosure is via the 16th-century Bab al-Qulla. Past an overpriced café lies Mohammed Ali's one-time Harem Palace, now the lavish **National Military Museum** (Map p135) and perhaps the best-tended exhibition in the country. Endless plush-carpeted halls are lined with dioramas depicting great moments in warfare, from Pharaonic times to the 20th-century conflicts with Israel – kitschy fun to start, then eventually a bit depressing.

East of the café a narrow road leads to an area with a few smaller museums, along the thrilling lines of the **Carriage Museum** (Map p135). Devotees of Islamic architecture might appreciate the 1528 **Mosque of Suleiman Pasha** (Map p135), a far more tasteful example of the Ottoman-style domed mosque.

Getting To/From the Citadel

To walk from Midan Ataba to the Citadel's entrance gate, it's almost 4km through the furniture and musical-instruments districts. From Midan Ataba go straight down

Sharia al-Qala'a and its continuation, Sharia Mohammed Ali, to Midan Salah ad-Din, then walk to Sharia Salah Salem via Sharia Sayyida Aisha. A taxi will cost E£12. Minibus 150 (E£1.10) runs from Midan Ataba. This and other services drop you only at Midan Salah ad-Din, still a 15-minute walk from the entrance; taking a taxi (E£3) from here is easier on the legs, but only marginally quicker due to the complicated traffic flow on the highway. A microbus to Sayyida Aisha gets you closest, to the intersection with Salah Salem.

THE CITADEL TO IBN TULUN

The route takes in two of Islamic Cairo's largest mosques, plus a few tiny surprises.

Mosque-Madrassa of Sultan Hassan

Massive yet elegant, the great structure of the **Mosque-Madrassa of Sultan Hassan** (Map p137; Midan Salah ad-Din; admission E£20; ☎ 8am-5pm Oct-May, 8am-6pm Jun-Sep) is regarded as the finest piece of early-Mamluk architecture in Cairo. It was built between 1356 and 1363 by the troubled Sultan Hassan, a grandson of Sultan Qalaun; he took the throne at the age of 13, was deposed and reinstated no less than three times, then assassinated shortly before the mosque was completed. Tragedy also shadowed the construction when one of the minarets collapsed, killing some 300 onlookers. Beyond the striking, recessed entrance, a dark passage leads into a square courtyard whose soaring walls are punctured by four *iwans* (vaulted halls), one dedicated to teaching each of the

four main schools of Sunni Islam. At the rear of the eastern *iwana*, an especially beautiful mihrab is flanked by stolen Crusader columns. To the right, a bronze door leads to the sultan's mausoleum.

Opposite the grand mosque, the **Mosque of Ar-Rifai** (Map p137; E£20) is constructed on a similarly grand scale. Begun in 1869 and not finished until 1912, it's an Islamic Revival confection. Members of modern Egypt's royal family, including Khedive Ismail and King Farouk, are buried inside, as is the last shah of Iran. Their tombs lie to the left of the entrance.

Museo Mevlevi & Amir Taz Palace

Walking west along busy Sharia as-Salbiyya eventually leads to the Mosque of Ibn Tulun. A short detour north on Sharia Suyufiyya brings you to two little-visited but rewarding buildings. The **Amir Taz Palace** (Map p137; ☎ 2514 2581; 17 Sharia Suyufiyya; admission free; ☎ 8am-4pm) is the restored home of one of Sultan al-Nasir Muhammad's closest advisers, who later controlled the throne through Sultan Hassan. Now used as a cultural centre, the home is not as extensive as Beit el-Suhaymi, but admission is free, and there are a couple of small exhibits, a beautiful wood ceiling in the loggia and even clean bathrooms. A little further down the street, behind a green door with an Italian Institute sign, the **Museo Mevlevi** (Map p137; Sharia Suyufiyya; admission free; ☎ 8am-4pm) centres on a meticulously restored Ottoman-era theatre for whirling dervishes. Hidden behind



stone façades, the beautiful wood structure feels like a little jewel box. Downstairs, see the remains of the madrasa that forms the building's foundation; the thorough notes are a rare model of thoughtful excavation.

Mosque of Ibn Tulun

Another 250m west on Sharia as-Salbiyya, the **Mosque of Ibn Tulun** (Map p137; ☎ 8am-6pm) is easily identified by its high walls topped with neat crenellations that resemble a string of paper dolls. Built between AD 876 and 879 by Ibn Tulun, who was sent to rule the outpost of Al-Fustat in the 9th century by the Abbasid caliph of Baghdad, it is the city's oldest intact, functioning Islamic monument. It's also one of its most beautiful, despite a rather ham-fisted restoration using cement on the mud-brick-and-timber structure. Ibn Tulun drew inspiration from his homeland, particularly the ancient Mosque of Samarra (Iraq), on which the spiral minaret is modelled. He also added some innovations of his own: according to architectural historians, this is the first structure to use the pointed arch, a good 200 years before the European Gothic arch. The mosque covers 2.5 hectares, large enough for the whole community of Al-Fustat to assemble for Friday prayers.

The mosque's geometric simplicity is best appreciated from the top of the minaret, which also has magnificent views of the Citadel. Reach the tower from the outer, moatlike courtyard, originally created to keep the secular city at a distance, but at one time filled with shops and stalls.

Gayer-Anderson Museum

Through a gateway to the south of the main entrance of the mosque, this quirky **museum** (Beit al-Kritliyya, the House of the Cretan Woman; Map p137; ☎ 2364 7822; Sharia ibn Tulun; adult/student ££30/15, video ££20; ☎ 9am-5pm) gets its current name from John Gayer-Anderson, the British major and army doctor who restored the two adjoining 16th-century houses between 1935 and 1942, filling them with antiquities, artwork and Oriental knick-knacks acquired on his travels in the region. On his death in 1945, Gayer-Anderson bequeathed the lot to Egypt. The puzzle of rooms is decorated in a variety of styles: the Persian Room has exquisite tiling, the Damascus Room has lacquer and gold, and the Queen Anne Room displays ornate furniture and a silver tea set. The enchant-

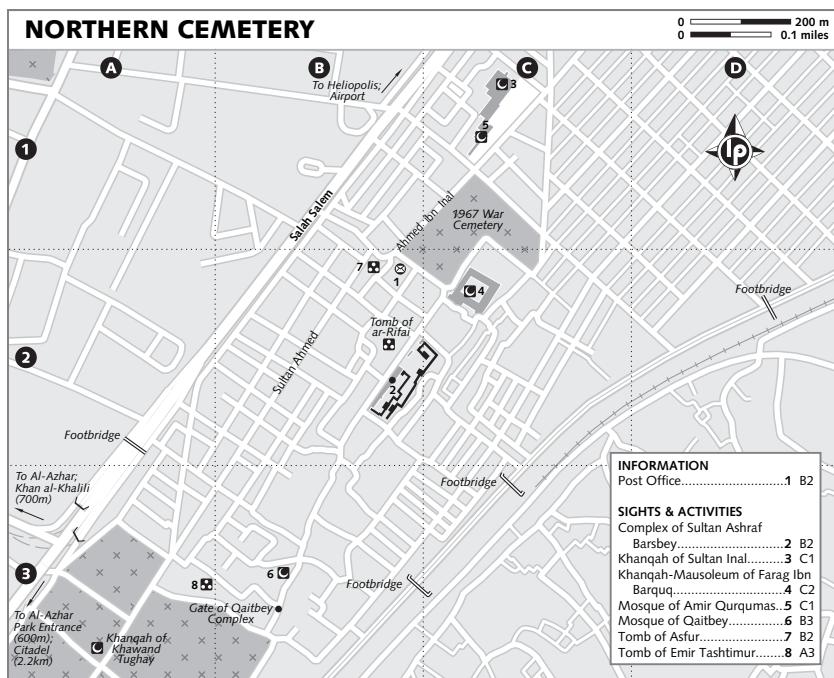
ing *mashrabiyya* gallery looks down onto a magnificent *qa'a* (reception hall) which has a marble fountain, decorated ceiling beams and carpet-covered alcoves. The rooftop terrace has been lovingly restored, with more complex *mashrabiyya*. You may find the interior familiar – the museum was used as a location in the James Bond film *The Spy Who Loved Me*. Across the street, Khan Misr Touloun (see p176) is a good handicrafts emporium.

From here, it's rewarding to keep walking another 750m west to the popular quarter of Sayyida Zeinab, where there's a metro station.

NORTHERN CEMETERY

The Northern Cemetery (Al-Qarafa; Map p139) is the more interesting half of a vast necropolis known popularly as the City of the Dead. The titillating name refers to the fact that the cemeteries are not only resting places for Cairo's dead, but for the living too. Visitors expecting morbid squalor may be disappointed; the area, complete with power lines, a post office and multistorey buildings, is more 'town' than 'shanty'. Some estimates put the number of living Cairenes here at 50,000; others, at 10 times this number. As Max Rodenbeck notes in *Cairo: The City Victorious*, some of the tomb dwellers, especially the paid guardians and their families, have lived here for generations. Others have moved in more recently, trying to make their way back to the centre from bleak low-income suburbs on. On Fridays and public holidays visitors flock here to picnic and pay their respects to the dead – this is undoubtedly the best time to come. At all times, remember that you are in a more private, residential space, which is a very low-income one; dress modestly and don't flaunt costly jewellery or gadgets.

The cemetery first appealed to Mamluk sultans and emirs because it afforded the sort of building space that was unavailable inside the densely packed city. The vast mausoleums they built were more than just tombs; they were also meant as places for entertaining – a continuation of the Pharaonic tradition of people picnicking among the graves. Even the humblest family tombs included a room for overnight visitors. The dead hoped they would be remembered; the city's homeless thanked them for free accommodation. This coexistence of the living and the dead was happening



as far back as the 14th century; in some tomb-houses, cenotaphs serve as tables and washing is strung between headstones.

The easiest way to the Northern Cemetery is heading east from Midan al-Hussein along Sharia al-Azhar. As you breast the top of the hill, bear right, walk below the overpass and go straight along the road between the tombs. Follow this road to the left, then right. You'll pass by the crumbling, domed **Tomb of Emir Tash Timur** (Map p139) on your left. About 150m further on, a narrow lane goes left, passing under a stone archway. This is the gate to the former compound of Qaitbey, whose splendid mosque is immediately ahead.

Mosque of Qaitbey

Sultan Qaitbey, a prolific builder, was the last Mamluk leader with any real power in Egypt. He ruled for 28 years and, though he was as ruthless as any Mamluk sultan, he was also something of an aesthete. His **mosque** (Map p139), completed in 1474 and featured on the E£1 note, is widely agreed to mark the pinnacle of Islamic building in Cairo. Behind the boldly striped façade, the interior has four

iwans around a central court lit by large, lattice-screened windows. Panelled in cool marble, it's one of the most pleasant places in Cairo to sit for a while and relax. The adjacent tomb chamber contains the cenotaphs of Qaitbey and his two sisters. The true glory, however, is above, where the exterior of the dome is carved with interlaced star and floral designs; its intricacy and delicacy were never surpassed in Cairo or anywhere else in the Islamic world – climb the minaret for the best view.

Other Monuments

From Qaitbey cross the square and continue north. After about 350m the street widens and on the right a stone wall encloses a large area of rubble-strewn ground that was formerly the **Complex of Sultan Ashraf Barsbey** (Map p139). Though not as sophisticated as the one topping the Mosque of Qaitbey, the dome here is carved with a beautiful star pattern. Inside is some fine marble flooring and a beautiful minbar (pulpit) inlaid with ivory. The guard will let you in for baksheesh (ask the ever-present children if he's not around).

Two hundred metres further north is the **Khanqah-Mausoleum of Farag Ibn Barquq** (Map p139), built by a son of Sultan Barquq, whose great madrasa and mausoleum stand on Bein al-Qasreen (p132). Completed in 1411 the *khanqah* is a fortresslike building with high, sheer façades and twin minarets and domes. In the courtyard, monastic cells lead off the arcades. Two tomb chambers – one for women, one for men – are each topped with domes; their ceilings are painted in mesmerising red-and-black geometric patterns.

Northern Cemetery to Al-Hussein

Two large adjacent complexes northwest – the 1507 **Mosque of Amir Qurqumas** (Map p139) and the 1456 **Khanqah of Sultan Inal** (Map p139) – are beautiful, thanks to restoration work, but they are not always open.

Rather than just retracing your steps from Ibn Barquq, walk straight ahead from the entrance, passing the post office on your left, until you come to the small, elongated **Tomb of Asfur** (Map p139); turn left immediately after. A straight walk 850m down Sharia Sultan Ahmed will bring you back to the road leading to the underpass – or you can continue another kilometre down Sharia Salah Salem to Al-Azhar Park's main entrance.

AL-AZHAR PARK

Islamic Cairo's eastern horizon changed substantially when **Al-Azhar Park** (Map pp110-11; ☎ 2510 7378; www.alazharpark.com; E£10; ☎ 9am-midnight) opened in 2005. With funds from the Aga Khan Trust for Culture, what had been a mountain of centuries' worth of collected garbage was transformed into a beautifully landscaped swath of green, the city's first (and only) park of significant size. It's hard to convey just how dramatically different the park is from any other public space in Cairo: a profusion of gardens, emerald grass, even a lake (part of a larger public water-supply system) cover the grounds, while ambient Arabic music drifts softly from speakers and fountains bubble in front of sleek modern Islamic architecture. In addition to a couple of small cafés and an open-air theatre (p173), there's an excellent restaurant here (p165) capitalising on the park's awesome views across the medieval city and beyond – a sunset visit is essential.

Depending on your outlook, the park is a gorgeous respite or a weirdly isolated elite

playground. The atmosphere may change, but as long as the only entrance is on Sharia Salah Salem, which requires a taxi to reach (pay E£12 from Tahrir), it's an expensive trek for most people. The entrances on the downhill side, in the Darb al-Ahmar district, were shut at last visit, allegedly for renovation work on the Ayyubid gates and walls, but also handily keeping the rabble out.

Zamalek & Gezira

Uninhabited until the mid-19th century, Gezira (Arabic for 'island') was a narrow strip of alluvial land rising up out of the Nile. After he built modern-day Downtown, Khedive Ismail dedicated his energy to a great palace on the island, with the rest of the land as a royal garden. During the development boom of the early 20th century, the palace grounds were sold off, while the palace was made into a hotel (now the core of the Cairo Marriott).

The northern third of the island is the stylish residential district of Zamalek; the rest, still called Gezira, is largely occupied by sports clubs and parks.

ZAMALEK

A leafy neighbourhood of old embassy mansions and 1920s apartment blocks, Zamalek (Map pp144-5) has few tourist sites, but it's a pleasant place to wander around and an even better place to eat, drink and shop.

The main street, Sharia 26th of July, cuts across the island, and its junction with Sharia Hassan Sabry (heading south) and Sharia Brazil (to the north) is the focal point of the area. Just a couple of doors east of Hassan Sabry on Sharia 26th of July, Simonds (see p168) is one of the city's oldest European-style cafés.

Further east along Sharia 26th of July, towards the bridge to Bulaq, are the excellent bookshop Diwan (p109) and – in the ground floor of a lavish apartment complex built by Swiss hotelier Charles Baehler in 1927 – café Cilantro (p168).

Immediately south of Sharia 26th of July, and overlooking the Nile, is the Cairo Marriott (p161). This converted palace has a good bakery (p168) and a lush, shady garden where you can enjoy your coffee or beer. Behind the hotel, the **Museum of Islamic Ceramics** (Map pp144-5; ☎ 2737 3298; 1 Sharia Sheikh al-Marsafy, Zamalek; adult/student E£25/15; ☎ 10am-1.30pm & 5.30-9pm Sat-Thu) is a beautiful small museum. It's housed in a gorgeous 1924 Islamic Revival

THE MIRACLE ON THE MOUNTAIN

Looking around some parts of Cairo, you'd think garbage is never collected – but it certainly is, by tens of thousands of people known as *zabbaleen*. The *zabbaleen* are Coptic Christians, and their district at the base of the Muqattam Hills contains not only all the city's refuse, sorted into recyclable bits, but also one of the most surprising churches in the country.

In fact, the **Church of St Simeon the Tanner** (Kineesat Samaan al-Kharraz; Map pp110-11; ☎ 2512 3666; Manshiyet Nasr), on a ridge above 'Garbage City', is just a part of a whole complex carved into the cliffs. It seats 5000 (that the buses carrying worshippers fit through the lanes below is a miracle in itself) and is ringed with biblical scenes carved into the rock. Look over the ridge and you can see the whole sprawling city; look down, and you see real, live pigs rooting around the *zabbaleen* backyards, recycling the edible trash.

But this church is not old (nor are any of the others here, though some are tucked in spooky hermits' caves). Completed in 1994, St Simeon is a belated honour for a 10th-century ascetic who prayed to make Muqattam move at the behest of Fatimid caliph Al-Muizz li-Din Allah (per Matthew 17:20: 'If ye have faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye shall say unto this mountain, Remove hence to yonder place; and it shall remove...'). Today the church is a major site of Coptic pilgrimage.

To make your own trek to this modern marvel, tell your cab driver 'Manshiyet Nasr' or 'Madaenat az-Zabbaleen'; after turning off the highway toward Muqattam, make the first left, going slightly uphill. Once you're in the *zabbaleen* district (which is surprisingly tidy, considering), anyone you pass will wave you in the right direction – they all know where you're headed. Pay £60 for a round-trip taxi from Downtown, with an hour's waiting time. If you'd like to go with a guide, consider **Ibrahim Morgan** (☎ 012 347 6343; morgan_@yahoo.com), recommended by Lonely Planet readers.

villa, where the intricately carved walls (and vintage bathroom!) are as fascinating as the colourful plates, tiles and even 11th-century hand grenades on display. The garden and back of the building are given over to the **Gezira Art Center** (Map pp144-5), with several galleries hosting rotating contemporary exhibitions.

GEZIRA

Gezira (Map p148) is best approached across Qasr el-Nil Bridge from Midan Tahrir, a popular strolling spot for couples at sunset. This brings you to **Midan Saad Zaghloul**, presided over by the statue of tarbooshed Mr Zaghloul himself, a 1930s nationalist leader. North of the *midan* on the banks of the Nile two lush **formal gardens** (Map p148; admission £10) have outdoor cafés where local families and young couples partake of tea and *sheesha*. Below the gardens, the **pedestrian cornice** (admission £2) is lively in the evenings.

Off the west side of the *midan*, the well-groomed **Gezira Exhibition Grounds** (Map p148) are dominated by the **Cairo Opera House** (Map p148; ☎ 2739 8144). Built in 1988 with money from Japan, the building is a modern take on traditional Islamic design. See p173 for details.

Across from the Cairo Opera House, the **Museum of Modern Egyptian Art** (Map p148; ☎ 2736 6667; www.modernartmuseum.gov.eg; £10; ☎ 10am-2pm & 5.30-10pm Tue-Sun) houses a vast – perhaps too vast – collection of 20th- and 21st-century Egyptian art. Even after a 2005 renovation, it still can be difficult to appreciate the work given the cramped rooms, collected dust and lack of signage. The museum's prize items are all on the ground floor: Mahmoud Mukhtar's Deco-elegant bronze statue *Bride of the Nile* is here, along with Mahmoud Said's *Al Madina* (The City, 1937). Though Said has a slew of kitschy imitators, he was one of the first artists to depict folk life in vivid colour, and his commitment inspired Naguib Mahfouz to pursue his own career in writing. Throughout the museum, it is interesting to observe how Western trends such as Pop Art have manifested themselves in Egypt – almost always with a much sharper social or political message. Upstairs is a small café and a gift shop selling a few postcards and posters.

Elsewhere in the exhibition grounds, the **Hanager Arts Centre** (Map p148; ☎ 2735 6861; ☎ 10am-10pm Tue-Sun) and the **Palace of Arts** (Map p148; ☎ 2737 0603, 736 7627; www.fineart.gov.eg; ☎ 10am-1.30pm

MUSEUMS: THE BEST OF THE REST

The mammoth Egyptian Museum gets all the fanfare, but the city also holds a number of lesser-known gems – ones that require half an hour or two, rather than a lifetime. And you'll always have the places to yourself. The coolest:

Agricultural Museum (below) So frozen in time, this whole museum should be in a museum.

Mahmoud Mukhtar Museum (below) Elegant sculpture, elegant building – and there's even a tomb in the basement!

Mr & Mrs Mahmoud Khalil Museum (opposite) Never thought you'd see a Picasso in Cairo, did you?

Museum of Islamic Ceramics (p140) Simply beautiful, with attractive, uncrowded displays and a gorgeous house as the setting.

& 5.30-10pm Sat-Thu) host rotating exhibits and performances.

Leave the complex from the rear entrance near the Galaa Bridge and you'll see a modest gate across the road, which leads to the **Mahmoud Mukhtar Museum** (Map p148; ☎ 2735 2519; ££5; ☎ 10am-1.30pm & 5-10pm Tue-Sun). Mukhtar (1891–1934) was the sculptor laureate of independent Egypt, responsible for Saad Zaghloul on the nearby *midan* and the *Egypt Reawakening* monument outside the Giza Zoo. His collected work ranges from tiny caricatures (look for *Ibn al-Balad*, a spunky city kid) to life-sized portraits that are studies in flowing line. Mukhtar's tomb sits in the basement. Egyptian architect Ramses Wissa Wassef (1911–74) designed the elegant building – originally open, to capture natural light, but this was changed presumably to keep the cleaning budget down.

North of the Cairo Opera House and Ahly Stadium, the **Cairo Tower** (Burg Misr; Map p148; ☎ 2735 7187; Sharia el-Borg; admission ££60, children under 6 free, video ££20; ☎ 8am-midnight) is the city's most famous landmark after the Pyramids. Resembling a 185m-high wickerwork tube, the tower was built in 1961 as a thumb to the nose at the Americans, who had given Nasser the money used for its construction to buy US arms. The 360-degree views from the top are clearest in the late morning, after the haze burns off, or late afternoon. An occasionally revolving restaurant on top serves dodgy-looking food (££100 lunch or dinner, including entrance), or you can get a soft drink at the cafeteria (££80, including entrance). You might encounter quite a queue at dusk.

Mohandiseen, Agouza & Doqqi

A map of Cairo in Baedeker's 1929 guide to Egypt shows nothing on the Nile's west bank other than a hospital and the road to the

Pyramids. The hospital is still there, set back from the corniche in Agouza, but it's now hemmed in on all sides by midrise buildings that shot up during the 1960s and 1970s when Mohandiseen, Agouza and Doqqi were created to house Egypt's emerging professional classes. The three districts remain middle-class bastions, home to families who made good during the years of Sadat's open-door policy – though some sections of Mohandiseen are Cairo's ritziest. Unless you happen to find concrete and traffic stimulating, the main attractions here are some good restaurants (p166), bars and upscale shopping on Sharia Suleiman Abaza and Sharia Libnan.

What little history there is floats on the river in the form of the **houseboats** moored off Sharia el-Nil just north of Zamalek Bridge in Agouza (Map pp144–5). Known as *dahabiyas*, these floating two-storey structures once lined the Nile all the way from Giza to Imbaba. During the 1930s some boats were casinos, music halls and bordellos. Many of the surviving residences still have a bohemian air, as chronicled in Naguib Mahfouz' novel *Adrift on the Nile*.

AGRICULTURAL MUSEUM

It may sound dull, but the **Agricultural Museum** (Map p148; ☎ 3761 6785; Sharia Wizarat al-Ziraa, Doqqi; admission 10pt, camera 20pt; ☎ 9am-2pm Tue-Sun) is far from it. Spread over several buildings, the displays tell you all you've ever wanted to know about agriculture in Egypt, from Pharaonic times onwards, and so much more: dioramas depict traditional weddings, glass cases are packed with wax cucurbits, and in one mothball-scented wing, every bird in Egypt has been stuffed and pinned to a board. Dusty and a bit spooky, it's a true hall of wonders. The ridiculously cheap admission is offset by the baksheesh you're expected to dispense to the

'guides' – they hold the keys to the best rooms, and they know it. It's about 1km from the Doqqi metro station.

MR & MRS MAHMOUD KHALIL MUSEUM

A noted politician during the 1940s, Mohammed Mahmoud Khalil amassed one of the Middle East's finest collections of 19th- and 20th-century European work. The wonderful **Mr & Mrs Mahmoud Khalil Museum** (Map p148; ☎ 3338 9720; www.mkm.gov.eg; 1 Sharia Kafour, Doqqi; admission with ID card or passport only, adult/student ££25/12; ☎ 10am-5pm Tue-Sun, 10am-3pm holidays) includes sculptures by Rodin and paintings by the likes of Delacroix, Gauguin, Toulouse-Lautrec, Manet, Monet and Pissarro. There are also some Rubens, Sisleys and a Picasso. The paintings are housed in Khalil's former villa, later taken over by President Sadat. It's just a few minutes' walk south of the Cairo Sheraton.

Pyramids of Giza

Amid all the hype about the New Wonders of the World, the Pyramids of Giza just sat there – as they have for 4000 years, both outliving the other six ancient wonders and living up to all the hype that has been lavished on them over the millennia. Their extraordinary shape, impeccable geometry and sheer bulk are a moot question: 'How were we built, and why?'

Centuries of research have given us parts of the answer to this double-barrelled question. We know they were massive tombs constructed on the orders of the pharaohs by teams of workers tens-of-thousands strong. This is supported by the discovery of a pyramid-builders' settlement, complete with areas for large-scale food production and medical facilities. Ongoing excavations on the Giza Plateau are providing more evidence that the workers were not the slaves of Hollywood tradition, but a highly organised workforce of Egyptian farmers. During the annual flood season, when the Nile covered their fields, the same farmers could have been redeployed by the highly structured bureaucracy to work on the pharaoh's tomb. The Pyramids can almost be seen as an ancient job-creation scheme, with the flood waters also making it easier to transport building stone to the site.

But despite the evidence, some still won't accept that the ancient Egyptians were capable of such astonishing achievements. Pyramidologists – for the study of the struc-

tures has become a 'science' in its own right – point to the carving and placement of the stones, precise to the millimetre, and argue the numerological significance of the structures' dimensions as evidence that the Pyramids were variously constructed by angels, the devil or visitors from another planet. It's easy to laugh at such seemingly out-there ideas, but visit the Giza Plateau and you'll see why so many people believe such awesome structures could only have unearthly origins.

THE PYRAMIDS AS FUNERARY COMPLEX

It was neither an obsession with death, nor a fear of it, that led the ancient Egyptians to build such incredible mausoleums as the pyramids. Rather it was their belief in eternal life and their desire to be at one with the cosmos. The pharaoh was the son of the gods, but it was also his role to conduct the gods' powers to his people. Set between the earth and the sky, connecting the worlds mortal and divine, he was therefore honoured in life and worshipped in death. The pyramid was a fitting tomb for such an individual. A funerary temple attached to each pyramid allowed the pharaoh to be worshipped after his demise, with daily rounds of offerings to sustain his soul. A long covered causeway connected the funerary temple to a 'valley temple' built on the quayside, where the flood waters would reach each year (a superb model of the Abu Sir pyramids illustrates all this on the 1st floor of the Egyptian Museum). The complex also provided a constant visible reminder of the eternal power of the gods, as well as the absolute power of the pharaoh for whom it was built.

PRACTICALITIES

It can be a bit of a shock to visit the **Giza Plateau** (Map p150; adult/student ££50/25; ☎ 7.30am-4pm) and realise that the sandy mound that's home to the pyramids is actually plonked in the middle of the congested city suburb of Giza. There are two entrances: one via a continuation of Pyramids Rd (Sharia al-Haram) at the foot of the Great Pyramid of Khufu, and another below the Sphinx, in the village of Nazlet as-Samaan. Most independent visitors enter from Pyramids Rd, as this is where the bus and minibus from Downtown stop. Follow the road up from the roundabout towards the Pyramids and firmly ignore anyone who tries to distract you (see p146). Continue

MOHANDISEEN, AGOUZA & ZAMALEK





INFORMATION		Kalimat.....	37 B6	Deals.....	73 B5
Al-Ezaby Pharmacy.....	(see 84)	Karim Francis Art Gallery.....	(see 75)	Euro Deli.....	74 E2
American University in Cairo		Museum of Islamic Ceramics.....	38 F4	L'Aubergine.....	(see 60)
Bookshop.....	1 E2	National Circus.....	39 D4	La Bodega.....	75 F4
Arab Group for Exchange Forex.....	2 E2	Samia Allouba Dance & Fitness		Marriott Garden Café.....	76 F4
As-Salam International Hospital.....	3 A5	Centre.....	40 A5	Sangria.....	(see 80)
Australian Embassy.....	4 G3	Zamalek Art Gallery.....	41 F3	Simonds.....	77 F4
Banque Misr (ATM).....	5 E5	SLEEPING ☹		The Coffee Bean & Tea	
British Council & Library.....	6 D4	Cairo Marriott.....	42 F4	Leaf.....	78 E3
Citibank.....	7 F4	Golden Tulip Flamenco Hotel.....	43 E2	Tornado.....	79 C5
Danish Embassy.....	8 E4	Hotel Longchamps.....	44 E3	ENTERTAINMENT ☹	
Diwan.....	9 F4	Mayfair Hotel.....	45 F4	Absolute.....	80 G2
Egyptian Centre for International		Pension Zamalek.....	46 E4	Cairo Jazz Club.....	81 D3
Cultural Cooperation.....	10 E3	President Hotel.....	47 E2	El Sawy Culture Wheel.....	82 E3
German Embassy.....	11 E5	EATING ☹		Nile Maxim.....	83 G4
Great Cairo Library.....	12 F2	About El-Sid.....	48 F4	SHOPPING ☹	
HSBC Bank.....	13 E3	Al-Omda.....	49 C4	Arkadia Mall.....	84 G1
International Language		Alfa Market.....	50 E3	Attara Ahl al-Beit.....	85 E3
Institute.....	14 A2	Al-Tabei ad-Dumyati.....	51 B5	Dina Maghawry.....	(see 88)
Irish Embassy.....	15 E3	Baraka Takeaway.....	52 F3	Egypt Craft Center/Fair Trade	
Istituto Italiano di Cultura.....	16 F4	Cedars.....	53 A5	Egypt.....	86 F4
Kenyan Embassy.....	17 A5	Chili's.....	54 G6	Friction.....	87 F2
Lebanese Embassy.....	18 E3	Crave.....	55 E2	Home & Beyond.....	(see 100)
Libyan Embassy.....	19 F4	Dar El Amar.....	56 G6	Loft.....	88 F4
Netherlands Embassy.....	20 F4	Didos Al Dente.....	57 E2	Makan.....	89 E2
Netherlands-Flemish Institute.....	21 F4	Emara Hati al-Gish.....	58 C3	Mix & Match.....	90 F3
Newsstand.....	22 F4	Kushari.....	59 E3	Mix & Match.....	91 F4
.....(see 42)		L'Aubergine.....	60 F4	Mobaco.....	92 F3
Newsstand.....	23 F4	La Mezzaluna.....	61 F4	Mom & Me.....	93 E3
Post Office.....	24 F4	Maison Thomas.....	(see 69)	Mounaya.....	94 F2
Sigma Net.....	25 E2	Mandarine Koueider.....	62 E3(see 42)	
Spanish Embassy.....	26 F3	Metro Supermarket.....	(see 2)	Nomad.....	95 G5
Telephone Centrale.....	27 E3	Sabai Sabai.....	63 F3	Nostalgia.....	96 F4
Thomas Cook.....	(see 13)	Samakmak.....	64 B2	Noubi Nabil.....	97 F4
Thomas Cook.....	28 B3	Sekem.....	65 F3	Orange Square.....	98 E3
Travco.....	29 F4	Sequoia.....	66 F1	Salem.....	99 A4
Zamalek Bookshop.....	30 E3	The Bakery.....	67 F4	Sami Amin.....	100 E3
Zamalek Center.....	31 E3	DRINKING ☹☹		Tao Gallery.....	101 F2
SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES		Arabica Café.....	68 F2	Toy R Us.....	(see 84)
All Saints Anglican Cathedral.....	32 F4	Cilantro.....	69 F4	Wady Craft Shop.....	(see 32)
Aristocrat.....	33 E3	Cilantro.....	70 E3	Wikalat al-Balah.....	102 H5
Atlas Zamalek Hotel.....	34 B4	Coffee Roastery.....	71 E3	TRANSPORT	
Fun Planet.....	(see 84)	Deals.....	72 F4	Lufthansa.....	103 F4
Gabalaya Park & Aquarium.....	35 E4				
Gabalaya Park Entrance.....	36 E4				

along the tarmacked road, up to the temporary ticket office (an unofficial-looking hut) to your right.

There are extra entry charges for the Solar Barque Museum and the interiors of the Pyramids (two of the three are open to visitors, rotating every few years). Before visiting, you could check www.guardians.net/hawass, antiquities director Dr Zahi Hawass' website, which usually posts news about tomb and Pyramid openings.

Note that climbing the Pyramids, a must for European visitors in the 19th and 20th centuries, is dangerous and is now strictly forbidden.

Bathrooms are at the café at the base of the Sphinx, as well as in a very dodgy trailer on the plateau itself, adjacent to the ticket office

for the Great Pyramid (pay the 'attendant' 50pt max).

THE HASSLE

With battalions of buses, armies of touts and legions of visitors from every part of the globe – all to a soundtrack of gargling camels and cries of 'Buy postcards?' – the tourist scene at the Pyramids is intense. But it helps to remember that it's not a modern phenomenon. The Pyramids have been attracting tourists since they were built, and a local was probably there offering them a ride on a donkey.

Also, it used to be worse. Now an aggressive campaign – involving a very tall concrete wall, razor wire and sentries on camelback – has cut down the number of touts, camel

drivers and other hustlers on the plateau itself. The bad news is that, because the people of Nazlet as-Samaan still rely on renting horses and camels for a living, the line of skirmish has just moved further away from the Pyramids. While your taxi or minibus is stopped in traffic on Pyramids Rd, young men might try to jump in with you to explain that the road ahead is closed – and the best way to proceed, conveniently, is on horseback. They might also tell you the ‘walk-in entrance’ is near their stables, or suggest that they can get you into the Pyramids area without a ticket. Note that genuine tickets have a hologram seal, and ignore everyone until you get one in your hands. Once on the plateau, you just have to negotiate with guys for camel rides and avoid the rogue antiquities cop who will try to usher you into the ‘ruin’ of the old police station.

CAMELS & HORSES

The blocks just behind the Sphinx-side entrance are filled with milling horses and camels. There’s also a smaller stable area by the Mena House entrance. Considering the extraordinary amount of hassle the horse-owners give tourists, it’s tempting to ignore them completely; however, the distance between the three pyramids is a lot to cover on foot, so the service is a real one, should you be interested.

Tourism authorities have set ‘official’ prices (££35 per hour for camels, horses and horse-carts), but, as one officer said with an apologetic shrug, ‘you’re still expected to bargain’. Women should be a little wary of over-friendly camel-owners trying to clamber up behind them, and everyone should choose to ride only healthy-looking animals. If you are ever held hostage on a camel – asked to pay more than agreed before you’re let down – call over the nearest tourist police, or go to the office by the Mena House and complain (££20 or ££25 is a fair fee for a quick trot around and photo op).

If you’re particularly interested in riding, hiring a horse from one of the village stables is a far better option than taking one at the Pyramids. Once you’re mounted, you will be off on your own in the desert with the Pyramids as a background. General expat opinion holds that the best stables near the Sphinx are **NB** (☎ 3382 0435), owned by Naser Breesh, who’s praised for his healthy steeds

and good guides; his place can be tricky to find: head down the street by the Sphinx poster off the main square where horses are gathered, or ask for directions to the Sphinx Club, as the stables are just behind it. **MG** (☎ 3385 3832) and **AA** (☎ 3385 0531), near the coach park, are both decent as well. Expect to pay around ££35 per hour (hand over the money after the ride, and tip your guide an additional ££5 or ££10), and keep your Pyramids site ticket or you’ll be charged again to enter. Moonlight rides around the Pyramids are a favourite outing, but under new regulations, you can’t ride very close to the site after 6pm.

GREAT PYRAMID OF KHUFU (CHEOPS)

The oldest pyramid in Giza and the largest in Egypt, the **Great Pyramid of Khufu** (Map p150; adult/student ££100/50) stood 146m high when it was completed around 2570 BC. After 46 windy centuries, its height has been reduced by 9m. About 2.3 million limestone blocks, reckoned to weigh about 2.5 tonnes each, were used in the construction.

Tickets, sold from a kiosk in front and slightly to the east (city side) of the pyramid, are limited to 300 per day: 150 on sale starting at 7.30am and 150 at 1pm. During the winter you’ll probably need to queue early, especially on Wednesday and Thursday, when tour groups from the Red Sea visit Cairo for the day. Note that only Egyptian pounds are accepted, and cameras are not allowed into the pyramid – you must surrender them to the guards at the entrance, who will ask for baksheesh before returning them (££1 is fine).

There isn’t much to see inside the pyramid, but the experience of climbing through the ancient structure is unforgettable – though impossible if you suffer the tiniest degree of claustrophobia. The elderly and unfit should not attempt the climb, as it is very steep.

Past the entrance, on the north face, a passage descends to an unfinished tomb (usually closed) about 100m along and 30m deep in the bedrock. Before you reach this, about 20m after the entrance, another passage, 1.3m high and 1m wide, ascends for about 40m to reach the Great Gallery, an impressive area 47m long and 8.5m high. At the start of the gallery, a small horizontal passage leads into the so-called Queen’s Chamber.

As you continue through the Great Gallery, notice how precisely the blocks in the ceiling

DOQQI, GIZA & GEZIRA



INFORMATION		Formal Garden.....	21 C2	Hard Rock Café.....	35 C4
Anglo-American Hospital.....	1 C2	Hanager Arts Centre.....	22 C2	Nomad.....	36 A3
Citibank.....	2 D3	Mahmoud Mukhtar Museum.....	23 C3	Revolving Restaurant Lounge.....	(see 29)
Egyptian Student Travel Services.....	3 C5	Manial Palace Museum.....	24 D5	Topkapi.....	37 D4
Ethiopian Embassy.....	4 A4	Mr & Mrs Mahmoud Khalil Museum.....	25 B4	ENTERTAINMENT 📺	
French Embassy.....	5 B6	Museum of Modern Egyptian Art.....	26 C2	Cairo Opera House.....	38 C2
Goethe Institut.....	6 A4	Palace of Arts.....	27 C2	Cairo Sheraton Cinema.....	39 B3
Instituto Cervantes.....	7 B3	SLEEPING 🛏		Casablanca.....	40 B3
Iranian Embassy.....	8 A4	Four Seasons at Nile Plaza.....	28 D4	Cinema Tahrir.....	41 A3
Israeli Embassy.....	9 B5	Grand Hyatt.....	29 C4	Club 35.....	42 B6
Italian Embassy.....	10 D4	EATING 🍴		Good News Grand Hyatt.....	(see 29)
Jordanian Embassy.....	11 B3	El Sakya.....	(see 29)	SHOPPING 🛍	
Saudi Arabian Embassy.....	12 B5	El-Mashrabiya.....	30 B5	Beymen.....	(see 28)
Syrian Embassy.....	13 A3	Fish Market.....	31 B6	Nagada.....	43 A4
UK Embassy.....	14 D3	La Gourmandise.....	32 B6	Nomad.....	(see 29)
Western Union.....	15 D3	Taboula.....	33 D3	TRANSPORT	
SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES		DRINKING ☕ 🍷		Dok Dok Felucca Point.....	44 D4
Agricultural Museum.....	16 A2	Cilantro.....	34 A4	EgyptAir.....	(see 39)
Cairo Tower.....	17 C2	EgyptAir.....			
Cairo Zoo.....	18 A6	EgyptAir.....			
Cairo Zoo Entrance.....	19 B5	Felucca Mooring Point.....			
Formal Garden.....	20 D2				

fit together. In the 10m-long King's Chamber at the end, the walls are built of red granite blocks. The ceiling itself consists of nine huge slabs of granite, which weigh more than 400 tonnes. Above these slabs, four more slabs are separated by gaps which are designed to distribute the enormous weight away from the chamber. Good airflow from the modern ventilation system (built into two ancient air shafts) will help you breathe easier as you contemplate the tremendous weight suspended above you.

Outside, on the eastern side of the pyramid, three small structures some 20m high resemble pyramid-shaped piles of rubble. These are the Queens' Pyramids, the tombs of Khufu's wives and sisters. You can enter some of them, but they're quite steamy inside.

SOLAR BARQUE MUSEUM

South of the Great Pyramid is the fascinating **Solar Barque Museum** (Map p150; adult/student ££40/20; ☎ 9am-4pm Oct-May, 9am-5pm Jun-Sep). Five pits near the Great Pyramid of Khufu contained the pharaoh's solar barques (boats), which may have been used to convey the mummy of the dead pharaoh across the Nile to the valley temple, from where it was brought up the causeway and into the tomb chamber. The barques were then buried around the pyramid to provide transport for the pharaoh in the next world.

One of these ancient cedar-wood vessels, possibly the oldest boat in existence, was unearthed in 1954. It was carefully restored from

1200 pieces of wood and encased in a glass museum to protect it from damage from the elements. Visitors to the museum must help this process by donning protective footwear to keep sand out.

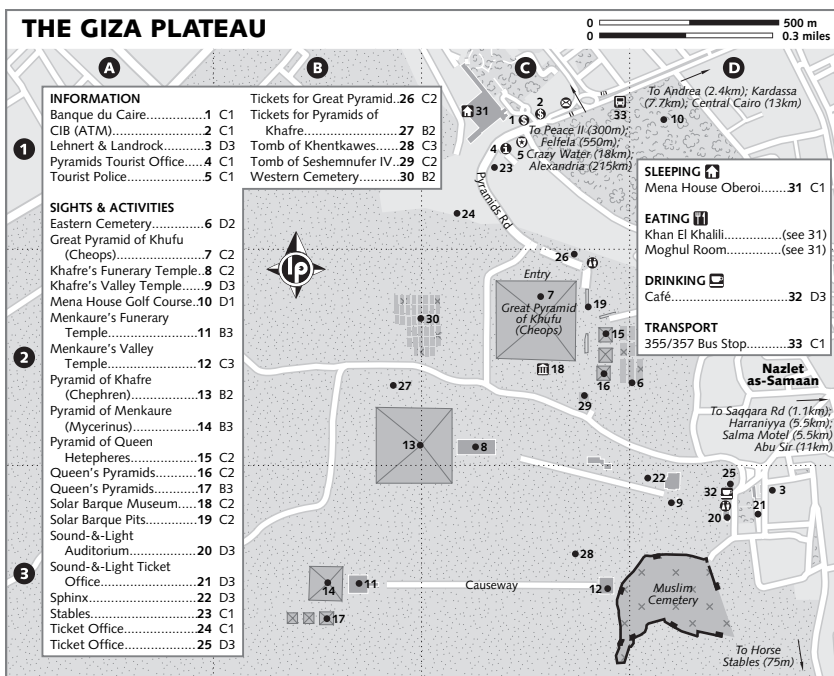
There are plans to move the boat to the nearby Grand Egyptian Museum whenever it opens – perhaps in 2010.

PYRAMID OF KHAFRE (CHEPHREN)

Southwest of the Great Pyramid, the **Pyramid of Khafre** (Map p150; adult/student ££25/15) seems larger than that of his father, Khufu. At just 136m high, it's not, but it stands on higher ground and its peak is still capped with a limestone casing. Originally all three pyramids were totally encased with polished white stone, which would have made them gleam in the sun. Over the centuries, this casing has been stripped for use in palaces and mosques, exposing the softer inner-core stones to the elements.

The chambers and passageways of this particular pyramid are less elaborate than those in the Great Pyramid, but are almost as claustrophobic. The entrance descends into a passage and then across to the burial chamber, which still contains Khafre's large granite sarcophagus. Tickets are sold at the kiosk in front of the pyramid.

Back outside, to the east of the pyramid, are the substantial remains of **Khafre's funerary temple** (Map p150) and the flagged paving of the causeway that provided access from the Nile to the tomb.



PYRAMID OF MENKAURE (MYCERINUS)

At 62m (originally 66.5m), this **Pyramid** (Map p150) is the smallest of the trio. A gash in the north face is the result of an attempt by Saladin's son Malek Abdel Aziz to dismantle the pyramid in AD 1186. He gave up after eight months, having achieved little. Outside the pyramid you'll see the excavated remains of **Menkaure's funerary temple** and, further east, the ruins of his **valley temple**, less excavated. Visitors are no longer allowed inside the pyramid, and it's a long slog out here – you're excused if you skip it.

THE SPHINX

Legends and superstitions abound about the **Sphinx** (Map p150), and the mystery surrounding its long-forgotten purpose is almost as intriguing as its appearance. On seeing it for the first time, many visitors agree with English playwright Alan Bennett, who noted in his diary that seeing the Sphinx is like meeting a TV personality in the flesh: he's smaller than one had imagined.

Known in Arabic as Abu al-Hol (Father of Terror), the feline man was dubbed the Sphinx

by the ancient Greeks because it resembled the mythical winged monster with a woman's head and lion's body who set riddles and killed anyone unable to answer them. (It even has a little tail.)

The Sphinx was carved from the bedrock at the bottom of the causeway to the Pyramid of Khafre; geological survey has shown that it was most likely carved during this pharaoh's reign, so it probably portrays his features, framed by the *nemes* (the striped headcloth worn only by royalty).

As is clear from the accounts of early Arab travellers, the nose was hammered off sometime between the 11th and 15th centuries, although some still like to blame Napoleon for the deed. Part of the fallen beard was carted off by 19th-century adventurers and is now on display in the British Museum in London. These days the Sphinx has potentially greater problems: the monument is suffering the stone equivalent of cancer and is being eaten away from the inside; pollution and rising groundwater are the likeliest causes. A succession of restoration attempts unfortunately sped up the decay rather than halting it. The

Sphinx's shiny white paws are the result of the most recent effort.

Just below the Sphinx an expensive **café** (tea & soda £15, fresh juice £20) boasts an outdoor terrace and truly amazing view. It's technically outside the site, but as long as you have your ticket, the guards will let you leave and come back in again.

TOMB OF KHENTKAWES

This rarely visited but imposing structure (Map p150), opposite the Great Pyramid and south of Khafre's causeway, is the tomb of Menkaure's powerful daughter. The tomb is a rectangular building cut into a small hill. A corridor at the back of the chapel room leads down to the burial chambers, but the descent can be hazardous.

CEMETERIES

Private cemeteries consisting of several rows of tombs are organised around the Pyramids in a grid pattern. Most tombs are closed to the public, but those of Qar, Idu and Queen Meresankh III, in the **eastern cemetery** (Map p150), are accessible, although it can sometimes be difficult to find the guard who has the keys.

The Tomb of Iasen, in the **western cemetery** (Map p150), contains interesting inscriptions and wall paintings that offer a glimpse of daily life during the Old Kingdom. The **tomb of Seshemnufer IV** (Map p150), just south of the Great Pyramid, also has a burial chamber you can climb down into.

SOUND-&-LIGHT SHOW

The Sphinx narrates the somewhat cheesy **sound-and-light show** (☎ 3386 3469; www.egyptsandl.com; adult/child 7-12 years ££60/30; 🕒 6.30pm, 7.30pm & 8.30pm winter, 8.30pm, 9.30pm & 10.30pm summer & Ramadan), but it's neat to see the Pyramids so dramatically lit. Though there's officially no student discount, you may be able to negotiate one. Schedules work as follows at the time of writing, but check the website for the latest:

Day	Show 1	Show 2	Show 3
Monday	English	French	Spanish
Tuesday	English	Italian	French
Wednesday	English	French	German
Thursday	Japanese	English	Arabic
Friday	English	French	-
Saturday	English	Spanish	Italian
Sunday	German	French	Russian

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Bus 355/357 runs from Heliopolis to the Pyramids via central Cairo every 20 minutes. It picks up from the road (not the island) under the overpass at Midan Abdel Moniem Riad. There's no sign so you'll have to ask a local where to stand. Be alert, as you'll probably have to flag the bus down. It also passes through Tahrir, and can usually be flagged down from the bus shelter near the north-western metro stairs; see Map pp118-19 for the exact position. The bus is a white one, with 'CTA' on its side. A ticket costs ££2 and the trip takes about 45 minutes.

Microbuses also go from Midan Abdel Moniem Riad, near the Ramses Hilton; again, just ask for 'Haram' and somebody will point you to the right line of vehicles. The fare is ££1.50 and you'll be dropped off about 250m short of the Mena House Oberoi hotel (also where buses 355 and 357 terminate).

By far the most straightforward way to go is in a yellow metered taxi from the rank on Midan Tahrir. It's usually about ££20, the same price you'd be lucky to bargain a black-and-white-cab driver down to – plus you get air-conditioning. Avoiding the city-centre traffic by taking the metro to the Giza stop (££1) doesn't work so well; from there, a taxi to the Pyramids *should* cost only ££8, but many drivers have caught on to this cost-saving tactic and quickly quote outrageous prices.

Returning to Cairo, taxis leaving from either entrance will try for at least ££40, so you'll need to bargain hard – or else walk down Pyramids Rd until you encounter a less voracious driver, or just take the bus.

Around the Pyramids

Tours to the Pyramids often include the two communities on the Maryutia Canal, which runs north-south about 1.5km east of the plateau. One is worth your time, perhaps even an independent trip. The other, not so much.

HARRANIYYA

Along the Maryutia Canal south of Pyramids Rd, Harraniyya is one of several villages that have now blurred into one long stretch of half-developed green farmland. The main (er, only) attraction is **Wissa Wassef Art Centre** (☎ 3381 5746; www.wissa-wassef-arts.com; Saqqara Rd; 🕒 10am-5pm). The mud-brick complex is the work of architect Ramses Wassef; it won an Aga Khan prize for its refined traditional

style. The artisans who work here in open studios (closed Friday) are known for their distinctive tapestries depicting rural scenes. Crude imitations are standard in souvenir shops; the ones for sale and on display in the museum here are in a completely different class, like paintings in wool. There's pottery and batik fabric, done to equally good effect. The place has the feeling of a sanctuary – quiet and refreshingly green.

To get here, take a microbus (E£1) or taxi (E£10) from Pyramids Rd in the direction of Saqqara and get off when you see the blue 'Harraniyya' sign, after about 3.5km, or 10 minutes. The centre is by the canal on the west side of the road.

KERDASSA

As the source of many of the scarves, *galabiyas* and weavings sold in the bazaars of Cairo, Kerdassa is often touted as an insider shopping destination, to buy 'direct from the source'. But the dismal setting of semirural poverty adjacent to a new strip mall, plus the price of a cab ride (E£15 from the Pyramids), cancels out the minor savings. You could also flag down a microbus (E£1) heading north on the canal from Pyramids Rd – the village is about 5.5km, or 15 minutes, along.

Heliopolis

It's only a suburb of Cairo, but were it to stand alone as a town in its own right, Heliopolis (Misr al-Gedida, or 'New Cairo'; Map p153) would be considered one of the gems of North Africa. A Belgian industrialist conceived the district in the early 20th century as a 'garden city', home to the colonial officials who ruled Egypt. With whitewashed Moorish-style buildings with dark wood balconies, grand arcades and terraces, it's the European vision of the Orient in stone. Since the 1950s, overcrowding has filled in the spaces between the graceful villas with apartment buildings festooned with satellite-TV dishes, but the area still has a relaxed, almost Mediterranean air. With all its trees and outdoor cafés, it's a pleasant place for an evening's wander – and many Egyptians think so too, as Heliopolis has become 'downtown' for people living in dull satellite cities further east. Weekend nights can be very lively here.

The main street is Sharia al-Ahram, on which stands the **Uruba Palace** (Map p153),

once a grand hotel graced by the likes of King Albert I of Belgium and now Mubarak's offices – a short commute, as he lives just up the street. From the palace, at the first intersection with the splendid Sharia Ibrahim Laqqany (detour left for some fantastic architecture), is the open-air cafeteria **Amphitron** (Map p153), as old as Heliopolis itself and a popular watering hole for Allied soldiers during the world wars. At the end of the street, the **Basilica** (Map p153) is a miniature version of Istanbul's famous Aya Sofya, dubbed the 'jelly mould' by local expats. Baron Empain, the man who founded Heliopolis, is buried here.

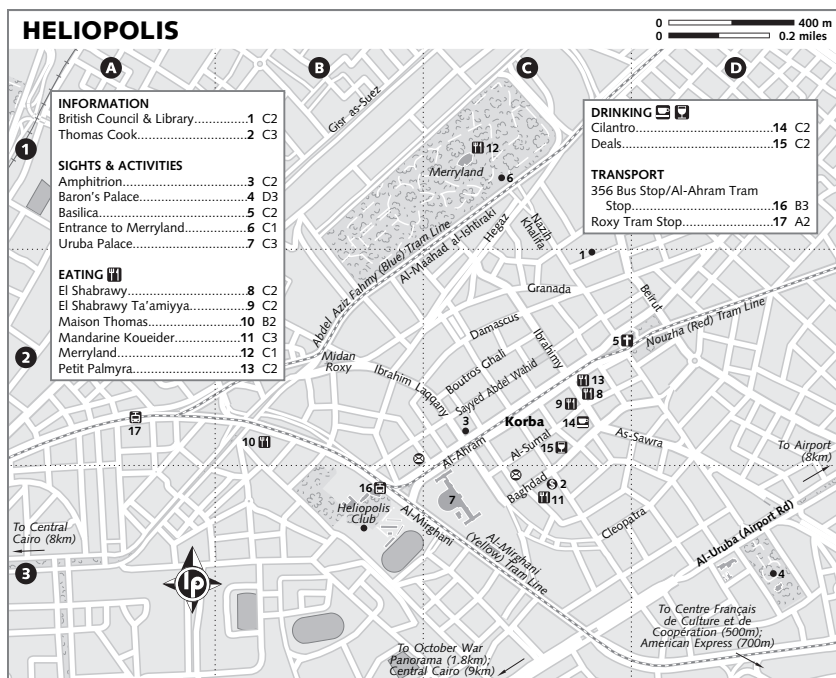
South on Sharia al-Uruba (Airport Rd), you can't miss the extraordinary **Baron's Palace** (Qasr al-Baron; Map p153), a Hindu-style temple modelled on the temples of Angkor Wat in Cambodia, with Buddhas, geishas, elephants and serpents adorning the exterior. The fantastical look of the place contributed to a citywide panic in 1997 about 'Satanists' allegedly holding rituals here – turned out they were a bunch of upper-class teenage heavy-metal fans. A decade later, the ruin is still very much off-limits.

OCTOBER WAR PANORAMA

Built with help from North Korean artists, the **October War Panorama** (Map pp110-11; ☎ 2402 2317; Sharia al-Uruba; admission E£10; 🕒 shows 9.30am, 11am, 12.20pm, 6pm & 7.30pm Wed-Mon), a memorial to the 1973 'victory' over Israel, is an extraordinary propaganda effort. A large 3D mural and diorama depicts the Egyptian forces breaching of the Bar Lev Line on the Suez Canal, while a stirring commentary (in Arabic only) recounts the heroic victories, but skips over the successful Israeli counterattacks. Both sides accepted a UN-brokered cease-fire, and Sinai was returned by negotiation six years later. The exhibition is about 2.5km southwest of the Baron's Palace, on the same road; walk, take one of the buses along Sharia al-Uruba or get a taxi.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Cairo's trams (25pt, 30 to 40 minutes) run to Heliopolis from just north of Midan Ramses (see Map p122). They're a little rattletrap, but often faster than the bus. Get off where the line branches, just before Midan Roxy. Or take airport bus 356 (E£2) from Midan Abdel Moniem Riad (see Map pp118-19).



The ride takes between 30 and 45 minutes. Get off outside the Heliopolis Club (the first stop after reaching the street with tram tracks). Trams and buses usually run every 20 minutes.

ACTIVITIES

For more details of activities around town, check *Al-Ahram Weekly* or the monthlies *Egypt Today* and the *Croc*.

Art Galleries

With a fresh generation of artists and new media, Cairo's art scene is more active and diverse than it ever has been. In addition to galleries, the city's cultural centres (p112) often mount interesting exhibitions too. Some options:

Cairo Atelier (Map pp118-19; ☎ 2574 6730; 2 Sharia Karim al-Dawla, Downtown; 🕒 10am-1pm & 5-10pm Sat-Thu) Off Sharia Mahmoud Bassiouni, as much a clubhouse as an exhibition space, frequented by Cairo's art-world old guard.

Contemporary Image Collective (Map pp110-11; ☎ 2794 1686; www.ciccairo.com; 20 Sharia Safeya Zaghoul, Mounira; 🕒 11am-6pm Sun-Thu) Excellent

exhibits documenting Egyptian life and occasionally shows videos on its rooftop.

Karim Francis Art Gallery Downtown (Map pp118-19; ☎ 2391 6357; 1 Sharia Sherifeen; 🕒 2-9pm Sat-Thu); Zamalek (Map pp144-5; ☎ 2736 2183; www.karimfrancis.com; 3rd fl, Baehler's Mansions, 157 Sharia 26th of Jul; 🕒 4-11pm Tue-Sun) Francis is one of Cairo's more influential curators.

Mashrabia Gallery of Contemporary Art (Map pp118-19; ☎ 2578 4494; www.mashrabiagallery.com; 8 Sharia Champollion, Downtown; 🕒 11am-8pm Sat-Thu) One of the first independent galleries, Mashrabia is bit cramped but represents the bigger names in painting and sculpture.

Townhouse Gallery of Contemporary Art (Map pp118-19; ☎ 2576 8086; www.thetownhousegallery.com; 10 Sharia Nabrawy, Downtown; 🕒 10am-2pm & 6-9pm Sat-Wed, 6-9pm Fri) Set amid car-repair shops, Townhouse is Cairo's most cutting-edge space, with emphasis on video and multimedia installations. It also has a large workshop situated across the street, for classes and confabs.

Zamalek Art Gallery (Map pp144-5; ☎ 2735 1240; www.zamalekartgallery.com; 11 Sharia Brazil, Zamalek; 🕒 10.30am-9pm Sat-Thu) A light-filled space showing contemporary Egyptian artists, usually figurative.

WILLIAM WELLS

Director of Visual Arts, Townhouse Gallery of Contemporary Art (p153), established in 1998.

What do you love most about the city?

The humour, which is a survival technique – every street is a theatre and every action a drama. And the city consists of so many historical districts, and people live and manoeuvre through their past with such ease. Walking into a 15th-century mosque, you step over foundation stones engraved with hieroglyphs. People squat in Ottoman houses, study in old colonial mansions and go about a modern 21st-century life. This historical backdrop tends to define your approach to life.

Where's the best place to experience this kind of historical backdrop?

Well, as long as people don't want to relax... The most interesting walk is often the most taxing. I'd suggest a walk from Midan Hussein through the market street of Al-Muski (p130) until they reach Midan Ataba and the Windsor Hotel (p170), where they can sit and enjoy a cold beer. It assaults all your senses and introduces you to the intensity of the city all at once.

What's your favourite piece of public art in Cairo?

That would have to be Mahmoud Mukhtar's *Egypt Reawakening* sculpture (see p142 for more on Mukhtar) in front of the zoo in Giza. It's a vision of a people's dreams, rather than just the numerous individuals that once inhabited the city.

What's your favourite word in Egyptian colloquial Arabic?

Ya'ani (literally, 'It means...'), which has no translation in English but covers most circumstances. It's used by everyone to answer most questions – and to avoid answering most questions!

No dodging this one: what's your favourite restaurant?

That has to be Estoril (p164), off Sharia Talaat Harb. It's more for the ambience than the food – it's the place most of the artists and journalists use as a second office.

And an ahwa?

My favourite coffeehouse is just in front of the gallery. It's called Ahmed Lipton. He offers the best *sheesha* (water pipe) in Downtown, and he welcomes everyone.

You've lived here more than 20 years – how has the city changed?

It has gradually become far more conservative, and that has affected people's lifestyles and opportunities for self-expression. But Cairo is still perhaps the most seductive city in the world for a creative person, and the richest for those with imagination.

Belly-Dancing Lessons

The most famous belly-dancing teacher in Cairo (and, indeed, in the whole of Egypt) is **Mme Raqia Hassan** (☎ 3748 2338; raqiahassan@hotmail.com). Many of the country's best dancers have learned their craft from Mme Hassan. She runs a small studio in her Doqqi apartment, where either she or one of her protégés will give you (or a group, if you can get one together) belly-dancing lessons. Some of the city's gyms and health clubs will organise group courses – try **Samia Allouba Dance & Fitness Centre** (Map pp144-5; ☎ 3302 0572; 6 Sharia Amr) in Mohandiseen.

Felucca Rides

One of the most pleasant things to do on a warm day is to go out on a felucca, Egypt's ancient broad-sail boat, with a supply of beer and a small picnic just as sunset approaches. The best spot for hiring is the Dok Dok landing stage (Map p148) on the corniche in Garden City, across from the Four Seasons. Subject to haggling, a boat and captain should cost about £30 per hour irrespective of the number of people on board; your captain will appreciate additional baksheesh (possibly in liquid form). The mooring point in Gezira just north of the Qasr el-Nil Bridge (Map p148) is less

desirable because the river is crowded here; captains at the dock opposite the Sheppard Hotel (Map pp118–19) tend to be tougher to bargain with.

Golf

Run by the hotel, the **Mena House Golf Course** (Map p150; ☎ 3383 3222; www.oberoihotels.com; Pyramids Rd, Giza; green fee E£150 plus club rental E£55; 🕒 7am–sunset), beneath the Pyramids, is always busy on Friday and Saturday, so better to tee off midweek. The course was being renovated in 2007, and prices will likely rise.

Horse Riding

A horse ride out by the Pyramids can be a great way to escape the clamour of Cairo. For details, see p147.

Pool & Snooker

Pool and snooker are popular in Cairo. Many venues are in the wealthier suburbs away from the city centre. The most central snooker and pool halls are on the top floor of the **Ramses Hilton Mall** (Map pp118–19; ☎ 2577 7444; east of the Ramses Hilton, Downtown; 🕒 2pm–4am). In Zamalek **Aristocrat** (Map pp144–5; ☎ 2736 6344; 2nd fl, 15 Sharia Ismail Mohammed; per hr E£22; 🕒 24hr) is a little mellower, and doubles as a bar and restaurant.

Swimming

Finding a place to cool off in the city can be difficult. Cairenes who can afford it swim in sporting clubs, which do not admit nonmembers. Some hotels allow day use for nonguests, at a price. Best options:

Atlas Zamalek Hotel (Map pp144–5; ☎ 3346 7230; atlas_zamalek_hotel@hotmail.com; 20 Gamiat ad-Dowal al-Arabiyya, Mohandiseen; minimum charge E£25) You'll often have the rooftop pool here to yourself, and the price can't be beat.

Cairo Marriott (Map pp144–5; ☎ 2728 3000; 16 Sharia Saray al-Gezira, Zamalek; day use E£110) The Marriott has a good pool in a garden setting. The fee includes use of the gym and sauna.

Muhammad Ali Sporting Club (☎ 010 568 6000; Corniche el-Nil, Sharia Saied Giza, Moneib; day use Fri & Sat adult/child E£40/25, Sun–Thu E£25/15) Major social scene – a mix of expats and Egyptians – at this cool Nile-side pool with beanbag chairs, beers and bikinis. Way south on the West Bank, about even with Ma'adi – a taxi will cost E£20 from the centre.

Nile Hilton (Map pp118–19; ☎ 2578 0444; 1113 Corniche el-Nil, Downtown; pool day use E£110) The

Hilton's pool is large, relatively deep and surrounded by shady trees.

DIY CAIRO

Contrary to first impressions of careening buses and crammed sidewalks, Cairo is an excellent city for walking. Really.

It's especially good for aimless, mapless wandering: districts are relatively compact, the terrain is level and the scenery changes quickly enough to keep things interesting. Streets are safe, and you will never accidentally wander into a 'bad' neighbourhood. We heartily encourage stowing the guide and let yourself get at least a little lost in Cairo's winding back lanes.

Feel free to walk in the street (most people do), be considerate when taking photos, and keep your ears open for local cues such as hissing (see boxed text, p162). And at least once, accept a stranger's invitation to tea or soda. These are some of the best places to stroll, over the course of a day.

Islamic Cairo in the Morning

Start early – before 7.30am – with tea at Fishawi's (p169) and watch the khan slowly wake up. If you do want to work in a little sightseeing, take a quick stroll up Bein al-Qasreen (p132) to admire the buildings without the crush of traffic and commerce. But the better, more aimless amble is to the south: take the small alley behind Sharia al-Azhar, heading in the direction of Al-Azhar Park, then head south, roughly following the old walls built by Salah ad-Din that are being excavated as part of the park development. The tiny workshops produce shoes, parquet flooring, mother-of-pearl inlay boxes and more. But it's also a residential district, where families on upper floors run baskets down to the *ba'al* for groceries, and knife-sharpeners and junk traders (the men who shout 'Beeeeeeee-kyal!') roll through the lanes. Keeping your general bearings with the park to your left, you can wander all the way down to the Citadel. Near the end, you'll wind up on the southern stretch of Darb al-Ahmar (p135). To loop back to Sharia al-Azhar, go via Sharia al-Khayamiyya (p134), where you can get a souvenir photo taken at Studio Shosha (Map p133).

Garden City at Twilight

The interlocking circles that form the streets of Garden City are maddening if you want to

HOW TO BLEND IN

Even if your skin colouring allows it, it's next to impossible to 'pass' as a native Cairene. But you can look more like a resident expat, thus deflecting attention onto the more obvious tourists walking behind you – and giving you more opportunity to enjoy the good things about Cairo. Here's how:

- Carry your stuff in a plastic shopping bag or a generic tote. Nothing screams 'tourist' like a multipocketed, extra-zippered, heavy-duty-nylon backpack with visible water bottle.
- Wear impractical shoes. This is a city. Fashion counts.
- Cover up your legs – this goes for men and women. Islamic rules aside, Egyptians simply have a higher level of modesty, and it's clear you haven't been here long if you don't feel embarrassed to show your knees in public.
- Carry a copy of *Al-Ahram Weekly* – or the Arabic *Al-Ahram*, if you want to go deep undercover.
- Learn and use the local nonverbal cues (see boxed text, p162).

get anywhere, but they're perfect for strolling just for the sake of admiring the crumbling mansions in this colonial-era district. The best time to visit is the hour before sundown, when the dust coating the architectural curlicues turns a warm, glamorous gold and the starlings shrill in the fruit trees.

You can start at the north end (get the brutalist concrete Canadian embassy behind you right away!) and wind south. Keep an eye out for wrought-iron dragons on cobwebbed gates, a rare Turkish-style wood-front home and the last real garden in Garden City, behind the Four Seasons hotel.

You'll wind up, conveniently, near the Dok Dok felucca pier (p154) and Nile-side Topkapi (p170).

Downtown after Midnight

This is less walking than café-hopping, when the air is cool and the streets are thronged. Start at Tawfiqiyya Souq (p117), which will just be shutting down, while the *ahwas* in the side alleys are just warming up. Then wander back to Midan Orabi, where you can perch on any random planter and someone will come and sell you tea. From here Sharia Alfay and the smaller streets on either side are your playground for snacking, *sheesh*-smoking and maybe even some lavish tipping of belly-dancers (see p173). Don't miss the Kawkab ash-Sharq café (p169), which is devoted to Umm Kolthum – you might even get caught up in a spirited sing-along. No matter how late you're out, you can wind up the night at the 24-hour Odeon Palace Hotel bar (p170).

CAIRO FOR CHILDREN

Cairo can be exhausting for kids, but there is much they will enjoy. If you have a few days in the city it may be worth buying *Cairo, the Family Guide*, by Lesley Lababidi and Lisa Sabbahy (AUC Press, ££70), revised in 2006. Most children will enjoy pretending to be a pirate on a Nile felucca (p154), gawking at the treasures of Tutankhamun in the Egyptian Museum (p185), investigating the Pyramids at Giza (p143) and Dahshur (p206), as well as the maze of Khan al-Khalili (p128). A number of child-oriented activities and theme parks are also worth considering.

The long-running **Cairo Puppet Theatre** (Masrah al-Ara'is; Map pp118-19; ☎ 2591 0954; admission ££5; 🕒 6.30-8.15pm Thu, 10.30am-1pm Fri & Sun) is opposite Ezbekiyya Gardens in Downtown. The shows are in Arabic, but are colourful and animated enough to entertain non-Arabic speakers of all ages.

Fun Planet (Map pp144-5; Arkadia Mall, Corniche el-Nil, Bulaq; first 3 games ££10, each subsequent game ££3-5; 🕒 3-11pm Sat-Thu & 1-11pm Fri) is an indoor amusement centre offering loads of rides and games and will appeal to teenagers. Citystars Centre (see p177) also has a big indoor fun park.

The **National Circus** (Map pp144-5; ☎ 3347 0612; Sharia el-Nil, Agouza, near the Zamalek Bridge; admission ££30-50; 🕒 box office 11am-10pm, performances 10pm-midnight) is a traditional circus with clowns, acrobats, lions and tigers and lots of glitter. You'll usually find it here during the cooler months – it tours the country at other times of the year. Not far away, children can feed the hippos, see countless kinds of camels – and meet lots of local kids – at the **Cairo Zoo** (Guineenat al-Haywanat;

Map p148; ☎ 3570 8895; Midan al-Gamaa, Giza; admission 25pt; ☎ 9am-4pm).

The aqua park **Crazy Water** (☎ 3781 4564; admission children 3-10 E£25, children 10 & older E£35-45; ☎ 10am-10pm) has half-a-dozen water slides, a wave pool, a kiddies' pool, and a playground area with sand, slides and tunnels. To get there from the Pyramids, drive 15km on the Cairo-Alexandria road from its intersection with Pyramids Rd, then turn left towards 6th of October City.

The theme park **Dr Ragab's Pharaonic Village** (☎ 3571 8675; www.pharaonicvillage.com; 3 Sharia al-Bahr al-Azam, Corniche, Moneib; adult E£79-159, child under 5 free, child 5-10 years 20% discount, family with 2 children E£99; ☎ 9am-6pm Sep-Jun, 9am-9pm Jul & Aug) is cheesy but offers a child-friendly glimpse of what life in ancient Egypt would have been like, with a boat trip past actors in Pharaonic costumes, a playground and an art centre where kids can make mini reed boats. Take a taxi (E£20 from Downtown), or walk the 800m from the Sakiat Mekki metro stop.

Fagnoon Art School (☎ 3815 1014; Saqqara Rd, Sabil Umm Hashim; per day E£25; ☎ 10am-7pm) is a wonderful art centre in the fields between Giza and Saqqara. Children can slosh paint around, model clay, work with wrought iron or print and paint on textiles, all in the shadow of the Saqqara step pyramid. You can bring your own food and drink, although *fiteer* (pancake/pizza), coffee and water are usually on sale. To get here, take a microbus from the Pyramids Rd 12.5km in the direction of Saqqara and asked to be dropped off at Sabil Umm Hashim.

The pleasant **Gabalaya Park & Aquarium** (Fish Garden; Map pp144-5; Sharia Umm Kolthum, Zamalek; admission E£1; ☎ 10am-5pm) has landscaped gardens with aquariums set in rocks (though not many actual fish). It's a great central spot to escape the crowds.

Overlooking Islamic Cairo, **Al-Azhar Park** (Map pp110-11; ☎ 2510 7378; www.alazharpark.com; E£10; ☎ 9am-midnight) is home to one of the few children's playgrounds in the central city.

When only bribery will help, try Mandarine Koueider (see p168) for delectable, distracting ice cream. Or cut straight to toys at **Mom & Me** (Map pp144-5; ☎ 2736 5751; 20A Sharia Mansour Mohammed, Zamalek) or **Toys R Us** (Map pp144-5; ☎ 2578 0820; Ground fl, Arkadia Mall, Bulaq).

TOURS

Innumerable companies and individuals offer tours of sights within and around

Cairo. We recommend Salah Muhammad's **Noga Tours** (☎ 012 313 8446; www.first24hours.com), as he employs excellent English-speaking guides, Egyptologists and drivers. Mohamed Anwar's specialised **museum tours** (☎ 012 340 7724) also have a good reputation. To hire a taxi for the day and dispense with a guide, the friendly **Fathy el-Menesy** (☎ 2259 3218, 012 278 1572) owns a well-maintained Peugeot and speaks English, as does **Abu Mu'azz** (☎ 010 563 2078). Alternatively, ask at your hotel. Fathy el-Menesy charges between E£200 and E£250 for a full day, and Noga Tours charges US\$23.50 (plus entry fees) per person for a day-long trip to the Giza Pyramids, Memphis and Saqqara. Its half-day tour of Dahshur costs US\$19.50 (plus entry fees) per person.

FESTIVALS & EVENTS

For general information on festivals and public holidays see p508.

Arabic Music Festival At the Cairo Opera House in November.

Belly-dance festival (www.nilegroup.net) At the Mena House Oberoi hotel in June. Check the website for details.

Cairo International Film Festival (www.cairofilmfest.com) At the Cairo Opera House in November/December.

Moulid an-Nabi Birthday of Prophet Mohammed, 12 Rabi al-Awwal (9 March 2009, 26 February 2010). A citywide party with sweets and kids in new clothes, but in the week beforehand, Midan Hussein is the venue for the most intense Sufi *zikrs* (long sessions of dancing, chanting and swaying carried out to achieve oneness with God).

Other moulids The other big saints' festivals in Cairo celebrate Sayyidna al-Hussein (June 2009, mid-March 2010), Sayyida Zeinab (in July 2008, and June in 2009 and 2010) and Imam ash-Shafi (August 2008, July 2009). They are great parties if you are not afraid of rowdy crowds (see boxed text, p509).

Ramadan Ninth month of the Islamic calendar (begins 1 September 2008 and 22 August 2009). By day everything slows down: shops and offices open late and close early, and just before sunset the streets empty as everyone goes home to break the fast. But the nights, particularly in Islamic Cairo, buzz until dawn.

Sham an-Nassim First Monday after Coptic Easter. Literally meaning 'sniffing the breeze' (ie to welcome spring), it's a ritual that came from Pharaonic tradition via the Copts, and is celebrated by all Cairenes, who picnic at the zoo, in parks, by the Pyramids and on riverbanks and even traffic islands.

SLEEPING

Cairo has a few gem hotels, and something for every budget, but in the midrange, the choices

CAIRO HOTEL SCAMS

In short, all scams are attempts to distract you from your lodging of choice. Hotels do not open and close with any great frequency in Cairo, and if it's listed in this book it is very unlikely to have gone out of business by the time you arrive.

At the airport, you may be approached by a man or woman with an official-looking badge. These people are not government tourism reps, they are hotel touts, and they can be shameless. For instance, they'll ask if you've booked a hotel. If you have, they'll offer to call the hotel to confirm that a room is waiting for you. Of course, they don't call the hotel – they call a friend who says that there is no booking and that his establishment is full. Concerned, the tout will offer to find you an alternative...

Some taxi drivers will stall by telling you that they don't know where your hotel is. In that case tell them to let you out at Midan Talaat Harb – from here it's a short walk to most budget hotels. Other lines include telling you the hotel you're heading for is closed/very expensive/horrible/a brothel and suggesting a 'better' place, for which they earn a commission, which will then be added to your bill.

The most complex scam is when a stranger (often on the airport bus) asks you your name and where you're staying. After a chat, the person says goodbye and isn't seen again. What they next do is call a friend, who goes and stands outside the hotel you've booked. When you arrive, he or she will ask 'Are you...?', using the name you volunteered back at the airport. When you answer in the affirmative, you'll be told that the hotel has been flooded/closed by the police/totally booked out and that the owners have organised a room for you elsewhere.

Finally, when checking in, never pay for more than a night in advance. No decent hotel will ever ask for more substantial cash. We've had letters from readers asked to stump up for two nights on arrival and then when they've decided to check out after one night (because of grotty toilets, no hot water, whatever), they've been unable to get a refund.

are not numerous. Paying more may get you satellite TV, but it doesn't guarantee quality – a few budget (under-££100) options outclass some midrange places that coast on package-tour bookings. Breakfast is usually included in the rate in both price categories, and prices are somewhat negotiable, especially in the summer, when tourists are fewer – consider the rates quoted here a guideline.

On the upper end, there are far more luxury hotels in Cairo than we review – they line the banks of the Nile (handy for sightseeing) and cluster by the Pyramids (scenic, but inconvenient). Feel free to treat these establishments as locals do: as places of respite from the city din, with clean bathrooms and other comforts. You can soak up lobby air-con for hours, and many of the pools (available only at this price level, with one exception) are open to nonguests for a fee (see p155). Rates vary according to season and other factors, and the prices quoted here don't include taxes and service charges (which can add up to 25% more), or breakfast.

Downtown

If you're on a budget, or just want to be in the thick of things, near great cheap eateries,

you're best off in Downtown. Most of the city's hostels and cheap hotels are located on or around Sharia Talaat Harb in old, usually decrepit, apartment blocks. (Grimy stairs and shaky elevators aren't necessarily a reflection of the hotels above.) Many have balconies and windows overlooking noisy main streets; request a rear room if you're a light sleeper. Plumbing sometimes dates from the Pharaonic era; better hotels will have individual hot-water heaters in each bathroom.

BUDGET

African Hostel (Map p122; ☎ 2591 1744; africanhousehostel@hotmail.com; 3rd fl, 15 Sharia Emad ad-Din; s/d/tr without bathroom ££35/60/75, d/tr ££65/80; ☑) The African offers an affordable way to stay in one of the city's most gorgeous mid-19th-century buildings (First Lady Suzanne Mubarak has her offices here). You want a room on the upper floor, where the balconies are. Paint is peeling in spots, and the toilets occasionally run, but the staff are very nice and the kitchen is enormous. The same crew runs the Richmond (Map pp118–19; ☎ 2393 9358; 5th fl, 41 Sharia Sheriff) and the New Minerva (Map pp118–19; ☎ 2392 3273), located in an alley

opposite the Richmond, both with the same bargain rates, though not such glam rooms.

ourpick Pension Roma (Map pp118-19; ☎ 2391 1088; fax 2579 6243; 4th fl, 169 Sharia Mohammed Farid; s/d with-out bathroom E£50/82, s/d with shower E£53/91) Run by a French-Egyptian woman with impeccable standards, the Roma brings dignity, even elegance, to the budget-travel scene. Towering ceilings, dark wood floors and filmy white curtains create a feeling of timeless calm. Evening meals are an option. Book ahead, as the place is very popular with repeat guests, many of whom could afford to stay at more expensive hotels but prefer the old-Cairo atmosphere here.

Lialy Hostel (Map pp118-19; ☎ 2575 2802; 3rd fl, 8 Midan Talaat Harb; s/d E£50/60, s/d/t with air-con E£60/70/90; ☎) Lialy's position on Midan Talaat Harb puts it right in the thick of the action. Ten simple rooms share three bathrooms; everything is clean but the hot water sometimes runs out. Some rooms have double beds and air-con. There's a small collection of books to read, a large breakfast room with satellite TV and free use of the kitchen.

Tulip Hotel (Map pp118-19; ☎ 2392 2704; tuliphotel@yahoo.com; 3 Midan Talaat Harb; s with fan E£65-75, d with fan E£95-105, s with air-con E£110, d with air-con E£130-140; ☎) Divided among three floors, the rooms at this older hotel have high ceilings and clean tile floors. Rates depend on air-con availability and the size of the bathroom. The back rooms are surprisingly quiet for the location, and the staff are polite and friendly.

Hotel Select (Map pp118-19; ☎ 2393 3707; hostelselect@yahoo.com; 8th fl, 19 Sharia Adly; dm/d/tr E£75/100/130; ☎) On a breezy upper floor with a wrap-around balcony, the Select has great views across Downtown – particularly from one of the corner doubles or triples. Brightly painted walls and lots of chintz-covered furniture give the place a cheerful, homy feel, and guests can use a small kitchen. Note there are no private singles, however – just one four-bed dorm-style room.

Hotel Luna (Map pp118-19; ☎ 2396 1020; www.hotel.lunacairo.com; 5th fl, 27 Sharia Talaat Harb; r without bathroom E£100, r E£110-150; ☎) The owner of this modern, backpacker-friendly place is one of the most fastidious in the city, and his sparkling rooms offer many small comforts, such as bedside lamps and bathmats. In the newer 'Oasis' wing, even the paint and furniture are colour-coordinated in soothing pastels – a rare sight indeed in Egypt. Excellent shared kitchen too.

MIDRANGE

Carlton Hotel (Map pp118-19; ☎ 2575 5022; www.carltonhotelcairo.com; 21 Sharia 26th of July; s/d half board E£135/195; ☎) The rooms at this old-fashioned place near Cinema Rivoli are reasonably priced (and the staff often seem ready to make a deal), but vary in size and degree of dilapidation. The ones that have been renovated have shiny white paint, clean wood floors, satellite TV and private bathrooms. There's a restaurant, a coffeehouse and a welcoming rooftop cafeteria where you can enjoy a cold beer.

Windsor Hotel (Map pp118-19; ☎ 2591 5277; www.windsorcairo.com; 19 Sharia Alfay; s/d with shower & hand basin US\$30/38, s/d US\$42/52, deluxe US\$48/58; ☎) Practically speaking, the rooms at the Windsor are dim, with low ceilings and noisy air-conditioners. But with the beautifully maintained elevator, worn marble stairs and hotel restaurant where the dinner bell chimes every evening at 7.30pm, the place is hard for nostalgia buffs to resist. The entrance (to both the hotel and the bar) is on the back side, in the narrow street just south of Sharia Alfay.

Fontana Hotel (Map p122; ☎ 2592 2321; fax 2592 2145; Midan Ramses; s/d US\$32/37; ☎) Sensible people will avoid this place; kitsch connoisseurs, however, will be uncontrollably drawn to the mind-boggling décor: lurid murals, animal patterns, flowers, layers of rugs and more furniture than you can possibly use in a night's stay. Bathrooms are newish, and there's a big rooftop pool with a view over the square.

ourpick Hotel Osiris (Map pp118-19; ☎ 2794 5728; http://hotelosiris.free.fr; 12th fl, 49 Sharia Nubar; s/d from US\$34/41; ☎) On the top floor of a commercial building, the Osiris' rooms enjoy views across the city. The French-Egyptian couple who run the place keep the tile floors and white walls spotless, and the pretty hand-sewn appliqué bedspreads tidily arranged on the supercomfy mattresses. Breakfast, served on a side terrace or the roof, involves fresh juice and crepes and omelettes. Its location in Bab al-Luq is quiet at night.

Grand Hotel (Map pp118-19; ☎ 2575 7700; grandhotel@link.net; 17 Sharia 26th of July; s/d US\$36/46; ☎) This busy seven-storey palace managed to survive conversion to a midrange place without losing its old-fashioned luxury character – the hundred or so rooms still have good parquet floors, but new, shiny white-tile bathrooms. Entry is around the back in a tiny plaza.

Victoria Hotel (Map p122; ☎ 2589 2290; info@victoria.com.eg; 66 Sharia al-Gomhuriyya; s/d US\$37/48; ☎)

Not far from Ramses Station, the Victoria is grand old palace with the happy addition of utterly silent air-conditioning, as well as comfy beds and satellite TV. Off long halls lined with clouded mirrors, the rooms have antique furniture and nice high ceilings – but no balconies, unfortunately. The place is not in central Downtown, but that keeps prices lower – and you're very close to the Ataba and Orabi metro stops.

Cosmopolitan Hotel (Map pp118-19; ☎ 2392 384; fax 393 3531; 1 Sharia ibn Taalab; s/d US\$44/55; 🏠) Gloomy Spanish Inquisition–look furniture, mysteriously spotted carpeting and reports of surly service would normally get this place dropped from the list. But its prime location, on a tranquil pedestrian street in Downtown, is tough to beat, as is its gorgeous Art Nouveau façade and entry staircase. If you could choose anywhere in Cairo, this might not be it – but if it's already booked as part of a package, you could do worse.

TOP END

Talisman Hotel (Map pp118-19; ☎ 2393 9431; www.talisman-hotel.com; 5th fl, 39 Sharia Talaat Harb; s/d/ste US\$80/107/160; 🏠 📺) Thanks to double-pane windows, Downtown traffic is a distant memory once you're inside this luxurious cocoon, the only boutique hotel in the city. The 24 rooms are an impeccable mix of Egyptian handicrafts, rococo furniture and jewel-tone colours. Turn into the alley opposite the A L'Americaine Coffee Shop; enter the first building entrance on the right and use the lift on the left side of the foyer.

Nile Hilton (Map pp118-19; ☎ 2578 0444; www.hilton.com; 1113 Corniche el-Nil; r from US\$170; 🏠 📺 📺) A 1959 midcentury-modern monolith, the Nile Hilton has been around long enough that its sleek concrete look is coming back into style. The unbeatable location, off Midan Tahrir and adjacent to the Egyptian Museum, as well as an exceptionally pretty pool, makes up for the smallest, not-very-stylish rooms.

Garden City

Just south of Midan Tahrir, this area is in some ways just as convenient as Downtown (still an easy walk away), and a lot quieter. Options are limited, however.

BUDGET

Garden City House (Map pp118-19; ☎ 2542 0600; www.gardencity.plus.com; 23 Sharia Kamal ad-Din Salah; s without

bathroom E£55, d without bathroom E£81-95, s/d E£73/106; 🏠) This pension is untouched by time – not great in some ways (rooms could use a fresh coat of paint), but a boon in others, such as the gentlemanly staff (nice for solo women). Shared bathrooms can be small and stifling; private bathrooms are much more spacious. The handy location is steps from Tahrir, but you can walk out and not be immediately accosted by touts.

TOP END

Grand Hyatt (Map p148; ☎ 2365 1234; http://cairo.grand.hyatt.com; Corniche el-Nil, Rhoda; s/d from US\$200/225; 🏠) The new favourite of tourists from the Gulf, the Hyatt is suitably glitzy. It has by far the best Nile-side terrace in town and a gargantuan rooftop pool. Rooms are minimalist chic, with brushed-gold trim and large marble bathrooms even in the standard layout.

Four Seasons at Nile Plaza (Map p148; ☎ 2791 7000; www.fourseasons.com; 1089 Corniche el-Nil; s/d from US\$270/300; 🏠 📺 📺) Of the two Four Seasons properties in Cairo (the other is the First Residence in Giza), this one may be marginally less posh, but it has a much handier location – you can walk to the Egyptian Museum in about 15 minutes. Rooms have lavish bathrooms and windows that actually open. The Omar Nagdi canvas behind reception is just one piece of a big collection of modern Egyptian art.

Islamic Cairo

Given crazy crowds, touts like locusts and more than the usual number of mosques with amplified calls to prayer, we can't rationally recommend bunking here. But if you want to plunge in at Cairo's deep end, this is the place.

El-Hussein Hotel (Map p129; ☎ 2591 8089; Midan Hussein; s/d E£105/130; 🏠) About the only remotely appealing option in the area. Off either side of an open-ended hallway (where street noise reverberates), the rooms are basic, though recently painted a soothing shade of mint green. But if you park yourself in a front-facing one with a balcony, the people-watching below is so mesmerizing you may not want to sleep anyway. There's a top-floor restaurant (no alcohol). Entrance is in the back alley, one block off the square.

Zamalek

For a good night's sleep, the relatively quiet enclave of Zamalek is the best in the city.

This is also where many of Cairo's best restaurants, shops, bars and coffee shops are located, and most of the city's sights are a short taxi ride away (or take a £2 cab to the Gezira metro station). Unfortunately, it's not very budget-friendly.

BUDGET

Mayfair Hotel (Map pp144-5; ☎ 2735 7315; mayfaircairo@yahoo.com; 2nd fl, 9 Sharia Aziz Osman; s/d without bathroom ££80/100, s/d ££130/150; 🏠 🚿 🚰) In an Art Deco building on a quiet street, the Mayfair got a redo in 2006, making it one of the better-value places in the neighbourhood – especially when you're relaxing on the large terrace. Solo travellers will find the single rooms cramped, however, and the young staff perfectly nice but perhaps a tad too attentive. Generous balconies, TVs, fridges and nice wood floors are a plus in the larger rooms.

MIDRANGE

Pension Zamalek (Map pp144-5; ☎ 2735 9318; pensionzamalek@msn.com; 6 Sharia Salah ad-Din; s/d without bathroom ££100/150, with air-con extra ££25; 🏠 🚿 🚰) With a warm welcome from mum and the kids watching TV in the living room, you'll feel as if you've moved in with a family if you stay at this clean and quiet pension a few blocks off the main drag. It has 14 kitschily furnished, slightly dim rooms (four with air-con) and shared bathrooms. Discounts are available for long stays.

Hotel Longchamps (Map pp144-5; ☎ 2735 2311; www.hotellongchamps.com; 5th fl, 21 Sharia Ismail Mohammed; s US\$48-54, d US\$68-75; 🏠 🚿 🚰) The old-European-style Longchamps has a residential feel. Rooms are spacious and well maintained, and guests gather to chat on the peaceful, greenery-covered rear balcony around sunset or lounge in the restaurant (where alcohol – and a full breakfast buffet – is served). If you want your own balcony and a small bathtub, pay extra for an 'executive' room. Book well ahead.

President Hotel (Map pp144-5; ☎ 2735 0718; pres_hotl@thewayout.net; 22 Sharia Taha Hussein; s/d US\$55/65; 🏠 🚿 🚰) According to the lobby, this is a thoroughly modern three-star place with glittering mirrors and plush carpeting. But rooms don't live up to the promise – the newish bathrooms make the rest look a little shabby. There is, however, a good top-floor bar and a very tasty patisserie in the lobby, which sup-

plies the breakfasts – for the right guest, this makes up for a lot.

TOP END

Golden Tulip Flamenco Hotel (Map pp144-5; ☎ 2735 0815; www.flamencohotels.com; 2 Sharia Gezirat al-Wusta; standard s/d US\$105/121, superior s/d US\$121/144; 🏠 🚿 🚰) This popular business-class place is comfortable and well equipped – as long as you skip the small standard rooms and go for the more spacious 'superior' class, which have balconies overlooking the houseboats on the Nile. Book ahead; a 25% discount applies in May and June.

Cairo Marriott (Map pp144-5; ☎ 2728 3000; www.marriott.com/caieg; 16 Sharia Saray al-Gezira; s/d from US\$180; 🏠 🚿 🚰) A 19th-century palace provides the lobby and other public areas, but the rooms are all in two modern towers. Renovated in 2007, with touches such as plasma-screen TVs and extra-plush beds, the rooms are some of the more comfortable in this price bracket, even if the standard bathrooms are as small as prison cells. It also has a popular garden café and a great pool.

Giza & Harraniyya

Because the Nile's west bank is inconvenient for sightseeing, the only reason to stay here is for absolute luxury – or if you're determined to pitch a tent.

BUDGET

Salma Motel (off Map pp110-11; ☎ 3381 5062, 010 270 4442; Saqqara Rd, Harraniyya; camping per person ££25, cabin ££80) The only camping option in Cairo is miles from the centre, adjacent to the Wissa Wassef Art Centre (p151). As it's close to a canal, mosquitoes can be a problem, whether you're in a camping spot or one of the double cabins. Breakfast is not included in the rate, nor offered. To get here, take a microbus or taxi from Pyramids Rd in the direction of Saqqara and get off when you see the blue 'Harraniyya' sign.

TOP END

Mena House Oberoi (Map p150; ☎ 3377 3222; www.menahouseoberoi.com; Pyramids Rd; r garden wing from US\$165, s/d palace wing from US\$235/280; 🏠 🚿 🚰) Built in 1869 as Khedive Ismail's hunting lodge, the stately Mena House offers two time warps in one: the public areas sport dazzling Islamic decoration and perpetually smell of jasmine, but the grandest palace-wing rooms

are Barbarella-meets-Ali Baba, with groovy tapestry bedspreads and smoky mirrors. You really have to splash out with a Pyramids view, because 'garden' views take in unsavoury chain-link fencing, while rooms in the new garden wing are dully modern. The swimming pool is suitably capacious.

EATING

With some of the best restaurants in the country, Cairo is the place to sample not only refined versions of Egyptian classics, but also all the pizza, pasta and even Thai food you've been craving. You can spend ££5 or ££250 on dinner – and if you go for the latter, your fellow guests will appreciate it if you dress the part. Most swank dining options are at the luxury hotels, and the chefs are usually imported straight from the relevant country, along with all the ingredients. At these and some midrange places, expect to pay an additional 22% or so, for tax and service (a few extra pounds' cash tip is always appreciated).

At the other end of the spectrum are the scores of street carts, *kushari* (spicy rice and lentils) counters, and fruit-and-veg markets where the majority of Cairenes feed themselves. You'll see Pizza Hut, KFC and McDonald's, but these glossy places are out of the reach of many locals; for visitors, they're a source of clean bathrooms, at least. But don't write off everything that looks like fast food: Egyptian minichains such as Koshary El Tahrir (opposite) are often some of the most delicious and cheap meals you'll have. Look for them along the main avenues Downtown and along Sharia 26th of July in Zamalek. (Note that at takeout places, you place your order with the cashier, then take your receipt

to the counter man, who wouldn't mind a tiny tip when all is done.)

Many restaurants tend to double as bars and nightclubs, with guests proceeding from multicourse meals into boozing and grooving before the night is over – if a place like this has notably scrumptious food, we list it here, but if the scene's more the thing, it's under Drinking (p170).

Too tired to leave the hotel? You can get just about anything delivered, and even order online through www.otlob.com, with service from more than 60 of the city's most popular restaurants.

Downtown

Forget fine dining. This is predominantly cheap-and-cheerful territory, plus a few nostalgic favourites.

BUDGET

our pick **At-Tabei ad-Dumyati** (Map p122; ☎ 2575 4211; 31 Sharia Orabi; dishes ££1-8; ☎ 7am-1am) About 200m north of Midan Orabi, this place offers some of the best meals in Cairo – and they just happen to be some of the cheapest as well. Start by picking four salads from a large array (the garlic-marinated tomatoes are killer, though they're not always available), then order *shwarma* (££5.50) or *ta'amiyya*, along with some lentil soup or *fuul*. The eggplant sandwiches are also delicious, and a steal at 75pt. There are branches in the food court of the Talaat Harb Complex (Map pp118-19) and in Mohandiseen (Map pp144-5).

Akher Sa'a (Map pp118-19; ☎ 2575 1668; 8 Sharia Alf; dishes ££1-9; ☎ 24hr) A frantically busy *fuul* and *ta'amiyya* takeaway joint with a no-frills cafeteria next door, Akher Sa'a has a limited

SILENT COMMUNICATION IN CAIRO

Cairenes have a whole array of nonverbal ways of getting a point across – and if you know some of them, you'll be much less likely to get offended, run over or neglected in a restaurant.

First, 'no' is often communicated with a simple upward nod or a brusque *tsk* sound – which can seem a bit rude if you're not expecting it. But if you use it casually to tout on the street, they're more likely to leave you alone.

Another signal that's often misinterpreted by foreigners is a loud hissing sound. No, that guy isn't commenting on your hot bod (well, OK, sometimes he might be) – he's trying to get your attention so you don't get trampled by his donkey cart coming down the narrow lane. Translate a hiss as 'Heads up – comin' through'.

But the most essential gesture to learn is the one for asking for the bill at a restaurant. Make eye contact with your waiter, hold out your hand palm up, then make a quick chopping motion across it with the side of your other hand, as if to say 'Cut me off'. Works like a charm.

menu but its food is fresh and good. The sign's in Arabic only; there's a Christian bookstore next door. A branch at 14 Sharia Abdel Khalek Sarwat has a fast-food-style setup downstairs (note the genius giant-*ta'amiyah* 'burger') but glacial table service upstairs.

Gas (Map pp118-19; ☎ 2576 3583; 13 Sharia 26th of July; dishes ££2-12; ☎ 9am-2am) This fast-food eatery is usually packed to the rafters with a constant stream of young Cairenes sampling its fresh and well-priced food. The *fiteer* with Greek cheese is scrumptious and the quarter chicken with rice and salad is both tasty and good value. You can sit upstairs or take away from the front counters. It has branches throughout the city, including opposite Khan al-Khalili (Map p129).

Koshary El Tahrir (Map pp118-19; Sharia Tahrir; small/medium/large kushari ££3/4/5) Our independent taste tests confirmed that this place is actually better than Abu Tarek (heresy!). There's a second branch on Sharia Abdel Khalek Sarwat.

Abu Tarek (Map pp118-19; 40 Sharia Champollion; small/large kushari ££3/5; ☎ 8am-midnight) 'We have no other branches!' proclaims this veritable *kushari* temple – no, the place has just expanded, decade by decade, into the upper stories of its building, even as it has held onto the unofficial Best Kushari title. The line moves fast; it's worth eating in to get the proper dose of garlicky vinegar, which isn't packed with takeout orders.

Fatatri at-Tahrir (Map pp118-19; 166 Sharia Tahrir; dishes ££9-16; ☎ 7am-1am) This tiny place just off Midan Tahrir has been serving sweet and savoury *fiteer* to Downtown residents, AUC students and legions of backpackers for decades. It's reliable and delicious, though it can get very crowded in the afternoon.

Other supercheap options:

Abu Samra (Map pp118-19; Tawfiqiyya Souq) Excellent *ta'amiyah*.

Felfela Takeaway (Map pp118-19; Sharia Talaat Harb) Also excellent.

Koshary Goha (Map pp118-19; 4 Sharia Emad ad-Din; kushari ££2-3; ☎ 10am-midnight) Average *kushari* but gorgeous vintage-Cairo setting.

Sayed Hanafy (Map pp118-19; Midan Orabi; small/medium/large kushari ££3/4/5; ☎ 24hr) Good *kushari*, and pavement tables.

MIDRANGE

Pottery Café (Map pp118-19; ☎ 2796 0260; 35 Sharia Mohammed Mahmoud; dishes ££8-22; ☎ 7am-11pm) AUC

students set up camp here, chowing down on big salads, stuffed baked potatoes and sandwiches. For coffee, though, you're better off at one of the other cafés on this strip.

Greek Club (Map pp118-19; ☎ 2575 0822; 3 Sharia Mahmoud Bassiouni; mains ££10-18; ☎ 7pm-2am) About the only thing that's still Greek about this private club is the bazouki music playing on its outdoor terrace, where cats clamber on a shady pergola. But it's a nice place to have a beer and a light meal; the menu is standard Egyptian, with a few Greek items, such as tzatziki, thrown in. If you can convince the door staff of your Hellenic heritage, you can skip the ££5 cover charge.

Abu al-Hassan al-Haty (Map pp118-19; 3 Sharia Halim; mains ££15-25) With its foggy mirrors, dusty chandeliers and waiters who look older than the building itself, this is a beautiful relic of Downtown – it's often used as a set for period TV shows. The food (all grilled items) is a bit secondary, but perfectly palatable.

Centro Recreativo Italiano Il Cairo (Map pp118-19; ☎ 2575 9590; 40 Sharia 26th of July; pizza ££15-30; ☎ 7-11pm) In winter, Cairo's Italian social club is in a cosy, wood-panelled room; in summer, it moves out into a vast yard in the centre of the embassy compound. It's the place to savour rarities such as great crisp-crust pizzas, affordable red wine and even pork products. Non-Italians pay an ££10 cover.

Felfela Restaurant (Map pp118-19; ☎ 2392 2833; 15 Sharia Hoda Shaarawi; entrées ££3-7, mains ££15-40; ☎ 8am-midnight) Packed with tourists, coach parties and locals since 1963, Felfela is an institution that can deliver a reliable, if not wildly delicious, meal and good service. A bizarre jungle theme rules the décor, but the food is straight-down-the-line Egyptian and consistently decent, especially the mezze and grilled chicken. A Stella costs ££12.

Café Riche (Map pp118-19; ☎ 2392 9793; 17 Sharia Talaat Harb; dishes ££15-40; ☎ 9am-1am) This narrow restaurant was the favoured drinking spot of Cairo's intelligentsia. It's a bit less lively now, but nonetheless a reliable and nostalgic spot to enjoy a meal (even a European-style breakfast) and a glass of wine, surrounded by framed portraits of Cairo luminaries on the wood-panelled walls.

our pick **Emara Hati al-Gish** (Map pp118-19; ☎ 2796 2964; 32 Sharia Falaki; sandwiches ££10-12, mains ££17-24; ☎ 11am-11pm) Carnivores will salivate instantly upon entering this grill palace, where the air is heavy with the smell of charcoal-cooked

meat, from a quarter-kilo (E£17.50) – up to a full stuffed, roasted sheep on request. The *kastileeta* (lamb chops) are particularly splendid, and the *mouza* (shins) good for gnawing. There's another branch in Mohandiseen, at 164 Sharia 26th of July, off Midan Sphinx (Map pp144–5). No alcohol.

Gomhouriya (Map pp118-19; 42 Sharia Falaki; meals E£20; ☎ 1pm-3am) Stuffed pigeon is the only thing on the menu, but it's splendid, served with salad and all-you-can-drink mugs of peppery, lemony broth. No alcohol, and easy to miss because it's small and there's no English sign; look for the big open oven. Out back are a few tables, along with sinks for washing off the grease when you're done nibbling the tasty fowl.

Sangria (Map pp144-5; ☎ 2579 6511; Casino ash-Shaggar, Corniche el-Nil, Bulaq; meals E£22-60; ☎ 1pm-3am) Adjacent to the club Absolute and opposite the Conrad hotel, Sangria has great Nile views from its 1st-floor terrace (where the stylish scene is) and a large garden area, which often has a more casual crowd, including children. Hip music adds to the ambience – the place is as much a bar as a restaurant. There's a minimum charge of E£50, but that's not hard to meet when a Sakkara costs E£23, and the menu ranges from spring rolls to garlic mushrooms to *penne alla vodka*. You'll find it in Bulaq, just north of Downtown on the Nile.

Le Bistro (Map pp118-19; ☎ 2392 7694; 8 Sharia Hoda Shaarawi; mains E£32-36) Tucked away below street level, Le Bistro nonetheless tries to conjure summery France with a blue-and-white colour scheme and Gallic crooners on the stereo. The food may not quite match its European ideal, but Francophone Cairenes love it, and steak frites can make a nice change from kebab.

Estoril (Map pp118-19; ☎ 2574 3102; 12 Sharia Talaat Harb; mezze E£7-35, mains E£32-59) Walking into Estoril (from an alley next to the Amex office) can be a little awkward: stroll through clouds of cigarette smoke, past booths crammed with Cairo's arts-and-letters set, then get the attention of a waiter, which is no mean feat. Once seated, though, you'll feel like one of the club, scooping up simple mezze and ordering beer after beer. It's not uncommon to see women alone here, and the bar in the back is a good place to perch for a shorter stay.

SELF-CATERING

For fresh fruit and vegetables try **Tawfiqiyya Souq** (Map pp118-19; Sharia Talaat Harb) or **Souq Bab al-Luq**

(Map pp118-19; off Midan Falaki). Tawfiqiyya Souq is open late, and there's an exceptionally good dairy store for ricotta-style cheese and rice pudding (around the corner on Sharia Talaat Harb) plus numerous *ba'als*, the all-purpose grocers where you can stock up on yogurt, crackers and drinks. For Western-style bread try the **Nile Hilton Deli** (Map pp118-19; ☎ 8am-11pm). For pastries and sweets head for **El-Abd Bakery** (Map pp118-19; 35 Sharia Talaat Harb; pastries E£1-6; ☎ 8am-midnight), Cairo's most famous pastry shop, easily identified by the crowds of people outside tearing into their Oriental sweets and savoury pies. There's another branch on the corner of Sharia 26th of July and Sharia Sherif.

Garden City

The luxury hotels here have some excellent restaurants. Look on Sharia Qasr al-Ainy for local haunts.

El Saky (Map p148; ☎ 2365 1234; Grand Hyatt Hotel, Corniche el-Nil; dishes E£22-90; ☎ noon-1am) Dotted with big white umbrellas and jutting over the water, the terrace restaurant at the Grand Hyatt is a great place to take in a view of the Nile – and perhaps some local movie stars, as this is a popular place to schmooze. The menu draws from all the hotel's restaurants, so you can take your pick of Indian, Italian, American and more.

Taboula (Map p148; ☎ 2792 5261; 1 Sharia Latin America; mezze E£10-30, mains E£30-45; ☎ noon-1am) The Lebanese food at this basement joint isn't as good as Sabaya's (below), but the atmosphere is more fun – here it's all big groups of Cairenes celebrating birthdays around giant communal tables, with lots of cocktails to go around. Mezze such as the *tomiyya* (garlic sauce) are your best bet, but skip the meatballs.

Bird Cage (Map pp118-19; ☎ 2795 7171; Semiramis InterContinental, Corniche el-Nil; appetisers E£26-85, mains E£42-95; ☎ noon-1am) Spicy means *spicy* at Cairo's best Thai restaurant, a soothing, wood-panelled space that's a favourite with wealthy Cairenes. Standards such as fish cakes and grilled beef salad are delicious and beautifully presented, as are more nouvelle offerings like *pla pow* (sea bass wrapped in banana leaves). Recipes might be a little light on the fish sauce for some tastes, but otherwise show a generous use of traditional Thai flavours. Don't miss the coconut biscotti served with tea – not particularly Thai, but very tasty.

Sabaya (Map pp118-19; ☎ 2795 7171; Semiramis InterContinental, Corniche el-Nil; mezze E£15-29, mains

££48-108; ☎ 7.30pm-1am) Lebanese cuisine is Egypt's most common 'ethnic' food, but it's rarely done as well as it is here, where the diverse and delicate *mezze* come with fresh-baked pillows of pita, and mains such as *fatteh* are served in individual cast-iron pots. The setting is very sleek, but considering portion sizes are generous and sharing is the norm, the prices are not as high as you would expect.

Islamic Cairo

There are plenty of fast-food joints around Midan Hussein but the restaurants in this part of town are limited – you really have to like grilled meat, and not be too squeamish about hygiene.

BUDGET

Al-Halwagy (Map p129; Midan Hussein; dishes ££5-30; ☎ 24hr) Not directly on the square, but just behind a row of buildings, this good *ta'amiyya*, *fuul* and salad place has been around for nearly a century. You can eat at pavement tables or hide away upstairs.

Egyptian Pancakes (Map p129; Midan Hussein; dishes ££10-15; ☎ 24hr) Adjacent to Al-Halwagy, this popular place serves up made-to-order *fit-eer* topped with your choice of cheese, egg, tomato, olives and ground meat. For dessert, choose your toppings from raisins, coconut and icing sugar.

MIDRANGE & TOP END

Khan el-Khalili Restaurant & Mahfouz Coffee Shop (Map p129; ☎ 2590 3788; 5 Sikket al-Badistan; snacks ££9-20, mains ££14-50; ☎ 10am-2am) The luxurious Moorish-style interiors of this restaurant and adjoining café are a popular haven from the khan's bustle/hassle. The place may be geared entirely to tourists, but the food is reasonably good, the air-con is strong and the toilets are clean. Tea is ££10 and *sheesha* is ££9. Look for the metal detector in the lane, immediately west of the medieval gate.

ourpick Citadel View (Map pp110-11; ☎ 2510 9151; Al-Azhar Park; entrées ££9.50-14, mains ££20-65, minimum ££100; ☎ noon-1am) Eating at this gorgeous restaurant – on a vast multilevel terrace, with Cairo's elite seated around you and the whole city sprawled below – feels almost like visiting a luxury resort. Fortunately, though, the prices are not so stratospheric, and the food, all traditional Egyptian grill items, is quite good. Reservations are recommended, par-

ticularly on the weekend. If you're not up for a full meal, you can have a coffee (££12) at the Alain Le Notre Café upstairs.

Zamalek

Zamalek has some of Cairo's best and most stylish restaurants. Cheap dining is not one of the island's fortes, but there are a few possibilities, including the Baraka *shwarma* stand (Map pp144-5) on Sharia Brazil and a *kushari* stand (Map pp144-5) on the west side of Sharia Shagaret ad-Durr.

MIDRANGE

Didos Al Dente (Map pp144-5; ☎ 2735 9117; 26 Sharia Bahgat Ali; pasta ££6.50-22.50) A noisy, crowded pasta joint with a small outdoor space, Didos rings with the clatter of dishes and often has crowds waiting out front for a table. It's popular with students from the nearby AUC dorm and it comes pretty close to living up to its claim of making the best noodles in town. No alcohol.

Maison Thomas (Map pp144-5; ☎ 2735 7057; 157 Sharia 26th of July; sandwiches ££12-40, pizzas ££23-40; ☎ 24hr) A little slice of Europe, with loads of brass and mirrors, and waiters in long white aprons serving crusty baguette sandwiches. But this institution is best known for its pizza, with generous toppings. There's a branch in Heliopolis (Map p153).

La Mezzaluna (Map pp144-5; ☎ 2735 2655; Sharia Aziz Osman; mains ££17-36; ☎ 7am-11pm) Head down a tiny alley to find this funky bilevel space that's frequented by Cairo bohemians. The menu is roughly Italian, from conventional combos such as tomato and basil to the 'Illy pasta' (beef bacon, cream, radicchio and coffee). Salads are enormous. No alcohol, but the little patio out front is a quiet place to take coffee. There's an outpost in Mohandiseen too (Map pp110-11).

Crave (Map pp144-5; ☎ 2736 3870; 22A Sharia Taha Hussein; mains ££18-50; ☎ noon-1am) This little black-and-white eatery looks extremely chic, but it has a welcoming (rather than snooty) staff and a reasonably priced menu of pizzas, pasta and the like. Score one of the comfy corner couch setups, and you could find yourself lounging here for quite some time. Many expats think its 'Zombie Burger' (££25) is the best in town, and the megasize, super-rich chocolate fondant dessert will satisfy serious cravings (order it with your main meal, to allow for baking time).

Abou El Sid (Map pp144-5; ☎ 2735 9640; 157 Sharia 26th of July; mezze E£11-24, mains E£25-57; ☺ noon-2am) Cairo's first hipster Egyptian restaurant, Abou El Sid is as popular with tourists as it is with upper-class natives looking for a taste of their roots – Omar Sharif has been known to savour the chicken with *molokhiyya*, but you can also enjoy a sugar-cane-and-tequila cocktail at the big bar, or a postprandial *sheesha*. It's all served amid hanging lamps, kitschy gilt 'Louis Farouk' furniture and fat pillows. There's another branch in Mohandiseen, on Midan Amman (Map pp110-11; ☎ 3749 7326). Reservations are a must. The entrance is on the west side of the Baehler's Mansions complex; look for the tall wooden doors.

L'Aubergine (Map pp144-5; ☎ 2738 0080; 5 Sharia Sayyed al-Bakry; entrées E£14-20, mains E£26-36; ☺ noon-2am) This white-walled, candlelit bistro devotes half its menu to vegetarian dishes such as blue-cheese ravioli and aubergine mous-saka – you can't go wrong with most of the cheesier, creamier items, and the mellow jazz soundtrack is soothing.

Sabai Sabai (Map pp144-5; ☎ 2735 1846; 21 Sharia al-Shaer Aziz Abaza; entrées E£8-35, mains E£30-85) Even if you're not craving Thai food, you might want to visit this mellow little restaurant for its quiet outdoor terrace. Salads and appetizers have all the requisite lemongrass and herbs, but the curries are a little weak. Taxi drivers may know the street by its old name, Sharia Maahad al-Swissry; the entrance is to the right of the hotel.

Sequoia (Map pp110-11; ☎ 2576 8086; 3 Sharia Abu al-Feda; mezze E£8, mains E£32-60, minimum Sat-Wed E£50, Thu-Fri E£75; ☺ 1pm-1am) At the very northern tip of Zamalek, this sprawling Nileside lounge is a major scene, with art exhibits by Townhouse Gallery, low cushions for nursing a *sheesha* and everything from Egyptian-style mezze to sushi on the menu. Bring an extra layer – evenings directly on the water can be surprisingly cool. A Stella goes for E£22.

Gezira

The east side of the island is lined with large boats converted into entertainment extravaganzas, each packed with themed restaurants and clubs. They're generally more style than substance, but a couple stand out.

Dar El Amar (Map pp144-5; ☎ 2735 3114, 012 390 0256; Blue Nile Boat, 9A Sharia Saray al-Gezira; mezze E£10-36, grills E£27-47; ☺ noon-3am) The challenge at this popular Lebanese restaurant is drawing your eyes

away from the Nile view long enough to make a choice from the 53 mezze on offer. Unlike many other eateries on the river, prices are reasonable and you don't have to be wearing designer glad rags to score a table. A Stella costs E£24.

Chili's (Map pp144-5; ☎ 2735 3122; Nile City Boat, Sharia Saray al-Gezira; entrées E£20-30, mains E£29-60; ☺ 11am-1am) The American pseudo-Mexican chain now occupies a spot on the Nile where Naguib Mahfouz used to hold court – as Cairo goes, so goes the world. All-you-can-eat salsa and chips and a 'build your own fajita' platter satisfy both homesick expats and middle-class Egyptians eager for exotic flavours.

Mohandiseen & Doqqi

These grey concrete suburbs look bland and flavourless, but it's possible to find some excellent restaurants among the plethora of fast-food outlets.

BUDGET

Al-Omda (Map pp144-5; ☎ 3346 2701; 6 Sharia al-Ghazza, Mohandiseen; dishes E£8-30; ☺ noon-2am) A mini-empire taking up the better part of a block, Al-Omda offers numerous ways to put grilled meats into your system. At the takeout joint on the corner, get a *shish tawouq* sandwich with spicy pickles. Or else you can sit down in the old-style 'Oriental' restaurant around the corner to your left, or head upstairs to the neon-lit café and get a *sheesha* with the trendy crowd. Down the block to the right, two other places add *kushari* and pizza. No alcohol served.

MIDRANGE

Samakmak (Map pp144-5; ☎ 3302 7308; 24 Sharia Ahmed Orabi, Mohandiseen; dishes E£30-75; ☺ 10am-4am) Shielded from a noisy street by a phalanx of shrubbery, a few tables with blue-checked cloths set a cheery note in a garden at the Cairo branch of the respected Alexandrian fish restaurant. There's no menu – just pick from mullet, crabs, squid and more (priced per kilo) in the iced-up display, then specify how you want it prepared. It arrives at the table accompanied by salads and rice. No alcohol.

Cedars (Map pp144-5; ☎ 3345 0088; 42 Sharia Geziret al-Arab, Mohandiseen; mezze E£10-22, mains E£45-75; ☺ noon-1am) This chic Lebanese restaurant is a favourite with Mohandiseen's lunching ladies, then with a younger crowd later in

the evening. Rattan chairs dot the spacious terrace, where there's *sheesha* along with the better-than-average food: peppery *muhammara* (red-pepper salad), fresh and salty *ayran* (yogurt drink) and big sandwiches stuffed with French fries. You can also get full meals from the grill.

Giza & Pyramids Road

There are a number of good eateries in this part of Cairo, though only Andrea, Fish Market and Moghul Room are worth a special trip. The others will serve you well if you happen to be in the neighbourhood.

BUDGET & MIDRANGE

El-Mashrabiah (Map p148; ☎ 3748 2801; 4 Sharia Ahmed Nessim; mains ££12-40; ☺ noon-1am) Excellent Egyptian food is served with formality at this intimate eatery. Located a few steps below street level, the dining room is further darkened by ornate carved panelling, deep leather banquettes and waiters dressed in sombre suits. Meat lovers will find themselves in seventh heaven: the *kofta* and *tagens* are good, as is the rabbit with *molokhiyya* and the duck with starchy taro root. But vegetarians don't get much to work with. No alcohol is served.

Andrea (Map p150; ☎ 3383 1133; 59 Tir'at al-Maryutia, Saqqara; entrées ££5-15, mains ££20-25; ☺ 10am-1am) Take a trip to the country at this restaurant 1.5km north of Pyramids Rd on the west side of Maryutia Canal. At the entrance women pat out bread dough and tend the spit-roasted chicken the place is justly famous for. There's little else on the menu aside from this and salads, and cold Stella (££20). Weather permitting, seating is in a large garden with playground equipment and a swimming pool. But with greenery comes mosquitoes, so lay on the repellent beforehand. A taxi from central Cairo should cost about ££20, or ££6 from the Pyramids/Mena House area. Make sure your driver doesn't take you to the unrelated Andrea Gardenia, south of Pyramids Rd.

Fish Market (Map p148; ☎ 3570 9693; Americana Boat, 26 Sharia el-Nil; dishes ££25-50; ☺ noon-2am) After selecting some of the finest and freshest seafood in town from the large display counter, most guests tuck into delicious *mezze* while their fish is simply but expertly cooked. With its wonderful Nile views (particularly at night), laid-back feel and efficient service, this place is a gem.

Cheap but good-quality eateries within walking distance of the Pyramids are few. Try **Felfela** (off Map p150; ☎ 3383 0234; 27 Cairo-Alexandria Rd; ☺ 8am-2am) or the popular Peace II Seafood Restaurant. Both are beloved by tour groups but also patronised by locals, they're on the main road off the roundabout in front of the Mena House Oberoi hotel.

TOP END

La Gourmandise (Map p148; ☎ 3569 2557; Ground fl, First Place mall, 35 Sharia al-Giza; pastries ££16-33, mains ££42-115; ☺ 10am-11pm) This café-pâtisserie in the glitzy Four Seasons mall comes complete with tuxedoed waiters, potted palms and a grand piano. Its good-quality Mediterranean dishes are perfect for lunch after you've been to the zoo.

Khan El Khalili (Map p150; ☎ 3383 3222; Mena House Oberoi, Pyramids Rd; mains ££55-150; ☺ 24hr) With highly functional air-conditioning and a fantastic view of the Pyramids, this is a good spot for a post-sightseeing lunch, even if the food is a bit bland. The menu is broad enough, from spaghetti to Indian dishes (a bright spot), that everyone will find a little something to like. A Stella costs ££20.

Moghul Room (Map p150; ☎ 3377 3222; Mena House Oberoi, Pyramids Rd; mains ££75-165; ☺ 7-11.45pm, plus 12.30-2.45pm Fri) Cairo's best Indian restaurant specialises in mild North Indian-style curries and kebabs, with an emphasis on tandoori dishes. Though it's a long taxi ride from Downtown, the opulent décor, good food and live sitar music make the trip worthwhile. There's a wide range of vegetarian options (from ££35 to ££40) and an extensive (and pricey) wine list. At lunch, a limited selection of dishes is available on Khan El Khalili's menu.

Heliopolis

In addition to the Amphitriton (p152) and branches of major chains, these places are a good break if you happen to be in the neighbourhood.

BUDGET

El Shabrawy (Map p153; ☎ 2258 6954; Sharia Ibrahimy; dishes ££4-15; ☺ 8am-2am) Locals love this place for its *makaroneh* – big bowls of noodles with a rich meat sauce – but the place also serves dishes such as egg-fried cauliflower and *aggah* (a cross between an omelette and a giant *ta'amiyya*), most of which are vegetarian. It's signed in

Arabic only – look for the red awning. The Shabrawy *ta'amiyya* stand (Map p153) on the opposite side of the street is also popular.

MIDRANGE

Petit Palmyra (Map p153; ☎ 2417 1720; 27 Sharia al-Ahram; mezze E£9-17, mains E£16-40; ☎ 11am-2am) Old-school Heliopolis, with stiffly starched serviettes, puffy chairs, sepia-tone photos on the wall and someone tickling the ivories while you eat. Egyptian-Levantine staples such as stuffed pigeon are great; a few European dishes such as *penne puttanesca* are decent.

Merryland (Map p153), north of central Heliopolis, is a large park and entertainment centre with kids' rides and lots of places to eat, from TGI Friday's to Egyptian snack joints. It was changing management on last visit, so the restaurants and other entertainment may vary, but in general it's a good place to eat and people-watch.

SELF-CATERING

Zamalek's best grocery is **Alfa Market** (Map pp144-5; ☎ 2737 0801; 4 Sharia al-Malek al-Afdal), with both local foods and imported items, while **Sekem** (Map pp144-5; ☎ 2738 2724; Sharia Ahmed Sabry) sells organic products and tofu. There's a 24-hour Metro Supermarket (Map pp144-5) on Sharia Ismail Mohammed, and several shops on Sharia 26th of July sell good-quality produce. Pork products such as prosciutto are available from the deli counter at Maison Thomas (p165) and the **Bakery** (Map pp144-5; ☎ 2728 3000; Cairo Marriott, 16 Sharia Saray al-Gezira; caffè latte E£14; ☎ 6.30am-10pm) does good European-style bread.

For a sweet treat, **Mandarine Koueider** (Map pp144-5; ☎ 2735 5010; 17 Sharia Shagaret ad-Durr; per scoop E£3.25; ☎ 9am-11pm) is the place to get your fix of delectable ice cream. Definitely shell out extra for the *zabadi bi-tut* (yogurt with blackberry). There's another branch in Heliopolis (Map p153).

DRINKING

Cairo isn't a 'dry' city, but locals tend to run on caffeine by day, available at both traditional *ahwas* (coffeehouses) and European-style cafés. Drinking beer or spirits typically doesn't start till the evening hours, and then it's limited to hotel bars and some cheaper dives. Liquor is expensive, and wine is barely drinkable, but beer is widely available and cheap. For self-catering, head for Drinkies

shops (on Sharia 26th of July in Zamalek and on Sharia Talaat Harb in Downtown), which stock beer, wine and the only reliable brands of local booze. Note that drinking on the street is absolutely taboo, and wandering around drunk is in poor taste as well. During Ramadan alcohol is served only to foreigners.

Cafés & Patisseries

Sometime after the year 2000, espresso crash-landed in Cairo, and the city hasn't been the same since. Every reasonably well-to-do neighbourhood supports several coffee bars offering every kind of caffeinated drink, as well as snacks, sweets and free wi-fi. If it weren't for the gaggles of headscarf-wearing teenage girls who crowd the banquettes after school, you'd be hard pressed to locate yourself in Egypt. Yes, there are even a couple of Starbucks outlets – and there will likely be more by the time you read this. For Egyptian coffeehouses see opposite.

DOWNTOWN

Cilantro (Map pp118-19; 31 Sharia Mohammed Mahmoud; cappuccino E£6, sandwiches E£6-17.50; ☎ 9am-2am) This popular, clean café – part of a locally owned chain – does excellent Italian-style coffee and Twinings tea. Downstairs, order to go and grab a packaged sandwich, fresh juice, cake or salad from the open fridge; for table service head upstairs (smoky, but with a couple of outside balcony seats). There are other branches just about everywhere you turn: Zamalek (Map pp144-5), Heliopolis (Map p153) and Doqqi (Map p148), to name a few. All offer free wi-fi, strong air-con and a stash of magazines and newspapers.

Groppi's (Map pp118-19; Midan Talaat Harb; minimum charge E£20; ☎ 7am-midnight) Distinctly *not* part of the new coffee wave, Groppi's high point was more than 50 years ago. Now it just seems haunted. The offerings are poor and overpriced, and the tearoom reeks of cheap tobacco. For nostalgia buffs only.

Groppi Garden (Map pp118-19; Sharia Adly; ☎ 7am-midnight) Same uninteresting pastries as the other Groppi, but the garden terrace here (with just a E£10 minimum) is a relatively peaceful place for a cup of tea or *sheesha*.

ZAMALEK

Simonds (Map pp144-5; 112 Sharia 26th of July; café au lait E£7; ☎ 7am-10pm) At this wonderfully

old-fashioned French-style café, the barista looks as if he's been serving for the better part of a century. The Byzantine pay-first system can be difficult to navigate pre-cafféine, as are the crowds – but it's a Cairene tradition to sit at a rickety counter stool and read the morning paper over a flaky, buttery pastry.

Coffee Roastery (Map pp144-5; 140 Sharia 26th of July; cappuccino E£7; ☎ 24hr) Its fast-food menu, blaring music videos and young staff make this an extremely popular meeting place for groups of young locals. The coffee, served in 30 different ways, is surprisingly good. Don't bother with the food.

Coffee Bean & Tea Leaf (Map pp144-5; 5 Sharia Abu al-Feda; cappuccino E£9; ☎ 9am-2am) At this branch of the American coffee chain most associated with Hollywood celebrity sightings, the clientele wears similarly large sunglasses and jewels. There's a strict no-tipping policy – which may or may not be connected with the occasional complaints of incorrect change-making. Still, the coffee is very good.

Euro Deli (Map pp144-5; 22 Sharia Taha Hussein; cappuccino E£9, sandwiches E£12-22; ☎ 24hr) Bright, busy and slick café with free wi-fi and good wraps, pastas and fries. For breakfast, there's chewy Montreal-style bagels – try the local variation, topped with *labneh* (thick yogurt with olive oil) and cucumber.

Arabica Café (Map pp144-5; ☎ 2735 7982; 20 Sharia al-Marashly, Zamalek; cappuccino E£7, breakfast E£5.50-9.50, fiteer E£11.50-23; ☎ 9am-11pm) Funky and lived-in, this upstairs café is frequented by teens and older students, who gather to study and doodle on the paper-topped tables. And unlike slicker competitors, you can actually get some Egyptian food here, along with your latte – breakfast options include *fuul* and *shakshouka* (spicy scrambled eggs), and you can order sweet or savoury *fiteer* anytime.

Ahwass

Cairo's *ahwas* are essential places to unwind, chat and breathe deeply over a *sheesha*. Dusty floors, rickety tables and the clatter of dominoes and *towla* (backgammon) define the most traditional places, but newer, shinier places – where women smoke as well – have expanded the concept, not to mention the array of *sheesha* flavours, which can now extend to guava and mint. Even though coffee (*ahwa*) gave its name to the café, *shai* (tea) is far more common than the inky-black Turkish-style brew, usually drunk in the

morning if at all. Or you can order lemonade, hot herbal infusions or, in the winter, rich, milky *sahlab* (see p96).

There's an *ahwa* for every possible subculture. We list the most famous ones here, but half the joy of the *ahwa* is discovering 'yours'. Look in back alleys all over Downtown (sports fans gather south of Sharia Adly; intellectuals, at Midan Falaki); there's a nice traditional joint down the lane behind Al-Azhar Mosque; and some mall food courts can be surprisingly fun. Most *ahwas* are open from 8am to 2am; a few serve beer, but generally it's a nonalcoholic scene.

Fishawi's Coffeeshouse (El Fishawy; Map p129; off Midan Hussein, Islamic Cairo; ☎ 24hr except in Ramadan) Probably the oldest *ahwa* in the city, and certainly the most celebrated, Fishawi's is a great place to watch the world go by. Despite being swamped by foreign tourists and equally wide-eyed out-of-town Egyptians, it is a regular *ahwa*, serving up *shai* (E£3) and *sheesha* (E£4.50) to stallholders and shoppers alike. It's especially alluring in the early hours of the morning. During Ramadan it closes from 3am till about 5pm.

Cafeteria Horreyya (Map pp118-19; Midan Falaki, Bab al-Luq) The Horreyya (there's no real sign outside – look for a pale-pink façade and plywood over some of the windows) is simultaneously one of the city's most classic *ahwas* and one of its most up-to-the-minute. Not only can you stare dreamily through the *sheesha* smoke up at the high ceilings, down at the sawdust-strewn floor and out across a great cross-section of customers, but you can also check your email on the free wi-fi. Really. Another bonus: beer is also available (E£8). There's a good chess scene here, too, though beer is strictly prohibited near those tables.

Some others to try include the following:

Abu Aly Café (Map pp118-19; Nile Hilton, 1113 Corniche el-Nil, Downtown; minimum charge E£20; ☎ 10am-1.30am) Popular with locals: an upscale *sheesha* experience, with live music, traditional food (entrées E£12 to E£15, mains E£46 to E£82) and waiters in *galabiyas*.

Kawkab ash-Sharq (Soma Caffé; Map pp118-19; 11 Sharia Saray al-Ezbekiyya, Downtown; ☎ 24hr) Dedicated to the 'Star of the Orient', Umm Kolthum. Look for the huge busts of the singer out front.

Mahrán (Map pp118-19; Downtown) Under a tree in an alley off Sharia Mahmoud Bassiouni in Downtown. Women are welcome.

Tornado (Map pp144-5; 3 Midan Aswan, Mohandisein; sheesha E£9; ☎ 10am-2am) Dim lights, TVs and canoodling

couples – but the hardest drink is a smoothie, and the fresh-fruit *sheesha* tastes practically healthy.

Zahret al-Bustan (Map pp118-19; off Sharia Talaat Harb, Downtown) A sometime haunt of intellectuals and writers – and students and backpackers.

Bars

LOCAL BARS

For those who want to see Cairo's underbelly, a few Downtown bars serve beer and local spirits. They can seem unwelcoming: none are suitable for women on their own, and the toilets are pretty foul. It also doesn't help that none is clearly labelled 'bar'; 'cafeteria' is the common euphemism, and the entrances are screened off so passers-by can't see in. A Stella will set you back E£8 or E£10.

Cairo (Map pp118-19; 3 Sharia Saray al-Ezбекиyya, Downtown; ☎ 24hr) Walk through the restaurant to the 1st-floor bar. The beer is not always icy, but the atmosphere is slightly sleazy and fun.

Cafeteria Stella (Map pp118-19; cnr Sharia Hoda Shaarawi & Sharia Talaat Harb, Downtown; ☎ until midnight) Marked with a tiny red neon sign, this spit'n'sawdust-style place gets good reviews from Downtown expats, who find it a more cheerful and welcoming place than similar bars nearby.

Cafeteria Port Tawfiq (Map pp118-19; Midan Orabi, Downtown) Dark and reasonably inviting.

Cap d'Or (Map pp118-19; Sharia Abdel Khalek Sarwat, Downtown) Quite run-down and lit with fluorescent bulbs – but you're not going for the décor. The staff and regulars are used to seeing foreigners.

WESTERN-STYLE BARS

As in any other busy city, bars open and close and go in and out of favour. The most reliable are those in hotels, but the flavour-of-the-week places can generate the most high-rolling fun. By far the best place to go boozing (if you have the cash) is Zamalek, where several bars are within staggering distance of one another. Many places also have full menus, so you can snack as you go. The fancier places can have door policies as strict as the nightclubs, so dress well and go in mixed groups.

Windsor Bar (Map pp118-19; 19 Sharia Alfay, Downtown; ☎ 6pm-1am) Alas, most of the Windsor's regular clientele has passed on, leaving a few hotel guests, a cordial, polyglot bartender and a faint soundtrack of swing jazz and Umm Kolthum. Colonial history has settled in an almost palpable film on the taxidermed antelope heads, the barrel-shape chairs and the dainty wall

sconces. Solo women will feel comfortable here. A Stella costs E£13.

La Bodega (Map pp144-5; ☎ 2735 6761; 1st fl, Baehler's Mansions, 157 Sharia 26th of July, Zamalek; ☎ noon-2am) This vast, amber-lit lounge doubles as a restaurant, but the food (mains E£29 to E£50) is inconsistent, so better to stick with cocktails at the long brass-top bar. The place draws most of Cairo's celebrity scenesters, who look gorgeous against the *belle époque* backdrop. One wing is sectioned off and dubbed Barten, where the crowd skews younger and the music louder. Reservations are recommended.

Odeon Palace Hotel (Map pp118-19; 6 Sharia Abdel Hamid Said, Downtown; ☎ 24hr) Its green carpet singed from *sheesha* coals, this rooftop bar is favoured by Cairo's heavy-drinking theatre and cinema clique, and is a great place to watch the sun go down (or come up). A Stella costs E£8 and bar snacks start at E£5.

Marriott Garden Café (Map pp144-5; Cairo Marriott, 16 Sharia Saray al-Gezira, Zamalek; ☎ 6.30am-10pm) The Marriott's garden terrace is one of the most comfortable spots in town to relax over a drink. Big cane chairs, fresh air and good-quality wine and beer make it deservedly popular. You can eat here, too. The only downside is that it's pricey.

Topkapi (Map p148; Corniche el-Nil, Garden City) Tucked below the street opposite the Four Seasons Nile Plaza and behind a moored restaurant boat, this mellow Nileside hang-out is easy to miss. Once down here, though, parked at a picnic bench and enjoying a *sheesha* and beer, it's easy to forget the traffic on the corniche. Inside the tentlike main room, a DJ spins hip international and Arabic tunes, and the menu (mains E£25 to E£42) is a quirky mix of local and Turkish flavours, with nightly specials. It occasionally hosts special, ticket-only parties.

L'Aubergine (Map pp144-5; 1st fl, 5 Sharia Sayyed al-Bakry, Zamalek; ☎ noon-2am) Wear your tightest black T-shirt and your sharpest eyewear to this minimalist bar that's just a little hipper than other fab nightspots, catering to jazz cats, expats and moodier AUC students.

Le Tabasco (Map pp110-11; ☎ 3336 5583; 8 Midan Amman, Mohandiseen; minimum charge E£50; ☎ 1pm-2am) Perennially chic, Le Tabasco is a basement grotto with good electronica and moody lighting – most of the well-dressed, slightly older patrons are here to air-kiss and nibble on assorted international snacks. Reservations are a help.

Deals (Map pp144-5; 2 Sharia Sayyed al-Bakry, Zamalek) A small cellar bar that never looks open actually gets too packed for comfort late in the evening and at weekends. It's pleasant enough at quieter times. There are other branches in Mohandiseen (Map pp144-5) and Heliopolis (Map p153).

Revolving Restaurant Lounge (Map p148; ☎ 3365 1234; 41st fl, Grand Hyatt Cairo, Corniche el-Nil, Garden City; minimum charge E£35; ☎ 3pm-2am) Cheesy, yes, but there's a lot to be said for comfortable seats and knock-out views from the tallest structure for miles around. There's a pianist and you'll need to frock up. (The adjacent restaurant doesn't merit the money.)

Le Grillon (Map pp118-19; 8 Sharia Qasr el-Nil, Downtown) Nominally a restaurant, this bizarre faux-patio is all about beer, *sheesha* and gossip about politics and the arts scene. The illusion of outdoors is created with wicker furniture, fake vines and lots of ceiling fans. The entrance is in the back of a courtyard between two buildings.

Bull's Eye (Map pp110-11; 32 Sharia Jeddah, Doqqi) This faux-English pub is a big stop on the nightlife circuit – an unpretentious place to rest up on nonclubbing nights. It draws a mix of expats and Egyptians, with darts, karaoke Wednesday and, if you're inclined, steak on the menu.

Nomad (Map p148; King Hotel, 20 Sharia Abdel Rahim Sabry, Doqqi; ☎ 1pm-4am) The West Bank equivalent of the Odeon Palace rooftop bar, ideal for breezy *sheesha* and beer, with a good view. But befitting its Doqqi location, it's a bit more stylish, and the *sheesha* comes in more flavours. Food here is recommended, though portions are on the snacky side.

Jazz Up (Map pp118-19; Nile Hilton, 1113 Corniche el-Nil, Downtown) The ground-floor bar in the Nile Hilton is an odd mix of wood paneling and white vinyl, as well as salsa nights (Sunday and Friday) and the occasional live band (Thursday).

Hard Rock Café (Map p148; ☎ 2532 1281; Grand Hyatt Cairo, Corniche el-Nil, Garden City; ☎ noon-4am) Exactly what you'd expect from the global chain.

ENTERTAINMENT

Western-style clubs, cinemas that screen English-language films and five-star cabarets with floorshowers abound in Cairo. Live music is somewhat more limited, but whether you're in for rock, local folk or jazz, it can be a welcoming scene because it's relatively small.

Theatre is mainly in Arabic, so not accessible to many travellers.

Nightclubs

There aren't enough clubbers in Cairo to pack more than one place at a time, so what's hot varies according to the night of the week. Occasionally a club will host a special one-off party for which a ticket is required; they're free or very cheap, but the challenge is getting one. Keep an ear to the ground, and ask likely Egyptians you meet. Many places start as restaurants and only shift into club mode after midnight, at which point the door policy gets stricter. Big packs of men are always a no-no – go in as mixed a group as you can, and ideally make reservations.

Absolute (Map pp144-5; ☎ 2579 6512; Corniche el-Nil, Bulaq; minimum charge E£75; ☎ 1pm-3am) One of Cairo's most elite clubs but also one of its best, Absolute absolutely requires reservations. With a big dance floor and solid DJs, it draws a flashy crowd for which bottle service is the norm. If you're not up for the full club scene, you can lounge at adjacent Sangria restaurant (p164).

Latex (Map pp118-19; ☎ 2578 0444; Nile Hilton, 1113 Corniche el-Nil, Downtown; ☎ 10pm-4am) The grande dame of Cairo's club scene (formerly known as Jackie's), the Nile Hilton's basement party zone still keeps up with the times. The music is always some variation on house, with the occasional Arabic pop hit thrown in, and the crowd is largely 20-somethings. There's a E£100 minimum Tuesday through Friday, except for ladies on Wednesday.

Club 35 (Map p148; ☎ 3573 8500; Four Seasons First Residence, 35 Sharia Giza, Giza; ☎ 7pm-3am) If you go before midnight, the place doesn't look all that promising, as it's still in soft-jazz Asian-fusion-bistro mode. But later, the light show gets livelier, as does the music, and it rivals Latex for weekend crowds.

Additionally the Hard Rock Café (left) often has a DJ spinning discs, and some kind of dance scene.

Cinemas

For what's showing, check the listings in *Al-Ahram Weekly* or online at www.yallabina.com; cinemas usually have four or five sessions a day, some starting at 10am and or as late as 12.30am. Tickets typically cost around E£25, and can be cheaper at daytime sessions (when more women attend

RAMY HABEEB

Director and co-founder of Kotobarabia.com, the first Arabic e-publishing house in the Middle East.

How long have you lived in Cairo?

Three years. I moved here in 2004 from Japan.

Whoa – major change!

Yeah, but I love Cairo. I like not knowing what the day will bring. And the average Egyptian is really friendly. I find myself striking up random conversations with people on the street – a good way of dealing with the claustrophobia. Anyway, I'm half Egyptian, and growing up I came to Cairo every summer to visit my family. It's amazing how fast it grows and changes.

Anything big recently?

The yellow cabs – what a step forward! The old black-and-white cabs have no meters, no air-conditioning, and, if you're really unlucky, no door handles. Each ride ends with an epic discussion as to exactly how much the ride is worth versus the complications of traffic, old cars and potential flat tires. But there are still plenty of those around, because the Egyptian mechanic is a MacGyver of automotive technology. Egyptians can fix anything! So if you still want the real Egyptian experience – haggle away!

What's your favourite monument in Cairo?

Seeing how I'm in publishing, I suppose my favourite monument is the statue of Naguib Mahfouz in Midan Sphinx [in Mohandiseen]. It was erected not long after he won the Nobel Prize.

And your favourite restaurant?

It's a tie between Gad (p163) and **Makani** (9 Sharia Amr, Mohandiseen; ☎ 8am-2am). Gad is real modern Egyptian fast food. You can get traditional *fuul* and *ta'amiyya* sandwiches, or crazy concoctions such as French fries in a pita pocket smothered with tahini.

On the other end of the spectrum, there's Makani: a sandwich and sushi delicatessen. I know that sandwiches and sushi don't exactly mix, but Makani has found the balance, along with a nice atmosphere. And you must try the carrot cake – it's the best I've ever had anywhere. And it has wireless.

Is there anywhere you go just to relax – and not use the computer?

Without a doubt, Nomad (p171). It's a rooftop bar with an amazing view – a great place to sit back, have a *sheesha* and enjoy the city from a peaceful, bird's-eye perspective.

But I also like Cilantro (p168). It's a home-grown coffeehouse that's positioned to compete with the Starbucks and Costas of the world. I would love to see something like Cilantro in other parts of the world, to see an Egyptian company compete on an international scale.

What's your favourite phrase in Egyptian colloquial?

Kubbar dimaaghik. It literally means 'Make your head bigger', but the connotation is 'Chill out' or 'Relax', to defuse a situation. Whenever I'm in an uncomfortable situation, I just say this, and people usually start to laugh and ask me how I learned the phrase – they're really surprised, because I'm often mistaken for a foreigner. By the end of the discussion, we're usually best friends.

shows at the lower-rent places). Also check schedules at the many cultural centres (p112). The following regularly screen English-language films:

Cairo Sheraton Cinema (Map p148; ☎ 3760 6081; Cairo Sheraton, Midan al-Galaa, Doqqi) The closest Cairo has to an art-house cinema.

Cinema Karim I & II (Map p122; ☎ 2592 4830; 15 Sharia Emad ad-Din, Downtown) Cheap tickets and action flicks make it popular with young males (not a place for unaccompanied women). The entrance to Karim II is around the corner.
Cinema Metro (Map pp118-19; ☎ 2393 7061; 35 Sharia Talaat Harb, Downtown) Once Cairo's finest, now one of its scruffiest.

Cinema Tahrir (Map p148; ☎ 3335 4726; 122 Sharia Tahrir, Doqqi) Comfortable, modern cinema where single females shouldn't receive hassle.

Citystars Centre (off Map pp110-11; ☎ 2480 2013; Sharia Omar ibn Khattab, Nasr City) A 13-screen megaplex at the mall.

Good News Grand Hyatt (Map p148; ☎ 2532 2800; Grand Hyatt Annex, Nile Corniche, Garden City) Three screens. Occasionally subtitles Arabic films in English.

Live Music & Theatre

For theatre and classical and folk music schedules, check the 'ET Calendar' in *Egypt Today* or the *Egyptian Gazette*; for bands, pick up a copy of the *Croc* monthly. Also keep an ear out for the SOS Music Festival (www.sosmusicfestival.com), a periodic free show of local bands that draws a devoted crowd.

Cairo Opera House (Map p148; ☎ 2739 8144; Gezira Exhibition Grounds, Gezira) Of the opera complex's five halls, performances by the Cairo Opera and the Cairo Symphony Orchestra tend to be held in its Main Hall while recitals, theatre and dance from Egypt and the rest of the world in its Small Hall, Gomhouria Theatre, Arab Music Institute and an open-air theatre. Jacket and tie are required by males for Main Hall performances (travellers have been known to borrow them from staff). Programmes are available at the information window (right of the main entrance).

Cairo Jazz Club (Map pp144-5; ☎ 3345 9939; www.cairojazzclub.com; 197 Sharia 26th of July, Agouza; 🕒 5pm-3am) The city's liveliest stage, with modern Egyptian folk, electronica, Oriental fusion, and more seven nights a week, usually starting around 10pm. You must book a table ahead (online is easiest), and no-one under 25 is admitted.

After Eight (Map pp118-19; ☎ 2574 0855; www.after8egypt.com; 6 Sharia Qasr el-Nil, Downtown; minimum charge Fri-Wed ££60, Thu ££90; 🕒 8pm-2am) A funky, poorly ventilated venue that gets packed for everything from jazz trios to a Frank Sinatra impersonator to the wildly popular DJ Dina, who mixes James Brown, '70s Egyptian pop and the latest cab-driver favourites; the clientele is equally eclectic. Reserve online (the website's style in no way reflects the club's).

Makan (Map pp110-11; ☎ 2792 0878; www.egyptmusic.org; 1 Sharia Saad Zaghloul, Mounira) The Egyptian Center for Culture & Art runs this intimate space dedicated to traditional music. Don't miss the Mazaher ensemble, performing the

traditional women's *zar*, a sort of musical trance and healing ritual (usually Wednesday, 9pm; ££20).

El Genaina Theatre (Map pp110-11; ☎ 2362 6748; www.mawred.org; Al-Azhar Park, Sharia Salah Salem, Islamic Cairo) The park's 300-seat open-air theatre hosts touring Western artists, stars from the Middle East and locals; shows are often free (though you must pay the park entrance fee).

Also check the schedule at El Sawy Culture Wheel (p112), where two concert halls host the city's bigger rock and jazz bands. Jazz Up (p171) has bands one or two nights a week, and the Citadel (p135) often has free major concerts in the summer as well.

Dance

BELLY DANCING

If you see only one belly dancer in your life, it had better be in Cairo, the art form's true home. The best dancers perform at Cairo's five-star hotels, usually to an adoring crowd of wealthy Gulf Arabs. Shows typically begin around midnight, although the star might not take to the stage until 2am or later. Admission is steep; expect to shell out upwards of ££250, which includes food, but not drinks. Cairo's divas are often getting in tiffs with their host hotels or their managers, so their venues may change from what's given below.

At the other end of the scale, you can watch a less nuanced expression of the art form for just a few pounds at several clubs along Sharia Alfay in Downtown. They're seedy, the mikes are set on the highest reverb, and most of the dancers have the appearance and grace of amateur wrestlers. But it can be fun, especially if you can maintain the right level of inebriation – buzzed enough to join in the dancing onstage (a perk if you shower the dancer and the band with enough ££5 notes) but not so out of it that you fall for the myriad over-charging tactics, such as fees for unordered snacks and even napkins (expect to pay about ££15 for a Stella, after about ££5 cover charge). Like the hotels, nothing happens till after midnight.

Haroun al-Rashid (Map pp118-19; ☎ 3795 7171; Semiramis InterContinental, Corniche el-Nil, Garden City; 🕒 11pm-4am Tue-Thu & Sun) This old-fashioned-looking five-star club – all red curtains and white marquee lights – is where the famous Dina undulates (though often not on Wednesday nights – call to check).

Casablanca (Map p148; ☎ 3336 9700; Midan al-Galaa, Doqqi) Located in the Cairo Sheraton, where Soraya is the star.

Palmyra (Map pp118-19; off Sharia 26th of July, Downtown; admission E£6) The furthest on the 'other end of the scale' is Palmyra, a cavernous, dilapidated 1950s dancehall in an alley off Sharia 26th of July. It has a full Arab musical contingent, belly dancers who get better the more money is thrown at them, and an occasional singer or acrobat. In addition to the entrance fee, there's a minimum charge of E£30, which basically covers a beer and a *sheesha*.

Scheherazade (Map pp118-19; 1 Sharia Alfay, Downtown; admission E£5) Worth visiting for the gorgeous interior alone, all Orientalist fantasia complete with red velvet drapes – this doesn't inspire a classier air in the patrons, however.

Nile Maxim (Map pp144-5; ☎ 2728 3000; opposite Cairo Marriott, Sharia Saray al-Gezira, Zamalek; minimum charge E£170; ☎ sailings at 7.30pm & 10.45pm) The best of the Nile cruise boats, run by the Marriott, is a relatively economical way to see a big-name star such as Randa or Asmahan, along with an à la carte menu. Go for the later sailing, as the show is less rushed.

SUFI DANCING

Al-Tannoura Egyptian Heritage Dance Troupe (☎ 2512 1735; admission free; ☎ 7pm winter, 8pm Mon, Wed & Sat summer) Egypt's only Sufi dance troupe – far more raucous and colourful than white-clad Turkish dervishes – puts on a mesmerising performance at the Wikala of Al-Ghuri (p133). It's a great opportunity to see one of the medieval spaces in use; arrive about an hour ahead to secure a seat.

SHOPPING

Between the mountains of chintzy souvenirs and the over-eager hustlers trying to sell them to you over endless glasses of tea, it's tempting to keep your wallet firmly shut in Cairo. But then you'd be missing out on some of Egypt's most beautiful treasures. The trick is knowing where to look. Though they're touristy and stocked with goods from China, the tiny shops of Khan al-Khalili (p128) do yield a few specific treasures, such as gorgeous silks, reviewed here. Downtown along Sharia Qasr el-Nil is more for checking out street fashion in the mass-market shops. Zamalek is the best place to actually buy – its shady streets have some gem boutiques for housewares and clothing, and not all of them are as expensive as you'd

expect – look especially on Sharia al-Marashly and Sharia Mansour Mohammed. For upscale imported goods (and all the people-watching that affords), Mohandiseen is the place to go, especially along Sharia Suleiman Abaza and Sharia Abd al-Hamid Lotfy.

Antiques & Interiors

Shop-owners have begun commissioning stylish home items from traditional artisans, with some beautiful results. As for antiques, some are stratospherically priced – but neat Egypt-specific items such as old advertising signs are often a deal. Sikket al-Badistan, the central east-west route through Khan al-Khalili, is home to several notable antiques shops.

Tao Gallery (Map pp144-5; ☎ 2735 0480; 15A Sharia al-Marashly, Zamalek; ☎ 10am-5pm Mon-Fri, 10am-1pm Sat) Fun, not-too-pricey home-décor items, such as custom-printed window sheers, Arabic movie posters, even (terrorist-kitsch alert!) decoupage coasters featuring the bearded mug of Hamas' Sheikh Nasrallah.

Loft (Map pp144-5; ☎ 2736 6931; www.loftegypt.com; 12 Sharia Sayyed al-Bakry, Zamalek; ☎ 10am-10pm Mon-Sat) In a rambling apartment, this eclectic store stocks Oriental curiosities from small brass candlesticks to antique divans. Here's where to pick up large painted tabletop trays like those in chic restaurants around town.

Ahmed El Dabba & Sons (Map p129; ☎ 2590 7823; 5 Sikket al-Badistan, Islamic Cairo) The most respected antiques dealer in Khan al-Khalili is a warren of Louis XV furniture and glass cases filled with gleaming jewellery and snuff boxes. This is where the treasures stashed in 19th-century Downtown apartments all end up.

Makan (Map pp144-5; ☎ 2738 2632; www.makan.egypt.com; 4 Sharia Ismail Mohammed, Zamalek; ☎ 10am-11pm) This cool housewares shop features clever applications of traditional crafts – check out the lights made from tambourines. Some items are minimalist; others, like the painted wood picture frames, have a folk-art aesthetic. Upholstery fabric is sold by the yard.

Noubi Nabil (Map pp144-5; ☎ 2735 3233; 106-126 Sharia 26th of July, Zamalek; ☎ 10am-2pm & 4-10pm) Elephant sculptures guard the entrance to this corner shop, a trove of antique silk rugs, cut-glass bowls, old silver and fine china. The overflow is in a smaller place just across 26th of July.

Also try the following:

Home & Beyond (Map pp144-5; ☎ 012 329 7830; 17 Sharia Mansour Mohammed, Zamalek) Arabic house-

number tiles, striped lampshades and blocks of fragrant *ambar* – a musky moisturizer.

King Saleh Bazaar (Map p129; ☎ 2589 2747; 80 Sharia al-Muizz li-Din Allah, Islamic Cairo) Immediately south of the Madrasa & Mausoleum of Qalaun. The more you look through the dust, the more pops out.

Nostalgia (Map pp144-5; ☎ 2737 0880; 6 Sharia Zakaria Rizk, Zamalek) From framed Arabic ad prints to escargot forks.

Books & CDs

For new books, look under Information (p109). **L'Orientale/L'Orientaliste** (Map pp118-19; ☎ 2576 2440; www.orientalecairo.com; Shop 757, Basement, Nile Hilton Shopping Mall, Corniche el-Nil, Downtown; ☎ 10am-8pm Mon-Sat, 10am-5pm Sun) is a great outlet for rare books on Egypt and the Middle East, as well as lithographs, maps and engravings. There's a second shop at 15 Sharia Qasr el-Nil. The 50 or so stalls at **Ezbekiyya Book Market** (Map pp118-19; Ezbekiyya Gardens, Downtown) have the occasional treasures, but browsing the messy piles is a chore.

The latest hit played in taxi cabs might be available only on cassette; look for sidewalk kiosks selling these. **Sawt al-Qahira** (Map pp118-19; ☎ 2392 1916; Midan Opera, Downtown; ☎ 10am-11pm), in an arcade set back from Sharia al-Gomhurriya, stocks the classic crooners on CD. The best music section outside the malls is at **Diwan** (Map pp144-5; ☎ 2736 2582; 159 Sharia 26th of July, Zamalek; ☎ 9am-11.30pm).

Carpets & Rugs

Unlike Morocco, Turkey or Iran, Egypt has no rich tradition of Oriental carpet weaving. The standard products are brown striped camel-hair Bedouin rugs, and flat-weave kilims with geometric patterns – all stocked by numerous shops in the tight squeeze of alleys behind the Mosque of Al-Ghoury, across the road from Khan al-Khalili, or some of the places mentioned in the Handicrafts & Souvenirs section (p176). The rugs and wall hangings at Wissa Wassef Art Centre (p151) are in a class by themselves. Super-elegant **El Kahhal Carpets** (Map p129; ☎ 2590 9128; Sikket al-Badistan, Islamic Cairo; ☎ 10am-8pm Mon-Sat), in the khan, has the finest imported stock in the city, with both antiques and new made-to-order designs.

Clothing & Jewellery

Egyptian-cotton clothing can be a good buy. For real local fashion (mostly polyester), cruise the main avenues Downtown; the arcade be-

tween Sharia Abdel Khalek Sarwat and Sharia Adly just west of Midan Opera is crammed with hijabs in every pattern imaginable. For jewellery, gold and silver is sold by weight (check the daily rate in the *Egyptian Gazette*), plus a little extra for labour; antique silver can be quite expensive (and unfortunately is easily faked). The centre of Khan al-Khalili is still the main district for gold and silver, and where you should go for a custom cartouche with your name in hieroglyphics. The stores listed here offer something a bit different.

Mix & Match (Map pp144-5; ☎ 2736 4640; 11 Sharia Brazil, Zamalek; ☎ 10am-8pm) Well made and locally designed, these separates for women in wool, silk and cotton are reasonably priced and often feature subtle Middle Eastern details. A branch two blocks south, at 11 Sharia Hassan Sabry, stocks larger sizes.

Mobaco (Map pp144-5; ☎ 2738 2790; 8 Sharia Ahmed Sabry, Zamalek) Not as interesting as Mix & Match in design, but inexpensive and in a great range of colours. There's always a flattering long cotton or linen skirt available, and men can choose from a rainbow of polo shirts sporting a camel logo. There are stores throughout the city, including at the Nile Hilton and the Semiramis.

Atlas (Map p129; ☎ 2591 8833; abdelazizsalah@hotmail.com; Sikket al-Badistan, Islamic Cairo) In business since 1948, the Atlas family specialises in silk. Sold by the yard, it's both beautiful and sturdy, and holds its dye better than anything you might find for less. Caftans and slippers are also available, and you can order custom clothing with any of the fabrics.

Sami Amin (Map pp144-5; ☎ 2738 1837; www.sami-amin.com; 15A Sharia al-Mansour Mohammed, Zamalek) Cool chunky brass-and-enamel jewellery as well as leather bags, belts and shoes, many imprinted with tribal patterns. And all at bargain prices – bags and sandals start at just ££33.

Friction (Map pp144-5; ☎ 2736 9204; 18B Sharia al-Marashly, Zamalek; ☎ 11am-8.30pm Sat-Thu) Friction's shop-window mannequins scandalise with underwear-as-outerwear; inside, it's club music and cool clothes from Turkish and Scandinavian designers – still nothing you could wear on the street here, but welcome at better night spots.

Nagada (Map p148; ☎ 3748 6663; www.nagada.net; 13 Sharia Refa'a, Doqqi; ☎ 10am-6.30pm) Colour-saturated, handwoven silks, cottons and linens are the mainstay of this luxe shop in a grand villa – buy by the yard, or in boxy, drapery women's

and men's apparel. There's also very pretty handmade pottery from Al-Fayoum.

Beymen (Map p148; ☎ 2791 7000; Four Seasons Hotel at Nile Plaza, 1089 Corniche el-Nil, Garden City; ☎ 10am-11pm) This Turkish department store is the last word in luxury shopping in Cairo, stocking Prada et al alongside its chic house brand. Disproportionately huge selection of scarves and perfume, and great people-watching in the café.

Dina Maghawry (Map pp144-5; ☎ 012 322 3896; www.dinamaghawry.com; 1st fl, 16 Sharia Sayyed al-Bakry, Zamalek; ☎ 11am-9.30pm Sat-Thu, 3-9.30pm Fri) This boutique showcases the local designer's delicate cascading necklaces trimmed with semiprecious stones and other elegant but modern pieces. Not cheap, but gorgeous work.

Both Nomad (below) and Oum El Dounia (right) sell chunky Bedouin-style silver.

Handicrafts & Souvenirs

These fixed-price shops often stock familiar Egyptian crafts for not much more than you'd pay in Khan al-Khalili, and often with better quality. Expect *muski* glass (gem-coloured but fragile), inlaid wood and papyrus. For *sheesha* fittings, visit the copper district just north of the Madrasa & Mausoleum of Barquq, or Sharia Ahmad Mahir Pasha east of Bab Zuweila.

Egypt Crafts Center/Fair Trade Egypt (Map pp144-5; ☎ 2736 5123; www.fairtradeegypt.org; 1st fl, 27 Sharia Yehia Ibrahim, Zamalek; ☎ 9am-8pm Sat-Thu, 10am-6pm Fri) Crafts sold here are produced in income-generating projects throughout the country. Items for sale include Bedouin rugs, hand-woven cotton, pottery from Al-Fayoum and beaded jewellery from Aswan. The cotton bedcovers and shawls are particularly lovely, and prices are excellent.

Nomad (Map pp144-5; ☎ 2736 1917; 1st fl, 14 Sharia Saray al-Gezira, Zamalek; ☎ 10am-7pm) This gem of a place specialises in jewellery and traditional Bedouin crafts and costumes, particularly from Siwa. Standout items include appliquéd tablecloths and cushion covers, dresses made in the oases, woven baskets, silk slippers and chunky silver jewellery. To find it, go past the Egyptian Water Works office to the 1st floor and ring the bell. There are smaller branches in the Cairo Marriott (Map pp144-5), Grand Hyatt (Map p148) and Nile Hilton (Map pp118-19) hotels.

Abd El Zaher (Map p133; ☎ 2511 8041; www.abdelzaher.binding.com; 31 Sharia Mohammed Abduh, Islamic Cairo;

☎ 11am-9.30pm) Cairo's last working bookbinder also makes beautiful leather- and oil-paper-bound blank books, photo albums and diaries. Free gold monogramming is included in the prices, which are heartbreakingly low, considering the work that goes into them. Getting your own book bound starts around ££15 and takes a few days.

Oum El Dounia (Map pp118-19; ☎ 2393 8273; 1st fl, 3 Sharia Talaat Harb, Downtown; ☎ 10am-7pm) At a great central location, Oum El Dounia sells an attractive range of locally made glassware, Bedouin jewellery, cotton clothes, bags, embroidered shawls and light fittings. It also stocks a small range of maps, postcards and English- and French-language books about Cairo and Egypt, as well as CDs.

Al-Khatoun (Map p133; ☎ 2514 7164; www.alkhatoun.net; 3 Sharia Mohammed Abduh, Islamic Cairo; ☎ 11am-9pm) This gorgeous store stocks an ever-changing array of very chic light-fittings, alabaster pots, tablecloths, jewellery, clothes and shawls, all designed and made in Egypt.

Khan Misr Touloun (Map p137; ☎ 2365 2227; Midan Ibn Tulun; ☎ 10am-5pm Mon-Sat) This shop opposite the Mosque of Ibn Tulun is stacked with a desirable jumble of crafts from all over Egypt, including wooden chests, jewellery, pottery, puppets, scarves and even hip T-shirts emblazoned with popular Egyptian product logos.

Said Delta Papyrus Center (Map p133; ☎ 2512 0747; 3rd fl, 21 Sharia al-Muizz li-Din Allah, Islamic Cairo; ☎ 10am-9pm) A spin-off of Dr Ragab (the father of quality papyrus painting), Said has a vast selection, from ancient Egyptian scenes to cool Cairo skylines. He'll do a cartouche with your name done in about half an hour. Prices are negotiable, and quite reasonable, provided you arrive without a tout. (The shop is up two flights and down a dim hallway.)

Wady Craft Shop (Map pp144-5; ☎ 2738 0826; All Saints Anglican Cathedral, 5 Sharia Michel Lutfallah, Zamalek; ☎ 9am-5pm) This charity store next to the Marriott Hotel sells cotton bags, aprons, tablecloths, inlay coasters and silk-screened tea towels – all work done by organisations of refugees, prisoners and others in need of aid.

Mahmoud Abd El Ghaffar (Al Wikalah; Map p129; ☎ 2589 7443; 73 Sharia Gawhar al-Qaid, Islamic Cairo) One of the best dealers in belly-dancing outfits in the city; the really nice stuff is upstairs. Look for the entrance down a little lane just off the main street.

Appliquéd work is one case where it can be more rewarding to head to the source: the

tent-makers bazaar, Sharia al-Khayamiyya (p134), where scores of shops sell intricately embroidered bedspreads, pillow covers and wall hangings, as well as canvas-weight striped fabric and thinner stamped cotton (££7 per metre).

Household Linens

Egyptian cotton is a badge of quality in sheets and towels, though little of it is turned into fine products locally. An exception is the gorgeous hand-embroidered sheets and robes by Malaika at **Mounaya** (Map pp144-5; ☎ 2736 4827; 16 Sharia Mohammed Anis, Zamalek; ☎ 11am-8pm Mon-Thu & Sat, noon-8pm Fri). You can also find decent linens for less than you'd pay at home at the frumpy **Galerie Hathout** (Map pp118-19; ☎ 2393 6782; 114 Sharia Mohammed Farid, Downtown).

Malls, Souqs & Markets

Street markets in Cairo are both social and functional – a great place for bargains and interacting with locals in a lively public space. Cairenes are also crazy for malls, and a new one opens every couple of years, inevitably drawing the crowds and shops away from the older places.

Souq al-Gomaa (Friday Market; Map pp110-11; Islamic Cairo; ☎ 6am-noon Fri) In the Southern Cemetery south of the Citadel, this sprawling weekly market is all the craziness of a medieval bazaar in a modern setting: under a highway flyover, expect new bicycles, live donkeys, toilets and broken telephones. Savvy pickers can find some great antiques and vintage duds. Go before 10am, when the crush of people can get overwhelming. You'll need a taxi to get there (about E£12 from Downtown); tell the driver 'Khalifa', the name of the neighbourhood.

Souq al-Fustat (Map p124; Sharia Mar Girgis, Old Cairo; ☎ 8am-4pm) A new market built for tourists, this is nonetheless a nice collection of shops, with vendors of antique carpets, modern ceramics, richly embroidered *galabiyyas* and wooden toys along with branches of Sami Amin (p175) and the bookbinders Abd El Zaher (opposite). Sales pressure is pleasantly low.

Wikalat al-Balah (Souq Bulaq, Bulaq Market; Map pp144-5; north of Sharia 26th of July, Bulaq) The main draw is secondhand clothing, mostly well organised, clean and with marked prices (especially on Sharia al-Wabur al-Fransawi). Further in, you'll find good textiles, car parts and military surplus.

Citystars Centre (off Map pp110-11; ☎ 2480 0500; Sharia Omar ibn Khattab, Nasr City; ☎ 11am-1am) Cairo's most lavish mall is the current landing spot for every new international chain, from Starbucks to Wagamama. There's a kids' theme park and a big cinema. It's about 12km east of Downtown – a E£12 taxi ride.

Arkadia Mall (Map pp144-5; Corniche el-Nil, Bulaq; ☎ 10am-11pm) The biggest mall in central Cairo, with bars and a top-floor arcade. All the usual international brands, plus a good food court.

Perfume

Cairenes adore scent, and this is one of the few cities where you'll find perfumers occupying kiosks in the subway – perfectly good (and nonpushy) places to shop, though you can find somewhat better quality at a few specialists, such as **Karama Perfumes** (Map p129; ☎ 2590 2386; 112 Sharia al-Azhar, Islamic Cairo), which is very popular with locals for scent copies as well as its own blends and basic essences; look for the open-sided corner shop at the corner of Sharia al-Muizz. At less reputable places, 'essences' are diluted with vegetable oil – be sceptical if a salesman rubs the scent furiously into your skin while applying a sample.

Spices

Spices are a good buy, particularly *kuzbara* (coriander), *kamoon* (cumin), *shatta* (chilli), *filfil iswid* (black pepper) and *karkadeh* (hibiscus). Buy whole spices, never ground, for freshness, and skip the 'saffron' – it's really safflower and tastes of little more than dust. The shops that sell these items also deal in henna, soaps and herbal treatments. One interesting place is **Abd ar-Rahman Harraz** (Map pp110-11; ☎ 2512 6349; 1 Midan Bab al-Khalq, Islamic Cairo), the sheikh of herbalist and medicinal plants; look for the neglected taxidermy in the window on the corner. **Attara Ahl al-Beit** (Map pp144-5; ☎ 2735 4955; Sharia Hassan Assem, Zamalek) is a small but excellent shop, just west of Sharia Shagaret ad-Durr. The streets around Midan Falaki also contain several large shops, as does the southwest corner of Khan al-Khalili.

Tailoring

Given cheap labour and skilled tailors, Cairo is a good place to get a bespoke suit. Bring magazine clips of suit designs, as local tailors aren't always up on trends. You may also need to bring your own fabric (at least 3m for a jacket and a pair of pants, plus another metre

for extra pants). The best quality is at Salem (below); cheaper shops on Midan Opera sell Egyptian-made textiles. Allow three days to a week, plus another day for final adjustments.

Orange Square (Map pp144-5; ☎ 2735 2887; 4A Sharia Ibn al-Nabieh, Zamalek; ☎ noon-8pm) With books to select designs from and a decent stock of fabric, this trendy operation is the easiest place to get a suit made. But not the cheapest: prices start at E£1800.

Samir El Sakka (Map pp118-19; ☎ 2392 6196; 31 Sharia Abdel Khalek Sarwat, Downtown; ☎ 10am-1.30pm & 5.30-8.30pm Mon-Fri) This old-school tailor trained in Rome; he stocks a small selection of fabrics. Prices start around E£1000.

Salem (Map pp144-5; ☎ 3345 2232; 30 Sharia Libnan, Mohandiseen) The finest suit fabrics from England and Italy are available here.

Osman Ahmed (Map pp118-19; ☎ 012 331 8622; 18 Sharia Adly, Downtown; ☎ 10am-2pm & 4-8pm Mon-Sat) As he doesn't speak English or stock fabrics, Mr Ahmed is the least convenient option, but his skills transcend the language barrier. He's used to foreign customers, and can work off a magazine photo.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Air

For international airfare details see p521; for domestic flights see p528. For information on airline offices in Cairo see p521.

CAIRO INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT

For information on the airport see p180. For flight information call ☎ 0900 777777 from a landline in Egypt or ☎ 27777 from a mobile phone.

EGYPTAIR OFFICES

EgyptAir Airport (☎ 2265 7256); Doqqi (Map p148; ☎ 2748 9122; Cairo Sheraton, Midan el-Galaa); Downtown (☎ 2391 9515; Midan Opera, Sharia al-Gomhuriyya); Downtown (Map pp118-19; ☎ 2393 0381; cnr Sharia Talaat Harb & Sharia al-Bustan); Downtown (Map pp118-19; ☎ 2392 7680; 6 Sharia Adly); Downtown (Map pp118-19; ☎ 2577 2410; Nile Hilton, 1113 Corniche el-Nil)

Bus

Cairo's main bus station is **Cairo Gateway** (Mina al-Qahira, Turgoman Garage; Map pp110-11; Sharia al-Gisr, Bulaq), 1km northwest of the intersection of Sharia Galaa and Sharia 26th of July. It's a five-minute walk from the Orabi metro stop – or pay E£5 or so for a taxi from Tahrir or Talaat Harb. The flashy new station maintains sepa-

rate windows for each bus company, so you might have to do some comparison-shopping. It is advisable to advance-book most tickets, particularly for popular routes such as Sinai, Alexandria and Marsa Matruh in summer. Companies don't offer student discounts.

There are four other bus stations, less frequently used now that Cairo Gateway has been revamped to handle more traffic:

Aboud (Map pp110-11; Sharia El-Tir'a El-Boulakia, Shubra) is the starting point for buses to the Delta; shuttle taxis run between here and Midan Ramses (2km to the south), or you can walk east from the Rod al-Farag metro stop, about 800m.

El-Moneib is the small station where buses from Al-Fayoum terminate. It is located on the Giza corniche after Sharia al-Bahr al-Azam and just south of Dr Ragab's Pharaonic Village. A taxi will cost E£15 from Downtown, or you can walk from Sakiat Mekki metro station, about 800m.

Al-Mazah is in Heliopolis near the airport (a taxi will cost E£30, or you can take the Merghani line of the Heliopolis tram and walk a couple of blocks north). Some international services depart from here, and some other services stop here en route out of Cairo.

Abbassiyya (Sinai Station; Map pp110-11; Sharia Ramses, Abbassiyya) is where all of the services from Sinai used to arrive, and there's a very slim chance you might still get dropped here – it's about E£15 in a taxi to the centre.

AROUND EGYPT

Alexandria & the Mediterranean Coast

From Cairo Gateway, **West & Mid Delta Bus Co** (☎ 2432 0049) travels to Alexandria (E£21 to E£25, three hours) hourly at 45 minutes past the hour starting at 4.45am and running till 8.45pm; after that, departures go at 15 minutes past, 9.15pm to 1.15am. A couple of extra VIP-class buses run at 9.45am and 12.45pm. Services to Marsa Matruh (E£50, five hours) leave at 7.30am, 8.15am, 10.45am, 3.15pm, 9.45pm and 11.30pm.

Al-Fayoum

Buses and service taxis for Al-Fayoum (E£6 to E£8, two hours) leave from El-Moneib station in Giza, as well as from Aboud, every half-hour 6am to 7pm. Fares on Thursday are E£1 more expensive. The buses stop en route at Midan el-Remaya after the Pyramids Rd and just before the Giza-Fayoum road.

Sinai

All Sinai buses leave from Cairo Gateway, but return to Abbassiyya, stopping at Al-Mazah en route.

East Delta Travel & Tourism Co (☎ 25742814) has services running to Sharm el-Sheikh (E£60 to E£70, seven hours) at 6.30am, 10am, 3pm, 7pm, 11pm, 11.30pm, midnight, 1am and 1.45am. Dahab (E£67 to E£80, nine hours) service goes at 7.15am, 1pm, 5pm and 12.15am.

There are three daily buses to Nuweiba (E£70 to E£80, eight hours) and Taba (E£70 to E£80, nine hours), leaving at 6.30am, 9.30am and 10.15pm. A daily service to St Katherine's Monastery leaves at 10.30am (E£37, 7½ hours).

Superjet (☎ 2290 9017) has services to Sharm el-Sheikh at 7.30am, 3.15pm, 10.45pm (all E£80, six hours) and 11.15pm (E£70).

Suez Canal

All Suez buses depart from Cairo Gateway. East Delta Travel & Tourism Co travels to Ismailia (E£7.25, 2½ hours) and Suez (E£7.25, 1½ hours) every 30 minutes between 6am and 8pm. Buses to Port Said (E£16, three hours) leave every 30 minutes between 6am and 9.30am and then every hour until 9.30pm.

Luxor & Aswan

Upper Egypt Travel (☎ 2576 0261) buses depart from Cairo Gateway. There's one daily service to Luxor (E£91, nine hours) at 5pm and 9pm; the 5pm bus goes on to Aswan (E£91, 12 hours). You're much better off getting the train.

Red Sea

Superjet departs from Cairo Gateway for Hurghada (E£60, six hours) at 7.30am, 2.30pm and 11.45pm.

Upper Egypt Travel & Tourism Co runs to Hurghada (E£56 to E£61, six hours) departing at 8am, 9.30am, noon, 1.30pm, 3pm, 5pm, 6.30pm, 8pm, 9pm, 10pm, 11pm, 11.30pm, 12.30am and 1am. The 1.30pm, 5pm, 6.30pm, 8pm, 9pm and 10pm services go on to Safaga (E£71, 7½ hours).

There are Upper Egypt Travel services running to Al-Quseir (E£76, nine hours) at 1.30pm, 6.30pm, 8pm, 10pm and 11pm. The 1.30pm, 6.30pm, 8pm and 11pm services go on to Marsa Alam (E£86, 10½ hours).

Western Oases

All Western Oases buses leave from Cairo Gateway. Note that to get to Siwa you must take a bus to Alexandria or Marsa Matruh, and then another onwards. For journeys to the oases take food and water as sometimes these buses don't stop anywhere useful for breaks.

There are three Upper Egypt Bus Co services per day to Bahariyya (E£25, four hours) and Dakhla (E£56, 10 hours) at 7am, 8am and 6pm. The 7am and 6pm buses stop in Farafra (E£40, seven hours). Another bus runs to Al-Kharga (E£51, eight hours) at 9.30pm and 10pm.

INTERNATIONAL

For information about buses to Libya, Israel and Jordan see p524.

Service Taxi

Most service taxis depart from lots around Ramses Station and Midan Ulali (see Map p122). Delta and Suez services leave from just north of Midan Ulali, east of Sharia Orabi, running to destinations including Suez (E£7, one hour), Ismailia (E£8, 1½ hours) and Port Said (E£15, two hours).

Service taxis for Alexandria (E£17, 2½ to three hours) leave from south of Ramses Station (Map122), and one large bus (E£17) waits in the skinny lane just behind. Both depart every hour or so; the bus has air-conditioning.

Train

Ramses Station (Mahattat Ramses; Map p122; ☎ 2575 3555; Midan Ramses) is Cairo's main train station. It has a **left luggage office** (Map p180; per piece per day E£2.50; ☎ 24hr), a **post office** (Map p180; ☎ 8am-8pm), ATMs, a pharmacy and a **tourist information office** (Map p180; ☎ 9am-7pm).

For general details about the types of trains and tickets available, including student discounts, see p533. Also try www.egypttrail.gov.eg, which may be running fully by the time you read this.

ALEXANDRIA

The best trains running between Cairo and Alexandria are the air-conditioned *Turbini* (1st/2nd class E£46/29, two hours). Second class in this train is about as good as 1st class in most others. They depart from Cairo at 8am, 2pm and 7pm. The next best trains are the *Espani* (Spanish) services, which cost the same as the *Turbini* and leave at 9am, noon, 5pm, 6pm and

10.30pm; the 9am and 6pm trains go direct, while the others stop at Tanta and sometimes Benha and Damanhur as well. Slower trains known as the *Francesse* (French; 1st/2nd class E£35/19, three hours) leave at 6am, 8.15am, 9.30am, 11am, 3.10pm, 4pm and 8pm. Student discounts are available on all tickets.

LUXOR & ASWAN

The excellent overnight wagons-lit service to Upper Egypt departs from **Giza Station** (Map pp110–11), right next to the Giza metro stop; you can purchase tickets at the office in a trailer to the right of the station entrance, but the larger **Abela Egypt Sleeping Train Ticket Office** (Map p180; ☎ 2574 9274; www.sleepingtrains.com; ☎ 8.30am–9pm) keeps longer hours and can take credit cards. Tickets for same-day travel must be purchased before 6pm, although in the high season (from about October to April) you should book several days in advance. The offices take payment in cash (euros or dollars only) or, for a small surcharge, credit card (Visa only).

The sleeping car services depart Giza at 8.25pm and 8.45pm daily. The former stops at fewer towns along the way, arriving in Luxor at 5am and in Aswan at 8.05am. The latter train gets in about 40 minutes behind. There is also a third sleeping car, departing at 9.10pm from Ramses and arriving at 6.30am in Luxor and 9.45am in Aswan; the agents try to steer people away from this train because it's slower, but it might be ideal if you want to sleep later. To either Luxor or Aswan,

tickets cost US\$60 per person one-way in a double cabin, US\$80 in a single cabin and US\$45 for kids ages four to 10. There are no student discounts. If you wish to get off at Luxor and continue to Aswan a few days later this must be specified when booking. The price includes an aeroplane-style dinner and breakfast.

Aside from the sleeping train, foreigners can travel to Luxor and Aswan only on train 980, departing Ramses daily at 7.30am; train 996, at 10pm; and train 1902, at 12.30am. To Luxor, 1st/2nd class fares are E£78/42; to Aswan, E£94/47. The trip to Luxor takes 10 hours; to Aswan, around 12. Student discounts of 30% are available in both classes. Tickets on these services can be bought from the windows beside platform 11 (Map p122), on the other side of the tracks from the main hall. You must buy your tickets at least a couple of days in advance.

SUEZ CANAL

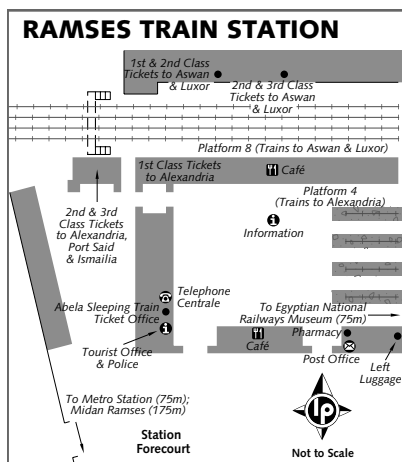
Trains to Port Said (2nd class E£18, 3½ to four hours) and Ismailia (E£11 to E£14, 2½ to three hours) leave at 8.45am, 12.30pm, 2.35pm, 5.45pm (Ismailia only) and 7.10pm. For Suez (2nd class E£18, 2½ hours), there are departures at 6.30am, 9.20am, 1.10pm, 4.15pm and 6.45pm – but they go only from Ain Shams station, 15km northeast of Ramses but accessible via the metro. Delays on these routes are common, so going by bus is more efficient, and more comfortable than the non-air-con trains.

GETTING AROUND

Overcrowded buses and minibuses are the most common form of transport for the majority of Cairenes, anyone with means takes taxis. By Western standards, taxis are very cheap, although the fare can mount up if you travel any distance – to the Pyramids, say – in which case the bus or the excellent metro can be better.

To/From the Airport

Cairo International Airport (www.cairo-airport.com) Terminal 1 (☎ 2265 5000); Terminal 2 (☎ 2265 2222) is on the northeastern fringes of Heliopolis, 20km northeast of the city centre. Terminal 1 services EgyptAir's international and domestic flights and Terminal 2 services all international carriers except Saudi Arabian Airlines. Under construction at the time of



writing, Terminal 3 (immediately adjacent to Terminal 2) is due to open sometime in 2008. You'll find ATMs and exchange booths in all arrivals halls.

BUS

Don't believe anyone who tells you that there is no bus to the city centre – there are two, plus a minibus.

Air-con bus 356 (E£2, plus E£1 per large luggage item, one hour) runs at 20-minute intervals from 7am to midnight between Midan Abdel Moniem Riad (behind the Egyptian Museum) in central Cairo and Terminal 1 at the airport (as of 2007; service to both terminals may be restored by the end of 2008). Less comfortable options are minibus 27 (6am to midnight) and the 24-hour bus 400 (both 50pt).

If you arrive at Terminal 1, you'll see the bus parking area to the side of the arrivals hall, beyond the Air Mall. During the construction of Terminal 3, buses are bypassing Terminal 2, so the situation is trickier: catch a shuttle bus to the car park (clearly marked, running constantly), then cross the road and walk left to the bus shelter. Flag down any bus from here; it will carry on to Terminal 1, where you can change if necessary. By the time you read this, though, Terminal 3 may very well be complete, and presumably the buses will stop in the parking area between Terminals 2 and 3.

TAXI

The going rate for a taxi from the airport to central Cairo is E£45 to E£60; unfortunately the metered yellow cabs (p183) are seldom seen at this end of the trip. (Heading to the airport from the centre, you can get one of these, or bargain a black-and-white down to E£35, taking into account that drivers must pay E£5 to enter the airport grounds.) It's better to get away from the arrivals hall and all the touts before talking to anyone, as walking away can sometimes bring the price down. Triple-check the agreed fare, as there is an irritating tendency for drivers to nod at what you say and claim a higher fare later.

If you don't want to bargain and would prefer a clean and comfortable ride, head for the limousine counter, where you can organise a car at a fixed price of E£60 to E£75. There's a lot to be said for this option, particularly after a long international flight.

PLAYING CHICKEN IN CAIRO

It may sound silly, but the greatest challenge most travellers face in Egypt is crossing the street in Cairo. Roads are always frantically busy and road rules are something that the average Cairene has heard of, but only in jokes. Our advice is to position yourself so that one or more locals forms a buffer between you and oncoming traffic, and then cross when they do – they usually don't mind being used as human shields. Basically, you have to trust the cars will avoid you – never, ever hesitate once you've stepped off the sidewalk, and cross as if you own the road. But do it fast!

In the traffic-free early hours of the morning (when so many flights seem to arrive), the journey to central Cairo takes 20 minutes. At busier times of the day it can take an hour, with the worst traffic on Sharia Uruba.

Bus & Minibus

Cairo is thoroughly served by a network of lumbering sardine-cans-on-wheels and smaller, shuttle-size minibuses (on which, theoretically, there's no standing allowed), but visitors will find only a few uses for them: they're good for a slow but cheap trip to the Pyramids or from the airport, but elsewhere you can travel more efficiently and comfortably by metro and/or taxi. Signs are in Arabic only, so you'll have to know your numerals. There is no known map of any of the city's bus routes.

Nonetheless, the view from a window seat on *any* bus is invariably fascinating. For general take-me-anywhere sightseeing, start at the central Midan Abdel Moniem Riad, behind the Egyptian Museum, where services leave for just about everywhere in the city; another major hub is Midan Ataba (see Map pp118–19). Just pick a neighbourhood and ask bystanders where to stand. Tickets cost between 50pt and E£2 depending on distance and whether there's air-con (mint-green buses often have it). See above for additional bus tips.

Car

Driving in Cairo can't in any way be recommended – not only is it harrowing, but you're only contributing to the already hideously

clogged streets. Lane markings are ignored and brakes are scorned; traffic lights are discretionary unless enforced by a policeman. At night some drivers use their headlights exclusively for flashing oncoming vehicles. But Cairo drivers do have road rules: they look out for each other and are tolerant of the type of driving that elsewhere might provoke road rage. Things only go awry when an inexperienced driver – like yourself, perhaps – is thrown into the mix.

For more information about cars and driving in Egypt see p529.

HIRE

The only reason we expect you might rent a car is to drive directly out of the city. The major options:

Avis (www.avisegypt.com) Airport (☎ 2265 4249);

Downtown (Map pp118-19; ☎ 2579 2400; Nile Hilton, 1113 Corniche el-Nil)

Budget (☎ 2265 2395; Cairo Airport)

Europcar (☎ 2267 2439; Terminal 1, Cairo Airport)

Hertz (www.hertzegypt.com) Airport (☎ 2265 2430);

Downtown (Map pp118-19; ☎ 2575 8914; Ramses Hilton, Corniche el-Nil)

The rates of these big guns match international charges and finding a cheap deal with local dealers is virtually impossible. You are much better off organising via the web before you arrive.

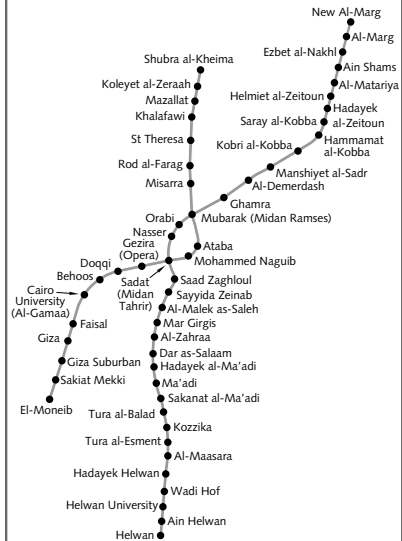
Metro

The metro is blissfully efficient and the stations are cleaner than many of Cairo's other public places. It's also inexpensive and, outside rush hours (7am to 9am and 3pm to 6pm), not too crowded. Two lines are in operation, with a fabled third line perpetually 'under construction'. The 35-station main line stretches for 43km from the southern suburb of Helwan up to Al-Marg; the second line connects Shubra with Giza, stopping at the Cairo Opera House en route. See the Cairo Metro map, p182.

Metro stations are easily identified by signs with a big red 'M' in a blue star. Tickets cost E£1 to any stop; keep your ticket handy to feed into the turnstile on the way out. Trains run every five minutes or so from around 6am until 11.30pm.

The first (and often second) carriage on each train is reserved for women. If you want to ride in this carriage, make sure you're stand-

THE CAIRO METRO



ing where the front of the train will stop, as it won't hang around long in the station.

Microbus

Increasingly Cairenes use private minibuses (*meekro*) – small vans with 10 or so seats – rather than public buses and minibuses. No destinations are marked, which can make them hard to use at first. To catch a *meekro*, position yourself beside the road that leads where you want to go and, as one approaches, yell out your destination. At the same time, a kid is usually leaning off the running board yelling the *meekro*'s end terminal. If it's going where you want to go and there are seats free, it'll stop. Some microbus terminals are near Midan Ataba and in Sayyida Aisha, the closest transit hub to the Citadel. Fares vary according to distance, from 50pt to E£2, paid after you take your seat. This often requires passing your money to passengers ahead and receiving your change the same way (which is always done scrupulously).

River Bus

The Downtown river-bus terminal (Map pp118-19) is at Maspero, on the Corniche

KHALED AL-KHAMISI

Author of the 2007 best-seller Taxi, a collection of transcribed conversations with Cairo cab drivers. The English translation is available from Aflame Books in the UK (www.aflamebooks.com).

You're a Cairo native, right?

I was born in Downtown Cairo and have lived there my whole life – except for four years in France, for my PhD at the Sorbonne. But when you live in a city like Cairo you feel as if you have lived in it for thousands of years, and not only since your birth.

How has the city changed?

Cairo has become much uglier, dirtier and more polluted, and it has expanded more into squatter-type cities. The splendour that used to be has disappeared. Yet, in my eyes, Cairo remains the most beautiful city in the world.

That's such a Cairene answer! What do you love best about it?

Every corner of the city conveys the aura of the ancient Egyptian civilisation, the old Coptic civilisation, Islamic history and the enlightenment period after Mohammed Ali Pasha. In Cairo you walk in history.

So what's your favourite historic building?

The Sultan Hassan mosque (p137) – it's the Pyramids of Islamic architecture.

How about restaurants and ahwas?

About El Sid (p166) in Zamalek is my favourite because it serves great Egyptian food. As for *ahwas* (coffeehouses), definitely Fishawi's (p169) in Al-Hussein. Even though it has a touristy feel, it still has its beauty and its history. Every wall and every chair in it represent Egypt's memories.

Do you have a place you like to relax?

Al-Azhar Park (p140) is situated in the middle of the city and it overlooks the Citadel and Egypt's old mosques. You can actually breathe fresh air.

Back to loving the city... I think a lot of visitors find it very hard to like at first. Any advice?

Don't rely on your first impression of Cairo, where traffic lanes don't count, car horns are inescapable, people cross the street anywhere they like and buildings are left unfinished so the owners don't have to pay taxes. If you look at its details, it really is one of a kind.

If you feel like the city is too much for you, the solution is very simple: take a felucca ride (p154) on the Nile at sunset, and you will find yourself in a world parallel to paradise.

in front of the big round TV building. Boats depart at 8am, 2pm and 9pm for Manial, Giza and Misr al-Qadima (Old Cairo). The trip takes 50 minutes and the fare is E£1.

Taxi

Aside from the midafternoon rush, taxis are readily available and will come to a screeching halt with the slightest wave of your hand. Standard black-and-white taxis are unmetered, and navigating the system requires the confidence that you are paying adequately. Given how cheap the fares are, a cabbie can with a few words plant the seed of doubt that you've paid too little,

so it's important not to get drawn into a dialogue over the fare. Following are some sample fares from Downtown:

Destination	Fare (E£)
Airport (45-60 airport to Downtown)	30-35
Cairo Gateway	5
The Citadel	12
Heliopolis	10-15
Khan al-Khalili	6
Midan Ramses	4
The Pyramids	25
Zamalek	6

USEFUL METRO STATIONS

Ataba The closest stop to Khan al-Khalili.

Gezira (Opera) Underneath the Cairo Opera House, closest to Zamalek.

Giza Connected to the Giza train station, for departures to Upper Egypt.

Mar Girgis In the middle of Coptic Cairo.

Mohammed Naguib Close to the Abdeen Palace and the Museum of Islamic Art.

Mubarak Beneath Midan Ramses and Ramses Railway Station.

Nasser Sharia 26th of July and Sharia Ramses; closest to Downtown nightlife.

Sadat Beneath Midan Tahrir, close to the Egyptian Museum.

Hiring a taxi for a longer period runs between E£15 and E£25 per hour, depending on your bargaining skills. For information on black-and-white taxi etiquette see p532.

But there has been a life-changing shift recently, with the arrival of **yellow taxis** (☎ 19730,

16516), which can be called ahead, have air-conditioning and always use meters. There aren't enough of them to hail in the street, but you can always get one from the rank on the south side of Midan Tahrir. With a minimum charge of E£3.50, they're pricier than black-and-whites for short distances, but for a trip to the Pyramids, for instance, they can actually work out more cheaply (drivers still appreciate a 10% or so tip, though).

Tram

Known to Cairenes, confusingly, as 'metros', ratty old-fashioned trams run from central Cairo to Heliopolis (25pt, 30 to 45 minutes). The terminal is just north of Midan Ramses (see Map p122); the line goes to Midan Roxy on the southern edge of Heliopolis (see Map p153), at which point it divides into three – Nouzha (through central Heliopolis on Sharia al-Ahram; sign written in red), Al-Mirghani (heads further east; sign in yellow) and Abdel Aziz Fahmy (west side, past Merryland; sign in blue).

Egyptian Museum

The Egyptian Museum is one of the world's most important museums of ancient history and one of its great spectacles. Here, the treasures of Tutankhamun lie alongside the grave goods, mummies, jewellery, eating bowls and toys of Egyptians whose names are lost to history. To walk around the museum is to embark on an adventure through time.

The museum has its origins in the work of French archaeologist Auguste Mariette. The Egyptian ruler Mohammed Ali had banned the export of antiquities in 1835. In 1858, his successor Said Pasha allowed Mariette to create the Egyptian Antiquities Service and to base its activities around a new museum in Bulaq, which was moved to the current purpose-built museum in 1902.

The number of exhibits long ago outgrew the available space and the place is virtually bursting at the seams. Many stories are told about the museum's basement store, some of whose sculptures have now sunk into the soft flooring and are currently being excavated. A 'Grand Museum of Egypt' has been planned, close to the Pyramids in Giza, but progress has been very slow and it is unlikely to open before 2012. When it does, many of the museum's highlights will be relocated to a state-of-the-art facility whose advantages will include climate control, something sorely lacking in the current building.

Until 1996, museum security involved locking the door at night. When an enterprising thief stowed away overnight and helped himself to treasures, the museum authorities installed alarms and detectors, at the same time improving the lighting on many exhibits. Some improvements have since been made to display cases, but much of the collection remains in early-20th-century cases with poor or nonexistent labels. This, together with the enormity of the collection and the fact that it is arranged chronologically, means that one of the most rewarding ways of visiting is simply to walk around and see what catches your eye. There's no missing the highlights – they usually have crowds around them – but be sure to stop and see some of the lesser items, all of which will help bring the world of the pharaohs back to life.

PRACTICALITIES

Don't hope to see everything in the **Egyptian Museum** (Map p187; ☎ 575 4319; www.egyptianmuseum.gov.eg; Midan Tahrir, Downtown; adult/student ££50/25; 🕒 9am-6.45pm) in one go. It simply cannot be done. Instead, plan on making at least two visits, maybe tackling one floor at a time, or decide on the things you absolutely must see and head straight for them. In peak season (much of winter and all public holidays), there's no best time to visit as the museum heaves with visitors throughout the day, although lunchtime and late afternoons can be a little quieter.

There are several queues to brave before entering, which in peak season often start to form an hour before opening time. At busy periods, the fivefold admission procedure is as painfully slow as it sounds:

- queue near the gate to pass through a metal detector and have your bags X-rayed
- queue at the booth to your right to buy a ticket
- queue at the cloak room on the left to leave bags, cameras and videos

The design for the planned Grand Museum of Egypt features a spectacular alabaster façade that will be illuminated at night.

Despite the enormous international fanfare surrounding the design for the planned Grand Museum of Egypt, the Egyptian government has yet to raise or allocate the estimated US\$500 million needed for its construction. You can follow its progress through the museum's website, www.gem.gov.eg.

- queue at the automatic ticket barriers to enter the building
- queue inside for a second metal detector and have your bags searched again.

Note that the **Royal Mummy Room** (adult/student E£100/50, tickets from museum upper fl, beside Room 50; ☎ 9am–6.20pm) closes before the rest of the museum.

Official guides can usually be found near the gate or after the cloakroom and will take you around for upwards of E£60 per hour. You can also rent audioguides inside (E£30) in English, Arabic and French, although with at least three different numbering systems in use, it isn't always easy to match the item to the commentary.

HIGHLIGHTS OF THE EGYPTIAN MUSEUM

The following are our favourite, must-see exhibits, for which you need at least a half-day, but preferably a little more.

Tutankhamun Galleries (1st fl; p191)

Old Kingdom Rooms (Ground fl, Rooms 42, 37 & 32; opposite)

Amarna Room (Ground fl, Room 3; p189)

Royal Tombs of Tanis (1st fl, Room 2; p193)

Royal Mummy Room (1st fl, Room 56; p190)

Graeco-Roman Mummies (1st fl, Room 14; p193)

Yuya & Thuyu Rooms (1st fl, Room 43; p193)

Ancient Egyptian Jewellery (1st fl, Room 4; p193)

Animal Mummies (1st fl, Rooms 53 & 54; p194)

Pharaonic Technology (1st fl, Room 34; p193)

www.egyptianmuseum.gov.eg is the Egyptian Museum's own website. It has a games section where you can play with falling lotuses, work with hieroglyphs and complete a Tutankhamun puzzle.

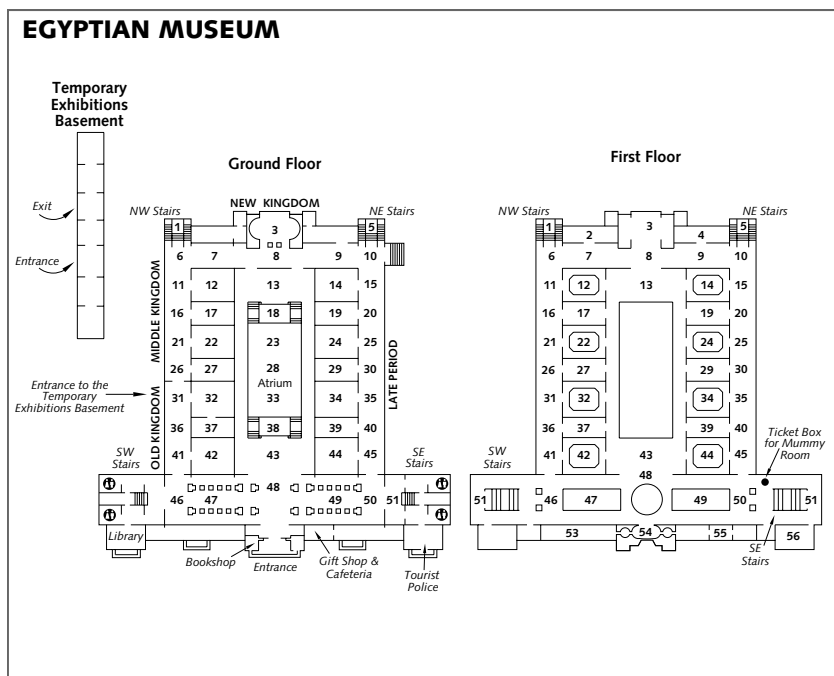
MUSEUM TOUR: GROUND FLOOR

Before entering the museum, wander through the garden; to your left lies the **tomb of Mariette** (1821–81), with a statue of the man, arms folded, shaded under a spreading tree. Mariette's tomb is overlooked by an **arc of busts** of two dozen Egyptological luminaries including Champollion, who cracked the code of hieroglyphs; Maspero, Mariette's successor as director of the Egyptian Antiquities Service; and Lepsius, the pre-eminent 19th-century German Egyptologist.

The ground floor of the museum is laid out roughly chronologically in a clockwise fashion starting at the entrance hall. For room numbers see Map p187.

ROOM 43 – ATRIUM

As you enter the museum, the central atrium is filled with a miscellany of large and small Egyptological finds. In the area before the steps lie some of the collection's oldest items. In the central cabinet No 8, the double-sided **Narmer Palette** is of great significance. Dating from around 3100 BC it depicts Pharaoh Narmer (also known as Menes) wearing the crown of Upper Egypt on one side of the palette, and the crown of Lower Egypt on the other, suggesting the first union of Upper and Lower Egypt under one ruler. Egyptologists take this as the birth of ancient Egyptian civilisation and his reign as the first of the 1st dynasty. This, then, is the starting point of more than 3000 years of Pharaonic history in which more than 170 rulers presiding over 30 dynasties and during which time almost everything in this building was fashioned. Seen like this, the Narmer Palette, found at the Temple of Horus in Kom al-Ahmar near Edfu, is the keystone of the Egyptian Museum.



ROOM 48 – EARLY DYNASTIC PERIOD

In glass cabinet No 16 is the **limestone statue of Zoser (Djoser)**, the 3rd-dynasty pharaoh, whose chief architect Imhotep designed the revolutionary Step Pyramid at Saqqara. The statue, discovered in 1924 in its serdab (cellar) in the northeastern corner of the pyramid, is the oldest statue of its kind in the museum. The seated, near-life-size figure has lost its original inlaid eyes, but is still impressive in a tight robe and striped headcloth over a huge wig.

ROOMS 47 & 46 – OLD KINGDOM

Look for the three exquisite **black schist triads** that depict the pharaoh Menkaure (Mycerinus), builder of the smallest of the three Pyramids of Giza, flanked either side by a female figure. The hardness of the stone makes the sculptor's skill all the greater and has helped ensure the triads' survival through the ages. The figure to the pharaoh's right is the goddess Hathor, while each of the figures on his left represents a nome (district) of Egypt, the name of which is given by the symbol above their head. These triads (plus one other that is not held by this museum) were discovered at the pharaoh's valley temple, just east of his pyramid at Giza.

ROOMS 42, 37 & 32 – MASTERPIECES OF THE OLD KINGDOM

In the centre of Room 42 is one of the museum's masterpieces, a smooth, black, dioritic, larger-than-life-size **statue of Khafre (Chephren)**. The builder of the second pyramid at Giza sits on a lion throne, and is protected by the wings of the falcon god Horus. The choice of stone, which is harder than marble or granite, suggests the pharaoh's power and yet this is the

The Egyptian Government established the Service des Antiques de l'Égypte in 1835 to halt the plundering of archaeological sites and to arrange the exhibition of all the artefacts it owned. Its most enduring legacy is this museum.

only survivor out of 23 identical pieces from the pharaoh's valley temple on the Giza Plateau.

Slightly to the left in front of Khafre, the core of the stunning **wooden statue of Ka-Aper** (No 40) was carved out of a single piece of sycamore (the arms were ancient additions, the legs modern restorations). The sycamore was sacred to the goddess Hathor, while Ka-Aper's belly suggest his prosperity. His eyes are amazingly lifelike, set in copper lids with whites of opaque quartz and corneas of rock crystal, drilled and filled with black paste to form the pupils. When this statue was excavated at Saqqara in 1860, local workmen named him Sheikh al-Balad (Headman), for his resemblance to their own headman. Nearby sits the **Seated Scribe** (No 44), a wonderful painted limestone figure, hand poised as if waiting to take dictation, his inlaid eyes set in an asymmetrical face giving him a very vivid appearance.

Room 32 is dominated by the beautiful **statues of Rahotep and Nofret** (No 27), a noble couple from the reign of Sneferu, builder of the Bent and the Red Pyramids at Dahshur. Almost life-sized with well-preserved painted surfaces, the limestone sculptures' simple lines make them seem almost contemporary, despite having been around for a staggering 4600 years.

In a cabinet off to the left, a limestone group shows **Seneb**, 'chief of the royal wardrobe' and his family (No 39). Seneb is notable for being a dwarf: he sits cross-legged, his two children strategically placed where his legs would otherwise have been. His full-size wife Senetites places her arms protectively and affectionately around his shoulders. Rediscovered in their tomb in Giza in 1926, the happy couple and their two kids have more recently been used in Egyptian family-planning campaigns.

Also here is a panel of **Meidum Geese** (No 138), part of an extraordinarily beautiful wall painting from a mud-brick mastaba at Meidum, near the oasis of Al-Fayoum (see p207). Painted around 2600 BC, the pigments remain vivid and the degree of realism (while still retaining a distinct Pharaonic style) is astonishing – ornithologists have had no trouble identifying the species.

Room 37, entered via Room 32, contains furniture from the Giza Plateau **tomb of Queen Hetepheres**, wife of Sneferu and mother of Khufu (Cheops), including a carrying chair, bed, bed canopy and a jewellery box. Her mummy has not been found, but her shrivelled internal organs remain inside her Canopic chest. A glass cabinet holds a miniature ivory statue of her son Khufu, found at Abydos. Ironically, at under 8cm, this tiny figure is the only surviving representation of the builder of Egypt's Great Pyramid.

ROOM 26 – MONTUHOTEP II

The seated statue in the corridor on your right, after leaving Room 32, represents Theban-born **Montuhotep II** (No 136), first ruler of the Middle Kingdom period. He is shown with black skin (representing fertility and rebirth) and the red crown of Lower Egypt. This statue was discovered by Howard Carter under the forecourt of the pharaoh's temple at Deir al-Bahri in Thebes in 1900, when the ground gave way under his horse – a surprisingly recurrent means of discovery in the annals of Egyptology.

ROOMS 21 & 16 – SPHINXES

These **grey-granite sphinxes** are very different from the great enigmatic Sphinx at Giza – they look more like the Lion Man from *The Wizard of Oz*, with a fleshy human face surrounded by a great shaggy mane and big ears. Sculpted for Pharaoh Amenemhat III (1855–1808 BC) during the 12th dynasty, they were moved to Avaris by the Hyksos and then to the Delta

The Illustrated Guide to the Egyptian Museum in Cairo is written by Zahi Hawass, the secretary-general of Egypt's Supreme Council of Antiquities, and published by the excellent American University in Cairo Press. Available all over the city, it costs ££150 and features colour photographs and useful itineraries.

city of Tanis by Ramses II (see p215). Also here is an extraordinary wood figure of the ka (spirit double) of the 13th dynasty ruler Hor Auibre.

ROOM 12 – HATHOR SHRINE

The centrepiece of this room is a remarkably well-preserved vaulted **sandstone chapel**, found near the Theban temple of Deir al-Bahri. Its walls are painted with reliefs of Tuthmosis III, his wife Meritre and two princesses, making offerings to Hathor, who suckles the pharaoh. The life-size cow statue suckles Tuthmosis III's son and successor Amenhotep II, who also stands beneath her chin.

Hatshepsut, who was coregent for part of Tuthmosis III's reign, eventually had herself crowned as pharaoh. Her life-sized **pink granite statue** stands to the left of the chapel. Although she wears a pharaoh's headdress and a false beard, the statue has definite feminine characteristics. The large reddish-painted limestone head in the corridor outside this room is also of Hatshepsut, originally from one of the huge Osiris-type statues that adorned the pillared façade of her great temple at Deir al-Bahri. Also here are wall decorations from the temple showing the famed expedition to Punt, perhaps Somalia or Eritrea.

ROOM 3 – AMARNA ROOM

Akhenaten (1352–1336 BC), the 'heretic pharaoh', did more than build a new capital at Tell al-Amarna, close the temples of the traditional state god Amun and promote the sun god Aten in his place. He also ushered in a period of great artistic freedom, as a glance around this room will show. Compare these great torsos with their strangely bulbous bellies, hips and thighs, their elongated faces and thick lips, with the sleek, hard-edged Middle Kingdom sculpture of previous rooms.

Perhaps most striking of all is the **unfinished head of Nefertiti** (No 161), wife of Akhenaten. Worked in brown quartzite, it's an incredibly delicate and sensitive portrait and shows the queen to have been extremely beautiful – unlike some of the relief figures of her elsewhere in the room, in which she appears with exactly the same strange features as her husband. The masterpiece of this period, the finished bust of Nefertiti, remains in the Berlin museum.

ROOM 10 – RAMSES II

At the foot of the northeast stairs is a fabulous large, **grey-granite representation of Ramses II**, builder of the Ramesseum and Abu Simbel. But here in this statue he is tenderly depicted as a child with his finger in his mouth nestled against the breast of a great falcon, in this case the Canaanite god Horus.

ROOM 34 – GRAECO-ROMAN ROOM

It is best to visit these last rooms after seeing the upper floor, because this is the end of the ancient Egyptian story. By the 4th century BC, Egypt had been invaded by many nations, mostly recently by the Macedonian Alexander the Great. Egypt's famously resistant culture had become porous, as will be obvious from the **stelae** on the back wall, and on the large **sandstone panel** on the right-hand wall inscribed in three languages: official Egyptian hieroglyphics; the more popularly used demotic; and Greek, the language of the new rulers. This trilingual stone is similar in nature to the more famous Rosetta stone (see p397), now housed in London's British Museum, a cast of which stands near the museum entrance (Room 48). Also, notice the **bust** situated immediately to the left as you enter this room: a typically Greek face with curly beard and locks, but wearing a Pharaonic-style headdress.

www.ancientegypt.co.uk is a fabulous website hosted by the British Museum that has loads of interactive online games and information about ancient Egypt for children. It is guaranteed to keep aspiring Egyptologists occupied for hours.

ROOMS 50 & 51 – ALEXANDER THE GREAT

On the official museum plan this area is labelled ‘Alexander the Great’ but currently there’s nothing here that relates directly to the Macedonian conqueror who became pharaoh. However, there is a beautiful small marble **statuette of the Greek goddess Aphrodite**, carved at the end of the 1st century BC and found in Alexandria. Egyptians identified her with Isis.

MUSEUM TOUR: FIRST FLOOR

Exhibits here are grouped thematically and can be viewed in any order, but assuming that you’ve come up the southeast stairs, we’ll enter the Tutankhamun Galleries at Room 45. This way, you’ll experience the pieces in roughly the same order that they were laid out in the tomb (a poster on the wall outside Room 45 illustrates the tomb and treasures as they were found). But if you are fascinated by mummies, then some of the most amazing ones are on display in the Royal Mummy Room, best visited before entering the Tutankhamun Galleries.

ROOM 56 – ROYAL MUMMY ROOM

The **Royal Mummy Room** (adult/student EE100/50, ticket office beside stairs off room 50; ☎ 9am–6.20pm) houses the remains of some of Egypt’s most illustrious pharaohs and queens from the 17th to 21st dynasties, 1650 to 945 BC. They lie in individual glass showcases (kept at a constant 22°C) in a suitably sombre, tomblike environment. Talking above a hushed whisper is forbidden (somewhat counterproductively, a guard will bellow ‘silence’ if you do) and tour guides are forbidden to enter, although some do.

Displaying dead royalty has proved highly controversial in the past. Late President Anwar Sadat took the Royal Mummies off display in 1979 for political reasons, but the subsequent reappearance of 11 of the better looking mummies in 1994 has done wonders for tourism figures and a second mummy room has now been added. The extra admission charge is steep, but well worth it if you have any interest in mummies or in ancient Egypt’s great rulers. Parents should be aware that the mummies can be a frightening sight for young children.

Take time to study the faces of some of the first room’s celebrated inmates, beginning with the brave Theban king **Sequenre II** who died violently, possibly during struggles to reunite the country at the end of the Second Intermediate Period (1650–1550 BC). His wounds are still visible beneath his curly hair and his twisted arms reflect the violence of his death. The perfectly wrapped mummies of **Amenhotep I** and **Queen Merit Amun** show how all royal mummies would once have looked, bedecked with garlands. Hatshepsut’s brother-husband **Tuthmosis II** lies close by, as does **Tuthmosis IV** with his beautifully styled hair – he was the first pharaoh to have his ears pierced. Here too is **Seti I**, often described as the best-preserved royal mummy, although his son **Ramses II**, in the middle of the room, might argue with that, his haughty profile revealing the family’s characteristic curved nose, his hair dyed in old age with yellow henna. Ramses II’s 13th son and successor **Merenptah** has a distinctly white appearance caused by the mummification process.

The new mummy room (same ticket) is located across the building, off room 46. The corridor display relates some of the most famous mummy discoveries, including the 1881 Deir al-Bahri cache of royal mummies. Many of the mummies in this section date from the 20th and 21st dynasties, the end of the New Kingdom and the start of the Third Intermediate

The Treasures of the Egyptian Museum, edited by Francesco Tiradritti, is an excellent reference published by the American University in Cairo Press. Available in most of Cairo’s English-language bookshops and at the museum bookshop, it features 416 pages of stunning colour photographs and costs ££300.

MYTH BUSTING

In January 2005 the National Geographic Society arranged for 1700 CT scans of the mummy of Tutankhamun to be taken at his tomb in Luxor's Valley of the Kings. The scans were then given to three teams of researchers (from Paris, New York and Egypt) who used them to model busts showing what the boy pharaoh might have looked like on the day of his death 3300 years ago. Unveiling the startlingly similar-looking busts to a packed international press conference, Zahi Hawass, secretary-general of Egypt's Supreme Council of Antiquities, stated that the scans had shown that Tut was healthy and well fed at the time of his death and that there was no evidence of foul play, contradicting the oft-repeated theory that he had been murdered at the behest of Ay, the commoner who ruled Egypt as regent while Tut was growing up. The scans showed that one of Tut's legs had been fractured shortly before his death, leading to conjecture that this had led to infection or a fat embolism that eventually killed him.

Period (c 1186–945 BC). In the mummy room, the small raised spots visible on the face of **Ramses V** may have been caused by smallpox. His predecessors **Ramses III and IV** lie nearby. Since her cheeks had burst apart due to overpacking during the mummification process, the appearance of **Queen Henettawy** (c 1025 BC) owes as much to modern restorers as to ancient embalmers, who decorated her linen shroud with an image of Osiris. **Queen Nesikhonsu's** mummy still conveys the queen's vivid features. **Queen Maatkare** lies nearby with her pet baboon. Also here are the mummies of several youths, including **Prince Djedptahiufankh**.

TUTANKHAMUN GALLERIES

The treasure of the young New Kingdom pharaoh, Tutankhamun, are among the world's most famous antiquities. The tomb and treasures of this pharaoh, who ruled for only nine years during the 14th century BC (1336–1327 BC), were discovered in 1922 by English archaeologist Howard Carter. Its well-hidden location in the Valley of the Kings, below the much grander but ransacked tomb of Ramses VI, had long prevented its discovery (see boxed text, p261). Many archaeologists now believe that up to 80% of these extraordinary treasures were made for Tutankhamun's predecessors, Akhenaten and Smenkhkare – some still carry the names of the original owners. Perhaps with Tutankhamun's death, everything connected with the Amarna Period was simply chucked in with him to be buried away and forgotten.

About 1700 items are spread throughout a series of rooms on the museum's 1st floor, and although the gold shines brightest, sometimes the less grand objects give more insight into the pharaoh's life. The following are some of the highlights.

Room 45

Flanking the doorway as you enter are two life-size **statues of Tutankhamun**, found in the tomb antechamber. A large black-and-white photograph shows them *in situ*. Made of wood coated in bitumen, their black skin suggests an identification with Osiris and the rich, black river silt, symbolised fertility and rebirth.

Room 40

Note **Tutankhamun's wig box** of dark wood, with strips of blue and orange inlay, the wooden mushroom-shaped support inside once holding the pharaoh's short curly wig.

Moisturising oils were very popular; even troops were anointed with perfumes as a mark of honour. One Spartan king stormed out of a banquet when his fellow Egyptian guests had overdone the perfume. He thought them decadent and effeminate.

Despite the magnificence of his burial artefacts, Tutankhamun only ruled Egypt for nine years and made little impression in the annals of its history.

Rooms 35 & 30

The **pharaoh's lion throne** (No 179) is one of the museum's highlights. Covered with sheet gold and inlaid with lapis, cornelian and other semiprecious stones, the wooden throne is supported by lion legs. The colourful tableau on the chair-back depicts Ankhnesenamun applying perfume to husband Tutankhamun, under the rays of the sun (Aten), the worship of which was a hangover from the Amarna period. Evidence of remodelling of the figures suggests that this was the throne of his father and predecessor, Akhenaten. The robes are modelled in beaten silver, their hair of glass paste.

Many **golden statues** were placed in the tomb to help the pharaoh on his journey in the afterlife, including a series of 28 gilt-wood protective deities and 413 *shabti*, attendants who would serve the pharaoh in the afterlife. Only a few of them are displayed here.

Room 20

This room contains exquisite **alabaster jars** and **vessels** carved into the shape of boats and animals.

Rooms 10 & 9

The northern end of this gallery is filled with the pharaoh's three elaborate **funerary couches**, one supported by the cow-goddess Mehetweret, one by two figures of the goddess Ammit, 'the devourer' who ate the hearts of the damned, and the third by the lioness god Mehet. The huge **bouquet** of persea and olive leaves in Room 10, near the top of the stairs, was originally propped up beside the two black and gold guardian statues in Room 45.

The alabaster chest contains four **Canopic jars**, the stoppers of which are in the form of Tutankhamun's head. Inside these jars, four miniature gold coffins (now in Room 3) held the pharaoh's internal organs. The chest was placed inside the golden Canopic shrine with the four gilded goddesses: Isis, Neith, Nephthys and Selket, all portrayed with protective outstretched arms.

Most people walk right past Tutankhamun's amazing **wardrobe**. The pharaoh was buried with a range of sumptuous tunics covered in gold discs and beading, ritual robes of 'fake fur', a large supply of neatly folded underwear and even socks to be worn with flip-flop-type sandals, 47 pairs of which were buried with him. From these and other objects, the Tutankhamun Textile Project has worked out that pharaoh's vital statistics were 79cm (31in) chest, 74cm (29in) waist and 109cm (43in) hips.

Rooms 8 & 7

These galleries just barely accommodate four massive **gilded wooden shrines**. These fitted one inside the other, like a set of Russian dolls, encasing at their centre the sarcophagi of the boy pharaoh.

Room 3

This is the room everybody wants to see as it contains the pharaoh's golden sarcophagus and jewels; at peak times, prepare to queue. Tutankhamun's astonishing **death mask** has become an Egyptian icon. Made of solid gold and weighing 11kg, the mask covered the head of the mummy, where it lay inside a series of three sarcophagi. The mask is an idealised portrait of the young pharaoh; the eyes are fashioned from obsidian and quartz, while the outlines of the eyes and the eyebrows are delineated with lapis lazuli.

No less wondrous are the two **golden sarcophagi**. These are the inner two sarcophagi – the outermost coffin, along with the pharaoh's mummy, remains in his tomb in the Valley of the Kings. The smallest coffin is,

like the mask, cast in solid gold and inlaid in the same fashion. It weighs 110kg. The slightly larger coffin is made of gilded wood.

ROOM 4 – ANCIENT EGYPTIAN JEWELLERY

Even after Tutankhamun's treasures, this stunning collection of royal jewellery takes the breath away. The collection covers the period from early dynasties to the Romans and includes belts, inlaid beadwork, necklaces, semiprecious stones and bracelets. Among the most beautiful is a **diadem of Queen Sit-Hathor-Yunet**, a golden headband with a rearing cobra inset with semiprecious stones. Also of note is Pharaoh Ahmose's gold dagger and Seti II's considerable gold earrings.

ROOM 2 – ROYAL TOMBS OF TANIS

This glittering collection of gold- and silver-encrusted objects came from six intact 21st- and 22nd-dynasty tombs found at the Delta site of Tanis (p215). Unearthed by the French in 1939, the tombs' discovery rivalled Carter's finding of Tutankhamun's tomb, but news of the discovery was overshadowed by the outbreak of WWII. The gold **death mask of Psusennes I** (1039–991 BC) is shown alongside his silver inner coffin and another silver coffin with the head of a falcon belonging to the pharaoh Shoshenq II (c 890 BC).

ROOM 14 – GRAECO-ROMAN MUMMIES

This room contains a small sample of the stunning portraits found on Graeco-Roman mummies, popularly known as the **Fayoum Portraits** (see boxed text, p209). These faces were painted onto wooden panels, often during the subject's life, and placed over the mummies' embalmed faces. These portraits express the personalities of their subjects more successfully than the stylised elegance of most other ancient Egyptian art and are recognised as the link between ancient art and the Western portrait tradition.

ROOM 34 – PHARAONIC TECHNOLOGY

For gadget buffs, this room contains a great number of everyday objects that helped support ancient Egypt's great leap out of prehistory. Some are still in use in Egypt today. **Pharaonic boomerangs** were apparently used for hunting birds.

ROOM 43 – YUYA & THUYU ROOMS

Before Tutankhamun's tomb was uncovered, the tomb of Yuya and Thuyu (the parents of Queen Tiy, and Tutankhamun's great-grandparents) had yielded the most spectacular find in Egyptian archaeology. Discovered virtually intact in the Valley of the Kings in 1905, the tomb contained a vast number of treasures, including five ornate sarcophagi and the remarkably well-preserved mummies of the two commoners who became royal in-laws. Among many other items on display are such essentials for the hereafter as beds and sandals, as well as the fabulous gilded **death mask of Thuyu**.

ROOM 48 – PYRAMID MODEL

This excellent large-scale model of one of the Abu Sir pyramids perfectly illustrates the typical pyramid complex with its valley temple, high-walled causeway, mortuary temple and minisatellite pyramid – well worth studying before a trip to Giza. Case No 82 contains the much-copied blue faïence **hippopotamus** from the Middle Kingdom, a symbol of the Nile's fertility.

Cosmetics played an important role in the daily life of both women and men; the tomb builders of Deir al-Medina are shown having their eye paint applied during working hours as protection against glare and various eye diseases.

ROOM 53 – ANIMAL MUMMIES

Animal cults grew in strength throughout ancient Egypt, as the battered and dust-covered mummified cats, dogs, crocodiles, birds, rams and jackals in Room 53 suggest.

ROOM 37 – MODEL ARMIES

Discovered in the Asyut tomb of governor Mesheti and dating from about 2000 BC (11th dynasty), these are two sets of 40 **wooden warriors** marching in phalanxes. The darker soldiers (No 72) are Nubian archers from the south of the kingdom, each wearing brightly coloured kilts of varying design, while the lighter-skinned soldiers (No 73) are Egyptian pikemen.

ROOMS 32 & 27 – MIDDLE KINGDOM MODELS

These sensational lifelike models were mostly found in the tomb of Meketre, an 11th-dynasty chancellor in Thebes, and, like some of the best of Egyptian tomb paintings, they provide a fascinating portrait of daily life in Egypt almost 4000 years ago. They include fishing boats, a slaughterhouse, a carpentry workshop, a loom and a model of Meketre's house (with fig trees in the garden). Most spectacular is the 1.5m-wide scene of Meketre sitting with his sons, four scribes and various others, counting cattle.

www.animalmummies.com, a website dedicated to the Egyptian Museum's animal mummies, encourages you to adopt one and help pay for a climate-controlled room and special cases to conserve the poor beasts.