

Egypt

A land of magnificent World Heritage sites and a thousand tourist clichés, Egypt was enticing visitors millennia before Mr Cook sailed his first steamers up the Nile and Ms Christie caused a couple of passengers to be stabbed along the way. It was in Egypt that the Holy Family sheltered, Alexander conquered and Mark Antony flirted. Napoleon stopped long enough to nick a few obelisks, the Ottomans paused to prop up the great and barbarous pasha Mohammed Ali, and the British stayed around to get the train system running and to furnish every empty nook and cranny of the British Museum. And all this was long, long after Menes (Narmer) united the two states of Upper and Lower Egypt and set the scene for the unfolding of the greatest civilisation the world has ever known.

The pointed perfection of the Pyramids, the magical minarets of Cairo's skyline and the tantalising tombs and temples of Luxor are just a few of the wonders these and millions of other visitors have admired during jaunts up and down the Nile and camelback trips through spectacularly stark desert landscapes.

As all travellers to this ancient land swiftly realise, Howard Carter's discovery of Tutankhamun's tomb did a lot more than raise the boy pharaoh's previously negligible profile and set off a craze for Egyptology among the chattering classes of the Western world – it confirmed once and for all that Egypt's discoveries are ongoing and her treasures limitless.

FAST FACTS

- **Area** 997,739 sq km
- **Capital** Cairo
- **Country code** ☎ 20
- **Language** Arabic
- **Money** Egyptian pound (££); US\$1 = ££5.75; €1 = ££6.79
- **Official name** Arab Republic of Egypt
- **Population** 74.9 million



HIGHLIGHTS

- **Cairo** (p96) The 'Mother of the World' is home to a big museum, even bigger Pyramids and a bigger-still local population.
- **Luxor** (p124) The many glories of ancient Thebes and the persistence of the local touts never fail to impress.
- **Abu Simbel** (p143) Ramses II's most magnificent monument is worth the trek through the desert.
- **Alexandria** (p117) This very cosmopolitan Mediterranean city is Egypt's hidden treasure – don't miss it.
- **Dahab** (p162) A backpackers' nirvana where you can kick back and recover from chronic Pharaonic fatigue.

CLIMATE & WHEN TO GO

Egypt's climate is easy to summarise. Except for the winter months of December, January and February, it is hot and dry. Temperatures increase as you travel south from Alexandria. Alexandria receives the most rain – approximately 190mm a year – while in Aswan, in the far south, rain is rare.

Summer temperatures range from 31°C on the Mediterranean coast to a scorching 50°C in Aswan. At night in winter, the temperatures sometimes plummet to as low as 8°C, even in the south of the country. In the mountains of Sinai, night-time temperatures in winter can fall well below zero.

June to August is unbearable in Upper Egypt (the area extending south of Cairo to the Sudan), with daytime temperatures soaring to 40°C or more. Summer in Cairo is almost as hot, and the combination of heat, dust, pollution, noise and crowds makes walking the city streets a real test of endurance.

For visiting Upper Egypt, winter is easily the most comfortable time – though hotel rates are at a premium. In Cairo from December to February, skies are often overcast and evenings can be colder than you'd think, while up on the Mediterranean coast, Alexandria is subject to frequent downpours.

The happiest compromise for an all-Egypt trip is to visit in spring (March to May) or autumn (October and November). See Climate Charts p643.

In this chapter, we have used 'summer' and 'winter' hours for museums and other attractions. Summer generally means May to September and winter October to April.

HOW MUCH?

- **Cup of tea** ££2 to ££4
- **Newspaper** 50pt
- **One-minute phone call to the UK** ££3.50
- **Internet connection per hour** ££5 to ££10
- **Museum admission** ££40

LONELY PLANET INDEX

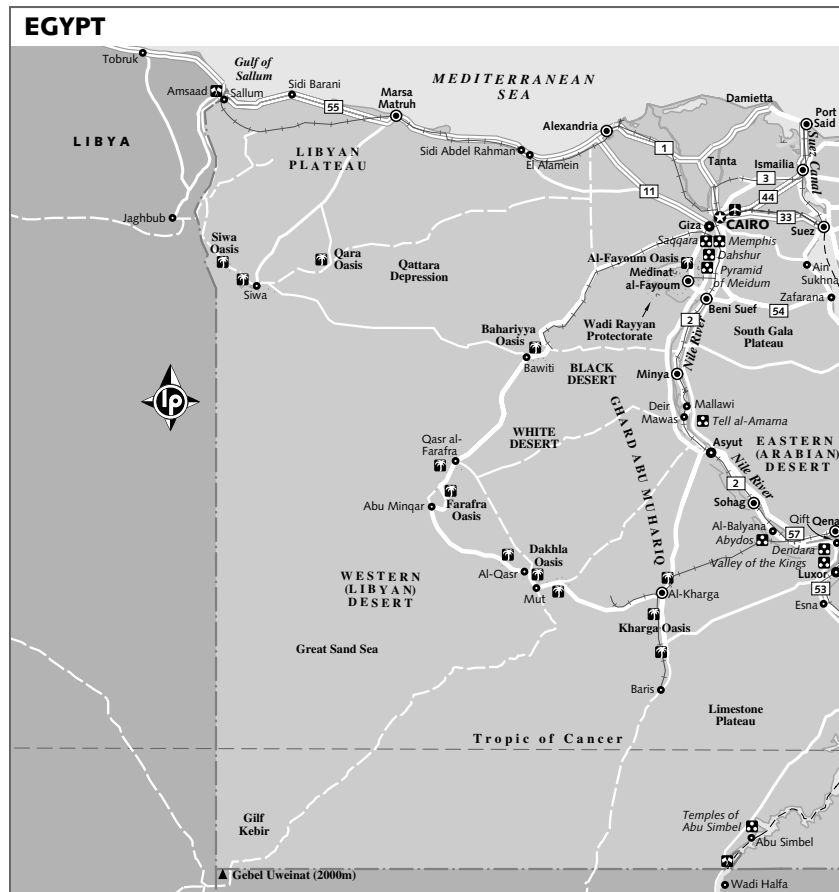
- **Litre of petrol** 18pt
- **Litre of bottled water** ££2.50
- **Bottle of Stella** ££10
- **Souvenir T-shirt** ££30
- **Fuul or ta'amiyya sandwich** 50pt

HISTORY

About 5000 years ago an Egyptian pharaoh named Menes (Narmer) unified Upper and Lower Egypt for the first time. For centuries before, communities had been developing along the Nile. The small kingdoms eventually developed into two important states, one covering the valley as far as the Delta, the other consisting of the Delta itself. The unification of these two states in about 3100 BC set the scene for the greatest era of ancient Egyptian civilisation.

Little is known of the immediate successors of Menes except that, attributed with divine ancestry, they promoted the development of a highly stratified society, patronised the arts and built many temples and public works. In the 27th century BC, Egypt's pyramids began to appear. The Pharaoh Zoser and his chief architect, Imhotep, built what may have been the first, the Step Pyramid at Saqqara. Zoser ruled from the nearby capital of Memphis.

For the next three dynasties and 500 years (a period called the Old Kingdom), the power of Egypt's pharaohs and the size and scale of their pyramids and temples greatly increased. The size of such buildings symbolised the pharaoh's importance and power over his people. The last three pharaohs of the 4th dynasty, Khufu (Cheops), Khafre (Chephren) and Menkaure (Mycerinus), built the three Great Pyramids of Giza.



It is evident that the pharaohs had ceded some of their power to a rising class of nobles by the beginning of the 5th dynasty (about 2494–2345 BC). In the following centuries Egypt broke down into several squabbling principalities. The rise of Thebes (Luxor) saw an end to the turmoil, and Egypt was reunited under Montuhotep II, marking the beginning of the Middle Kingdom. For 250 years all went well, but more internal fighting and 100 years of occupation by the Hyksos, invaders from the northeast, cast a shadow over the country.

The New Kingdom, its capital at Thebes and later Memphis, represented a blossoming of culture and empire in Pharaonic Egypt. For almost 400 years, from the 18th

to the 20th dynasties (1550–1069 BC), Egypt was a great power in northeast Africa and the eastern Mediterranean. But by the time Ramses III came to power (1184 BC) as the second pharaoh of the 20th dynasty, disunity had again set in. This was the state of affairs when the army of Alexander the Great took control of Egypt in the 4th century BC.

Alexander founded a new capital, Alexandria, on the Mediterranean coast, and for the next 300 years the land of the Nile was ruled by a dynasty established by one of the Macedonian's generals, Ptolemy. Romans followed the Ptolemaic dynasty, and then came Islam and the Arabs, conquering Egypt in AD 640. In due course, rule by the Ottoman Turks and the Europeans



followed (the French under Napoleon, then the British) – shifts of power common to much of the Middle East (see p37).

Self-rule was finally restored to the Egyptians as a result of the Revolution of 1952. Colonel Gamal Abdel Nasser, leader of the revolutionary Free Officers, ascended to power and was confirmed as president in elections held in 1956. That same year, the colonial legacy was finally and dramatically shaken off in full world view when Nasser successfully faced down Britain, France and Israel over the Suez Canal. Nasser was unsuccessful, however, in the 1967 war with Israel, dying shortly after of a heart failure. Anwar Sadat, his successor, also fought Israel in 1973, a war that paved the way for a

peace settlement, culminating in the Camp David Agreement in 1979. In certain quarters, Camp David was viewed as a traitorous abandonment of Nasser's pan-Arabist principles and it ultimately cost Sadat his life at the hands of an assassin in 1981.

Sadat's murderer was a member of Islamic Jihad, an uncompromising terrorist organisation that aimed to establish an Islamic state in Egypt. Mass roundups of Islamists were immediately carried out on the orders of Sadat's successor, Hosni Mubarak, the vice president and a former air-force general, who declared a state of emergency when he assumed power. This state of emergency continues today.

Mubarak was able to rehabilitate Egypt in the eyes of the Arab world without abandoning the treaty with Israel. For almost a decade, he and his National Democratic Party (NDP) managed to keep the domestic political situation calm – with the constant presence of the armed forces always in the background. Things started to change in the late 1980s. Discontent brewed among the poorer sections of society as the country's economic situation worsened. With a repressive political system that allowed little or no chance to legitimately voice opposition, it was almost inevitable that the Islamist opposition would resort to extreme action.

Frequent attempts were made on the life of the president and his ministers, and regular clashes with the security forces occurred. The government responded with a heavy-handed crackdown, arresting thousands and continuing to outlaw the most popular Islamist opposition group, the Muslim Brotherhood. By the mid-1990s, the violence had receded from the capital, retreating to the religious heartland of middle Egypt where, in 1997, members of the Gama'a al-Islamiyya (Islamic Group), a Muslim Brotherhood splinter group, carried out a bloody massacre of 58 holidaymakers at the Funerary Temple of Hatshepsut in Luxor.

The massacre destroyed grass-roots support for militant groups and the Muslim Brotherhood declared a cease-fire the following year. Things were relatively quiet until October 2004, when a bomb at Taba, on the border with Israel, killed 34 and signalled the start of an unsettled 12 months. In early 2005, President Mubarak bowed to growing international pressure to bring

the country's political system in line with Western-style democracy, and proposed a constitutional amendment (subsequently approved by parliament and ratified at a national referendum) that aimed to introduce direct and competitive presidential elections in September that year. While some pundits saw this as a step in the right direction, others saw it as a sham, particularly as popular opposition groups such as the Muslim Brotherhood were still banned and other independent candidates were required to have the backing of at least 65 members of the overwhelmingly NDP-dominated lower house of parliament. When the Kifaya! (Enough!) coalition of opposition groups loudly voiced its unhappiness with these restrictions, security forces cracked down. Ayman Nour, the leader of the popular Ghad (Tomorrow) party, was thrown into jail on what many thought were trumped-up charges and opposition rallies around the country were violently dispersed. At this stage the banned Muslim Brotherhood began holding its own rallies, and in Cairo there were two isolated terrorist incidents aimed at foreign tourists, both carried out by members of the same pro-Islamist family. Soon after, three bombs at the popular beach resort of Sharm el-Sheikh claimed the lives of 64 people, most of them Egyptian. Various groups claimed responsibility, tourism took an immediate hit and Egyptians braced themselves for the possibility of further terrorist incursions and domestic unrest.

Egypt Today

Despite the ever-present – though slim – threat of an Islamist uprising, the major challenge facing President Mubarak as this book goes to print isn't associated with religious extremism or global terrorism. Nor is it related to the constant international and opposition denunciation of press censorship and other infringements on human rights. The biggest threat to the NDP's hold on power is the irrefutable fact that Egypt is in serious economic crisis, and has been for many years. The national economy is best described as a basket case, and when the ever-burgeoning growth in population, rise in unemployment, and decline in tourism resulting from the July 2005 Sharm el-Sheikh bombs are considered, a prosperous national future looks increasingly unlikely.

THE CULTURE

Egypt is the most populous country in the Arab world and has the second-highest population in Africa.

Anthropologists divide Egyptian people very roughly into three racial groups, of which the biggest is descended from the Hamito-Semitic race that has peopled the Nile (as well as many other parts of North Africa and neighbouring Arabia) for millennia. Included in this race are the Berbers, a minority group who settled around Siwa in the country's Western Desert. The second group, the truly Arab element, is made up of the Bedouin Arab nomads, who migrated from Arabia and live in desert areas, particularly Sinai. The third group is the Nubians, who inhabit the Aswan area.

The population is growing at a rate of 2% annually, placing enormous stress on infrastructure and the national economy. Unemployment is officially recorded as being at 10%; unofficially it's much higher.

RELIGION

About 94% of Egypt's population is Muslim; the remainder is Coptic Christian. Generally speaking, the two communities happily coexist.

CAIRO

القاهرة

📍 02 / pop 11 million

A chaotic, cacophonous and confidently charismatic city, Cairo can be hard work but boy, she's worth it. Her millions of children live in the shadow of the Pyramids, along the banks of the Nile, alongside the mausoleums of the dead and on the edges of her voracious urban sprawl. All have their complaints about pollution, traffic and overcrowding, but none of them would dream of leaving. This is, after all, the capital of the Arab world and Egypt's greatest city. Tutankhamun's treasure and the Khan al-Khalili are obvious – and wonderful – diversions for the visitor, but it's the everyday rituals of life here that prove most enticing. Once you've dodged the gladiatorial traffic a few times, promenaded along the Corniche, grown attuned to the multitudinous calls to prayer and listened to the new Amr Diab song time

after time, you'll forget that you're filthy and exhausted, and will throw yourself willingly into the madness.

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, 22km south of the Giza plateau.

The core foundations of the city of Cairo were laid in AD 969 by the early Islamic Fatimid dynasty. There had been earlier settlements, notably the Roman fortress of Babylon and the early-Islamic city of Fustat, established by Amr ibn al-As, the general who conquered Egypt for Islam in AD 640. Much of the city that the Fatimids built remains today: the great Fatimid mosque and university of Al-Azhar is still Egypt's main centre of Islamic study, while the three great gates of Bab an-Nasr, Bab al-Futuh and Bab Zuweila still straddle two of Islamic Cairo's main thoroughfares.

Under the rule of subsequent dynasties, Cairo swelled and burst its walls, but at heart it remained a medieval city for 900 years. It wasn't until the mid-19th century that Cairo started to change in any significant way.

Before the 1860s, Cairo extended west only as far as what is today Midan Opera. The future site of modern central Cairo was then a swampy plain subject to the annual flooding of the Nile. In 1863, when the French-educated Ismail came to power, he was determined to upgrade the image of his capital, which he believed could only be done by dismissing what had gone before and 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 brand-new European-style Cairo beside the old Islamic city. This building boom has continued until the present day, with the city's boundaries constantly expanding into the surrounding desert.

ORIENTATION

Finding your way around the vast sprawl of Cairo is not as difficult as it may first seem. Midan Tahrir is the centre. Northeast of Tahrir is Downtown, a noisy, busy com-

CAIRO IN TWO DAYS

On day one, brave the crowds to view the magnificent exhibits at the **Egyptian Museum** (p101), then take a wander around the Downtown area, stopping to grab a cheap and delicious lunch at **At-Table ad-Dumyati** (p112). In the afternoon, make your way to **Khan al-Khalili** (p104) and practise your haggling skills with the cheerful stall owners. When there, don't forget to have a tea and *sheesha* (water pipe) at **Fishawi's** (p113). Return to Downtown to eat a simple but delicious Levantine meal at the long-running **Greek Club** (p111) or dine like a pasha at Zamalek's glamorous **Abou El Sid** (p112).

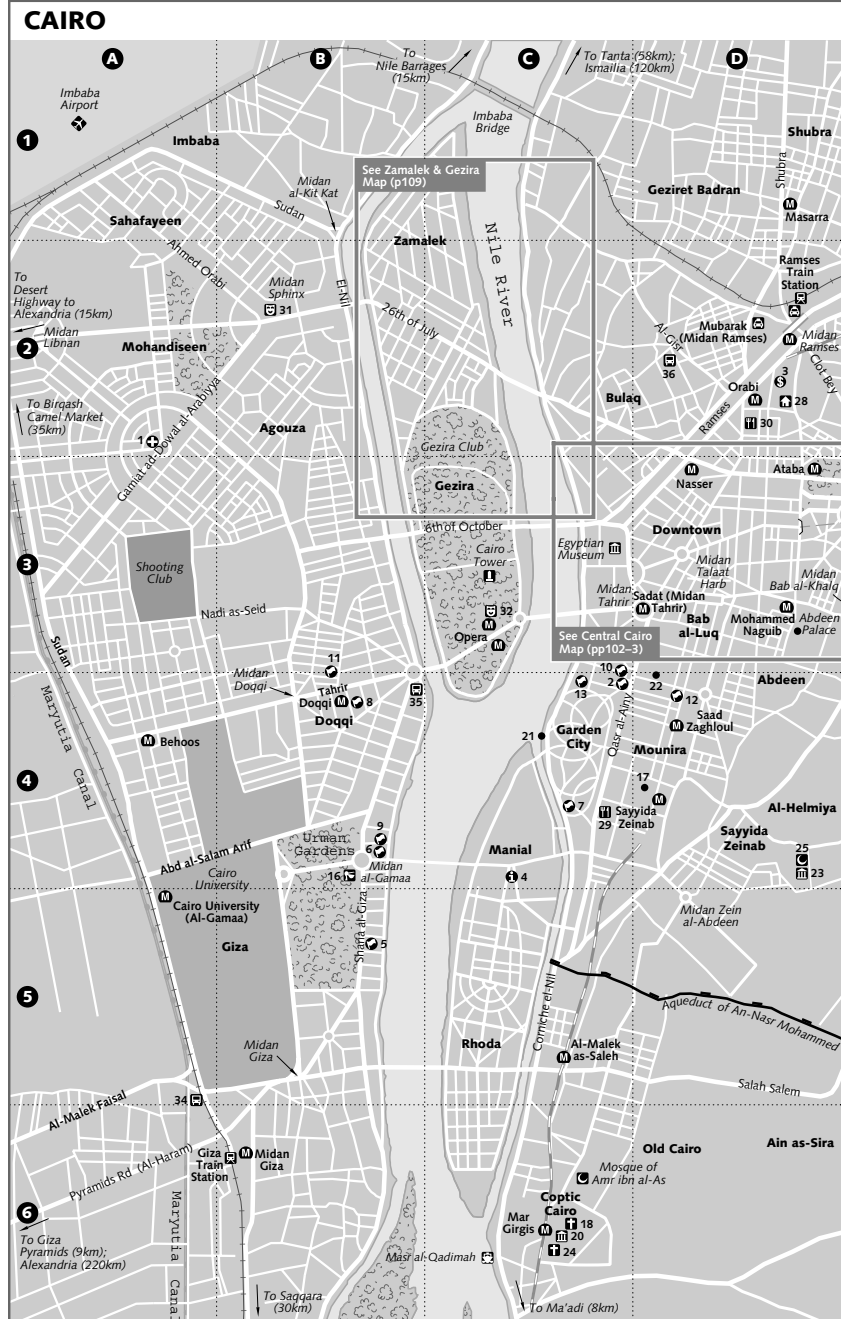
Your second day is devoted to the **Pyramids** (p106). You'll need at least four hours here, and should explore the interior of at least one of the massive stone structures. After you've had a late outdoor lunch at **Andrea's** (p108), it's back to the centre of town for a sunset **felucca cruise** (p108). On your last night in town, a splurge is on the cards – **Sabaya** (p112), at the Semiramis Intercontinental on the Corniche, will fit the bill perfectly.

mercial district centred on Sharia Talaat Harb. This is where you'll find most of the cheap eateries and budget hotels. Midan Ramses, location of the city's main train station, marks the northernmost extent of Downtown.

Heading east, Downtown ends at Midan Ataba and Islamic Cairo takes over. This is the medieval heart of the city, and is still very much alive today. At its centre is the great bazaar of Khan al-Khalili.

Sitting in the middle of the Nile is the island neighbourhood of Zamalek, historically favoured by ruling colonials and still a relatively upmarket enclave with many foreign residents, a few midrange hotels and innumerable restaurants and bars.

The west bank of the Nile is less historical and much more residential than areas along the east bank. The primary districts, north to south, are Mohandiseen, Agouza, Doqqi and Giza, all of which are heavy on concrete and light on charm. Giza covers by far the largest area of the four, stretching some 20km west either side of one long,



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straight road (Pyramids Rd, also known as Sharia al-Haram) that ends at the foot of the Pyramids.

Maps

The American University in Cairo 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 pp102-3; ☎ 797 5370; Sharia Mohamed Mahmoud; ☎ 9am-6pm Sat-Thur); Zamalek (Map p109; ☎ 739 7045; 16 Sharia Mohammed ibn Thakeb; ☎ 10am-7pm Sat-Thur, 1-7pm Fri) The best English-language bookshop in Egypt, with stacks of material on the politics, sociology and history of Cairo, Egypt and the Middle East. It also has plenty of guidebooks and some fiction. The Zamalek branch is smaller than the main Downtown branch.

Diwan (Map p109; ☎ 736 2578; 159 Sharia 26th of July, Zamalek; ☎ 9am-11.30pm) An excellent English- and French-language bookshop with its own café and a wide range of novels and guidebooks.

Lehnert & Landrock (Map pp102-3; 44 Sharia Sherif; ☎ 9.30am-2pm & 4-7.30pm Mon-Fri, Sat morning) Very good selection of books about Cairo and Egypt. It also sells postcards. There's a convenient branch opposite the Egyptian Museum.

Emergency

Ambulance (☎ 123)

Fire department (☎ 180)

Police (☎ 122)

Tourist police (☎ 126)

Tourist police office (Map pp102-3; ☎ 390 6028; Downtown) On the 1st floor of a building in the alley just left of the main tourist office.

Internet Access

4U Internet Café (Map pp102-3; ☎ 575 9304; 1st fl, 8 Midan Talaat Harb, Downtown; per hr ££5; ☎ 24hr) Under the Lialy Hostel.

Five St@rs Net (Map pp102-3; ☎ 574 7881; ☎ 24hr) Next to 4U Internet Café. Offers an almost-identical service for the same price, the only difference being that it doesn't burn CDs. There's another branch near Midan Tahrir.

Hany Internet Cafe (Map pp102-3; ☎ 395 1985; 16 Sharia Abdel Khalek Sarwat, Downtown; per hr ££3; ☎ 24hr) In front of El-Tahrir Kushari.

Internet Egypt (Map pp102-3; per hr ££10; ☎ 9am-midnight) In the basement of the Nile Hilton shopping mall. Students receive a 20% discount.

Internet@Cafe (Map p109; 25 Sharia Ismail Mohammed, Zamalek; per hr ££5; ☎ 9am-1am)

Medical Services

Many of Cairo's hospitals have antiquated equipment and a cavalier attitude to hygiene, but there are some exceptions, including the **As-Salam International Hospital** (Map pp98-9; ☎ 524 0250, emergency ☎ 524 0077; Corniche el-Nil, Ma'adi).

There is no shortage of pharmacies in Cairo and almost anything can be obtained without a prescription. Pharmacies that operate 24 hours and deliver include **Al-Ezaby** (Bulaq Map p109; Arcadia Mall, Corniche el-Nil; Heliopolis ☎ 414 8467; 1 Sharia Tayseer).

Money

There are banks and forex bureaus all over town; the Banque Misr branches at the Nile Hilton and Mena House Oberoi hotels are open 24 hours. There are ATMs throughout the city.

Amex (☎ 9am-4.30pm) Midan Tahrir (Map pp102-3; ☎ 578 5001; Nile Hilton, Midan Tahrir, Downtown); Sharia Qasr el-Nil (Map pp102-3; ☎ 574 7991; 15 Sharia Qasr el-Nil, Downtown) Exchanges travellers cheques and supplies US dollars.

Thomas Cook (emergency hotline ☎ 010 140 1367) Downtown (Map pp102-3; ☎ 574 3955; 17 Sharia Mahmoud Bassiouni; ☎ 9am-4.30pm Sat-Thur); Garden City (Map pp102-3; ☎ 795 8544; Semiramis Intercontinental, Corniche el-Nil; ☎ 8am-4.30pm Sat-Thur) Same services as Amex.

Post

Main post office (Map pp102-3; ☎ 391 2615; Midan Ataba; ☎ 8am-6pm Sat-Thur, 8am-noon Fri & public holidays)

Telephone

In Cairo, there are telephone centrales (Map pp102-3) located on the northern side of Midan Tahrir (in central Cairo) and on Sharia Mohammed Mahmoud, Bab al-Luq, Sharia Adly, next to the Windsor Hotel off Sharia Alf, and on Sharia 26th of July in Zamalek. All of these have a couple of cardphones.

Tourist Information

Main tourist office (Map pp102-3; ☎ 391 3454; 5 Sharia Adly, Downtown; ☎ 8.30am-7pm) Staff seem totally uninterested in supplying tourist information. It's not worth a visit.

Visa Extensions

All visa business is carried out at the **Mogamma** (Map pp102-3; Midan Tahrir, Downtown; ☎ 8am-1.30pm Sat-Wed), a 14-storey Egypto-Stalinist monolith. Foreigners go up to the 1st floor, turn right and proceed straight down the corridor ahead. 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 extension will be processed overnight and available for collection from 9am the next day.

SIGHTS

Egyptian Museum

More than 100,000 relics and antiquities from almost every period of ancient Egyptian history are housed in the **Egyptian Museum** (Map p104; ☎ 575 4319; Midan Tahrir, Downtown; adult/student ££60/30; ☎ 9am-6.15pm). To put that in perspective, if you spent only one minute at each exhibit it would take more than nine months to see everything. Some of the museum's exhibits will be moved to the new 'Great Museum', close to the Pyramids in Giza, but this isn't scheduled to open until 2008 at the earliest.

Guides costs ££50 per hour and congregate outside the ticket box. You must check your cameras into the baggage room before entering the museum. Access to the Royal Mummy Room costs an additional ££80/40; tickets for this are bought at the 1st-floor entrance to the room.

There are many rooms to see, but those that are particularly noteworthy are described here.

GROUND FLOOR

Rooms 32, 37 & 42 – Old Kingdom Rooms

Room 32 is dominated by the **double statue of Rahotep and Nofret**. The simple lines of this limestone sculpture make the figures seem almost contemporary, despite having been around for a staggering 4600 years. Also in here are the panels known as the **Meidum Geese**, part of a frieze that originates from a mud-brick mastaba at Meidum, near Al-Fayoum (to this day, the lakes there are still

SCAMS

Scams in Cairo are so numerous that there's no way we could list them all here. They are roughly divided into three types: hotel scams (p110), overcharging on tours to Luxor and Aswan (you're better off making your own way there and brokering arrangements on the ground) and shopping scams. One long-running scam occurs around the Egyptian Museum: 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 for an hour. Then he suggests that while they're waiting, they may be interested in going to the nearby 'Government Bazaar', which is coincidentally having its annual sale on that day. Needless to say, there's a sale everyday, it's not much of a sale at all, and he'll collect a commission on anything you purchase...

host to a great variety of bird life). Room 37 contains the **tomb of Queen Hetepheres**, mother of Khufu, builder of the Great Pyramid at Giza. Room 42 holds what some consider to be the museum's masterpiece – a larger-than-life-size **statue of Khafre**, builder of the second Pyramid at Giza.

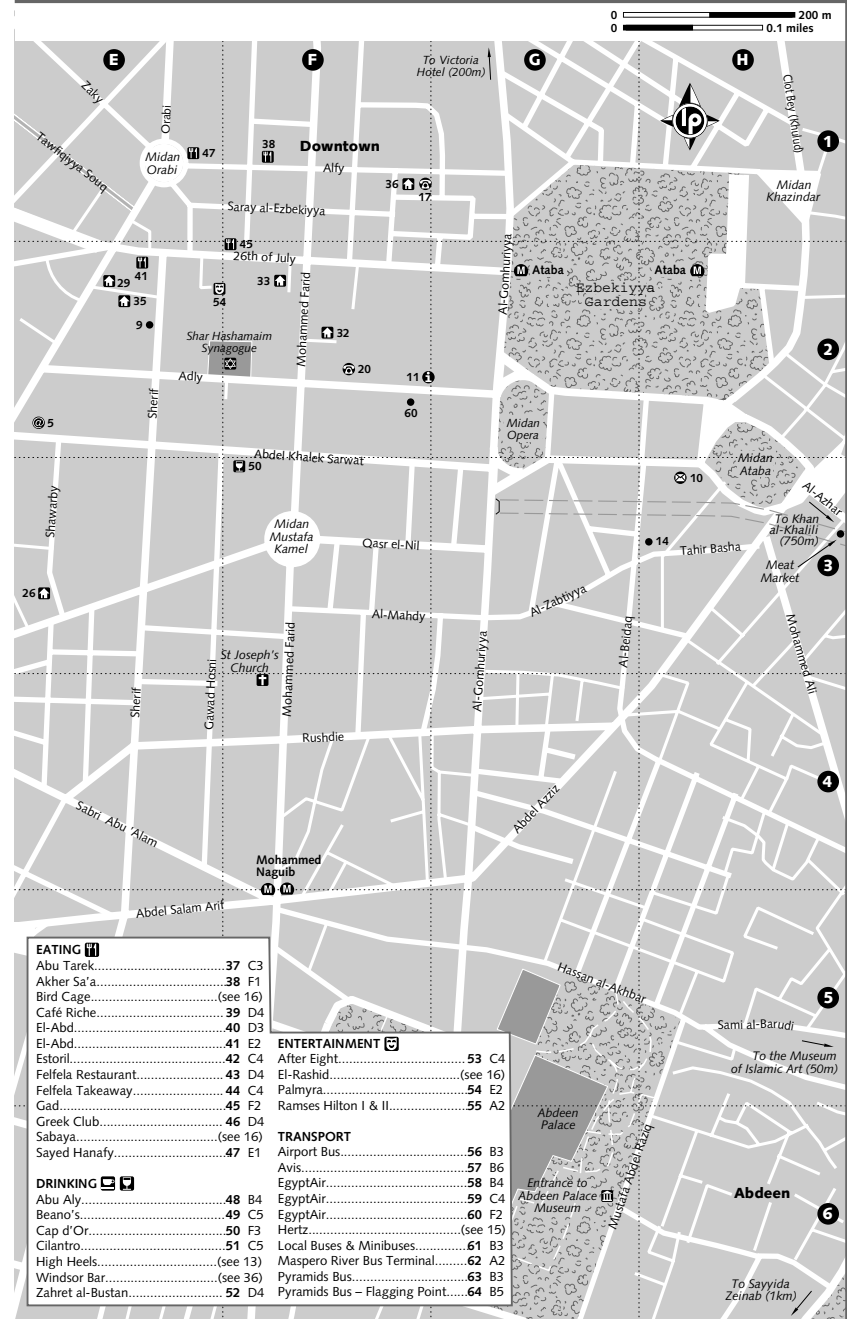
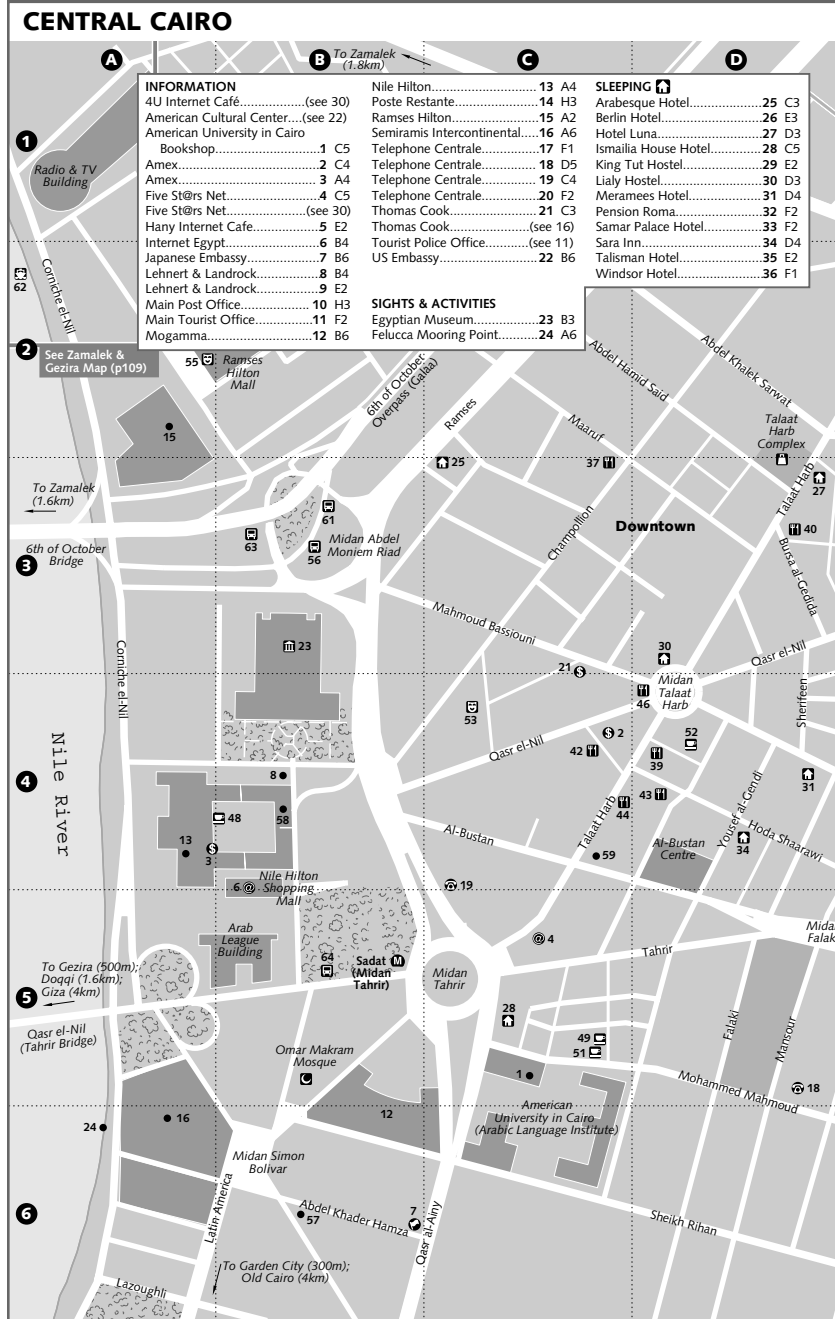
Room 3 – Amarna Room

This room is devoted to **Akhenaten** (1352–1336 BC), the 'heretic pharaoh' who set up ancient Egypt's first and last monotheistic faith. Compare the bulbous bellies, hips and thighs, and the elongated heads and thick, Mick Jagger-like lips of these statues with the sleek, hard-edged norm of typical Pharaonic sculpture. Also very striking is the delicate, but unfinished, **head of Nefertiti**, Akhenaten's wife.

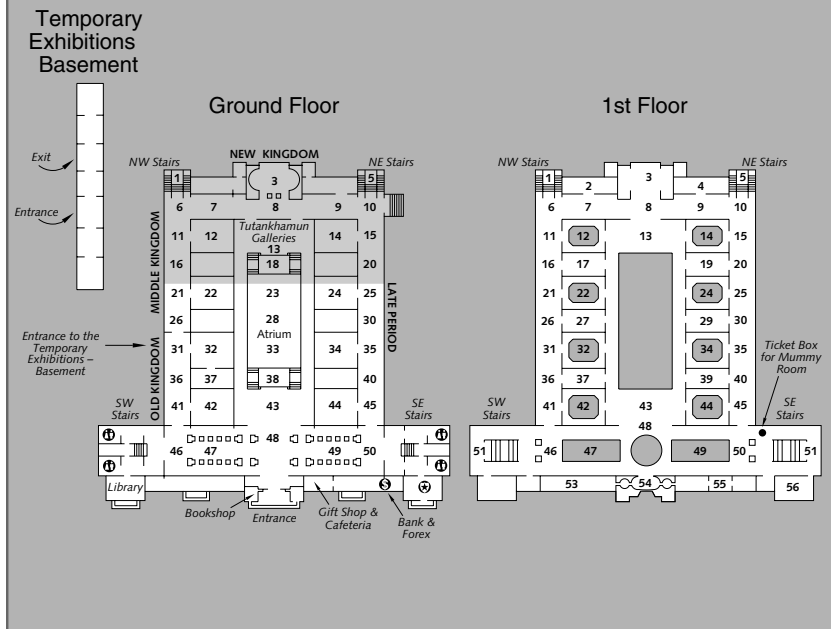
1ST FLOOR

Room 2 – Royal Tombs of Tanis

This is a glittering collection of gold- and silver-encrusted amulets, gold funerary masks, daggers, bracelets, collars, gold sandals, and finger and toe coverings from five intact New Kingdom tombs found at the Delta site of Tanis.



EGYPTIAN MUSEUM



Tutankhamun Galleries

The exhibit that outshines everything else in the museum is without doubt the treasure of this young and comparatively insignificant pharaoh, who ruled for only nine years. About 1700 items are spread throughout a series of rooms. Room 3 contains an astonishing **death mask** made of solid gold, while rooms 7 and 8 house the four **gilded shrines** that fitted inside each other and held the gold sarcophagus of Tutankhamun at their centre.

Room 56 – Royal Mummy Room

This darkened and somewhat ghoulish gallery houses the bodies of 11 of Egypt's most illustrious pharaohs and queens, who ruled Egypt between 1552 and 1069 BC, including **Ramses II**.

Islamic Cairo

The best place to start exploring this medieval part of the city is the great bazaar, **Khan al-Khalili** (Map p105). This is easy to find if you're walking from central Cairo: from Midan Ataba walk straight along Sharia

al-Azhar under the elevated motorway, or along the parallel Sharia al-Muski. Alternatively it's a short taxi ride – ask for 'Al-Hussein', which is the name of both the *midan* (city square) and the mosque at the mouth of the bazaar. The fare should be no more than E£5 from Downtown. Before diving into the bazaar, it's worth taking time out to visit one of Cairo's most historic institutions, **Al-Azhar Mosque** (Map p105; admission free; ☎ 24hr), which is not only one of Cairo's earliest mosques, but also the world's oldest surviving university. Even though admission is free, pushy attendants will demand baksheesh (a tip).

One of the best walks in Cairo is north from Khan al-Khalili up Sharia al-Gamaliyya, a once-important medieval thoroughfare and home to fine clusters of Mamluk-era mosques, madrassas and caravanserais. You can visit the **Wikala al-Bazara** (Map p105; Sharia al-Tombakshiyya; adult/student E£10/5; ☎ 10am–5pm), a beautifully restored caravanserai, on your way towards the old **northern wall** and **gates** (currently being restored). The square-towered **Bab an-Nasr** (Gate of Victory; Map

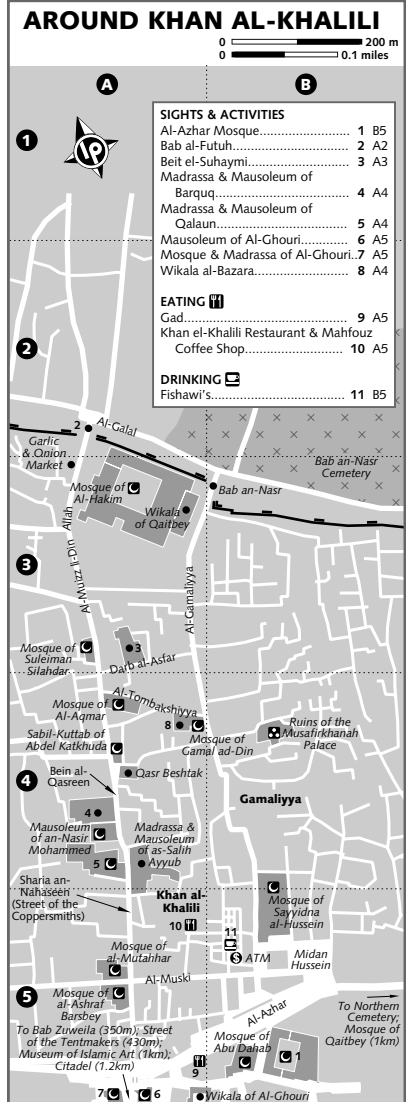
p105) and the rounded **Bab al-Futuh** (Gate of Conquests; Map p105) were built in 1087 as the two main northern entrances to the new walled Fatimid city of Al-Qahira. Returning to the bazaar via Sharia al-Muizz li-Din Allah, don't miss the spectacular **Beit el-Suhaymi** (Darb al-Asfar; Map p105; adult/student E£20/10; ☎ 9am–5pm), a beautifully restored complex of three houses. You'll find it tucked down a small alley. This part of Islamic Cairo is home to the city's most historic and architecturally significant madrassas, including the **Madrassa & Mausoleum of Barquq** (Map p105; baksheesh requested; ☎ 6am–9pm) and the **Madrassa & Mausoleum of Qalaun** (Map p105), which was closed for restoration at the time of research.

If you walk east from Al-Hussein along Sharia al-Azhar and bear right after breasting the top of the hill, walking under the overpass and straight on, you'll come to the fascinating **Northern Cemetery** (commonly known as the 'City of the Dead'; Map pp98–9), home to the splendid **Mosque of Qaitbey** (Map pp98–9).

South of Khan al-Khalili, a busy market street runs down past the **Mausoleum of Al-Ghuri** (Map p105; closed for renovation at the time of research) and the exquisite **Mosque & Madrassa of Al-Ghuri** (Map p105; admission free) to the twin minarets of **Bab Zuweila** (Map pp98–9), the sole surviving gate from the old city's southern wall. The view from the minarets is about the best in Cairo. Continuing south from Bab Zuweila, you pass through the **Street of the Tentmakers**, a covered bazaar filled by craftsmen specialising in appliqué work. From here you can turn right to make your way to the **Museum of Islamic Art** (Map pp98–9; also closed at the time of research), home to one of the world's finest collections of Islamic applied arts, or go left to the Citadel (a long walk).

Commenced by Saladin (Salah ad-Din al-Ayyub) back in the 12th century, the **Citadel** (Map pp98–9; ☎ 512 1735; Midan al-Qala'a; adult/student E£50/25; ☎ 8am–5pm winter, 8am–6pm summer) is one of the city's busiest tourist attractions – but we're not quite sure why. Its walls encircle an assortment of three very different and not terribly impressive mosques, and several palaces housing some fairly indifferent museums. The best part of any visit is marvelling at the view from the two terraces; on a clear day you can see all the way to the Giza Pyramids.

Don't miss the **Mosque of Ibn Tulun** (Beit al-Kritliyya; Map pp98–9; ☎ 364 7822; www.gawp.org; Sharia Ibn Tulun; admission E£6; ☎ 8am–6pm), 800m southwest of the Citadel. It's quite unlike any other mosque in Cairo, mainly because the inspiration is almost entirely Iraqi – the closest things to it are the ancient mosques of Samarra. Right next door to Ibn Tulun is



the **Gayer-Anderson Museum** (Map pp98-9; Sharia ibn Tulun; adult/student E£30/15, video E£20; ☎ 8am-4pm), two 16th-century houses restored and furnished by a British major between 1935 and 1942. It's well worth a visit.

After wandering the bazaar and dealing with its touts there's nothing better than sheltering for a while in the **Khan el-Khalili Restaurant & Mahfouz Coffee Shop** (Map p105; ☎ 590 3788; 5 Sikket el-Baddistan; snacks E£9-20, mains E£30-50; ☎ 10am-2am; ♿), a quiet space with a luxurious Moorish-style interior. Perfect for a tea (E£7) or Stella (E£8) and a *sheesha* (water pipe; E£6), it's also good (but pricey) for snacks and meals. Look for the wooden door onto the lane. See p113 for details of the bazaar's most famous coffeehouse, Fishawi's.

Old Cairo

مصر القديمة

Once known as Babylon, this part of Cairo predates the coming of Islam and remains to this day the seat of the Coptic Christian community. You can visit the **Coptic Museum** (Map pp98-9; ☎ 363 9742; Sharia Mar Girgis; adult/student E£35/20; ☎ 9am-4pm), with its mosaics, manuscripts, tapestries and Christian artwork, and **Hanging Church** (Kineeset al-Muallaqa; Map pp98-9; Sharia Mar Girgis; admission free; ☎ mass 8-11am Fri, 7-10am Sun), which is the centre of Coptic worship. Among the other churches and monasteries here, the **Church of St Sergius** (Map pp98-9; admission free; ☎ 8am-4pm) is supposed to mark one of the resting places of the Holy Family on its flight from King Herod. The easiest way to get here from Midan Tahrir is by Metro (50pt). Get out at the Mar Girgis station.

The Pyramids

The sole survivor of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World, the Pyramids of Giza (Map p107) still live up to more than 4000 years of hype. Their extraordinary shape, geometry and age render them somehow alien; they seem to rise out of the desert and pose the ever-fascinating question 'How were we built, and why?'

On a sandy plateau in the middle of the suburb of Giza, the site is open from 7am to 7.30pm daily. There's a general admission fee of E£60/30 per adult/student, and then extra charges for each of the three Pyramids and the solar barque. Before visiting, you may want to look at [.net/hawass, the official website of Dr Zahi Hawass, secretary general of the Supreme Council of Antiquities and director of the Giza Pyramids Excavation.](http://www.guardians</p>
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If you're keen to ride around the site on a horse, donkey or camel, or in a carriage, there are stables encircling the plateau. Rates range from E£10 per hour for a donkey to E£30 for a carriage.

GREAT PYRAMID OF KHUFU (CHEOPS)

The oldest pyramid at Giza and the largest in Egypt, the Great Pyramid of Khufu stood 146.5m high when it was completed in around 2600 BC. Although there isn't much to see inside the pyramid, the experience of climbing through such an ancient structure is unforgettable, though completely impossible if you suffer from even the tiniest degree of claustrophobia. The elderly and the unfit shouldn't attempt it either, as it is very steep.

Entry to the Great Pyramid costs an extortionate E£150/75 per adult/student. Only Egyptian pounds are accepted. Tickets are limited to 300 per day – 150 in the morning and 150 in the afternoon. These go on sale at 8am and 1pm at the dedicated ticket box in front and slightly to the east (city side) of the pyramid and you'll need to queue ahead of time. 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.

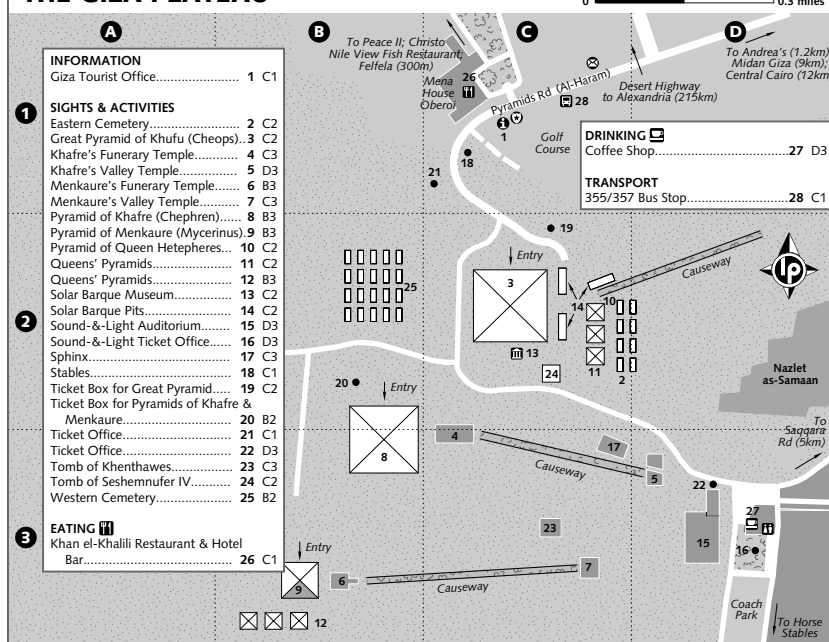
PYRAMID OF KHAFRE (CHEPHREN)

Southwest of the Great Pyramid, and with almost the same dimensions, is the Pyramid of Khafre. At first it seems larger than that of Khufu, his father, because it stands on higher ground and its peak still has part of the original limestone casing that once covered the entire structure. Among the most interesting features of this pyramid are the substantial remains of Khafre's funerary temple, located outside to the east. Entry costs E£30/15 per adult/student and tickets are obtained from the ticket box in front of the pyramid.

PYRAMID OF MENKAURE (MYCERINUS)

At a height of 62m (originally 66.5m), this is the smallest of the three Pyramids. Extensive damage was done to the exterior by a 16th-century caliph who wanted to demol-

THE GIZA PLATEAU



ish all the Pyramids. Entry costs E£25/15 per adult/student and tickets are obtained from the ticket box in front of the Pyramid of Khafre.

THE SPHINX

Known in Arabic as Abu al-Hol (Father of Terror), the Sphinx is carved almost entirely from one huge piece of limestone left over from the carving of the stones for the Great Pyramid of Khufu. It is not known when it was carved, but one theory is that it was Khafre who thought of shaping the rock into a lion's body with a god's face, wearing the royal headdress of Egypt. Another theory is that it is the likeness of Khafre himself that has been staring out over the desert sands for so many centuries.

SOLAR BARQUE MUSEUM

Along the eastern and southern sides of the Great Pyramid are five long pits that once contained the pharaoh's funerary barques. One of these ancient wooden vessels, possibly the oldest boat in existence, was unearthed in 1954. It was restored and a glass

museum (adult/student E£35/20; ☎ 9am-4pm winter, 9am-5pm summer) was built over it to protect it from the elements. It's well worth a look.

SOUND-&LIGHT SHOW

Hordes of tour groups converge on an area below the Sphinx for the nightly **sound-and-light show** (☎ 386 3469; www.sound-light.egypt.com; adult/child 6-12 E£60/30; ☎ 6.30pm, 7.30pm & 8.30pm winter, 1hr later in summer). There are three performances in a variety of languages. Check with the Giza tourist office for the schedule or check the website. Though there's officially no student discount, we have heard from travellers who have managed to negotiate one.

EATING & DRINKING

Just below the Sphinx there's an expensive **coffee shop** (Map p107; tea E£10, fresh juice E£15) with an outdoor terrace and truly amazing view. It's just outside the site, but as long as you have your ticket, the guards will let you come in again. If you're in need of something stronger, the bar and the Khan el-Khalili Restaurant (Map p107) at the nearby

Mena House Oberoi serve up Stella (E£19) in fabulous c1960s Arabesque surrounds. For meals, try the Peace II seafood restaurant, Christo Nile View Fish Restaurant or the local branch of Felfela, all of which are around the corner from Mena House. A short taxi ride away (no more than E£5), on the road to Saqqara, is the extremely popular **Andrea's** (☎ 381 0938; ☒ 10am-8pm), which serves a great set meal of roast chicken, hummus, salad and bread (E£45) in a garden setting on the Maryoutia Canal. A Stella costs E£15.

GETTING THERE & AROUND

Bus 355/357 runs from Heliopolis to the Pyramids via Midan Tahrir every 20 minutes. It picks up from the road (not the island) under the overpass at Midan Abdel Moniem Riad (Map pp102-3) and can sometimes be flagged down from the side of the road near the northwestern Metro stairs on Midan Tahrir. You'll recognise it by the 'CTA' sign on its side. It costs E£2 and takes 45 minutes.

Expect to pay about E£20 one way for a taxi. Returning to Cairo, these leave from outside the Mena House Oberoi hotel. They'll try for E£40, so you'll need to bargain hard.

ACTIVITIES

You can hire a **felucca** (Map pp102-3) for about E£30 per hour from the mooring point by the Semiramis Intercontinental, on the Corniche. However, the best place to hire feluccas is about 800m to the south at the Dok Dok landing stage (Map pp98-9), just short of the bridge over to Le Meridien hotel.

CAIRO FOR CHILDREN

There is plenty to keep children entertained in Cairo. If the **Pyramids** and **Egyptian Museum** aren't enough to keep them happy, they can feed the animals (25pt per feeding) at the **Cairo Zoo** (Guineenat al-Haywanet; Map pp98-9; ☎ 570 8895; Midan al-Gamaa, Giza; admission 25pt; ☒ 9am-4pm); pretend to be a pirate on a **felucca ride**; or investigate the new **Al-Azhar Park** (Map pp98-9; ☒ 10am-10pm), home to one of the few children's playgrounds in the city. If the situation is serious and only bribery will help, try **Top Toys** (Map p109; ☎ 736 3741; 13 Sharia Brazil, Zamalek; ☒ 10am-11pm).

TOURS

Myriad companies and individuals offer tours of sights within and around Cairo. We recommend Salah Muhammad's **Noga Tours** (☎ 205 7908, 012 313 8446; www.first24hours.com), as he employs excellent English-speaking guides, Egyptologists and drivers. His vehicles are also properly maintained. If you're keen to dispense with a guide and hire a taxi for the day, friendly **Fathy el-Menesy** (☎ 259 3218, 012 278 1572) owns a well-maintained Peugeot and speaks English. Otherwise, ask at your hotel. To give you an idea of cost, the Berlin Hotel can organise a local taxi to visit Dahshur, Memphis and Saqqara for E£40 per person; Fathy el-Menesy charges between E£200 and E£250 for a full day; and Noga Tours charges US\$22.50 plus entry fees per person for a full-day trip to the Giza Pyramids, Memphis and Saqqara. Its half-day tour of Dahshur costs US\$19 plus entry fees per person.

SLEEPING Budget

Inexpensive hostels, hotels and pensions are concentrated in Downtown, mainly on the higher floors of office buildings on and around Sharia Talaat Harb. All tend to be very hot in summer. If you're a light sleeper, request a rear room rather than one facing a busy street.

Hotel Luna (Map pp102-3; ☎ 396 1020; www.hotel.lunacairo.com; 5th fl, 27 Sharia Talaat Harb, Downtown; s/d with shared bathroom E£60/80, with private bathroom E£80/100; ☒ ☒) The Luna is one of the best budget hotels in Egypt. Its large rooms have crisp, clean linen and air-con; seven offer private bathrooms and the others have hand basins. Shared bathrooms are so clean they gleam. There's a sitting area near reception where you can relax, and guests have free use of the kitchen. Guests staying four or more nights get a free airport pick-up. Fantastic.

Lialy Hostel (Map pp102-3; ☎ 575 2802; www.lialyhostel.com; 3rd fl, 8 Midan Talaat Harb, Downtown; dm/s/d E£25/50/60, s/d with air-con E£70/80; ☒ ☒) One of the friendliest hostels in the city, right in the thick of the action. Eleven 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. Also fantastic.

ZAMALEK & GEZIRA

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King Tut Hostel (Map pp102-3; ☎ 391 7897; king_tut_hostel@hotmail.com; 8th fl, 37 Sharia Talaat Harb, Downtown; s/d E£40/60, with air-con & TV E£45/80; 🚻 📺) One of a number of recent additions to the Cairo hostel scene, the King Tut has freshly painted rooms with comfortable beds; nine have air-con and two have satellite TV. All share spotless bathrooms. There's an attractive lounge with cushions, brass tables and satellite TV. Nearly as fantastic.

Meramees Hotel (Map pp102-3; ☎ 396 2318; 32 Sharia Sabri Abu Alam, Downtown; dm/s/d with shared bathroom E£17/35/50, d with private bathroom E£75) It's been around for a while, but the Meramees is maintaining its standards of cleanliness and comfort. Rooms share bathrooms and come with fans – the downstairs singles are particularly nice. There's free use of the kitchen, free tea and coffee, and free airport pick-ups for guests staying three or more nights.

Sara Inn (Map pp102-3; ☎ 392 2940; www.sara.innhotel.2ya.com; 7th fl, 21 Sharia Yousef el-Gendi, Downtown; dm E£25, s E£25-50, d E£40-60, d with private bathroom & air-con E£120; 🚻 📺) Run by the former manager of the Dahab Hotel (which is no longer worthy of a recommendation), this new place has a range of rooms, the best of which have air-con, private bathrooms and a hefty price tag. Though lacking both

character and enough shared bathrooms, it's quiet and clean.

Pension Roma (Map pp102-3; ☎ 391 1088; fax 579 6243; 4th fl, 169 Sharia Mohammed Farid, Downtown; s/d with shared bathroom E£37/69, with private shower E£40/78) Staying here is like sleeping over at your grandma's house – it's charmingly old-fashioned. The helpful staff, large rooms and elegant lounge area are positives; negatives include the uncomfortable beds and miserly breakfast. Book ahead.

Samar Palace Hotel (Map pp102-3; ☎ 390 1093; samar-palace-hotel@yahoo.com; 3rd fl, Sharia Magharipi, Downtown; s/d with shared bathroom E£35/65, d with private bathroom & air-con E£75; 🚻) A hotel rather than a hostel, Samar Palace has recently been refurbished and is really worth considering. It's popular with Egyptians and Gulf Arabs, who clearly appreciate the comfortable rooms and lounge area with satellite TV. Breakfast (E£5) is served on the roof terrace. It's down a laneway off Sharia 26th of July, directly over an *ahwa* (coffeehouse).

Ismailia House Hotel (Map pp102-3; ☎ 796 3122; ismahouse@hotmail.com; 8th fl, 1 Midan Tahrir, Downtown; dm E£16-17, s E£22-27, d E£48-50, d with private bathroom E£60-65; 📺) Listed here predominantly due to its fabulous views over the *midan* and to the Nile, this long-running hostel has rooms

that could benefit from a good scrub. Ask for rooms 805, 810 or 820, all of which come with balcony and amazing views. There's a pleasant lounge with satellite TV.

Berlin Hotel (Map pp102-3; ☎ 395 7502; berlinhotelcairo@hotmail.com; 4th fl, 2 Sharia Shawarby, Downtown; s/d E£77/97; 🚻 📺) This small place, just off Sharia Qasr el-Nil, is pricey, but is worth considering due to its very helpful management. Rooms come with comfortable beds, air-con and shower cubicles.

Midrange

Hotel Longchamps (Map p109; ☎ 735 2311; www.hotelongchamps.com; 21 Sharia Ismail Mohammed, Zamalek; s US\$42-46, d US\$56-62; 🚻 📺) This place is probably the best midrange option in Cairo. Pristine rooms feature extremely comfortable beds, private bathrooms and satellite TV. There's a generous breakfast buffet, as well as a restaurant (alcohol served) and a blissfully peaceful rear balcony where guests can relax with a tea. Owner Hebba Bakri is an excellent host.

Victoria Hotel (Map pp98-9; ☎ 589 2290; info@victoria.com.eg; 66 Sharia al-Gomhuriyya; s/d US\$28/37; 🚻 📺) It's a shame the Victoria's location isn't better. Near Ramses train station, it offers large rooms with comfortable beds, satellite TV and private bathrooms. Though lacking atmosphere, it offers four-star amenities for two-star prices and that's a pretty attractive proposition.

Arabesque Hotel (Map pp102-3; ☎ 579 9679; arabesque_hotel@yahoo.com; 11 Sharia Ramses, Downtown; s/d with shared bathroom E£60/80, with private bathroom & air-con E£100/150; 🚻 📺) Midrange hotels are thin on the ground, so the Arabesque is destined to do well. Rooms have a bland fit out but are comfortable and clean; avoid those at the front, which overlook one of the city's busiest and noisiest motorways. The lounge has great views over the Nile, comfortable seating and a satellite TV.

President Hotel (Map p109; ☎ 735 0718; preshot@thewayout.net; 22 Sharia Taha Hussein, Zamalek; s/d US\$70/55; 🚻 📺) The President's in-house patisserie, Le Bec Sucre, is one of the best in the city, and breakfasts are a highlight of any stay. The mouldy bathrooms provide the downside. Rooms come with three-star accoutrements, including satellite TV.

Windsor Hotel (Map pp102-3; ☎ 591 5277; www.windsorcairo.com; 19 Sharia Alfy, Downtown; s/d with shower & hand basin US\$30/38, with private bathroom

THE AUTHOR'S CHOICE

Talisman Hotel (Map pp102-3; ☎ 393 9431; talisman_hoteldecharme@yahoo.fr; 5th fl, 39 Sharia Talaat Harb, Downtown; s/d US\$80/95; 🚻 📺) This exquisite boutique hotel is straight out of the pages of *The Thousand and One Nights*. Rooms are individually decorated and sumptuously equipped; common areas are equally impressive, featuring antique furniture, *objets d'art* and rugs. The suites (US\$120) are quite simply works of art. It's not often that we give hotels a 10 out of 10, but for value, style and comfort that's what the Talisman deserves. Reservations are essential. To find it, turn off Sharia Talaat Harb into the alley opposite A L'Americaine Coffee Shop and enter the first building entrance on the right, where you'll see a sign for the Minerva Hotel. The Talisman uses the lift on the left-hand side of the foyer.

US\$37/46; 🚻 📺) This ageing edifice was the British Officers' Club before 1952 and retains a colonial air. Rooms have more atmosphere than comfort, though all come with air-con. The large deluxe rooms (single/double US\$47/57) also have satellite TV. The hotel's best feature is its charming lounge-bar.

Top End

Cairo Marriott (Map p109; ☎ 735 8888; www.marriott.com/CAEG; Sharia al-Saray al-Gezira, Zamalek; r from US\$157; 🚻 📺 📺) Despite the addition of two very modern towers that house all the rooms, this is one of the few historic hotels left in the city. It has a popular garden café, loads of restaurants, large rooms with all the mod cons and a health club. Breakfast costs an extra US\$16.

EATING Restaurants

In central Cairo, most places to eat are centred around Midan Talaat Harb. The city's most interesting eateries are over the river in the neighbourhood of Zamalek. In this section and other Eating sections throughout this chapter, we have noted when alcohol is available. All the other restaurants reviewed are booze-free.

Greek Club (Map pp102-3; ☎ 577 4999; 3 Sharia Qasr el-Nil, Downtown; mains E£9-16; 🍷 7am-2am) With its

CAIRO HOTEL SCAMS

On arrival at the airport, you may be approached by a man or woman with an official-looking badge that says 'Ministry of Tourism' or something similar. These people are not government tourism officials, they are hotel touts, and they have more tricks up their sleeves than they do scruples. For instance, they'll often ask if you've booked a hotel. If you have, they'll offer to call the hotel to make sure that a room is waiting for you. Of course, they don't call the hotel – they call a friend who pretends to be the hotel and says that there is no booking and that his establishment is full. Concerned, the tout will offer to find you an alternative...

Other scams include telling you that the hotel you're heading for is closed/horrible/very expensive/a brothel and suggesting a 'better' place, from which they will earn a commission that will then be added to your bill. Many taxi drivers will also try it on too. The most innovative scam is when these touts ask you your name and where you're staying under the pretence of striking up a casual conversation. After a chat (often on the airport bus), they say goodbye and aren'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.

Do not be swayed by anyone who tries to dissuade you from going to the hotel of your 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. 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 Talat Harb and from there it's a short walk to almost all the budget hotels.

great neoclassical interior, soaring ceilings and outdoor terrace, this Cairene institution oozes faded charm. There's no menu, but the waiter will reel off the dishes of the day, likely to include well-cooked Levantine choices such as *shish tawooq* (kebab made with marinated, spiced chicken, E£30) and excellent Greek salad (E£15). A Stella costs E£10. You'll find it above the Groppi Patisserie (entrance on the side).

Estoril (Map pp102-3; ☎ 574 3102; 12 Sharia Talaat Harb, Downtown; mezze E£6, mains E£29-56; ☎) Tucked down an alley opposite Amex, this eatery has been serving up traditional Egyptian and French dishes since 1959. It claims to offer its diners an intro into 'the esoteric Cairene's world of art, literature, journalism and the rest', and though we're not sure it delivers on this, we always like to linger over a beer and a few mezze dishes.

Hana Korean Restaurant (Map p109; ☎ 738 2972; 21 Sharia Aziz Abaza, Zamalek; dishes E£30-40; ☎) You'll feel as if you're in Seoul when you eat at this bustling Zamalek restaurant. The *kimchi* (pickled vegetables) is authentic and the Stella is ice cold – what more could you ask for?

Abou El Sid (Map p109; ☎ 735 9640; 157 Sharia 26th of July, Zamalek; mezze E£6-24, mains E£20-50; ☎ noon-2am; ☎) A sumptuous Orientalist fantasy of a restaurant-bar, Abou El Sid serves traditional Egyptian food to wannabe pashas, amid hanging lamps, large cushions and brass tables. Reservations are necessary. A beer costs E£20.

Felfela Restaurant (Map pp102-3; ☎ 392 2833; 15 Sharia Hoda Shaarawi, Downtown; mezze E£2-5, mains E£20-35; ☎ 8am-midnight; ☎) Perpetually packed with tourists, coach parties and locals, Felfela deserves its popularity. A

bizarre jungle theme rules when it comes to the décor, but the food is straight-down-the-line Egyptian and consistently good, especially the mezze. A Stella costs E£12.

Maison Thomas (Map p109; ☎ 735 7057; 157 Sharia 26th of July, Zamalek; sandwiches E£16-26, pizzas E£19-28; ☎ 24hr; ☎) Is this the best pizza in Cairo? Many locals think it is, and they can be seen lining up to perch on the high stools and grab a quick pizza fix. You can eat in or take away (alcohol is sold only with takeaway).

Didos Al Dente (Map p109; ☎ 735 9117; 26 Sharia Bahgat Ali, Zamalek; pasta E£5-19; ☎) A pasta joint popular with students from the nearby AUC, Didos comes pretty close to living up to its claim of making the best pasta in town. It's tiny, so be prepared to wait on the street for a table.

Abou Shakra (Map pp98-9; ☎ 531 6111; 69 Sharia Qasr al-Aini, Garden City; ☎ 9am-2am; ☎) Abou Shakra is where to come for a skewer or two. It's been serving up its plates of *kofta* (mincemeat and spices grilled on a skewer) and kebabs (E£28), and shwarma sandwiches (E£6 to E£12) at this main branch since 1947 and locals love it to bits. There's takeaway at the front and a dining room behind it. Believe it or not, an imam reading from the Quran is posted next to the toilets on Friday.

L'Aubergine (Map p109; ☎ 738 0080; 5 Sharia Sayed al-Bakry, Zamalek; mains E£16-30; ☎ noon-2am; ☎) This dimly lit Western-style bistro isn't as glam as it used to be, but it still serves up a wide range of dishes, lots of which are vegetarian. Its upstairs bar (Stella E£14) is popular, and often has a DJ.

Café Riche (Map pp102-3; ☎ 392 9793; 17 Sharia Talaat Harb, Downtown; dishes E£12-25; ☎ 8am-midnight; ☎) This Cairo institution was being renovated when we visited. Once the favoured drinking spot of Cairo's intelligentsia, in recent years it's been a reliable spot to enjoy a meal and a glass of wine.

The city's best restaurants are found in its five-star hotels. Our favourites are both at the Semiramis Intercontinental: **Sabaya** (Map pp102-3; ☎ 795 7171; mains E£40-60; ☎), a world-class Lebanese restaurant, and its Thai neighbour **Bird Cage** (Map pp102-3; ☎ 795 7171; mains E£40-60; ☎) are both excellent. **Torii** (Map p109; ☎ 739 4691; set menus E£120-140, noodles E£53-88; ☎) at the Cairo Marriott is also worth a mention for its theatrical interior, fresh fish and promotional material, in which it

claims to be 'the gateway to sushi and self-discovery'! All sell alcohol.

Quick Eats

Akher Sa'a (Map pp102-3; 8 Sharia Alfay, Downtown; meals E£3-4; ☎ 24hr) A frantically busy fuul and ta'amiyya takeaway joint with a no-frills cafeteria next door, Akher Sa'a has a limited menu but its food is fresh and good.

Gad (Map pp102-3; ☎ 576 3583; 13 Sharia 26th of July, Downtown; ☎ 7am-1am; ☎) This Western-style fast-food eatery is usually packed to the rafters with a constant stream of young Cairenes sampling its fresh, well-priced food. The fiteer with Greek cheese (E£9.50) is scrumptious, and the quarter chicken with rice and salad (E£10) is both flavoured and great value. You can sit upstairs or take away from the street-front counters. There are also branches opposite Khan al-Khalili (Map p105) and on Sharia Mourad, Midan Giza (☎ 569 0250).

We recommend two Downtown joints that specialise in kushari: **Abu Tarek** (Map pp102-3; 40 Sharia Champollion, Downtown; small/large E£3/4; ☎ 24hr), which has been serving up the stuff to locals for nearly as long as touts have been working the Ramses train station; and **Sayed Hanafy** (Map pp102-3; Midan Orabi, Downtown; small/medium/large E£2/3/4; ☎ 24hr), which is relatively new, but building a big, well-deserved reputation.

Felfela takeaway (Map pp102-3; Sharia Talaat Harb, Downtown) sells excellent fuul and ta'amiyya sandwiches, and try the phenomenally popular **El-Abd** (Map pp102-3; ☎ 8am-midnight; Sharia 26th of July Downtown; Sharia Talaat Harb cnr Sharias Talaat Harb & Bursa al-Gedida, Downtown) for the best Oriental pastries in town (take-away only).

DRINKING Cafés

Italian-style coffee is very popular in Cairo, and there's an ever-growing number of stylish cafés serving up decent café latte for around E£6 (regular). The most popular are those of the Cilentano and Beano's chains. **Cilentano** (Downtown Map pp102-3; ☎ 792 4571; 31 Sharia Mohammed Mahmoud; Heliopolis ☎ 415 0167; 4 Sharia Ibrahim Korba; Ma'adi ☎ 520 1190; 17 Rd 219; Ma'adi City Centre ☎ 520 4410; Carrefour; Zamalek Map p109; ☎ 736 1115; 157 Sharia 26th of July) outlets are small and clean, with open fridges displaying packaged sandwiches, cakes and salads (E£5.50

to E£14) to eat in or take away. The brownies (E£3.50) are particularly delicious. Most of the outlets are nonsmoking (although the Downtown branch near the AUC isn't) and have wi-fi. **Beano's** (Downtown Map pp102-3; ☎ 792 2328; 49 Sharia al-Falaky; Heliopolis ☎ 690 3484; 15 Sharia Baghdad; Zamalek Map p109; ☎ 736 2388; 8 Midan al-Marsafy) branches offer more of the same. At Zamalek's famous **Simonds** (Map p109; ☎ 735 9436; 112 Sharia 26th of July, Zamalek), the barista has been frothing cappuccino (E£5) for over half a century, and the croissants (E£2.50) are as good as any served up in Paris.

Ahwas

Fishawi's (Map p105; Khan al-Khalili; tea E£3, sheesha E£4.50; ☎ 24hr) One of Cairo's oldest and most famous coffeehouses, and an essential stop on every Cairo itinerary. It's a few steps off Midan Hussein.

Middle-aged and moneyed Cairenes frequent the popular *sheesha* courtyard and tent at the Nile Hilton's **Abu Aly** (Map pp102-3; sheesha E£7-8, tea E£9.50; ☎ 10am-4am). The younger set tends to congregate at the bustling **Zahret el-Bustan** (Map pp102-3; Khan al-Khalili; tea E£3, sheesha E£4.50; ☎ 24hr), in a laneway off Talaat Harb.

Bars

The best Downtown bars are **Estoril** (Map pp102-3; ☎ 574 3102; 12 Sharia Talaat Harb; ☎), which also has a restaurant (opposite) that serves good mezze; the **Cap d'Or** (Map pp102-3; Sharia Abdel Khalek Sarwat, Downtown); and the appallingly monikered **High Heels** (Map pp102-3; ☎ 578 0444; Corniche el-Nil, Downtown) at the Nile Hilton. If you want a quiet drink, you could do worse than colonise an armchair at the **Windsor Bar** (Map pp102-3; ☎ 591 5277; 19 Sharia Alfay, Downtown) at the Windsor Hotel (p111).

There's more choice in Zamalek. Cashied-up locals and expats prop up the bar at the stylish **La Bodega** (Map p109; ☎ 736 6761; 157 Sharia 26th of July, Zamalek; ☎ noon-2am), and at **Abou El Sid** (Map p109; ☎ 735 9640; 157 Sharia 26th of July, Zamalek; ☎ noon-2am), where you can order a *sheesha* with your drinks or eat in the restaurant (opposite). For a more casual alternative, try the bar above **L'Aubergine** (Map p109; ☎ 738 0800; 5 Sharia Sayed al-Bakry, Zamalek; ☎ noon-2am; ☎), a Western-style restaurant (opposite); the rowdy **Deals** (Map p109; ☎ 736 0502; 2 Sharia Sayed al-Bakry, Zamalek; ☎ 6pm-2am), off Sharia

THE AUTHOR'S CHOICE

At-Tabie ad-Dumyati (Map pp98-9; ☎ 575 4211; 31 Sharia Orabi, Downtown; dishes E£2-8; ☎ 6am-1am) About 200m north of Midan Ramses, this highly recommended place offers the best cheap meals in Cairo. Your choice of four salads from a large array costs E£3.25, and a small plate of shwarma costs E£5.75. A fresh juice is E£2.50. You can sit down or take away. Highly recommended. There's also a branch in the food court of the Talaat Harb Commercial Centre.

26th of July; or the more laid-back **Sand Bar** (Map p109; ☎ 736 3558; 13a Sharia al-Marashly, Zamalek; ☎ 4pm-3am). Those who want to listen to music congregate at the likes of **White/Zen** (Map p109; ☎ 012 230 4404; 25 Sharia Hassan Assem, Zamalek), an *über*-glam bar that serves Thai food and noodles, hosts a DJ and sells two-for-one Heinekens at its Wednesday happy hour. They then move on to colonise the large dance floor and outdoor terrace at **Rive Gauche** (Map p109; ☎ 012 210 0129; Sharia Maahad el-Swissry, Zamalek).

ENTERTAINMENT

Sufi Dancing

There are regular displays of Sufi dancing by the **Al-Tannoura Egyptian Heritage Dance Troupe** (Map pp98-9; ☎ 512 1735; admission free; ☎ 7pm Mon, Wed & Sat winter, 8pm summer) at the El-Gawhara Theatre in the Citadel. Go to the exit gate rather than the main entrance gate of the Citadel and make sure you're there at least one hour before the performance.

Belly-Dancing

The best belly dancers perform at Cairo's five-star hotels. Current favourites are **Haron El-Rashid nightclub** (Map pp102-3; ☎ 795 7171, ext 8011; Corniche el-Nil, Downtown; ☎ 11pm-3.30am Tue-Sun) at the Semiramis Intercontinental, where the famous Dina undulates; and the Cairo Sheraton's **Casablanca Club** (Alhambra; Map pp98-9; ☎ 336 9700; Midan al-Galaa, Doqqi; ☎ 7pm-4am Tue-Sun), where Soraya stars. Performances at these places begin late (around 1am). **Palmyra** (Map pp102-3; admission E£5.50 ☎ 10pm-4am), off Sharia 26th of July in Downtown, is a cavernous, dilapidated 1950s dance hall. 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. The Stella here costs a very reasonable E£11, but the *sheeshas* are expensive (E£20 for apple). There's a minimum charge of E£35, which basically covers the entrance fee, a beer and a *sheesha*.

Live Music

For live music try the **Cairo Jazz Club** (Map pp98-9; ☎ 345 9939; 197 Sharia 26th of July, Agouza) or **After Eight** (Map pp102-3; ☎ 574 0855; 6 Sharia Qasr el-Nil, Downtown; minimum charge Fri-Wed E£60, Thu E£90; ☎ noon-2am). Several nights a week, concerts of everything from electronic fusion to classical to Nubian music are

held at the **Sawy Centre** (Culture Wheel; Map p109; ☎ 736 6178; www.culturewheel.com; Sharia 26th of July, Zamalek). The **Cairo Opera House** (Map pp98-9; ☎ 739 8132, 739 8144; www.operahouse.gov.eg; Gezira Exhibition Grounds) has two auditoriums hosting performances by the Cairo Opera and the Cairo Symphony Orchestra, as well as recitals and concerts by local and international jazz and classical musicians.

Cinemas

If you're keen to see an English-language film, try the **Ramses Hilton I & II cinemas** (Map pp102-3; ☎ 574 7435) at the Ramses Hilton shopping mall. Tickets at the 10.30am and 1.30pm sessions cost E£10; at the 6.30pm, 9.30pm and midnight sessions they're E£25.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Air

EgyptAir (Corniche el-Nil Map pp102-3; ☎ 577 2410; Nile Hilton, Corniche el-Nil, Downtown; Sharia Adly Map pp102-3; ☎ 392 7649; 6 Sharia Adly, Downtown; Sharia Talaat Harb Map pp102-3; ☎ 393 2836; 9 Sharia Talaat Harb, Downtown) has a number of offices. The main sales office is on Sharia Adly.

Bus

Cairo's main bus station is **Turgoman Garage** (Map pp98-9; Sharia al-Gisir, Bulaq), 1km northwest of the intersection of Sharias Galaa and 26th of July. It's too far to walk from central Cairo and the only way to get here is by taxi (E£5 from Downtown). The station was being redeveloped at the time of research, so its confusing split into two sections will soon be a thing of the past. There are two other bus stations: Al-Mazar, near the airport, where international services depart and where most other services stop en route out of Cairo; and **Abbassiyya (Sinai) Bus Terminal** (Map pp98-9; Sharia Ramses, Abbassiyya), where all of the services from Sinai arrive (confusingly, these leave from Turgoman).

For details of international bus services from Cairo, see p176.

ALEXANDRIA & THE MEDITERRANEAN COAST

All services leave from Turgoman. **West Delta Bus Co** (☎ 576 5582) travels to Alexandria (E£16, 2½ hours) on the hour between 5am and 1am. Services to Marsa Matruh (E£32 to E£40, 5½ hours) leave at 6.45am, 8.15am, 1.15pm and 9.30pm.

LUXOR & ASWAN

Upper Egypt Travel (☎ 576 0261) buses depart from Turgoman. There's one daily service going to Luxor (E£85, 10 to 11 hours) at 9pm and one service to Aswan (E£85, 12 to 13 hours) at 5pm. You're much better off getting the train.

RED SEA

Superjet (☎ 579 8181) leaves from Turgoman, going to Hurghada (E£57 to E£60, 6½ hours), at 7.30am, 2.30pm and 11.15pm. Upper Egypt Travel services to Hurghada (E£55) depart at 7.30am, 9am, noon, 3pm, 10pm and 11.30pm. The 9am and 10pm services go on to Safaga (E£65, 7½ hours).

There are Upper Egypt Travel services to Marsa Alam (E£80, 12 hours) via Al-Quseir (E£70, nine hours) at 1.30pm, 6.30pm and 11pm. There's an additional service to Al-Quseir at 9pm.

SINAI

All Sinai buses leave from Turgoman, but return to Abbassiyya.

East Delta Bus Co (☎ 574 2814) has services going to Sharm el-Sheikh (E£55 to E£65, seven hours) at 6.30am, 7.15am, 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 5pm, 7pm, 11pm, 11.30pm, midnight and 12.15am. The 7.15am, 1pm, 5pm and 12.15am services go on to Dahab (E£62 to E£75, nine hours).

There are three daily buses to Nuweiba (E£55 to E£75, eight hours) and Taba (E£55 to E£75, nine hours), leaving at 6.30am, 9.30am and 10.15pm. A daily service to St Katherine's Monastery (E£37, 7½ hours) leaves at 10.30am.

Superjet has services to Sharm el-Sheikh (E£68) at 7.30am, 3.15pm and 11.15pm.

SUEZ CANAL

All Suez buses leave from Turgoman Garage. **East Delta Bus 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.

WESTERN OASES

All Western Oases buses leave from Turgoman. Note that to get to Siwa you must take a bus to Alexandria or Marsa Matruh, and then another onwards.

There are two Upper Egypt Bus Co services per day to Bahariyya (E£20, five hours), Farafra (E£40, eight hours) and Dakhla (E£50 to E£55, 10 to 12 hours) at 7am and 6pm. Two extra services travel to Dakhla via Asyut and Al-Kharga (E£50), leaving at 9.30pm and 10pm.

Service Taxi

Most service taxis depart from taxi stands around Ramses train station and Midan Ulali. Service taxis depart for Alexandria (E£12, three hours), Ismailia (E£8, 1½ hours), Port Said (E£14, two hours) and Suez (E£7.50, one hour).

Train

Ramses train station (Mahatta Ramses; Map pp98-9; ☎ 575 3555; Midan Ramses, Downtown) is Cairo's main train station. It has a left-luggage office charging E£2.50 per piece per day, a **post office** (☎ 8am-8pm), a pharmacy and a **tourist information office** (☎ 9am-7pm).

The closest place to access US dollars or euros is **Egyptian Foreign Exchange Corp** (Map pp98-9; Sharia Emad ad-Din, Downtown), a 10-minute walk away.

LUXOR & ASWAN

The **Abela Egypt Sleeping Train** (☎ 574 9274; www.sleepingtrains.com) leaves for Upper Egypt at 8pm. It arrives in Luxor at 5.05am the next morning and in Aswan at 8.15am. It costs US\$53/74 per person one way in a double/single cabin. Children four to nine years of age pay US\$40. There are no student discounts and tickets must be paid for in US dollars or euros (cash only). The price includes dinner and breakfast. The ticket office is next to the tourist information office near the station's main entrance.

Aside from the sleeping train, foreigners can only travel to Luxor and Aswan on train 980, departing Cairo daily at 7am; train 996, departing at 10pm; and train 1902, departing at 12.30am. To Luxor, 1st-/2nd-class fares are E£67/45 on the night trains, and E£62/40 on the morning train. To Aswan they're E£81/47 on the night trains, E£77/43 on the morning train. The trip to Luxor takes 10 hours; to Aswan it's around 13. Student discounts are available on tickets for both classes.

Tickets can be bought from the ticket office beside platform 11, which is on the

other side of the tracks from the main hall. You must buy your tickets at least a couple of days in advance.

ALEXANDRIA

The best trains running between Cairo and Alexandria are the *Turbini* (E£36/28 in 1st/2nd class, two hours). 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, 6pm and 10.30pm. Slower trains, known as *Francesse* (French; E£26/16 in 1st/2nd class, three hours), leave at 6am, 8.30am, 11am, 3.10pm, 4pm and 8pm. Student discounts are available on all tickets.

PORT SAID

Trains to Port Said (E£20, four hours) and Ismailia (E£14, three hours) leave at 8.45am, 11.30am, 2.30pm and 10pm.

GETTING AROUND

To/From the Airport

Cairo International Airport (Terminal 1 ☎ 265 5000; Terminal 2 ☎ 265 2222) is 20km northeast of Cairo. There are four terminals in all, but two terminals about 3km apart handle most passenger traffic: Terminal 1 services EgyptAir's international and domestic flights and Terminal 2 services all international airlines except Saudi Arabian Airlines. You'll find ATMs and exchange booths in the arrivals halls.

Bus 356 is air-conditioned, and runs at 20-minute intervals from 7am to midnight between both terminals of the airport and Midan Abdel Moniem Riad (Map pp102–3),

behind the Egyptian Museum in central Cairo (E£2, plus E£1 per large luggage item, one hour). There is a far less comfortable 24-hour service on bus 400 (50pt), which leaves from the same places. Note that between the hours of midnight and 6am, this bus only stops at Terminal 1.

If you arrive at Terminal 1, you'll see the bus-parking area to the side of the arrivals hall. If you arrive at Terminal 2, walk out of the arrivals hall, cross the road, go down the stairs or escalator, cross through the car park and wait on the opposite side of the street at the end of the car park to flag the bus down. There's no marked stop.

If you decide to grab a black-and-white taxi, the going rate to central Cairo is around E£45 to E£60 (it's around E£30 to E£35 to the airport). You'll get the best rate if you walk down to the car park rather than relying on the taxis right outside the arrivals hall. Limousines cost anything from E£50 to E£85.

Bus & Minibus

Cairo's main local bus and minibus stations are at Midan Abdel Moniem Riad (Map pp102–3). From there, services leave for just about everywhere in the city.

Metro

The Metro system is startlingly efficient, and the stations are cleaner than any other public places in Cairo. It's also surprisingly inexpensive. You're most likely to use the Metro if you're going down to Old Cairo (served by a station called Mar Girgis). A short-hop ticket (up to nine stations) costs 50pt. The first and (sometimes) second carriages are reserved for women only.

Microbus

Destinations are not marked, so minibuses are hard to use unless you're familiar with their routes. Position yourself beside the road that leads where you want to go and when a microbus passes, yell out your destination – if it's going where you want to go and there are seats free, it'll stop.

River Bus

The Maspero river bus terminal (Map pp102–3) is on the Corniche in front of the big round Radio & TV Building. From here boats depart every 15 minutes between 7am

and 10pm for Doqqi, Manial, Giza and Misr al-Qadima (Old Cairo). The trip takes 50 minutes and the fare is 50pt. From 7am to 3pm, some boats go only to Doqqi. There's also a service between Zamalek and Imbaba (25pt).

Taxi

If a destination is too far to walk, the easiest way of getting there is to take a taxi. They're cheap enough to make buses, with their attendant hassles, redundant. Use the following table as a rough guide as to what you should be paying for a taxi ride around Cairo. It's best to hail a Peugeot 504 rather than one of the diabolically unroadworthy Fiats.

TAXI FARES FROM DOWNTOWN

Destination	Fare (E£)
Abbassiyya (Sinai) Bus Terminal	15
Airport	30-35
Citadel	5
Heliopolis	10-15
Khan al-Khalili	5
Midan Ramses	3
Pyramids	20
Turgoman Garage	5
Zamalek	5

AROUND CAIRO

MEMPHIS, SAQQARA & DAHSHUR

دهشور & سفارة ممفيس

There's little left of the former Pharaonic capital of **Memphis**, 24km south of Cairo. It's only worth visiting for its **museum** (adult/student E£25/15; ☎ 8am-4pm winter, 8am-5pm summer), which contains an impressive statue of Ramses II.

A few kilometres away is **Saqqara** (adult/student E£50/25; ☎ 8am-4pm winter, 8am-5pm summer), a massive necropolis covering 7 sq km of desert and strewn with pyramids, temples and tombs. Deceased pharaohs and their families, administrators, generals and sacred animals were interred here. The star attraction is the **Step Pyramid of Zoser**, the world's oldest stone monument and the first decent attempt at a pyramid. Surrounding it is Zoser's pyramid complex, which includes shrines and a huge court.

Other attractions include the **Mastaba of Ti** and the **Pyramid of Teti**.

Ten kilometres south of Saqqara is **Dahshur** (adult/student E£20/10; ☎ 8am-4pm winter, 8am-5pm summer), an impressive 3.5km-long field of 4th- and 12th-dynasty pyramids, like the **Bent Pyramid** (unfortunately off limits to visitors) and the wonderful **Red Pyramid**. If you're on a tight budget, there's a lot to be said for visiting Dahshur and exploring the interior of this, the oldest true pyramid in Egypt, rather than spending a fortune at Giza.

It's possible to visit Memphis, Saqqara and Dahshur in five hours, but you will need your own transport to get you here, take you around the sites (parking at each site costs E£5) and bring you back to Cairo. A taxi will cost about E£140 shared among a maximum of seven people. Stipulate the sights you want to see and how long you want to be out, and bargain hard. Otherwise, organise a day tour (p108).

MEDITERRANEAN COAST

ALEXANDRIA

الاسكندرية

☎ 03 / pop 3.8 million

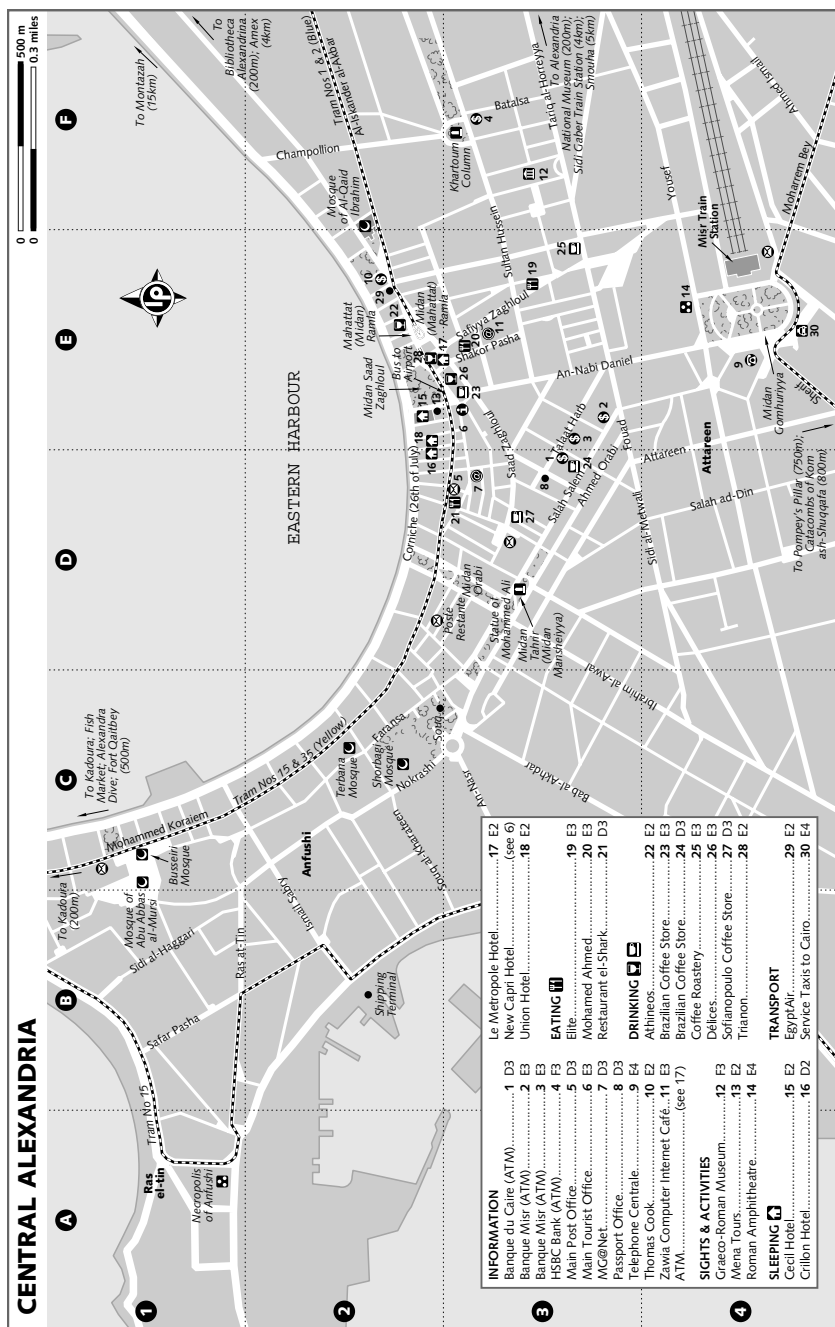
For a city with such a glorious past, Alexandria (Al-Iskendariyya) is surprisingly low-key – and this is its greatest charm. Arranged necklace-style around the coastline, it has a very different feel to the rest of Egypt. If the *belle époque* buildings, excellent food and efficient public transport system aren't enough to convince you of this fact, the European-like allegiance to good espresso coffee and the total lack of touts will. All we can say is 'Vive la différence!'

History

Established in 332 BC by Alexander the Great, the city became a major trade centre and focal point of learning for the entire Mediterranean world. Its ancient library held 500,000 volumes and the Pharos lighthouse was one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World. Alexandria continued as the capital of Egypt under the Roman Empire and its eastern offshoot, the Byzantine Empire. From the 4th century onwards, the city declined into insignificance. Napoleon's arrival and Alexandria's subsequent

PLAYING CHICKEN IN CAIRO

It may sound silly, but the greatest challenge most travellers face when travelling through 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 form a buffer between you and oncoming traffic, and then cross when they cross – they usually don't mind being used as human shields! Basically, it's a game of chicken. Never, ever hesitate once you've stepped off the sidewalk; cross as if you own the road. And do it fast.



redevelopment as a major port attracted people from all over the world, but the 1952 Revolution put an end to much of the city's pluralistic charm.

Orientation

Alexandria is a true waterfront city, nearly 20km long from east to west and only about 3km wide. The focal point of the city is Midan Ramla, also known as Mahattat Ramla (Ramla station) because it is the central terminus for the city's tramlines. Immediately adjacent is Midan Saad Zaghloul, a large square running back from the seafont and joining Midan Ramla at the corner. Around these two *midans*, and in the streets to the south and west, are the central shopping area, the main tourist office, restaurants, cafés and most of the cheaper hotels. To the west of this central area are the older quarters of the city, such as Anfushi. To the east are new suburbs stretching 15km along the coastline to Montazah, and its palace and gardens. Most of the city's five-star hotels and restaurants are either in this part of town or near the popular Green Plaza Mall, beyond the southern suburb of Smouha on the agricultural road to Cairo.

Information

INTERNET ACCESS

Internet cafés are frustratingly thin on the ground. Other than the two central cafés mentioned here, you are entitled to one hour of free Internet access as part of the entry price to the Bibliotheca Alexandrina. **MG@Net** (per hr E£2; ☎ 10am-midnight) Conveniently located near Midan Saad Zaghloul.

Zawia Computer Internet Café (☎ 484 8014; Sharia Dr Hassan Fadaly; per hr E£4; ☎ 11am-11pm) Off Sharia Safiyya Zaghloul.

MONEY

For changing cash, the simplest option is to use one of the many exchange bureaus on the side streets between Midan Ramla and the Corniche. There are also dozens of currency-exchange offices along Sharia Talaat Harb. There's an ATM at the **HSBC Bank** (47 Sharia Sultan Hussein), a five-minute walk east of the centre, and another in the foyer of Le Metropole Hotel. There's also one at Misr train station, but it's often out of order. Go to **Thomas Cook** (☎ 484 7830; 15 Sharia Saad Zaghloul; ☎ 8am-5pm) if

you want to cash travellers cheques, as **Amex** (☎ 541 0177; 5 Sharia Toudor, Mina Roman Mall, Rushdy) is a long way from the centre.

POST & TELEPHONE

The main post office is two blocks east of Midan Orabi. There is a 24-hour telephone centre on Midan Gomhurriya.

TOURIST INFORMATION

Main tourist office (☎ 485 1556; Midan Saad Zaghloul; ☎ 8.30am-6pm) This very helpful office is in the southwest corner of the *midan*, beneath the tourist police station.

Tourist office (☎ 8.30am-6pm) At Misr train station.

VISA EXTENSIONS

Passport office (28 Sharia Talaat Harb; ☎ 8am-1.30pm Sat-Thu) Off Sharia Salah Salem.

Sights

GRAECO-ROMAN MUSEUM

Ancient Alexandria is almost as intangible to us as Atlantis, but the 40,000 artefacts collected in the 24 rooms of this excellent **museum** (☎ 483 6434; 5 Sharia al-Mathaf ar-Romani; adult/student E£30/15; ☎ 9am-4pm) go some way towards bringing it to life. Objects to look out for include three carved heads of Alexander (the city's founder); an extraordinary wooden statue of Serapis in human form; a carved head of Cleopatra; and several small terracotta lanterns, the only historical depictions of the ancient Pharos lighthouse in existence. The central courtyard has an unassuming cafeteria where you can sip tea while sitting in a plastic chair among a plethora of Roman columns.

ALEXANDRIA NATIONAL MUSEUM

This recently opened **museum** (Sharia Tariq al-Horreyya; adult/student E£30/15; ☎ 9am-4pm) is housed in an elegant villa and features an impressive collection of pieces showcasing various stages in the city's development. Interpretive labels are clear and informative, but the lighting is very poor. Make sure you see the heads of Akhenaten and Hatshepsut in the ground floor Pharaonic section, and the coins and statuary retrieved from the Mediterranean on the 1st floor.

ROMAN AMPHITHEATRE (KOM AL-DIKKA)

The 13 white marble terraces of the only **Roman theatre** (Sharia Yousef; adult/student E£15/10;

(☞ 9am-5pm) in Egypt were discovered in 1964. Also worth seeing is the 'Villa of the Birds' **mosaic** (adult/student £10/5) in the grounds.

CATACOMBS OF KOM ASH-SHUQQAFA

Dating back to the 2nd century AD, these eerily fascinating **tombs** (carnous; adult/student £20/10; ☞ 8am-5pm) would have held about 300 corpses. The centrepiece of the catacombs, the **principal tomb**, is the prototype for a Hammer horror-film set, with a miniature funerary temple decorated with a weird synthesis of ancient Egyptian, Greek and Roman death iconography. No cameras are allowed. You'll find the catacombs in the southwest of the city, a five-minute walk from the famed, misnamed and disappointing **Pompey's Pillar** (adult/student £10/5, tripod £20; ☞ 8am-5pm).

BIBLIOTHECA ALEXANDRINA

Resembling the Death Star from *Star Wars*, this architecturally splendid **library** (☞ 483 9999; www.bibalex.org; Corniche al-Bahr; adult/student main library £10/5, antiquities museum £20/10, manuscript collection £20/10; ☞ 11am-7pm Sun, Mon, Wed & Thu, 3-7pm Fri & Sat) is an attempt to put the city back on the world's cultural map. Inspired by the original great library, which was founded in the early 3rd century BC and acclaimed as the greatest of all classical institutions, this modern version has been designed to hold eight million books in its vast rotunda space. The ancient wealth of learning is lyrically evoked on its curved exterior walls, which are carved with giant letters, pictograms, hieroglyphs and symbols from every known alphabet.

Activities

In recent years Alexandria has been giving up some of her hidden treasures. Underwater excavations have been carried out in the eastern harbour and around Fort Qaitbey, dredging up pavements, platforms, statues and red-granite columns – remnants from what is being described as 'Cleopatra's Palace'. **Alexandra Dive** (☞ 483 2042; www.alexandra-dive.com) offers diving tours of the submerged harbour sites when the water is clear. You'll find its office in the grounds of the Grand Café/Tikka Grill/Fish Market complex on the Corniche near Fort Qaitbey.

Sleeping

Alexandria is one of the few Egyptian cities where hotel rates stay the same year-round.

We counsel against staying at the New Hotel Welcome House near Midan Saad Zaghloul, as the tourist office has no hesitation in reporting that it receives on average one complaint per day from travellers saying that personal items have gone missing during their stay at this extremely dodgy place.

Union Hotel (☞ 480 7312; fax 480 7350; 5th fl, 164 Corniche; s/d with shared bathroom £46/64, with private bathroom £52/70, with private bathroom & air-con £171/196; ☞) This is the best of the budget options, offering clean and comfortable rooms with satellite TV for more-or-less budget rates. Front rooms have balconies overlooking the harbour and are very light (singles/doubles £62/67). Upstairs rooms have been freshly painted. Breakfast is £8 extra.

New Capri Hotel (☞ /fax 480 9703, ☞ 480 9310; 8th fl, 23 Sharia el-Mina el-Sharkia; s/d £E39/56) You'll find the New Capri by taking the frighteningly creaky lift to the 8th floor of the building housing the tourist office. The hotel is run-down but reasonably clean, with one shared bathroom for every two bedrooms. Half the rooms have fans; the remaining rooms would be sweatboxes in summer. There's a lovely breakfast room with great views over the harbour. Enter from the side street.

Crillon Hotel (☞ 480 0330; 3rd fl, 5 Sharia Adib Ishaq; s/d with private bathroom or view £E60/90) Two blocks back from Midan Saad Zaghloul, this old-fashioned place runs a close second to the Union in the cleanliness and comfort stakes, and most of the freshly painted rooms have balconies with harbour views. Twelve of the 36 rooms have private bathrooms, but these don't have views. To find it, look for the brass plaque next to the building entrance.

Le Metropole Hotel (☞ 484 0910; resamet@para.diseinegypt.com; 52 Sharia Saad Zaghloul; s US\$100-135, d US\$120-155; ☞ ☑) An excellent, centrally located four-star hotel with high ceilings and ornate cornices that hint at Alexandria's early-20th-century heyday. Rooms are well appointed and extremely comfortable.

Cecil Hotel (☞ 487 7173; h1726@accor-hotels.com; 16 Midan Saad Zaghloul; s/d/ste from US\$144/170/291; ☞ ☞ ☑) Run by the Sofitel chain, the Cecil is a local institution, as famous for its progression of famous guests as it is for the Moorish whimsy of its architecture.

A recent renovation has endowed rooms with reproduction antique furniture, marble bathrooms, work desks and extremely comfortable beds. It's worth paying extra for one with a harbour or *midan* view.

Eating

The place for cheap eating is around the area where Sharia Safiyya Zaghloul meets Midan Ramla, and along Sharia Shakor Pasha, one street over to the west. There are plenty of little fuul and ta'amiyya places here, as well as sandwich shops and the odd kushari joint.

Mohamed Ahmed (☞ 483 3576; 17 Sharia Shakor Pasha; dishes £E1-10) This basic eatery is usually full to the brim with locals ordering tasty ta'amiyya, fuul, omelettes and fried cheese. It's fantastic value – a filling meal for two will cost around £E8. You can sit down or take away. Recommended.

Restaurant el-Shark (Sharia Hassan ash-Seikh) If you're in the mood for edgy local special-

ities such as grilled dove (£E8) or gizzard soup (£E3), this friendly local eatery could be for you. It also serves staples such as roast chicken (£E15) and *fatta* (rice and bread soaked in a garlicky-vinegar sauce with lamb or chicken; £E3.50 to £E15.50) in its plant-filled dining room. A fresh lemon juice costs £E2.

Elite (☞ 486 3592; 43 Sharia Safiyya Zaghloul; dishes £E3.50-31; ☞) Another of those Alexandrian time warps, the Elite faintly resembles a Left Bank café c1960, with the additional (and discordant) feature of diner-style booths. The menu contains everything from cheese on toast to *tournedos aux champignons* (fillet steak with mushrooms) and is extremely popular with locals. Alcohol is available.

Kadoura (per person around £E50; ☞ 9am-3am; ☞) Famed for serving huge, ultrafresh seafood dishes, Kadoura is an essential stop on any Alex itinerary. Diners choose from the outdoor display of the catch of the day, specify whether they want it grilled or fried, and

COFFEE À GO-GO

Those travellers who come to Alex to discover the sophisticated city immortalised in Lawrence Durrell's *The Alexandria Quartet* inevitably end up whiling away hour upon hour in the city's wonderful array of coffeehouses and patisseries. Most of these institutions date back to first half of the 20th century and have retained their wonderful interiors and European-flavoured (mainly Greek) atmospheres – fortunately most have also retained loyal clienteles. We love the fact that most of the men behind the coffee machines look as if they've been honing their coffee-making skills for the full life of the cafés.

Though the famous Pastroudi's has sadly closed, you can still discuss Camus novels over an espresso at the following, which are generally open from 9am till 11pm daily.

Sofianopoulo Coffee Store (Sharia Saad Zaghloul; espresso £E2.50) It's stand-up service only at this atmospheric and extremely attractive coffee bar. Vies with the Brazilian Coffee Store for the 'best coffee in town' award; we think it's the winner.

Brazilian Coffee Store (Sharia Saad Zaghloul; espresso £E2) The Brazilian makes a damn fine espresso and is always packed with locals grabbing a quick caffeine fix and discussing the day's news. There is no seating at this branch, but you'll find a few tables at the branch on Sharia Salah Salem.

Délices (Sharia Saad Zaghloul; cappuccino £E7.50, cakes £E4) The best cakes in town are served up at this venerable tearoom. The coffee's so-so, but the outdoor tables overlooking Midan Saad Zaghloul are wonderful spots to spend an hour or so watching the world go by.

Trianon (Midan Ramla; cappuccino £E7, gateaux £E4) The Trianon's *salon de thé* was a favourite of the Alexandrian-Greek poet Cavafy, who worked in offices above it. It's still immensely popular despite its coffee and food being of only average quality. There's a minimum charge of £E10.

Athineos (Midan Ramla; cappuccino £E4, pastries £E2.50) The wonderful interior in the half that faces the tramline features soaring ceilings, mint-green walls and gilded columns but is inevitably empty, unlike the modernised sea-facing side. The coffee here is disappointing, but the pastries are good.

Coffee Roastery (48 Sharia Tariq al-Horreyya; cappuccino £E6) This Hard Rock Café-style place is the modern heir to Alex coffeehouse heritage. Nostalgia-lovers will hate it; local youths love it to bits. The coffee is good and there's free wi-fi.

take a seat in the utilitarian interior alongside the many local families who treat this place as a home away from home. It's then eaten with side dishes of dips, salads, bread and delicious pickles. Kadoura is at the end of a laneway inland from Sharia Mohamed Koraiem. There's a second branch on the Corniche near Fort Qaitbey. Highly recommended.

Fish Market (☎ 480 5114; per person around E£70; 🍴) The seafood here is nearly as good as the catch served up at Kadoura, and this place has the added bonuses of great views of the harbour and a licence to sell alcohol. Service can be a bit surly and the muzak is wrist-slashingly bad. The mezze (E£4 per person) that comes with your choice of fresh seafood is excellent, as is the freshly baked bread that accompanies it.

Getting There & Away

BUS

Long-distance buses all leave from the 15th of May bus station, behind Sidi Gaber train station. The tram trip from Midan Ramla takes 30 minutes.

Between them, Superjet and the West Delta Bus Co run services to Cairo every 30 minutes from 5.30am to 10pm.

Superjet goes to Cairo (E£24 to E£28, 2½ hours) and Cairo airport (E£26 to E£32, three hours). It also has VIP services at 8am and 4pm (E£32 to Cairo, E£37 to Cairo airport), and an extra service to Cairo airport at 1am (E£37).

West Delta Bus Co has cheaper (E£20 to Cairo, E£25 to Cairo airport) less-comfy services. It also has VIP services at 8am and 3pm (E£27 to Cairo, E£35 to Cairo airport) and early-morning services to Cairo airport at 12.30am and 1.30am (E£33).

West Delta Bus Co runs buses to Marsa Matruh (E£20 to E£23, 4½ hours) every hour between 7am and 1am. These go via El Alamein (E£15, two hours). Superjet only travels to Marsa Matruh between June and September (E£24); it leaves at 7.15am.

There are West Delta Bus Co buses to Siwa (E£27, nine hours) at 8.30am, 11am and 2pm.

To Sallum (E£23, eight hours), there are West Delta Bus Co services at 9.30am, 10.30am, noon, 1.30pm, 3.30pm and 6pm.

To Sharm el-Sheikh, there's one Superjet service (E£88, 10½ hours) at 7.30pm and

one West Delta Bus Co service (E£70) at 9pm. To Port Said, there's one daily Superjet service (E£24, four hours) and five daily West Delta Bus Co services (E£20 to E£22), which leaves at 6am, 8am, 1pm, 4pm and 7pm. West Delta Bus Co buses travel to Ismailia (E£28, five hours) at 7am and 2.30pm.

Superjet travels to Hurghada (E£85, nine hours) at 8pm; West Delta Bus Co sometimes has a service (E£70) at 8am but you shouldn't bank on it.

SERVICE TAXI

Most service taxis in Alexandria are minivans. The main station is Moharrem Bey taxi station in the city's south. From here minivans travel to destinations including Cairo (around E£10, three hours) and Marsa Matruh (around E£12, four hours). A taxi from Moharrem Bey to Midan Ramla costs E£5, or you can catch tram 6.

TRAIN

Cairo-bound trains depart from Misr train station (Mahatta Misr), Alexandria's main train terminal. They stop five minutes later at the equally busy Sidi Gaber train station, which serves the populous eastern suburbs and is next to the main bus station. The fastest and most comfortable trains are the express *Turbini* (E£36/28 in 1st/2nd class, 2¼ hours), which leave at 8am, 2pm and 7pm. Next best are the express *Espani* (Spanish) trains (E£34/25 in 1st/2nd class), which depart at 8.15am, 3pm, 7.30pm and 10pm. There's also one *Espani* service (E£30 in 1st class) at 11pm that stops once en route. The cheaper and far less comfortable *Francesse* (French) trains (E£26/16 in 1st/2nd class, three hours) leave at 6am, 10am, 11am, 1pm, 3.30pm, 5pm, 6pm, 8pm and 9.30pm. To be assured of seats on the *Turbini* and *Espani* services it is essential to book ahead. Student discounts are available on all trains.

The **Abela Egypt Sleeping Train** (☎ 393 2430; www.sleepingtrains.com) travels daily to Aswan, via Cairo and Luxor. It leaves Alexandria at 5.20pm and arrives in Luxor at 5.25am the next day, terminating in Aswan at 8.50am. It costs US\$56/74 per person one way in a double/single cabin. There are no student discounts and tickets must be paid for in US dollars or euros. The price includes a

basic dinner and breakfast. Between June and September, the sleeping train also travels three times per week to Marsa Matruh. Contact the office for prices and departure times.

There are local services to Marsa Matruh (E£37/23 in 1st/2nd class) at 1.30pm and 6.45pm, but these trains are so dirty and old that both the tourist office and train-station staff give them the big thumbs down. The 1st-class service only operates in summer.

It costs E£5 for a taxi from the Misr train station to Midan Ramla, or E£10 if you catch a taxi that's waiting in the parking area.

Getting Around

TO/FROM THE AIRPORT

The **international airport** (☎ 425 0527) is at Burg al-Arab, 60km west of the city. To get there, take bus 555 (E£6, one hour) from near the Cecil Hotel. A taxi should cost no more than E£80.

EgyptAir flights sometimes land at the city's smaller **airport** (☎ 427 1036), at Nouzha. To get there, catch minibus 711 or 703 (50pt) from Midan Orabi or Ramla. A taxi should cost no more than E£10.

BUS & MINIBUS

As a visitor to Alexandria, you won't use the buses much – the trams are a much better way of getting around. The only routes worth considering are bus 1 (75pt), which runs from Midan Sa'ad Zaghloul to 15th of May Bus Station (Sidi Gaber); bus 4 (75pt), which runs from Ramla to Kilo 21 (northwest coast); and bus 11 (E£1.50), which runs from Ras el-Tin to Ramla to Mamoura via the Corniche.

There are a couple of minibuses (all tickets 50pt) that travellers sometimes use: minibus 735 runs from Ramla to Montazah via the Corniche; and minibus 736 runs from Ras el-Tin to Mamoura via the Corniche.

TAXI

A short trip within town (eg Midan Ramla to Misr train station) will cost E£5. Midan Ramla to Sidi Gaber will cost E£10; to the eastern beaches will cost around E£15.

TRAM

Midan Ramla is the main tram station; from here, yellow-coloured trams go west

and blue-coloured ones go east. All tickets cost 25pt. The most useful routes:

Tram No	Route
1 & 2	Ramla to Victoria, via the sporting club & Rushdy
6	Moharrem Bey to Ras el-Tin
15	Ramla to Ras el-Tin via El-Gomruk & Anfushi
16	Midan St Katerina to Pompey's Pillar
25	Ras el-Tin to Sidi Gaber, via Ramla
36	Ras el-Tin to San Stefano & Sidi Gaber

EL ALAMEIN

العالمين

The beginning of General Montgomery's offensive on 23 October 1942 ruined forever Field Marshall Rommel's hopes of pushing his Afrika Korps from Tobruk, Libya, through Allied lines to Alexandria and the Suez Canal, so winning North Africa. Within two weeks he was on the run, and the battle at El Alamein, 105km west of Alexandria, went down as a turning point of WWII. Today a **war museum** (admission E£5, camera/video E£5/20; 🕒 9am-4pm winter, 8am-6pm summer) and the Commonwealth, German and Italian **war cemeteries** mark the scene of one of the biggest tank battles in history.

To get here, catch any of the West Delta Bus Co services (E£15, two hours) to Marsa Matruh from the 15th of May bus station in Alexandria, and ask to be let off outside the museum. The spot is marked by a tank in the middle of the highway, so you can't miss it. Alternatively, minivans leave from the Moharrem Bey taxi station and cost around E£5.

Returning to Alexandria is a bit more difficult, as you'll need to flag down a minivan by the side of the highway. If you're lucky it will go all the way to Moharrem Bey, but sometimes it will stop in an outlying suburb and you'll need to find another minivan to take you into town.

The easiest way to visit El Alamein is to organise a car and English-speaking driver through **Mena Tours** (☎ 480 9676; fax 486 5827; Midan Saad Zaghloul; 🕒 9am-6pm Sat-Thu), which is based next to the Cecil Hotel in Alexandria. This will cost approximately E£350. A private taxi will charge between E£150 to E£200 to take you to the museum, ferry you around the cemeteries and bring you back to Alexandria.

NILE VALLEY وادي النيل

In this part of Egypt, the world's longest river is fringed by fertile farmland and scattered with remains from the country's ancient past.

LUXOR

☎ 095 / pop 422,400

Built on and around the 4000-year-old site of ancient Thebes, contemporary Luxor is a curious but comfortable mix of provincial country town and staggering ancient splendour. The concentration of monuments is extraordinary: they tower incongruously above the buzz of everyday life and make this the most compelling of all Egyptian destinations.

History

Following the collapse of centralised power at the end of the Old Kingdom period, the small village of Thebes emerged as the main power in Upper Egypt under the 11th- and 12th-dynasty pharaohs. Rising against the northern capital of Heracleopolis, Thebes reunited the country under its political, religious and administrative control and ushered in the Middle Kingdom period. The strength of Thebes' government also enabled it to re-establish control after a second period of decline, liberate the country from foreign rule and bring in the New Kingdom dynasties.

At the height of their glory and opulence, from 1550 to 1069 BC, all the New Kingdom pharaohs (with the exception of Akhenaten, who moved to Tell al-Amarna) made Thebes their permanent residence. The city had a population of nearly one million, and the architectural activity was astounding.

Orientation

What most visitors today know as Luxor is actually three separate areas: the town of Luxor itself on the east bank of the Nile; the village of Karnak, 2km to the north-east; and the towns of Gurna, New Gurna and Al-Gezira near the monuments and necropolis of ancient Thebes on the west bank of the Nile.

In Luxor town there are three main thoroughfares: Sharia al-Mahatta, which runs from the train station down to Luxor

Temple; Sharia al-Karnak, which runs from Luxor Temple past the souq and up towards the Temples of Karnak; and the Corniche. Most of the package-tour hotels are at the southern end of town, on Sharia Khalid ibn al-Walid. The majority of budget hotels are located between the train station and Sharia Televizyon, down near Sharia Khalid ibn al-Walid. Banks, the main tourist office and other services are clustered around the Old Winter Palace Hotel on the Corniche.

Information

INTERNET ACCESS

East Bank

Aboudi (Map p125; ☎ 237 2390; Corniche el-Nil; per hr EE10; ☎ 9am-10pm, closed noon-1pm Fri) On the cramped 1st floor above the bookshop.

Friends Internet Café (Map p125; ☎ 236 7260; Sharia Salah ad-Din; per hr EE10; ☎ 9am-midnight) This air-conditioned café is the best place in town to check your email; it boasts fast ADSL connections and a comfortable setup. A cappuccino costs EE2.50.

Rainbow Net (Map p125; ☎ 238 7938; Sharia Yousef Hassan; per hr EE6; ☎ 9am-midnight) You'll find it up the laneway – it's well posted from the street.

West Bank

Nile Centre Internet (Map p128; Main Rd, Al-Gezira; per hr EE5; ☎ 9am-midnight) Conveniently located near the ferry stop.

Ramoza Internet (Map p128; Main Rd, New Gurna; per hr EE3; ☎ 8am-midnight) Inconveniently located and has dodgy connections, but it's the cheapest place in Luxor.

MONEY

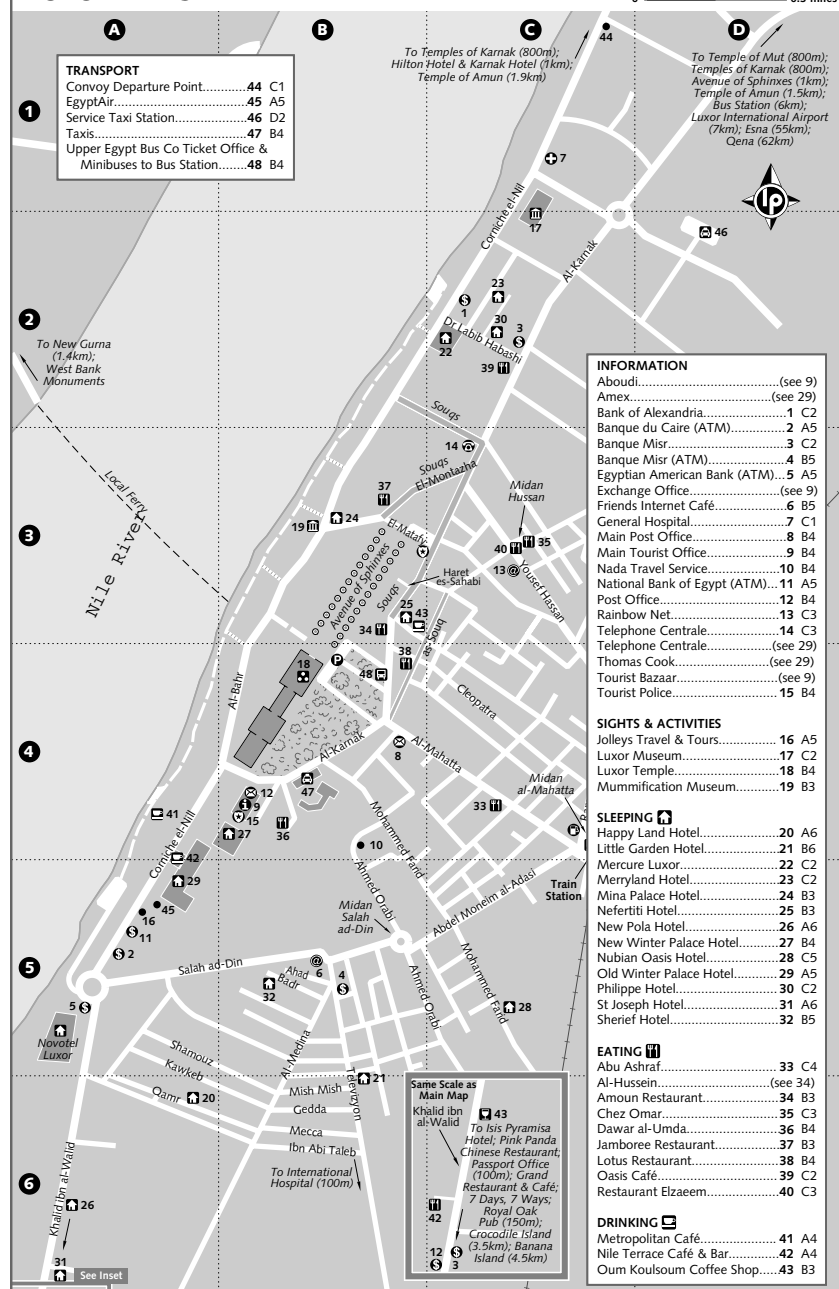
There are ATMs at the Banque du Caire and National Bank of Egypt branches on the Corniche near the Old Winter Palace Hotel, and at the Egyptian American Bank in front of the Novotel. The National Bank of Egypt also has a foreign exchange desk open between 8.30am and 9pm.

Amex (Map p125; ☎ 237 8333; ☎ 9am-4.30pm) and **Thomas Cook** (Map p125; ☎ 237 2196; ☎ 8am-2pm & 3-8pm) both have offices at the Old Winter Palace Hotel. They will usually change money and travellers cheques to Egyptian pounds or US dollars. There's also a conveniently located exchange office in the Tourist Bazaar.

POST

Main post office (Map p125; Sharia al-Mahatta) There's also a branch in the Tourist Bazaar on the Corniche.

LUXOR – EAST BANK



TELEPHONE

Telephone centrale Old Winter Palace Hotel (Map p125; ☎ 8am-10pm); Sharia al-Karnak (Map p125; ☎ 24hr); train station (☎ 8am-8pm)

TOURIST INFORMATION

Main tourist office (Map p125; ☎ /fax 237 2215; Corniche el-Nil; ☎ 8am-8pm) The extremely helpful office is in the Tourist Bazaar, next to New Winter Palace Hotel.

Tourist office (☎ 8am-8pm) Branches at the train station and airport.

Tourist police (Map p125) Next door to the main tourist office.

VISA EXTENSIONS

Passport office (☎ 238 0885; ☎ 8am-2pm Sat-Thu) Almost opposite the Isis Pyramisa Hotel, south of the town centre.

Sights**EAST BANK****Museums**

About halfway between the Luxor and Karnak Temples, the impressive **Luxor Museum** (Map p125; Corniche el-Nil; adult/student ££55/30; ☎ 9am-2pm & 4-9pm winter, 9am-2pm & 5-10pm summer) has a small but well-chosen collection of relics from the Theban temples and necropolises. All are impressively conserved and displayed, with excellent interpretive labels. The collection includes pottery, jewellery, furniture, statues and stelae. Look out for the exquisitely carved statue of Tuthmosis III and the gorgeous gilded head of the goddess Hathor depicted as the cow Mehit-Werit. A five-minute video presentation in English in the theatre near the entrance gives a useful overview of the collection.

Down the steps opposite the Mina Palace Hotel is the small but fascinating **Mummification Museum** (Map p125; Corniche el-Nil; adult/student ££40/20; ☎ 9am-1pm & 4-9pm winter, 9am-1pm & 5-10pm summer). Its well-presented displays tell you everything you ever wanted to know about mummies, mummification and the journey to the afterlife. During excavation season (January to March), visiting Egyptologists give lectures every Saturday at 7pm.

Luxor Temple

Built on the site of an older sanctuary dedicated to the Theban triad, **Luxor Temple** (Map p125; ☎ 237 2408; adult/student ££50/25, tripod ££20; ☎ 6am-9pm winter, 6am-10pm summer) is a strikingly graceful piece of architecture close to

the Nile. Largely built by the New Kingdom pharaoh Amenhotep III, it was added to over the centuries by Tutankhamun, Ramses II, Nectanebo, Alexander the Great and various Romans. In the 13th century, the Arabs built a mosque in an interior court.

Temples of Karnak

Much more than a temple, **Karnak** (☎ 238 0270; adult/student ££60/30, tripod ££20; ☎ 6am-5.30pm winter, 6am-6.30pm summer) is a spectacular complex of sanctuaries, kiosks, pylons and obelisks, dedicated to the Theban gods and the greater glory of Egypt's pharaohs. The complex was built, added to, dismantled, restored, enlarged and decorated over nearly 1500 years and today it's a major tourist attraction. Most work was done in the New Kingdom period, although the original sanctuary of the main enclosure, the **Great Temple of Amun**, was built during the Middle Kingdom. The entire site covers an area of around 1.2 sq km.

A **sphinx-lined path** that once went to the Nile takes you to the massive **1st Pylon**, from where you end up in the **Great Court**. To the left is the **Temple of Seti II**, dedicated to the triad of Theban gods – Amun, Mut and Khons. In the centre of the court is the one remaining column of the **Kiosk of Taharqa**, a 25th-dynasty Ethiopian pharaoh.

Beyond the **2nd Pylon** is the unforgettable 6000-sq-metre **Great Hypostyle Hall**, built by Amenhotep III, Seti I and Ramses II.

You can also visit an **Open Museum** (adult/student ££20/10) off to the left of the first court, where you can see a collection of statuary found throughout the complex, as well as three well-preserved chapels. Tickets must be purchased at the main ticket office.

A stampede of tour groups descends upon the site for the nightly **sound-and-light show** (☎ 237 2241; adult/student ££55/44, video camera ££35). There are three or four performances in a variety of languages. Check with the tourist office for the schedule or see www.sound-light.egypt.com.

Microbuses make the short run to the temples from Luxor's centre for 50pt. A *calèche* (horse-drawn carriage) costs ££7 from Luxor Temple; a taxi costs ££10 to ££15, depending on where you are coming from.

WEST BANK

The West Bank of Luxor was the necropolis of ancient **Thebes**, a vast city of the dead

where magnificent temples were raised to honour the cults of pharaohs entombed in the nearby cliffs, and where queens, royal children, nobles, priests, artisans and even workers had tombs built, ranging from spectacular to ordinary in design and décor.

To see every site would cost about ££320 (without student card), and take days. Except for Deir al-Bahri (commonly known as the Funerary Temple of Hatshepsut) and the tombs in the Valleys of the Kings and Queens, you can't pay for admission at the individual sites. Instead you must go to the **Antiquities Inspectorate Ticket Office** (Map p128; ☎ 6am-4pm winter, 6am-5pm summer) on Main Rd, 500m west of the Colossi of Memnon. Plan exactly which sites you wish to visit, as you must purchase individual tickets for each one. Tickets are valid only for the day of purchase; no refunds are given. Students pay half price. Note that photography is strictly forbidden in all the West Bank tombs; if you're caught using a camera, guards will confiscate the film or memory card.

To give you an idea of the distances involved, from the local ferry landing it is 3km straight ahead to the Antiquities Inspectorate Ticket Office, past the Colossi of Memnon. From there it's 1km to the Valley of the Queens and 5km to the Valley of the Kings.

It should cost around ££100 to hire a taxi to bring you here from the East Bank

and transport you from site to site. Alternatively, you can hire a bicycle on the East Bank and bring it over on the ferry, or you can catch a ferry, take a local pick-up truck (25pt; ask for 'Gurna') to the Antiquities Inspectorate Ticket Office, and then hire a rattletrap bike from the **bike hire place** (Map p128; per day ££10) next to the Nour al-Gurna hotel and pedal yourself around.

Before you visit, you may like to look at www.thebanmappingproject.com. Professor Kent Week's fascinating website focusing on the monuments of the West Bank, particularly the Valley of the Kings.

Colossi of Memnon

These 18m-high statues (Map p128) are all that remain of a temple built by Amenhotep III. The Greeks believed that they were statues of Memnon, who was slain by Achilles in the Trojan War.

Temple of Seti I

This pharaoh expanded the Egyptian empire to include Cyprus and parts of Mesopotamia. The temple (Map p128) is seldom visited, but is well worth a look.

Valley of the Kings

Once called the Gates of the Kings and the Place of Truth, this famous **royal necropolis** (Map p128; ☎ 231 1662; adult/student ££70/35; ☎ 6am-

WEST BANK SITES

Tickets to the following sites must be purchased at the Antiquities Inspectorate Ticket Office. Opening hours are from 7am to 5pm daily in winter, and 6am to 7pm in summer. Deir al-Bahri and the Valleys of the Kings and Queens have dedicated ticket offices and opening hours. All sites are shown on the map on p128.

Site	Adult/student (££)
Assasif Tombs (Tombs of Kheruef & Ankhor)	20/10
Assasif Tombs (Tomb of Pabasa)	20/10
Deir al-Medina Temple & Tombs	20/10
Deir al-Medina (Tomb of Pashedu)	10/5
Medinat Habu (Funerary Temple of Ramses III)	30/15
Ramesseum	30/15
Temple of Seti I	30/15
Tombs of the Nobles (Tombs of Khonsu, Userhet & Benia)	12/6
Tombs of the Nobles (Tombs of Menna & Nakht)	20/10
Tombs of the Nobles (Tombs of Neferronpet, Dhutmosi & Neferskerhu)	20/10
Tombs of the Nobles (Tombs of Ramose, Userhet & Khaemhet)	20/10
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LUXOR – WEST BANK

0 1 km
0 0.5 miles

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Al-Moudira (3km)
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Old Gurna
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Temple of Mentuhotep
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Valley of the Kings
Valley of the Queens
Fields
New Gurna
Al-Faydia Canal
Al-Gezira
Gezirat al-Bayarat
Al-Kharga (247km)
Esna (67km)
Razagat (22km)
Armant (17km)
Bridge (9km)
To Al-Moudira (6km)
Local Ferry
See Luxor – East Bank Map (p125)

4pm winter, 6am-5pm summer) is dominated by the barren **Al-Qurn** (Horn) mountain. The tombs were designed to resemble the underworld; a long, inclined, rock-hewn corridor descends into either an antechamber or a series of halls, and ends in a burial chamber. Over 60 tombs have been excavated here, but not all belong to pharaohs. At the time of research, a disappointingly small array of tombs was open to visitors, including the tombs of **Ramses III, Ramses V/VI, Ramses IX, Amenhotep II, Queen Tawosret/Sethnakht** and **Siptah**.

The **tomb of Tutankhamun**, found in 1922 by Howard Carter and far from the most interesting, needs an extra ticket (adult/student £100/50). This is bought at the second ticket box when you enter the site, where the ludicrous toy train (£1) stops. It's only worth paying the exorbitant entry fee if you've been to Cairo's Egyptian Museum and wish to see where the extraordinary collection of objects from the tomb was found.

Hiking across the **Theban Hills** from the Valley of the Kings to Deir al-Bahri is one of the most rewarding activities in Luxor. To do this, ascend the steep cliff opposite the closed tomb of Seti I. Ask a guard to point you in the right direction, as the official path is sometimes blocked by restoration work and there's no signage here or at any point along the route. When you start climbing, souvenir vendors will offer to guide you to the ridge in return for a tip; it's up to you whether you take them up on their offer but be prepared for them to also try to sell you bits and pieces of tourist tat along the way. Once on the ridge, follow the path to the left and continue left when you come to a fork in the path. Follow the path around the ridge, passing a police post on your distant left, until you eventually see Deir al-Bahri down the sheer cliff to your right. Continue along the ridge, ignoring the steep trail that plunges down the cliff face, and almost complete a circle to descend in front of the ticket office to Hatshepsut's magnificent temple. The walk takes 50 minutes and is extremely steep in parts. Make sure you have water and are wearing decent walking shoes.

Deir al-Bahri (Funerary Temple of Hatshepsut)

Rising out of the desert plain in a series of terraces, the **Funerary Temple of Hatshepsut** (Map p128; adult/student £30/15; ☞ 6am-4.30pm winter,

6am-5pm summer) merges with the sheer limestone cliffs of the eastern face of the Theban mountain. It was desecrated and vandalised by her bitter successor, Tuthmosis III, but retains much of its original magnificence, including some fascinating reliefs.

Assasif Tombs

Three of these 18th-dynasty tombs (Map p128) are open to the public – those of **Pabasa, Kheruef** and **Ankhor**. Like the Tombs of the Nobles further south, the artwork concentrates on events from everyday life such as fishing and hunting. You can buy admission tickets at the Antiquities Inspectorate Ticket Office or at Deir al-Bahri.

Tombs of the Nobles

There are at least 12 tombs (Map p128) in this group worth visiting; the most colourful are those of **Ramose, Rekhmire** and **Nakht**. Tickets are sold for groups of two or three tombs.

Ramesseum

Ramses II was keen to leave behind monuments to his greatness, and his funerary temple (Map p128) was to be the masterpiece. Sadly, it lies mostly in ruins.

Deir al-Medina

This small Ptolemaic temple (Map p128), dedicated to the goddesses Hathor and Maat, was later occupied by Christian monks – hence its name, literally 'the monastery of the city'. Near the temple are the tombs of some of the workers and artists who created the royal tombs.

Valley of the Queens

The 70-odd **tombs** (Map p128; adult/student £30/15; ☞ 6am-4.30pm winter, 6am-5pm summer) in this valley belong to queens and other royal family members from the 19th and 20th dynasties. Only three – the tombs of **Titi, Amunherkhephshuf** and **Khaemwaset** – are currently open to the public. The crowning glory of the site, the **Tomb of Nefertari**, was closed to the public at the time of research; authorities weren't giving any clues as to when or if it will reopen.

Medinat Habu

The temple complex of Medinat Habu is dominated by the enormous **Funerary Temple of Ramses III** (Map p128), inspired by the

temple of his father, Ramses II. The largest temple after Karnak, it has a stunning mountain backdrop and some fascinating reliefs. The best time to visit is in the late afternoon, when the setting sun interacts amazingly with the golden stone.

Activities

FELUCCA RIDES

Feluccas cruise the Nile throughout the day, and cost between ££30 and ££50 per hour per boat, depending on your bargaining skills. Captains will regularly accost you along the Corniche, so it's easy to shop around for the best boat and price. The most popular trip is 5km upriver to Banana Island, a tiny, palm-dotted isle where locals grow fruit and vegetables. The trip takes between two and three hours, and is best timed so that you are on your way back in time to watch the sunset over Luxor from the boat.

HORSE RIDING

A ride around the West Bank temples is an unforgettable experience, particularly near sunset. Two West Bank stables offer guided rides, the best being **Arabian Horse Stables** (Map p128; ☎ 231 0024, 010 504 8558; 🐾 7am-sunset), which is known for its well-maintained horses and tackle. If you phone ahead to book, staff will collect you from the East Bank in a launch. Rides usually take three hours and cost ££25 per hour. The stable also offers guided camel rides (££20 per hour) and donkey rides (££15 per hour).

The Khalifa family, which owns the Nile Valley Hotel, runs **donkey treks** to the Valley of the Kings and Deir el-Bahri for ££35. For more information see www.nile-valley.nl.

Tours

Travel restrictions for foreigners in the Nile Valley make independent travel challenging, so you may want to visit sites outside Luxor on an arranged day tour.

Jolleys Travel & Tours (Map p125; ☎ 010 183 8894; 🐾 9am-10pm) Has a good reputation for its day trips. Located next to the Old Winter Palace Hotel.

QEA (Map p128; ☎ 231 1667; www.questfortheegyptianadventure.com; Main Rd, Al-Gezira) A newly opened British-and-Egyptian-run agency based on the West Bank. It can tailor tours around and in Luxor, as well as in the Western Desert. A percentage of its profits go towards charitable projects in Egypt.

Sleeping

Perhaps more than at any tourist destination in Egypt, the cost of accommodation in Luxor fluctuates seasonally. Some hotels drop their charges by 50% in the low season (May to September), although others don't bother altering them at all. The second half of January is Luxor's busiest season, as Egyptians travel here over the school holiday break. You'll need to book ahead at this time.

Whether to stay on the East or West Bank is a hard call to make. The West Bank is quieter, has fewer touts and is closer to the tombs and temples that are Luxor's major attraction. There is a good array of midrange accommodation choices here, but not so many budget or top-end alternatives. Eating options are also limited. The East Bank is where most of the shopping and entertainment action is based, as well as the majority of Luxor's budget hotels and cheap eateries. It's home to the Karnak and Luxor Temples, Luxor Museum and a battery of *calèche* drivers, hotel touts and shop owners who see all foreigners as walking wallets.

Try to avoid the dodgy hotel touts who pounce on travellers as they get off the train and bus – these guys get a 25% to 40% commission for taking you to hotels who work with them, a cost which ends up being factored into your bill. They're also renowned for telling fibs about hotels that refuse to pay them commission. Always check for yourself.

EAST BANK

Budget

Happy Land Hotel (Map p125; ☎ 237 1828; www.luxorhappyland.com; Sharia Qamr; dm with air-con ££10, s/d with shared bathroom ££15/21, with private bathroom & air-con ££22.50/30; 🍷 📺) A large and extremely popular hostel run by the enthusiastic Mr Ibrahim Abdul. Happy Land has spotless, freshly painted rooms, half of which have air-con and private bathrooms. Generous breakfasts, soap and mosquito coils are included in the price. There's a rooftop lounge with satellite TV, bikes for hire (££10 per day) and free laundry facilities. It's about a 10-minute walk from the train station.

Nubian Oasis Hotel (Map p125; ☎ 292 9445; Sharia Mohammed Farid; dm ££10, s/d ££10/20, with air-con ££20/35; 🍷) A newcomer to the budget-accommodation scene in Luxor, this place

is sure to become a permanent fixture. The 24 rooms have private bathrooms, hard beds and clean linen; 18 have air-con and some have double beds and satellite TV. It offers a generous breakfast, bike hire (££6 per day) and free use of two kitchens and a washing machine. Tea (££1) and Stella (££6) can be enjoyed on the roof terrace. You'll find it in a residential street five minutes' walk from the train station.

Nefertiti Hotel (Map p125; ☎ 237 2386; www.nefertitihotel.com; btwn Sharia al-Karnak & Sharia as-Souq; s/d ££40/60; 🍷) Budget hotels don't come much better than the Nefertiti. Its simple but spotlessly clean rooms all have small private bathrooms and air-con; some have double beds. The roof terrace has good views over to the West Bank, and the top-floor lounge has a pool table and satellite TV. A generous breakfast is included in the price. Recommended.

Merryland Hotel (Map p125; ☎ 238 1746; s/d ££50/80; 🍷 📺) This quiet three-star choice, just near the Luxor Museum, has an old-fashioned, institutional feel but offers bargain rooms that come complete with satellite TV and private bathrooms. All are clean and have small balconies. The roof terrace has a bar, breakfast area and great views over to the West Bank.

Sherief Hotel (Map p125; ☎ 237 0757; sheriefhotel@yahoo.co.uk; Sharia Badr; s/d with shared bathroom ££25/50, with private bathroom ££40/60; 🍷 📺) Owner Abdul took over this small place in 2004 and is trying hard to give it a homely feel. It has 12 rooms, five with their own bathroom and six with air-con. Lila the cat holds court in the comfortable downstairs restaurant and there's a sunny roof terrace. Service is impressive, but the prices are a tad steep for what's on offer.

Mina Palace Hotel (Map p125; ☎ 237 2074; fax 238 2194; Corniche el-Nil; s/d ££80/100; 🍷) If you want to be in the thick of the Luxor scene and you travel with earplugs to ensure a good night's sleep, this long-running hotel could be for you. The corner rooms sport two balconies and have extraordinary views of the West Bank and the avenue of sphinxes at the Luxor Temple. Rooms have satellite TV, comfortable beds and very clean bathrooms, though all could do with a lick of paint. There's a roof terrace where you can enjoy a beer while watching the sun set over the Nile.

Midrange

Little Garden Hotel (Map p125; ☎ 238 9038; www.littlegardenhotel.com; Sharia Radwan; s/d US\$18/24; 🍷) This hotel is without doubt the best midrange choice on the East Bank. Its location isn't attractive, but the charming secluded courtyard garden at the front makes amends. The owner worked in hotel management in Germany and has brought European standards of service and cleanliness with him. There's a rooftop restaurant serving Oriental food, including a set menu of soup, salad, *tagen* (stew), rice, pastry and tea or coffee (££29.50); it also has *majlis* seating where you can relax over a tea and *sheesha* (no alcohol or views). A 10% student discount is offered.

New Pola Hotel (Map p125; ☎ 236 5081; www.newpolahotel.com; Sharia Khalid ibn al-Walid; s/d US\$30/40; 🍷 📺 📺) The newest addition to Luxor's hotel scene is officially only a three-star hotel, but its amenities are definitely four-star standard. These include a rooftop swimming pool, 24-hour room service and a pleasant downstairs restaurant and bar. Half of the 80 rooms have Nile views; all have satellite TV and comfortable beds.

Philippe Hotel (Map p125; ☎ /fax 238 0050; Sharia Dr Labib Habashi; s/d US\$30/40; 🍷 📺) A large place near the Luxor Museum, the Philippe has recently undergone a renovation and its motel-style rooms are comfortable, if characterless. Each has satellite TV and a private bathroom. There's a roof terrace with a decent-sized pool. It's worth trying to negotiate a discount.

St Joseph Hotel (Map p125; ☎ 238 1707; stjoseph2@hotmail.com; off Sharia Khalid ibn al-Walid; s/d US\$25/35; 🍷) This place, at the package-tour end of town, with a small rooftop pool (heated) and rooms featuring satellite TV, comfortable beds and private bathrooms. Ask for a room with a Nile view.

Top End

Old Winter Palace Hotel (Map p125; ☎ 238 0422; h1661@accor-hotels.com; Corniche el-Nil; r Pavilion Bldg US\$125-375, old wing US\$235-1125; 🍷 🍷 🍷) This Victorian pile on the Corniche is a significant monument in its own right. The spectacular foyer and luxurious rear garden are the stuff of which lasting memories are made, but rooms in the old wing aren't quite as impressive, as most are small and

only half have Nile views. The new Pavilion Building in the garden is home to 118 comfortable rooms overlooking the large pool area. The adjoining New Winter Palace Hotel is real package-tour territory, offering 136 rooms (US\$88 to US\$126) that are sorely in need of a refit; half have Nile views. Breakfast costs an extra £E72 to £E85.

Mercurie Luxor (Map p125; ☎ 238 0944; h1800-gm@accor-hotels.com; Corniche el-Nil; s US\$85-124, d US\$104-156, ste \$374; ☒ ☞ ☞) If you make your way past the usual kitsch gilt-and-marble foyer beloved by tour-group operators, the Mercurie offers some pleasant surprises. Nile-side rooms (US\$105 to US\$124) are large and very light, with extremely comfortable beds and furnished balconies. The suites are knockouts, featuring Nile-facing terraces and Jacuzzis. The hotel has a bar, two restaurants, coffee shop, tennis court and large pool. Avoid the cheaper garden- or pool-facing rooms at the rear – it's worth paying a bit extra for a Nile view. The hotel's location is possibly the best on the East Bank.

WEST BANK

Budget

Marsam Hotel (Map p128; ☎ 237 2403; marsam@africamail.com; Gurna; s/d with shared bathroom £E45/90, with private bathroom £E65/130) This is the best budget place on the West Bank. It has 27 simple but spotless rooms (four with private bathrooms) with ceiling fans and traditional palm-reed beds. Owned by a member of the Abdul Rasul family (of tomb-robbing fame),

it was originally built for American archaeologists in the 1920s. Atmospheric and quiet, it's an old favourite with archaeologists, so it can be difficult to get rooms during the dig season (January to March).

El-Gezira Hotel (Map p128; ☎ 231 0034; www.el-gezira.com; Al-Gezira; s/d £E60/80; ☞) Though showing its age, this place offers clean rooms for bargain prices. All rooms have air-con, private bathrooms and comfortable beds; some have screened balconies overlooking the Nile. There's also a pleasant rooftop restaurant where you can enjoy a Stella (£E8) and a filling Egyptian meal (£E25). The hotel's only downside is its proximity to a small, mosquito-infested lake.

Midrange

Nour al-Gurna (Map p128; ☎ 231 1430; Gurna; s £E100, d £E120-150, ste £E200) A small mud-brick house with a family feel, the Nour al-Gurna is notable for its stylish rooms and its excellent indoor-outdoor restaurant, which serves up food made from home-grown ingredients to locals and travellers. It's located near the Antiquities Inspectorate Ticket Office, and pick-ups regularly run between the hotel and the river.

Nour al-Balad (Map p128; ☎ 242 6111; s/d/ste £E120/150/500) Run by the same family as the Nour al-Gurna, the Nour al-Balad is an extremely attractive boutique hotel in an isolated location near Medinat Habu.

Hotel el-Fayrouz (Map p128; ☎ 231 2709; www.elfayrouz.com; Al-Gezira; s/d £E70/100; ☞ ☞) A relatively recent addition to the West Bank's hotel scene, the German-run Fayrouz is worth considering due to its quiet but central location, pleasant garden and panoramic roof terrace. Very clean rooms have balconies and hard beds; some have air-con. The restaurant serves good-quality Egyptian and European dishes (£E7 to £E19).

El-Nakhil Hotel (Map p128; ☎ /fax 231 3922; Al-Gezira; s/d US\$24/33; ☞) This attractive new hotel offers an array of well-appointed rooms, including garden villas modelled on traditional Nubian housing. One of these is fully set up to cater to wheelchair-bound guests.

Nile Valley Hotel (Map p128; ☎ 231 1477; www.nilevalley.nl; Main Rd, Al-Gezira; s/d £E75/110; ☞) This large pink hacienda-style block, near the ferry dock, is a good midrange choice. All rooms have clean private bathrooms and air-con; those overlooking the garden at the rear

are the best. The rooftop restaurant has great Nile views and is a good place to grab a *sheesha*, tea or meal (£E13 to £E28). On Sunday nights it hosts a buffet (£E40) accompanied by Sufi dancing and local music.

Top End

Al-Moudira (☎ 2325 1307; moudirahotel@yahoo.com; Daba'iyya; r/ste US\$200/275; ☒ ☞ ☞ ☞) Built to resemble a Damascene courtyard house, this gorgeous hotel features luxurious rooms, whimsical interiors, a wonderful pool area and a stylish bar and restaurant. Some guests revel in its seclusion (it's a 15-minute taxi ride from the ferry landing), others end up feeling as if they're trapped in a gilded cage. We're of the former opinion: highly recommended.

Flats in Luxor (Map p128; ☎ 010 356 4540; www.flatsinluxor.com; per week Jun-Sep £E1900, Oct-May £E2500; ☞ ☞ ☞ ☞) If you're planning a longish stay in Luxor, you need look no further than these impressive flats. Located between Al-Gezira and New Gurna, they're run by a British-Egyptian couple and feature three bedrooms (sleeping six), large sitting/dining areas, satellite TV and fully equipped kitchens. The two upper-floor flats have balconies with views over to the Theban Hills. There's a panoramic roof terrace with a pool table and sun lounges, and a downstairs area with a pool and Jacuzzi.

Eating

EAST BANK

Sharia al-Mahatta has a number of good sandwich stands and other cheap-eat possibilities, as well as a few juice stands at its Luxor Temple end. One of the most popular fast-food joints in town is **Restaurant Elzaeem** (Map p125; ☎ 24hr), where you can grab a table and enjoy tasty kushari (small/medium/large £E4/7/10) or spaghetti (£E6 to £E11). Other decent cheap eats can be found around Sharia Televizyon.

Abu Ashraf (Map p125; Sharia al-Mahatta; dishes £E2-9) This popular restaurant and takeaway near the station has a terrace on the street and an air-con dining room behind. It serves up decent kushari (medium/large £E4/6), as well as pizza (from £E12) and kebabs (£E14).

Grand Restaurant & Café (☎ 8am-1am; ☞) It may be a favourite of tour groups, but this doesn't mean that the Grand should be dismissed out of hand. The outdoor terrace is

THE AUTHOR'S CHOICE

Oasis Café (Map p125; ☎ 012 336 7121; mains £E10-45; ☎ 10am-10pm; ☞) Finally Luxor has a restaurant that appreciates décor as much as food. Taking up several rooms of a 1920s building in the centre of town, the Oasis has high ceilings, tiled floors and traditional-style furniture. With jazz softly playing, watercolours on the walls, and smoking and nonsmoking rooms, it feels like an oasis of sophistication compared to the brash tourist restaurants elsewhere in town. The food is good too, with an extensive brunch menu and a regular menu of international dishes, including pastas (£E15 to £E20) and grilled meats (£E30 to £E40). A blackboard lists daily specials. Sandwiches (£E12 to £E18) are hearty, and a wide selection of pastries and excellent coffee encourage lingering.

a pleasant spot to enjoy everything from soup (£E5) to a sandwich (£E9 to £E15) or a *sheesha* (£E5). It also serves mezze and salads (£E5).

Chez Omar (Map p125; ☎ 236 7678; Midan Yousif Hassan; salads £E3.50, mains £E15; ☎ 24hr) The friendly Chez Omar, in a small oasis of green, is a pleasant spot to enjoy a casual meal. It serves up good basic Egyptian dishes, including kebabs and pigeon. You can get an under-the-counter Stella here for £E10.

Lotus Restaurant (Map p125; ☎ 238 0419; Sharia As-Souq; ☞) You can observe the goings-on in the souq from the windows of this spotlessly clean 1st-floor restaurant. The Egyptian dishes are good – try the delicious lentil soup (£E5) or tasty chicken *tagen* (£E22) – or order European dishes such as spaghetti napolitana (£E12). The owners also run the Ritz Restaurant (Map p125) near Le Meridien Hotel. Credit cards are accepted.

Amoun Restaurant (Map p125; Sharia al-Karnak; mezze £E2.50-7, mains £E7-19; ☎ 7am-10pm) At the end of the souq near the Luxor Temple, this long-standing travellers' favourite serves up bland Oriental dishes, pizzas and pastas in clean surrounds. You can sit on the outdoor terrace or in the air-con dining room. The neighbouring Al-Hussein is a carbon copy, with identical menu and prices. Both offer a student discount.

7 Days, 7 Ways (Sharia Khalid ibn al-Walid; ☞) This 1st-floor eatery is keeping the British

THE AUTHOR'S CHOICE

Amon Hotel (Map p128; ☎ 231 0912; fax 231 1353; Al-Gezira; s/d in old wing £E80/120, in new wing £E100/160; ☞) This family-run place is a favourite haunt of foreign archaeological missions, and no wonder. It offers great food, friendly service and spotlessly clean rooms for bargain prices. The comfortable rooms in the new wing have private bathrooms and balconies overlooking the attractive central courtyard garden. Five old-wing rooms have air-con, and some also have private bathrooms. The triple rooms on the top floor of the old wing (£E230) and adjoining roof terrace offer breathtaking views over to the Theban Hills and back to the East Bank.

colonial spirit alive and well by serving up affronts to the Egyptian palate, such as roast beef and Yorkshire pudding (E£29.50, Sunday only) and chip butties (E£11). A Stella costs E£10.50, renditions of 'Rule Britannia' come free.

Jamboree Restaurant (Map p125; ☎ 235 5827, 012 781 3149; Sharia al-Montazah; ☎ 10.30am-2.30pm for snacks & Oriental dishes, 6-10.30pm for full menu; 🍷) If you're feeling like a jacket potato (E£10 to E£16), spaghetti carbonara (E£22.50) or something similarly non-Egyptian, this British-run place could be just the thing. Relax on the pleasant rooftop terrace or dine in air-con comfort in the characterless but spotlessly clean dining room. A selection from the (safe) salad bar costs E£14.50.

The town's five-star hotels are home to myriad pricey restaurants. Among the best are **Dawar al-Umda** (Map p125; ☎ 238 0721; Sharia al-Kamak), a *Thousand and One Nights*-style outdoor restaurant in the garden of the Mercure Inn that hosts a popular Oriental buffet (E£85) on Thursday evenings, featuring performances by Sufi and belly dancers; and the **Pink Panda Chinese Restaurant** (☎ 237 2750) at the Isis Pyramisa Hotel.

WEST BANK

Restaurant Mohammed (Map p128; ☎ 231 1014; Gurna; meals E£8-20; 🍷 24hr) This laid-back restaurant is set in and around the peaceful courtyard of Mohammed Abdel Lahi's mud-brick house, just along from the Antiquities Inspectorate Ticket Office. Mohammed's mum cooks up a delicious *kofta tagen* (E£20), served with home-grown salad leaves; it goes down a treat with a cold Stella (E£8) or fresh lemon juice (E£3).

Nour al-Gurna (Map p128; ☎ 2311 430; Gurna; set meal E£20) The restaurant of this boutique hotel serves up delicious Egyptian food in a pleasant courtyard or a cool room, depending on the season. The food is made using fresh home-grown ingredients and is quite excellent.

Africa Restaurant (Map p128; set menu E£25; ☎ 10am-11pm) In a pleasant courtyard space close to the ferry landing, the Africa serves up large and very tasty set meals of chicken, fish, *kebab hala* (kebabs in a tomato sauce) or *kofta* with an avalanche of side dishes. If you ask nicely, the waiter can usually find a cold Stella (E£9) under the counter.

Tutankhamun Restaurant (Map p128; ☎ 231 0118; fixed menu E£35) Just south of the ferry dock, this outdoor terrace restaurant is run by a cook who once worked on one of the French archaeological missions in Luxor. He serves up decent set meals of roast chicken, duck *à l'orange*, *kebab hala* or chicken curry, accompanied by a generous array of vegetable dishes, bread, soup, salad and tahini. The view of the Luxor Temple is great, but the restaurant's overall standard of hygiene leaves a lot to be desired.

Drinking

Nile Terrace Café & Bar (Map p125; Corniche el-Nil; beer E£23; ☎ 9am-7pm) At the front of the Old Winter Palace Hotel, this is a wonderful, if pricey, place to enjoy a sunset apéritif.

Metropolitan Café (Map p125; Stella small/large E£8/12) Its Nile-side terrace is a cheaper alternative to the Old Winter Palace Hotel, but its views are often obscured by moored cruise ships. Don't bother eating here.

Oum Kouloum Coffee Shop (Map p125; sheesha & coffee E£4) Off the souq next to the Nefertiti Hotel, this is the most popular *ahwa* in town.

The **Royal Oak Pub** (Sharia Khalid ibn al-Walid; ☎ 4pm-2am) and the **Kings Head Pub** (Map p125; Sharia Khalid ibn al-Walid; ☎ 10am-2am) are British-style watering holes where you can watch English football or Sky News (an oxymoron if ever we heard one) on the satellite TV. You can even score some Indian food at the Kings Head. A beer costs around E£12 at both.

Getting There & Away

AIR

The **EgyptAir office** (Map p125; ☎ 238 0580; Corniche el-Nil; ☎ 8am-8pm) is next to Amex. There are regular connections with Cairo (E£714 one way) and Aswan (E£360 one way), and thrice-weekly flights to Sharm el-Sheikh (E£537 one way). Flights to Abu Simbel operate only in the high season, when there are one or two departures a day via Aswan. These entail ridiculously long transits, so you're much better off organising transport from Aswan.

BUS

The new **bus station** (Sharia al-Karnak) is located near the airport. There's an Upper Egypt Bus Co ticket office in front of the Horus

Hotel, near the Luxor Temple, and from here minibuses transfer passengers to the bus station for E£5. Note that this transfer service doesn't commence until 9am each day – if you wish to catch an earlier bus you'll need to catch a taxi to the station (E£25). There are two daily Upper Egypt Bus Co services to Cairo (E£85, 10 to 11 hours), departing at 7pm and 9pm. Eight daily buses run to Hurghada (E£25 to E£30, five hours) between 6.30am and 9pm. From Hurghada, the service goes on to Suez (E£46 to E£55, eight to nine hours). There's one bus per day to Port Said (E£70), which leaves at 8pm. One daily bus leaves at 5pm, travelling to Sharm el-Sheikh (E£100, 14 to 16 hours) and Dahab (E£110, 14 to 16 hours).

There is sometimes a bus to Aswan at 3.30pm (E£15), but it's often cancelled. You are much better off catching the train.

There is a service to Al-Kharga (E£40, four hours) on Saturday and Tuesday at 7:15am, and on Sunday and Wednesday at 1pm.

If you are travelling to Al-Quseir (E£8) or Marsa Alam (E£15), you'll need to make your way to the bus station at Qift, which is minutes before Qena, and catch a bus there. These leave at 11am, 2.30pm and 5pm.

CONVOY

It is often, but not always, compulsory for foreigners to travel out of Luxor by convoy. At the time of our research, you could make your own way to the Western Desert, Minya, Tell al-Amarna and Asyut, but were forced to travel in the convoy when going to Aswan, Esna, Edfu, Kom Ombo, Hurghada, Dendara, Abydos, Qena, Marsa Alam, Al-Quseir and Safaga. There are 10 checkpoints between Luxor and Hurghada and nine between Luxor and Aswan, so your chances of travelling outside the convoys are somewhere between slim and impossible.

There are convoys to Hurghada at 8am, 2pm and 6pm daily, travelling via Qena and Safaga. The 8am convoy also stops at Dendara and Abydos, and the 2pm stops at Dendara but not Abydos. If you're travelling to Al-Quseir, you need to travel the first part of the trip with the Hurghada convoy.

Convoys to Aswan leave at 7am, 11am and 3pm. The 7am convoy travels via Esna, Edfu and Kom Ombo. If you're travelling

to Marsa Alam, you need to travel the first part of the trip with the Aswan convoy.

All convoys leave Luxor from a road off the Corniche, north of the general hospital and Luxor Museum (Map p125).

CRUISES

The best times of the year for cruising are October/November and April/May. During the high season (October to May), an armada of cruise boats travels the Nile between Aswan and Esna (for Luxor), stopping at Edfu and Kom Ombo en route. You should be able to negotiate a decent discount on the usually high cruise price if you make your way to Esna and deal directly with the boat captains rather than booking through a travel agency. Feluccas can also be organised from Esna, but most travellers prefer to travel the other way (Aswan to Luxor), as this is how the current runs. See p142 for more information.

SERVICE TAXI

The service taxi station (Map p125) is on a street off Sharia al-Karnak, a couple of blocks inland from the Luxor Museum, but because of police restrictions you will have to take an entire car and go in convoy, which means paying about E£300 for Hurghada and E£200 for Aswan. Be at the taxi stand 30 minutes before the convoy is due to leave.

TRAIN

Luxor's **train station** (Map p125; Midan al-Mahatta) is conveniently located in the centre of town.

Abela Egypt Sleeping Train (☎ 237 2015; www.sleepingtrains.com) services leave at 8.30pm and 9.30pm daily, arriving in Cairo at 5.45am and 6.45am the next morning. The first service travels on to Alexandria. The trip costs US\$53/74 per person one way in a double/single cabin. Children four to nine years old pay US\$40. There are no student discounts and tickets must be paid for in US dollars or euros. The price includes breakfast.

The only other Cairo trains that foreigners are allowed to take are train 981 (E£62/40 in 1st/2nd class), departing at 9.15am; train 1903 (E£67/45), departing at 9.15pm; and train 997 (E£67/45), departing at 11.10pm. The trip takes approximately 10 hours and student discounts are available

on both classes for all three services. All trains have air-conditioning.

Train 981 to Cairo stops at Al-Balyana (for Abydos; E£26/16 in 1st/2nd class, three hours), Asyut (for Tell al-Amarna; E£36/22, four hours) and Minya (for Tell al-Amarna or Beni Hasan; E£49/32, 4½ hours). Be warned that the authorities are not keen on foreigners getting off at these destinations, and usually insist on a tourist police escort for everyone who does.

Foreigners are permitted to take three daily services to Aswan. These are train 996 (E£30/21 in 1st/2nd class), leaving at 7.15am; train 1902 (E£30/21), leaving at 9.30am; and train 980 (E£26/16), departing at 5pm. The trip takes three hours and a student discount is available on tickets for both classes.

All three of the Aswan trains stop at Esna (E£14/12 in 1st/2nd class, 45 minutes), Edfu (E£19/15, 1½ hours) and Kom Ombo (E£25/18, 2½ hours).

There's a train from Luxor to Al-Kharga every Thursday (E£11/10.25 in 2nd/3rd class, seven hours) at 6am or 7am, depending on the time of year.

Getting Around

TO/FROM THE AIRPORT

Luxor International Airport (☎ 237 4655) is 7km east of town. A taxi will cost around E£25 to East Bank destinations and E£50 to West Bank destinations. There are no buses between the airport and town.

CALÈCHE

For about E£20 per hour you can get around town by *calèche*. Rates are subject to haggling, squabbling and – occasionally – screaming. You can usually bargain a short trip down to E£5. When the time to pay arrives, drivers have been known to demand 'Nubian pounds', which – surprise, surprise – they maintain are worth more than Egyptian pounds. Tell them where they can park their carriages (you get the picture...) if they try this scam on you.

FERRY & BOAT

Regular *baladi* (municipal) ferries carry passengers between the East and West Banks. You'll find the East Bank stop down a flight of stone stairs in front of the Luxor Temple, and the West Bank stop in front

(to the left) of the dusty car park where the pick-ups congregate. A ticket costs E£1 each way. Private launches charge E£5 each way for the same trip.

PICK-UP

On the West Bank, colourful pick-up trucks shuttle passengers from the ferry dock to various destinations for 25pt. To catch one, flag it down from the side of the street; when you want to alight, push the bell on the inside of the partition between the driver and passengers. You can also hire one of these as a private taxi for E£5.

NORTH OF LUXOR

Dendara

دندرة

☎ 096

The wonderfully preserved **Temple of Hathor** (adult/student E£30/15; ☎ 7am-6pm), at her cult site of Dendara, is one of the most impressive temples in Egypt. Built at the very end of the Pharaonic period, its main building is still virtually intact, with a great stone roof and columns, dark chambers, underground crypts and twisting staircases, all carved with hieroglyphs. Hathor, the goddess of pleasure and love, is figured on the 24 columns of the Outer Hypostyle Hall, and on the walls are scenes of Roman emperors as pharaohs. The views from the roof are magnificent.

Dendara is 4km southwest of Qena on the west side of the Nile. It's an easy day trip from Luxor.

The tourist police in the Nile Valley do everything possible to discourage independent travel to Dendara, preferring travellers to take a day cruise from Luxor, or to travel by taxi or tour bus in the daily 8am and 2pm convoys. A taxi from Luxor costs E£100 to E£130 return; to Dendara and Abydos it will cost E£225 to E£250. If you decide to try your luck getting here under your own steam, your best bet is the bus to Qena, and a taxi from there to the site. You'll have to put up with a tourist police escort. See p134 for details.

The Novotel Hotel's **M/S Le Lotus** (☎ 238 0925; h1083@accor-hotels.com; adult/child E£260/130) cruises to Dendara each day during the winter tourist season. Tickets include lunch and entry fees. *Le Lotus* also sometimes offers a dinner cruise. Contact the company for further details.

SOUTH OF LUXOR

Esna

أسنا

The hypostyle hall, with its 24 columns still supporting a roof, is all that remains of the **Temple of Khnum** (adult/student E£15/10; ☎ 6am-4pm winter, 6am-5pm summer), constructed by Egypt's Ptolemaic rulers. Dedicated to the ram-headed creator god who fashioned humankind on his potter's wheel using Nile clay, its pillars are decorated with hieroglyphic accounts of the temple rituals.

Trains running between Luxor and Aswan stop here (see p135 and p142), but the station is on the opposite side of the Nile, making a visit in this way complicated. It's much easier to take a day tour or travel in a private taxi (E£100 return) in the 7am daily convoy from Luxor.

Edfu

أدفو

The attraction in this town, 53km south of Esna, is the **Temple of Horus** (adult/student E£50/25; ☎ 6am-4pm winter, 6am-5pm summer), the most completely preserved Egyptian temple in Egypt. Built by the Ptolemies, it was one of the last great Egyptian attempts at monument building on the grand scale, and was dedicated to the falcon-headed son of Osiris. It took about 200 years to complete. Excavation of the temple from beneath the sand, rubble and structures that had been built on its roof was conducted by Auguste Mariette in the mid-19th century.

Trains running between Luxor and Aswan stop here (p135 and p142); the station is approximately 4km from the temple. Pick-up trucks travel between the station and town for E£5 (for the whole truck). Again, it's easier to take a day tour or travel in a private taxi (E£130 to E£150 return) in the 7am daily convoy from Luxor.

Kom Ombo

كوم أومبو

The dual **Temple of Sobek & Haroeris** (adult/student E£30/15; ☎ 6am-4pm winter, 6am-5pm summer) is dedicated to the local crocodile god and the falcon-headed sky god, respectively. One of the most spectacularly sited temples in the country, it stands on a promontory at a bend in the Nile near the village of Kom Ombo. In ancient times sacred crocodiles basked in the sun on the river bank here.

Kom Ombo is closer to Aswan than to Luxor. If you're travelling from Luxor you can stop here on the train (p135) and catch

a pick-up from the station to the town (25pt), and then another from the town to the boat landing near the temple (25pt, 4km). If you're coming from Aswan you can catch the train (p142) or bus (p142). The easiest way to visit is to take a day tour or travel by private taxi in the morning convoys between Luxor and Aswan. A return taxi from Luxor to Edfu and Kom Ombo costs E£225 to E£250.

ASWAN

أسوان

☎ 097 / pop 241,000

Egypt's southernmost city sits on the banks of a particularly beautiful stretch of the Nile. Here, the river's dark blue water is fringed by dense palms, gentle hills of sand rise in the background and flocks of local feluccas are ever present. This is Egypt at its most photogenic, the stuff of picture books and postcards galore.

Orientation

The train station (Map p138) is at the northern end of town, three blocks east of the river. The bus station is a few kilometres further north. The lively souq (Sharia as-Souq) runs south from the square in front of the train station, parallel to the Corniche, which is home to banks, restaurants, shops and most of the public utilities. The southern end of the Corniche is marked by the distinctive form of the Archangel Michael Coptic Orthodox Cathedral, and is where you'll find the Nubia Museum and a number of the city's better hotels.

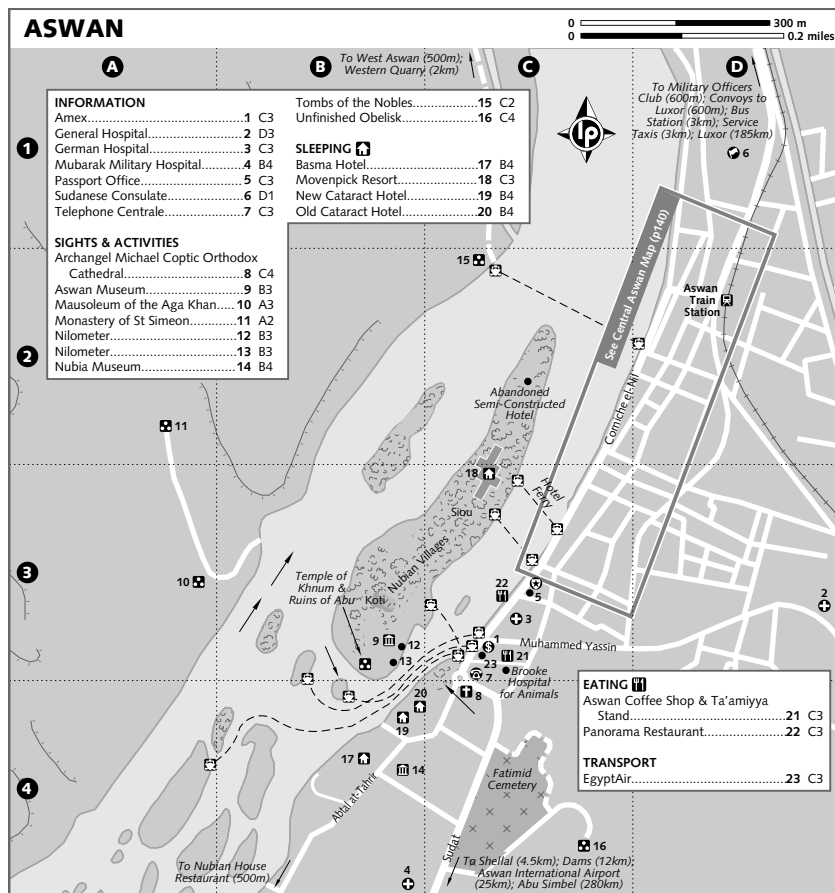
Information

INTERNET ACCESS

Aswan Internet Cafe (Map p140; ☎ 231 4472; Corniche el-Nil; per hr E£10; ☎ 9am-midnight) In the oddly shaped El-Tagdiffe (Rowing) Club building on the Corniche. **Aswanet** (Map p140; ☎ 231 7332; Keylany Hotel; per hr E£10; ☎ 9am-1am)

MONEY

The main banks all have branches on the Corniche; there are ATMs at the Banque Misr, Banque du Caire and the National Bank of Egypt. Banque Misr has a **foreign-exchange booth** (☎ 8am-3pm & 5-8pm) beside its main building. **Amex** (Map p138; ☎ 230 6983; Corniche el-Nil; ☎ 9am-5pm) and **Thomas Cook** (Map p140; ☎ 304 011; Corniche el-Nil; ☎ 8am-2pm & 5-9pm) also have offices here. Both cash travellers



cheques and will sell US dollars if they have them in stock. There's an Egypt Exchange office (Map p140) on the Corniche.

POST

Main post office (Map p140; Corniche el-Nil; ☎ 8am-2pm Sat-Thu) Next to the Rowing Club.

TELEPHONE

Telephone centrale (Map p138; Corniche el-Nil; ☎ 24hr) You can make international calls from this office, located towards the southern end of town, just past the EgyptAir office.

TOURIST INFORMATION

Main tourist office (Map p140; ☎ 231 2811; Midan al-Mahatta; ☎ 8am-3pm & 6-8pm) Next to the train station.

Tourist office (☎ 232 3297; ☎ 8am-3pm) On a side street one block in from the West Bank ferry landing.

VISA EXTENSIONS

Passport office (Map p138; ☎ 8.30am-1pm Sat-Thu) On the 1st floor of the police building on the Corniche.

Sights

NUBIA MUSEUM

This fascinating **museum** (Map p138; Sharia Abtal at-Tahrir; adult/student E£50/25; ☎ 9am-1pm & 5-9pm) showcases the history, art and culture of Nubia from prehistoric times to the present day. The impressive and well-labelled collection is housed in a building that has been designed to reference traditional Nubian architecture. Make sure you have a look at

the 'Nubia Submerged' exhibition, which includes photographs of Philae, Abu Simbel and Kalabsha before they were resited. The entrance is opposite the Basma Hotel, a 15-minute walk from the town centre.

UNFINISHED OBELISK

This huge discarded **obelisk** (Map p138; adult/student E£30/15; ☎ 7am-5pm winter, 8am-6pm summer) lies southeast of the Fatimid Cemetery, on the edge of the northern granite quarries that supplied the ancient Egyptians with most of the hard stone used in pyramids and temples. Three sides of the shaft, which is nearly 42m long, were completed, except for the inscriptions; it would have been the largest single piece of stone ever handled if a flaw had not appeared in the granite. Private taxis will charge E£5 to bring you here from the centre of town.

ELEPHANTINE ISLAND

The ruins of the ancient town of Yebu and two impressive **Nilometers** (Map p138) lie at the southern end of this island, within the grounds of the small and decidedly underwhelming **Aswan Museum** (Map p138; adult/student E£20/10; ☎ 8am-5pm winter, 8.30am-6pm summer). If you're keen to visit the museum or the two small Nubian villages on the island (and to be frank, we're not sure it's worth the effort), go down the stairs opposite the telephone centrale or the Thomas Cook office and wait on the pontoon landing for one of the regular ferries (E£1). Note that women sit up front, men at the back.

ASWAN BOTANICAL GARDEN

Lord Kitchener turned this island into a verdant **botanical garden** (Map p138; admission E£10; ☎ 8am-5pm winter, 8am-6pm summer) and you can admire the product of his labours today. You'll need to hire a boat or felucca to get here.

MONASTERY OF ST SIMEON

To reach this well-preserved, 6th-century mud-brick Coptic Christian **monastery** (Map p138; adult/student E£20/10; ☎ 7am-4pm winter, 8am-5pm summer), it's a half-hour hike from the felucca dock near the Mausoleum of the Aga Khan. If you decide to take a camel or donkey instead of walking, bargain hard – a return trip with a 45-minute waiting period should cost no more than E£30.

TOMBS OF THE NOBLES

A few of the Old and Middle Kingdom **tombs** (Map p138; adult/student E£20/10; ☎ 8am-4pm winter, 8am-5pm summer) of local dignitaries are worth exploring.

Activities

No visit to Aswan would be complete without at least an hour spent sailing around the islands in a felucca. Late afternoon is probably the best time of day to do this. The official government price for hiring a felucca capable of seating one to eight people is E£25 per hour, but with a bit of bargaining you should be able to hire a boat for three hours for about E£60 – enough time to sail to Seheyl Island and back.

Sleeping

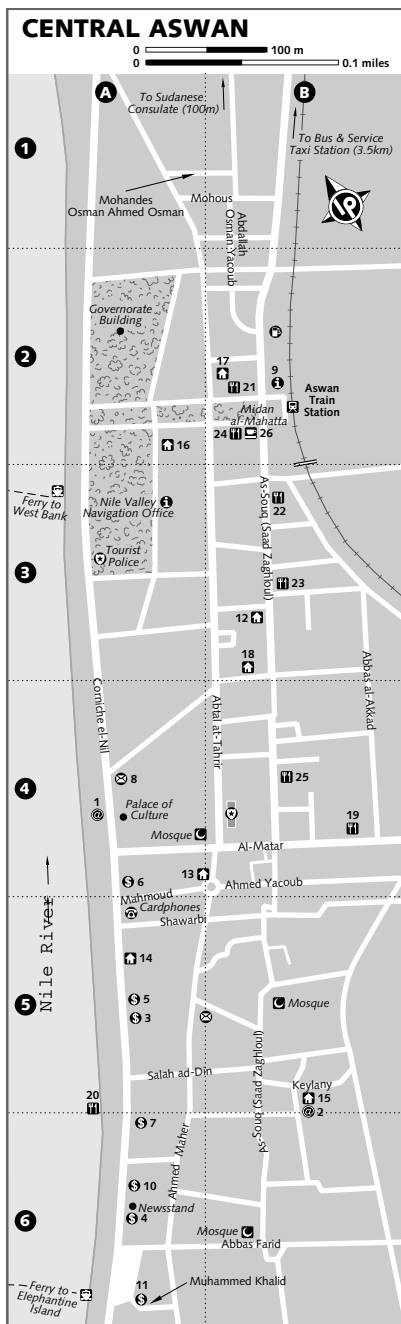
Be warned that hotels in the centre of town, particularly those on the Corniche, can be noisy at night.

BUDGET

Keylany Hotel (Map p140; ☎ /fax 231 7332; www.keylanyhotel.com; Sharia Keylany; s/d E£50/70; ☎) The best budget option in town, this place is noteworthy for its extremely professional staff and its delicious breakfasts (filter coffee, fresh juice and pancakes). Rooms are freshly painted and very clean; all have private bathrooms. The owner is planning to add a pool, a Jacuzzi and new Nile-view rooms, so prices may rise.

Nuba Nile Hotel (Map p140; ☎ 231 3267; hamdi_ahmed@hotmail.com; s/d E£50/70; ☎) This clean and comfortable place is a short walk from the train station, next to a popular *ahwa*. Rooms have tiny private bathrooms; most have air-con and a few have 'honeymoon' (king-sized) beds. Some rooms have no windows, others have balconies overlooking the street. The friendly owner has plans to put a pool and coffee shop upstairs in the future.

Nubian Oasis Hotel (Map p140; ☎ 231 2123/6; nubianoasis_hotel_aswan@hotmail.com; Sharia as-Souq; s/d E£20/25; ☎) When we visited this popular backpacker haunt, threadbare carpets, grotty bathrooms and lumpy beds featured. We've since heard that the place has been refurbished, which is good news. There's a terrace café where you can relax over a Stella (E£7), free Internet access, and air-con and private bathrooms in all rooms.



Hathor Hotel (Map p140; ☎ 231 4223; fax 230 3462; Corniche el-Nil; s/d E£35/55; 🏠 🚿 📺) A slightly grubby place on the Corniche, Hathor has a friendlier feel than neighbouring Horus Hotel, but is nowhere near as nice as Keylany. There's a tiny pool and outdoor furniture on the rooftop. Most rooms have air-con; all have cramped private bathrooms.

Happi Hotel (Map p140; ☎ 231 4115; fax 230 7572; Sharia Abtal at-Tahrir; s/d E£50/70; 🏠 🚿 📺) If you can ignore the spectacularly rude reception staff, the Happi comes close to living up to its name, offering clean rooms with private bathrooms and satellite TV. Guests have free use of the pool at the Cleopatra Hotel.

MIDRANGE & TOP END

Marhaba Palace Hotel (Map p140; ☎ 233 0102; marhabaaswan@yahoo.com; Corniche el-Nil; s/d US\$50/60; 🏠 🚿 📺) Aswan's dearth of decent midrange hotels means any new place is good news, but the Marhaba overshadows the competition. Rooms are small but well appointed, with comfortable beds, tasteful décor, luxurious bathrooms and satellite TV. Bright and welcoming, it has two restaurants, friendly staff and a roof terrace with excellent Nile views. Recommended.

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Cleopatra Hotel (Map p140; ☎ 231 4001; fax 231 4002; Sharia as-Souq; s/d US\$32/45; 🏠 🚿 📺) This attractive hotel in the souq is one of Aswan's few real midrange hotels. It has friendly staff, and clean rooms with satellite TV and private bathrooms. The best feature is its small rooftop pool.

Basma Hotel (Map p138; ☎ 231 0901; basma@rocketmail.com; Sharia Abtal at-Tahrir; s/d US\$108/141; 🏠 🚿 📺) An extremely comfortable four-star place, opposite the Nubia Museum. Basma has a nice garden and pool, and some good Nile views, especially from the terrace rooms at the end of the building. Breakfast costs E£27.

New Cataract Hotel (Map p138; ☎ 231 6000/1; h1666@accor.com; Sharia Abtal at-Tahrir; s/d US\$96/124, with Nile view US\$124/149; 🏠 🚿 📺) If you're keen to share the views and amenities of the Old Cataract but don't have the budget, its modern, adjoining neighbour may be worth considering. Usually full of tour groups, it offers 144 large rooms, half of which have Nile views. Ask for one on the 7th or 8th floor. Breakfast, which is obligatory, costs an extra E£41.

Movenpick Resort (Map p138; ☎ 230 3455; www.movenpick-aswan.com; s/d US\$183/236; 🏠 🚿 📺) This five-star resort on Elephantine Island is a great place for a relaxing Egyptian break. Rooms are large and comfortable, and all have a balcony with Nile views. Resort facilities are impressive – an enormous pool, tennis courts, and a spa and health club with well-equipped gym. A free 24-hour ferry shuttles guests between the island and the Corniche. Breakfast costs E£37.

Old Cataract Hotel (Map p138; ☎ 231 6000; www.softel.com; Sharia Abtal at-Tahrir; r US\$168-1500; 🏠 🚿 📺) This world-famous hotel is where Agatha Christie wrote and where presidents and potentates have watched the Nile flow by. It offers fabulous views and great Moorish architecture. If you decide to stay here, it's worth paying extra for a deluxe room with a balcony overlooking the Nile (US\$265).

Eating

The most popular snack stand in town is next to the Aswan Coffee Shop (Map p138), in the street housing the Brook Hospital for Animals. It's opposite a public oven and uses freshly baked bread in its ta'amiyya sandwiches. For good, cheap fiteer, try the fiteer stand (Map p140) on the southern

side of Midan al-Mahatta, opposite Biti Pizza. For kushari, try the kushari store (Map p140) with the couple of outdoor tables on Sharia as-Souq, just around the corner from Sharia al-Matar.

Nubian House Restaurant (☎ 232 6226; meze E£4-5, mains E£7-20) The afternoon views of the First Cataract from the terrace of this friendly place are utterly breathtaking and shouldn't be missed. As well as serving authentic Nubian dishes, it is very welcoming to guests who choose to linger over a tea (E£4) and a *sheesha* (E£3). The only downside to a visit is the presence of tour groups, which often book out the tables with the best views. To get here, follow the road from the Basma Hotel and veer right after 15 minutes, when it comes to a fork past a development of upmarket housing. There's no street lighting at all, so don't attempt the walk at night – catch a taxi. Not to be confused with the far less impressive Nubian House on Elephantine Island.

Panorama Restaurant (Map p138; ☎ 231 6108; Corniche el-Nil; mains E£8-15) Our favourite of the Nile-side terrace restaurants, the Panorama serves up a delicious fish *tagen* (E£15) as well as offering a wide range of herbal and medicinal teas (E£2). Pristine toilets, a laid-back feel, all-day breakfasts and great views over to Elephantine Island are added bonuses.

Al-Masry Restaurant (Map p140; ☎ 230 2576; Sharia al-Matar; meals around E£25) A local institution, Al-Masry produces tasty kebabs and *kofta*, served with bread, salad and tahini.

Biti Pizza (Map p140; Midan al-Mahatta; pizzas E£20; 🍷 24hr) A good but pricey pizza joint, Biti serves up Egyptian- and Italian-style pizzas in refreshingly clean surroundings. Sitting on the roof terrace and watching the frenetic goings-on in the square below is great fun.

El Madena (Map p140; Sharia as-Souq) This unpretentious place in the souq serves a meal of *kofta*, tahini, rice, bread and salad for E£20, and a vegetarian meal for E£12.

Aswan Moon Restaurant (Map p140; ☎ 231 6108; Corniche el-Nil; meze E£4-9, mains E£12-30) A panto with brightly coloured awnings and views over to Elephantine, this popular place serves up lacklustre food to hoards of tourists. The pizzas (E£17 to E£23) are unimpressive, but the *daood basha* (meatballs in a tomato sauce, E£10) is quite tasty. Stella (E£8) is served. This is one of the

best places in town to meet up with felucca captains.

Chief Khalil (Map p140; ☎ 231 0142; Sharia as-Souq; meals £25-50; ☺) This tiny but popular seafood restaurant grills delicious fresh fish from Lake Nasser and the Red Sea over coals and serves it up with salads, and rice or french fries.

Drinking

Old Cataract Hotel (Map p138; ☎ 8am-11pm) Enjoying tea or an aperitif on the Nile-side terrace at the Old Cataract is on many a traveller's 'must-do' list. The hotel discourages an inundation of tourists by charging £55 per person for this privilege, which goes towards the price of afternoon tea (£43 to £55), a Stella (£17), open sandwiches (££24 to ££29) or a cappuccino (££9).

Nubian House Restaurant (☎ 232 6226) The most atmospheric tea-and-*sheesha* spot in town.

The cafés (Map p140) on the busy corner of Midan al-Mahatta and Sharia as-Souq are great places to linger over a honey-drenched baklava and a glass of tea.

Getting There & Away

AIR

EgyptAir (Map p138; ☎ 231 5000; Corniche el-Nil; ☎ 8am-8pm) offers six flights between Aswan and the Egyptian capital (££1037 one way, 1½ hours). The one-way hop to Luxor is ££364 (30 minutes) and leaves daily at 9am. A service taxi between the airport and the centre of town costs ££1.

BOAT TO SUDAN

See p664 for details of the weekly ferry to Wadi Halfa.

BUS

The new bus station is north of the town centre. A taxi to the town centre (including the hotels near the Nubia Museum) will cost ££5; a seat in one of the regular service taxis costs 50pt. Buses leave for Cairo (££85, 13 hours) at 3.30pm. There are 6am, 8am, 12.30pm, 2pm, 3.30pm and 5pm services to Luxor (££15, four to five hours) via Kom Ombo and Esna. To Suez (££85, 13 hours) buses leave at 6am, 8am, 3.30pm and 5pm, travelling via Hurghada (££45, seven hours). There is one 6.30am service to Marsa Alam (££15, six hours).

CONVOY

It is compulsory for foreigners to travel between Luxor and Aswan by convoy, and the nine checkpoints along the way mean that it is impossible to get around this rule. Two daily convoys leave Aswan from the front of the Military Officers Club near the bus station. The 8am convoy travels via Esna, Edfu and Kom Ombo, allowing stops at each of these sites. The 1.30pm convoy travels direct to Luxor and only allows one brief toilet stop en route. The trip to Luxor takes three hours. From Luxor, the convoy continues to Hurghada.

See p144 for details of the daily convoys to Abu Simbel.

FELUCCA

Aswan is the best place to arrange overnight felucca trips because even if the winds fail, the Nile's strong currents will propel you north. The most popular trips are to Kom Ombo (one night, two days) or Edfu (two nights, three days), but some people go on to Esna (three nights, four days).

Prices are usually based on six people travelling on the felucca; if there are fewer passengers the price per person will be higher. The standard cost is ££31.50 per person to Kom Ombo, ££56.50 to Edfu and ££62.50 to Esna. Feluccas rarely travel all the way to Luxor, as winds are hard to catch on the final Esna-Luxor stretch. All passengers must pay an extra ££5 per person for a permit, plus the cost of food and drink supplies.

SERVICE TAXI

At the time of writing, the police in Aswan were forbidding foreigners from taking service taxis between Aswan and Luxor, often turning them back at the checkpoint just north of town. As with all such directives, people do get around the rules, but in general it's better to take the bus or train, or else get a group of people together and hire a private taxi. A taxi to Luxor will cost between ££150 to ££200; ££200 to ££250 if you stop at Kom Ombo, Edfu and Esna en route.

TRAIN

Air-conditioned tourist trains to Cairo (££77 to ££81 in 1st class, ££43 to ££47 in 2nd class, 13 hours) via Luxor (££26 to ££30 in

1st class, ££16 to ££21 in 2nd class, three hours) leave at 6am, 6pm and 8pm. Tickets can be booked in advance. A student discount is available on tickets for both classes.

All three of these trains stop at Kom Ombo (££15/12 in 1st/2nd class, 45 minutes), Edfu (££19/10, 1¼ hours) and Esna (££22/14, 2½ hours).

Abela Egypt Sleeping Train (☎ 230 2124; www.sleepingtrains.com) services leave at 5pm and 6.30pm, arriving in Cairo at 5.45am and 6.45am the next morning. The first service travels on to Alexandria. Tickets cost US\$53/74 per person one way in a double/single cabin. Children four to nine years old pay US\$40. There are no student discounts and tickets must be paid for in US dollars or euros. The price includes a basic dinner and breakfast.

Getting Around

TO/FROM THE AIRPORT

Aswan International Airport (☎ 248 0333) lies about 25km southwest of town; the taxi fare into town should be no more than ££25.

CALÈCHE

A *calèche* trip along the Corniche will cost ££10.

TAXI

A 3½-hour taxi tour to the Temple of Philae, High Dam and Unfinished Obelisk costs around ££30. A taxi anywhere within town costs ££5.

AROUND ASWAN

Philae (Aglikia Island)

معبد فيله

South of Aswan and relocated to another island to save it from being flooded during the building of the High Dam in the 1960s, the **Temple of Philae** (adult/student ££50/25; ☎ 7am-4pm winter, 7am-5pm summer) was dedicated to Isis, who found the heart of her slain brother, Osiris, on Philae Island (now submerged). Most of the temple was built by the Ptolemaic dynasty and the Romans. Early Christians later turned the hypostyle hall into a chapel.

Tickets are purchased from the small office before the boat landing at Shella, south of the Old Dam. You'll pay ££25 (maximum) for a taxi to bring you here, wait for an hour or so and then bring you back to town. You'll need to negotiate a price for

a boat to take you between the ticket box and the island – the captains have formed a cartel, so it's very hard indeed to organise a return trip for less than ££30 to ££35 per boat, particularly at night.

A nightly **sound-and-light show** (☎ 230 5376; admission ££55), lasting 1½ hours, is held at the temple. Though there is officially no student discount, we have seen ISIC holders negotiate tickets for ££44. Check with the tourist office in Aswan for performance times and languages.

Abu Simbel

أبو سمبل

☎ 097

Ramses II, never one to do things by half, surpassed even himself when he caused the magnificent **Great Temple of Abu Simbel** (☎ 400 325; adult/student ££70/35; ☎ 5am-5pm winter, 5am-6pm summer) to be carved out of a mountainside. The temple was dedicated to the gods Ra-Harakhty, Amun, Ptah and the deified pharaoh himself. Guarding the entrance, the four famous colossal statues of Ramses II sit majestically, each more than 20m tall, with smaller statues of the pharaoh's mother, Queen Tuya, his beloved wife, Nefertari, and some of their children.

The other temple at the Abu Simbel complex is the rock-cut **Temple of Hathor**, fronted by six massive 10m-high standing statues. Four represent Ramses and the other two Nefertari. Both temples were moved out of the way of the rising waters of Lake Nasser in the 1960s and relocated here.

Sound-and-light shows (££60) are performed here each night. The tourist office in Aswan has the latest schedule.

There are banks in town, but no ATMs. You can eat at the Seti Abu Simbel or at a clutch of ramshackle eateries (including ta'amiyya and shwarma stands) on the main street.

SLEEPING

Abu Simbel Village (☎ /fax 400 092, ☎ 012 363 9794; r££110; ☺) Also known as Hotel Abbas, this is the cheapest option in town. Basic but clean rooms are arranged around a concrete courtyard and come with wheezing air-con units, intermittent hot water and small private bathrooms.

Eskaleh (☎ 012 368 0521; fikrykachif@genevalink.com; s£30-35, d£40-50; ☺) This recently opened cultural centre is housed in a traditionally

constructed mud-brick building and offers comfortable accommodation in five rooms. There's an attractive restaurant-lounge and a roof terrace with views over the lake. Rooms are simple but stylish, with modern tiled bathrooms. The friendly owners serve meals (breakfast/lunch/dinner ££15/30/40) featuring produce grown in their organic vegetable garden and host regular performances of Nubian music and dance.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Most foreigners travel to Abu Simbel in one of the two official daily convoys from Aswan. These leave at 4am and 11am, take 3½ hours to get to the site and allow two hours before returning. No taxis are allowed to travel in the convoy, so your only options are luxury coach (if you're part of a tour group) or cramped minibuses (if you've paid for a tour through one of Aswan's hotels or travel agencies). You'll need to shop around to get the best deal for a day tour – Thomas Cook charges ££240 for a seat on its minibuses; most of the budget hotels in town sell seats for ££50 to ££90. These prices don't include admission costs, but most include stops at the Unfinished Obelisk, High Dam and Philae on the return trip. To pay for your seat on the bus and to see all four sites you'll be looking at a minimum cost of ££190/140 per adult/student for the day, plus food and drink.

The only way to avoid the convoy is to travel on the services offered by the Upper Egypt and El Gouna Bus Cos. These leave from the Aswan bus station at 8am, 9am, 11.30am, 4pm and 5pm, take four hours and cost ££20 one way. Some of these buses are comfortable and offer air-con, others are filthy old rust buckets on wheels; you'll have to rely on the luck of the draw as to which type you get. Officially, a maximum of four foreign tourists are allowed on each of these services, so arrive at the bus station well ahead of time to be sure of getting a seat. Check return times when you purchase your tickets. Bring your passport, as there are two checkpoint stops. In Abu Simbel the buses depart from the front of the Wady El Nile Restaurant on the main street. Tickets are purchased from the conductor.

EgyptAir has two daily flights from Aswan to Abu Simbel (££640 return), leaving at 6.30am and 9am.

WESTERN OASES الواحات الغربية

Forming the northeast section of the great Sahara, the Western (Libyan) Desert starts on the banks of the Nile and continues into Libya, covering 2.8 million sq km. The stark landscape is bizarre and beautiful in equal measure, and the five major oases provide unique pit stops for the growing number of adventurers and travellers making their way here. Asphalt roads link all the oases, four of them in a long loop from Asyut around to Cairo. Siwa, out near the Libyan frontier, is linked to Bahariyya, but permits are needed to use the road. The easiest access is via Marsa Matruh on the Mediterranean coast.

If you want to know more about travelling in this part of Egypt, the best reference is *The Western Desert of Egypt: An Explorer's Handbook* by Cassandra Vivian. This is widely available in Egypt.

KHARGA OASIS الواحات الخرجة

☎ 092

The largest of the oases, Kharga is currently blighted by overexuberant tourist police who stick to foreigners like superglue. It's one of those places that hides many of its treasures under a veneer of provincial insignificance.

The town itself, **Al-Kharga**, is of little interest; its only real tourist attraction is the impressive **Antiquities Museum** (Sharia Gamal Abdel Nasser; adult/student ££20/10; ☎ 9am-4pm), but 2km to the north you'll find the well-preserved **Temple of Hibis** (admission ££10; ☎ 8am-5pm winter, 8am-6pm summer), built in honour of the god Amun by the Persian emperor Darius I. To the east are the remains of the **Temple of An-Nadura**, built by the Romans, and just north is the Coptic **Necropolis of Al-Bagawat**, dating as far back as the 4th century. South of the town are the fortified Roman temples of **Qasr al-Ghueita** and **Qasr az-Zayyan**.

Information

There's a helpful **tourist office** (☎ 792 1206; Midan Nasser; ☎ 8am-3pm, variable evening hr Sat-Thu). The **Banque du Caire** (off Sharia Gamal Abdel Nasser) has an ATM and will change cash and travellers cheques.

Sleeping & Eating

El-Radwan Hotel (☎ 792 9897; s/d ££50/80; ☎) The freshly painted rooms in this budget choice, on the street behind the museum, are quite comfortable, if slightly on the pricey side. All come with air-con and pristine private bathrooms.

El Dar el-Bidaa Hotel (☎ 792 1717; Midan Sho'ala; s/d with shared bathroom ££30/40, with private bathroom ££35/45; ☎) A noisy, dirty and generally depressing place, El Dar el-Bidaa should only be considered by those down to their last few piastres (it's the only low-budget option around). The best rooms come with air-con and satellite TV. No breakfast is served and the hot water shouldn't be counted on.

Kharga Oasis Hotel (☎ 792 1500; Midan Nasser; s/d with fan ££63/88, with air-con ££70/95; ☎) The quiet corridors of this large and perennially empty concrete building are eerily reminiscent of the hotel in Kubrick's *The Shining*. The rooms come with private bathrooms, screened windows and comfortable beds. No scary Jack Nicholson types were spotted. You can camp in the palm-filled garden for ££7.50 per person, but you'll be charged ££25 per group to use a bathroom.

Sol Y Mar Pioneer (☎ 792 7982; www.solymar-hotels.com; Sharia Gamal Abdel Nasser; s/d with half board ££530/701; ☎ ☎ ☎) This ridiculously overpriced option has all the amenities and blandness of a standard international four-star hotel. Dinner here costs ££55 and alcohol is available.

Restaurants are few and far between in Kharga and the best places to eat are the hotels. Otherwise, try Al-Ahram, at the front of the Waha Hotel on Sharia an-Nabawi, which sells cheap roast chicken and salads.

Getting There & Away

It's important to note that the checkpoints at either end of the road between Al-Kharga and Luxor close at 4pm, which means that you must start your trip in either direction before midday.

EgyptAir flights from Cairo to Al-Kharga had been suspended at the time of research due to a lack of demand.

Buses leave from the new bus station behind Midan Basateen. Three buses leave Al-Kharga daily for Cairo (££40 to ££45, eight hours) at 7pm, 9.30pm and 11pm. These travel via Asyut. There are extra services to Asyut (££8, three hours) at 6am, 7am, 11am and 9pm.

Buses to Dakhla (££8, two hours) leave at 11am, 2pm, 11pm, 1am and 3am. The 2pm and 1am buses connect with the 6pm and 6am buses to Farafra, Bahariyya and Cairo (see p146).

There are bus services to Luxor (££35, five hours) on Tuesday and Saturday at 1pm, and on Sunday and Wednesday at 7am.

Minibuses to Asyut and Dakhla cost ££9 and leave from the bus station.

There's a train from Al-Kharga to Luxor every Friday at 6am or 7am, depending on the time of year. The trip takes about

TAKING A DESERT SAFARI

The oases are chock-full of operators eagerly offering camel and 4WD desert safaris. Needless to say, these vary dramatically in terms of cost and quality. A few companies have been running desert treks for years and can be trusted to supply roadworthy vehicles, healthy camels and Bedouin guides who know the desert like the back of their hands, but there are also a fair number of fly-by-night operations that are more interested in making a quick buck than providing a quality service. Before signing up, check vehicles to make sure they're roadworthy, confirm how much food and drink is supplied (and what this will be), ask how long the operators have been conducting safaris, confirm start and end times (some shifty types start late in the afternoon and return early in the morning but charge for full days) and try to get feedback from travellers who have just returned from a trip. If you're planning on exploring remote parts of the desert such as the Gilf Kebir, Oweynat or the Great Sand Sea it is absolutely imperative that you go with an outfit that supplies new 4WDs travelling in convoy, GPS, satellite phones and experienced Bedouin guides. You'll need an official permit for the Great Sand Sea (US\$100, 14 days to process). To give an idea of prices, a one-night camping trip into the White Desert will cost between ££150 and ££400 per person per day, with the average price being ££230. If you're travelling into the remote corners of the desert, you'll be looking at between ££550 and ££650 per day.

seven hours and tickets cost E£11/10.25 in 2nd/3rd class.

DAKHLA OASIS

الواحات الدخلة

092

The verdant and very easy-going oasis of Dakhla contains two small towns, **Mut** and **Al-Qasr**. Mut is the bigger and has most of the hotels and public utilities. The towns' signature, and their unifying element, are their 600 **hot springs** – make sure you investigate a few. Also be sure to visit the remarkable mud-brick citadel at Al-Qasr, which is home to a small **Ethnographic Museum** (admission E£3; ☎ variable). Local guides are happy to take you through the citadel's narrow winding lanes and into its half-hidden buildings in exchange for some bakshesh.

Information

The **tourist office** (☎ 782 1685/6; Sharia as-Sawra al-Khadra; ☎ 8am-3pm) is on Mut's main road. The Abu Mohamed Restaurant, opposite the tourist office, offers **Internet access** (per hr E£10; ☎ 7am-midnight). The **Bank Misr** (Sharia Al-Wadi) in Mut will change cash and travellers cheques and give advances on Visa and MasterCard, but it doesn't have an ATM.

Sleeping

El-Kasr Hotel (☎ 787 6013; Al-Qasr; to sleep on roof E£3, beds E£10) Conveniently located on the main road near the entry to the old town, the friendly El-Kasr is the best backpacker option in town. It has four big, screened rooms with hard beds, narrow balconies and one reasonably clean shared bathroom with hot water from a nearby spring. There's a relaxing roof terrace with great views and a busy downstairs café where you can watch satellite TV, play backgammon, and enjoy a Stella (E£7) and good simple food. Breakfast is included in the room price, and costs E£3 for those sleeping on the roof.

Beir Elgabal Camp (☎ 787 6600; elgabalcamp@hotmail.com; s/d with shared bathroom E£35/70, with private bathroom E£50/100) A clean and very attractive camp located at the foot of a dramatic mountain range, this place is isolated (it's 5km off the main road between Al-Qasr and Mut) and wonderfully peaceful. Run by Bedouin (no English is spoken), it offers a mix of concrete and mud-brick rooms arranged around a grassed courtyard with

palm-shaded seating. All rooms have mosquito nets, soft mattresses and fans. You can pitch a tent and use a bathroom for E£20. Hot water isn't always assured. Dinner costs E£20 and Stella (E£15) is served. **Bedouin Oasis Village** (☎ 782 0070; bedouin_oasis_village@hotmail.com; Mut; s/d with shared bathroom E£30/50, with private bathroom E£50/60; ☎) On the crest of a hill on the main road into Mut, this recently opened and very stylish hotel offers extraordinary value for money. A central mud-brick building houses a restaurant with outdoor terrace; the nearby Fort-style annexe has rooms with screened windows and comfortable beds.

Desert Lodge (☎ 734 5960; www.desertlodge.net; s/d half board US\$45/60; ☎) Crowning a hill near Al-Qasr, this fort-style ecolodge is a wonderful place to stay. The building's design is nearly as impressive as its spectacular setting – the common areas are extremely attractive, the outdoor terraces have theatrical lighting and comfortable seating, and rooms have four-star appointments (no TVs). The lodge has a billiard room, giant outdoor chess set, licensed restaurant, and Bedouin tent for evening *sheeshas*. It offers an array of desert-safari options.

Eating

Ahmed Hamdy's Restaurant (☎ 782 0767; Sharia as-Sawra al-Khadra) Popular with travellers, this restaurant's official name is 'Ahmed Hamdy's Restaurant for Delicious Food' and it lives up to its claim. Hearty set meals of chicken, rice, bread, salad, beans and tea cost a bargain E£16.

Abu Mohamed Restaurant (☎ 782 1431; Sharia as-Sawra al-Khadra; dishes E£8-10) Another excellent main-street eatery, Abu Mohamed has been serving up good-value meals for 18 years. A very large set meal costs E£25 and includes a delicious dessert. Stella costs E£15.

Getting There & Around

All buses leave from near the new mosque on the main square in Mut.

Buses leave at 6am and 6pm travelling to Farafra (E£20, 4½ hours), Bahariyya (E£20, seven hours) and Cairo (E£45, eight to 10 hours).

Buses leave at 7pm and 8.30pm travelling to Al-Kharga (E£10, 2½ hours), Asyut (E£20, six hours) and Cairo (E£50 to E£55, 11 hours).

Three daily services travel to Asyut (E£20 to E£21, six hours) via Al-Kharga (E£10, 2½ hours) at 6am, 8.30am and 10pm.

Service taxis (Peugeots and minibuses) travel to Farafra, Al-Kharga and Asyut for the same ticket costs. All depart from near the new mosque when full.

Local pick-ups depart from near the police station in Mut and travel to Al-Qasr for 75pt.

Abu Mohamed Restaurant hires out bikes for E£10 per day.

FARAFRA OASIS

الواحات فرافرا

092

The smallest and least attractive of the oases, Farafra makes a good setting-off point for trips into the spectacular **White Desert** but isn't worth visiting otherwise. The only tourist attraction in the town is **Badr's Museum** (☎ 751 0091; admission redeemable with any purchase E£5; ☎ 8.30am-sunset), a gallery designed and run by enthusiastic local artist, Badr Abdel Moghny.

Sleeping & Eating

El-Waha (Oasis) Hotel (☎ 751 0040; hamdyhamoud@hotmail.com; s/d with shared bathroom E£15/30, with private bathroom E£20/40) This budget place is basic but bearable. Rooms have screened windows and fans; some have private bathrooms. There's a dirt garden and 'Bedouin-style' meal shack in the rear garden. The smelly shared bathrooms have no hot water. By the time this book hits the shops, the friendly owners should have opened a new place in town called Arabia Safari Camp.

Al-Badawiya Hotel (☎ 751 0060; www.badawiya.com; s/d with private bathroom US\$18/\$26; ☎) The Al-Badawiya is constructed from mud bricks and built around a central courtyard. Rooms are clean and light and have beds sporting pristine linen and filmy mosquito nets. There's a lovely swimming pool with a children's pool and poolside seating. Breakfast costs E£15. The Bedouin owners have years of experience in conducting desert safaris.

Dining choices are limited. The restaurant in the **Al-Badawiya Hotel** (lunch E£35, dinner E£45) serves meals and has a good reputation. You'll find a shack on the main road called Al-Tamawy that serves up tea and stodge at a few tables. Alcohol isn't available in Farafra.

Getting There & Away

Buses travel to Cairo (E£40, seven to nine hours) via Bahariyya (E£20, 2½ hours) daily at 10.30am and 10.30pm. Buses coming from Cairo travel on to Dakhla (E£20, 4½ hours, two daily). Buses leave from outside the shops at the Dakhla end of the main street. Tickets are issued on board.

Occasional minibuses travel to Dakhla and Bahariyya for the same prices.

BAHARIYYA OASIS

الواحات البحرية

011

The hilly oasis of Bahariyya is dotted with palm trees and mineral-rich springs. Buses will bring you to **Bawiti**, the dusty main village. Attractions include the **Temple of Alexander**, 26th-dynasty tombs at **Qarat Qasr Salim** and the 10 famous Graeco-Roman **Golden Mummies** on show near the **Antiquities Inspectorate Ticket Office** (admission to 6 local antiquities sites E£30; ☎ 8.30am-4pm), just south of the main road in Bawiti.

Information

The **tourist office** (☎ 847 3039; Main St, Bawiti; ☎ 8am-2pm & 7-9pm Sat-Thu) is on the roundabout on the right-hand side of the main road coming from Cairo. When we visited, the staff had closed for the day to take tourists on a safari, so take the opening hours with a grain of salt. There are two small grocery stores, a small bookshop and a phone office in the main group of shops, which you'll find around the Western Desert Hotel. The **National Bank of Development** (☎ 8am-2pm Sun-Thu), in the first street on the right after the tourist office, will change money, but not travellers cheques.

Sleeping & Eating

Ahmed's Safari Camp (☎/fax 847 2090; ahmed_safari@hotmail.com; camping per person E£10, huts per person E£10, s/d with private bathroom E£40/80, with air-con & private bathroom E£70/100; ☎) This popular travellers' haunt is 4km outside Bawiti, on the road to Farafra; you'll need your own transport to get here. It's got almost as many facilities as Bawiti itself, with a 24-hour restaurant, farm and kitchen garden, safari company, bakery, and swimming pool fed by a hot spring. There is a range of accommodation options, all of which are basic and only just clean enough to pass muster. Dinner costs E£10 and a

Stella will set you back the same amount. Genial owner Abd Elrahem is a font of local knowledge and runs popular desert safaris.

Alpenblick Hotel (☎ 847 2184; alpenblick@hotmail.com; Bawiti; s ££45, d with shared/private bathroom ££60/90) The 30-year-old Alpenblick is notable for its bizarre concrete architecture and its attractive courtyard garden. Though simple, rooms are clean and light, with screened windows and fans.

Paradise Hotel (☎ 847 2600; Main St, Bawiti; tr per person ££10) We can't imagine a more inappropriate name for this squalid place. It's the cheapest place around, but we guarantee that you'll commence a meaningful and protracted relationship with a dermatologist if you sleep in the filthy beds here. Breakfast costs an extra ££5.

Western Desert Hotel (☎ 847 1600; www.westerndeserthotel.com; Bawiti; s/d US\$17/25; 🍷 📺) A new and very clean midrange hotel, opposite the Popular Restaurant in the centre of town, this place has a pleasant roof terrace and a restaurant serving home-style Egyptian dishes. Eighteen rooms have white walls, balconies and private bathrooms; some have air-con and all have fans.

International Hot Springs Hotel (☎ 847 3014; www.whitedeserttours.com; s/d with half board US\$45/70; 🍷 📺) It may not be the most attractive hotel in the Western Desert, but this professionally run place, 1km outside Bawiti on the Cairo Rd in the shadow of Black Mountain, is undoubtedly one of the best. The spring that gives the hotel its name is in a private sheltered courtyard and is extremely hot – wonderful for relaxing after a hard day in the desert. Chalet rooms feature comfortable beds, private bathrooms, fans and screened windows. A restaurant serves excellent food and alcohol. Owner Peter Wirth is an old Western Desert hand and organises pricey but highly regarded tours throughout the area and further afield. Highly recommended.

Food options are limited to the hotels, a basic cafeteria near the petrol station or the town's one restaurant, **Popular Restaurant** (☎ 847 2239; set meal ££20; 🍷 5am-midnight). The decent set meal here comprises soup, roast chicken, rice, pickles, salad, vegetable dishes and bread. Beer is available.

Getting There & Away

Buses travel to Cairo (££20, four hours) daily at 1pm and 1am.

Heading to Farafra (££20, two hours) or Dakhla (££30, five hours) you can pick up one of the buses from Cairo. These leave from the front of the Paradise Hotel opposite the Upper Egypt Bus Co ticket office on the main road.

Occasional minibuses travel to Farafra and Cairo for the same ticket costs.

See p150 for information about permits for travel between Bahariyya and Siwa.

SIWA OASIS

الواحات سيوه

☎ 046

With its donkey-slow pace of life and distinctive Berber culture, Siwa offers the traveller a unique Egyptian experience. Cut off from the rest of the country for centuries – an asphalt road to the coast was only constructed in the 1980s – it retains a detached, almost mystical, air and is considered by many to be the most beautiful of all the oases.

Information

To the north of the main square you'll find a branch of the **Banque du Caire** (📞 8.30am-2pm & 5-8pm) with ATM, as well as a post office and a helpful **tourist office** (📞 9am-5pm Sat-Thu). **El Negma Internet Centre** (☎ 460 0761; per hr ££10; 📞 9am-midnight) is near the Fortress of Shali.

Sights & Activities

Apart from date-palm groves, Siwa's major attractions include a couple of **springs** where you can swim, the remains of the **temple of Amun** and some Graeco-Roman **tombs**. The town centre is marked by the jagged remnants of the medieval mud-brick **Fortress of Shali**. At the edge of town are the towering dunes of the **Great Sand Sea**.

There are innumerable safari companies in Siwa, most of which charge around ££80 per person to visit Abu Shufuf, ££100 to visit the Great Sand Sea and ££120 for an overnight camping trip to White Mountain and Lubbaq Oasis. You can hire **sand boards** at the Nour el-Wahaa Restaurant.

Several shops around town sell local crafts, such as basketware and jewellery, but the quality is pretty disappointing. The local dates and olives on sale throughout town are delicious.

Women need to be very careful if wandering alone among the palm groves or bathing in the springs. There have been a number of reports of assaults.

Sleeping

Make sure your hotel room has screened windows – the mosquitoes in Siwa are extremely vicious.

Palm Trees Hotel (☎ 460 1703; salahali2@yahoo.com; s/d with shared bathroom ££15/25, d with private bathroom ££35) Just off the main square, this popular but knocked-around backpacker place has rooms with grotty bathrooms, screened windows and fans. The hotel's redeeming feature is the shady, palm-filled garden at the rear. Single women wouldn't feel comfortable here. Breakfast is extra (around ££5).

Yousef Hotel (☎ 460 0678; s/d with shared bathroom ££8/16, with private bathroom ££10/20) Smack in the centre of town, this long-standing backpacker favourite offers very simple and reasonably clean rooms. Front rooms have balconies and all windows are screened. The hotel doesn't provide breakfast.

Kilany Hotel (☎ 460 1052; zaitsafari@yahoo.com; d ££50) The Kilany has 10 small twin rooms with screened windows (some with balcony), fans and private bathrooms. There's a roof terrace overlooking the palm groves and fortress. Its position near the mosque and on the main street means that noise can be a problem. Breakfast costs an extra ££10.

Shali Lodge (☎ 460 1299; info@eqi.com.eg; Sharia el-Seboukha; s/d ££200/260; 🍷) Siwa's only boutique hotel is an absolutely charming place to stay. A tiny but beautiful mud-brick building in a lush palm grove a couple of hundred metres from the main square, it offers eight large suite-style rooms with satellite TV, screened windows and private bathrooms. Reservations are necessary and breakfast costs an extra ££12 or so. Recommended.

Eating

No alcohol is served in Siwan restaurants. There are cheap chicken-and-salad joints on the central market square, including Elahrar Chicken Restaurant, which has been recommended by travellers.

Abdo Restaurant (☎ 460 1243; 📞 8.30am-midnight) The type of place that is beloved by backpackers, Abdo is unusual in that it is equally popular with locals. The food is both good and well priced – try the vegetable couscous (££10) or the half chicken and salad (££13); we'd suggest avoiding the fiteer and the meat dishes. A fresh lemon juice costs ££4, tea is ££2 and breakfast pancakes are ££6.

Sahara Café & Restaurant (Sharia Batoukhi; salads ££1.50-3, mains ££4.50-11) This sprawling and highly attractive garden restaurant is on the road to the bus office. It offers a limited and very cheap array of mezze, kebabs, fuul and omelettes. We visited twice – the first time to be comprehensively ignored, the second time only to be told that the cook hadn't turned up to work. Hmm.

Nour el-Wahaa Restaurant (☎ 460 0293; dishes ££5-15) In the palm groves near the Shali Lodge hotel, this attractive garden restaurant is a great place to relax over a *sheesha* (££4.50) and mint tea (££3). It serves up an array of simple Egyptian dishes including molokhiyya (stewed leaf soup, ££5), lentils with rice (££7) or half a roast chicken (££16). Breakfast here costs ££3 to ££5.

Kenooz Siwa (☎ 460 1299; Shali Lodge, Sharia el-Seboukha; dips ££5, pastas ££10-15, pizzas ££10-20, mains ££20) The setting on a rooftop among the palms next to Shali Lodge is fabulous, but when we visited the food was absolutely inedible. The only reason we list the place is that locals have told us that our experience wasn't representative, and that the food is usually the best in town.

There are several places dotted around the square where you can have a *sheesha* or a cup of coffee and play some backgammon. Bakri's Café, next to Abdo Restaurant, is one of the most popular.

Getting There & Around

There's no bus station in Siwa. When you arrive, you'll be left off the bus in the central market square. To purchase tickets to Marsa Matruh or Alexandria you'll need to visit the West Delta Bus Co office at the southern end of town, near the Sports Centre. To get there walk down Sharia Sadat past the mosque and the Cleopatra Hotel. The road divides just past the mosque; take the right fork and you'll soon come to a residential block of apartments, which is part of a housing estate, on the right-hand side of the street. Look for the ground floor window with a blue shutter – this is the ticket office. It's sensible to buy your ticket ahead of time, as buses are often full. You can board from here, or from the central market square.

There are three daily buses to Alexandria (££27, eight hours), stopping at Marsa Matruh (££12, four hours). These services

leave at 7am, 10am and 10pm. The 7am and 10am buses connect with buses to Cairo at Marsa Matruh (1½-hour transit). There is an additional daily service to Marsa Matruh at 1pm.

Microbuses going to Marsa Matruh leave from the main square near the King Fuad Mosque. They are more frequent but not as comfortable as the West Delta Bus Co bus. Tickets cost the same.

Although there is a road linking the oases of Siwa and Bahariyya, no public transport travels along it. Some 4WD owners in town will take you if you can manage the hefty prices they charge (approximately ££1300, 10 hours). At present the road is in an appalling state, but it is due to be fully asphalted by the end of 2006, meaning that many more people will use it. To get a permit to drive to Bahariyya (US\$10 per person), contact the tourist office. This can take quite a while, as it must be processed in Cairo.

A trip on a donkey cart within town costs ££5. You can hire bone-rattling bikes on the main square or in a shop near Palm Trees Hotel for ££10 per day.

SUEZ CANAL

قناة السويس

The Suez Canal severs Africa from Asia and links the Mediterranean with the Red Sea. It's an extraordinary sight to see the super-tankers appear to glide through the desert as they ply its waters. One of the greatest feats of modern engineering, the canal opened in 1869 and remains one of the world's busiest shipping routes.

PORT SAID بور سعيد

☎ 066 / pop 539,000

Like many port cities, Port Said has a slightly seedy but undeniable charm. Its grand but faded New Orleans-style wooden buildings hint at its prosperous past, and its long and bustling Corniche attests to the fact that its locals enjoy life and enjoy sharing it with the thousands of Egyptians who come here for summer holidays.

The town is effectively built as an island, connected to the mainland by a bridge to the south and a causeway to the west.

Information

Most financial services are on Sharia al-Gomhuriyya. The Banque du Caire and the National Bank of Egypt have ATMs, and the **Thomas Cook** (☎ 322 7559; ☎ 8am-4.30pm), next to the petrol station will change travellers cheques. The main **American Express Bank** (☎ 9am-2pm & 6.30-8pm Sun-Thu) is on Sharia Palestine near the tourist office, and there's another one on Sharia Gomhuriyya, opposite the mosque; both have ATMs.

Compu.Net (per hr ££3; ☎ 9am-midnight) Just opposite the main post office.

Main post office (☎ 8.30am-2.30pm) Opposite Ferial Gardens, one block north of Sharia al-Gomhuriyya.

Telephone centrales (☎ 24hr) One is on Sharia Palestine two blocks northwest of the tourist office; the other is behind the governorate building.

Tourist office (☎ 323 5289; 8 Sharia Palestine; ☎ 9am-6pm Sat-Thu, 9am-2pm Fri) This helpful office supplies maps.

Sights & Activities

The **National Museum** (☎ 323 7419), at the top end of Sharia Palestine, was closed for renovation at the time of research. The small **Military Museum** (☎ 322 4657; Sharia 23rd of July; admission ££5; ☎ 9am-4pm Fri-Wed, 9am-10pm Thu, closed for Fri prayers) has some interesting relics from the 1956 Anglo-French War, and the 1967 and 1973 wars with Israel.

The easiest way to explore the canal is to take the free public ferry from near the tourist office across to Port Fuad and back.

Sleeping

Youth Hostel (☎ 322 8702; port-said-y.h@hotmail.com; Sharia 23rd of July; dm HI members/nonmembers ££13.25/15.25, f per person ££30.25; ☎ ☎) You'll find this enormous, friendly hostel opposite the stadium, just near the public beach at the end of the New Corniche. Though it's mainly geared towards school groups, there are large and ridiculously pricey family rooms that come complete with private bathroom and air-con. Dorms are worn but clean.

Hotel de la Poste (☎ /fax 322 4048; 42 Sharia al-Gomhuriyya; s/d ££39/49; ☎) The owners of this faded but elegant hotel make a real effort to keep it clean and well maintained, and it's undoubtedly the best-value option in town. Freshly painted rooms are comfortable, and some offer satellite TV, private bathrooms and air-con. You can buy breakfast in the

popular downstairs patisserie. Rooms with balconies cost slightly more.

Sonesta (☎ 332 5511; sonesta@iec.egnet.net; s/d city view US\$137/186, canal view US\$186/230; ☎ ☎) This excellent four-star choice is wonderfully positioned right at the entrance to the canal, and its poolside terrace café is a fabulous spot from which to watch the ships make their majestic passage through the water. Rooms have the usual business-hotel amenities, and the hotel has an English pub and Egyptian and Italian restaurants. Breakfast costs US\$5.

Eating & Drinking

There's a swathe of fast-food joints on the New Corniche up from the Helnan Port Said hotel. This is also where most of the night-time action is.

El-Borg (☎ 332 3442; New Corniche; meals ££25-50; ☎ 10am-3am) This cavernous place is located at the top end of the New Corniche, a 30-minute walk from the roundabout, and offers up the best seafood in town. The waiter will show you the display of the day's catch so that you can make your choice, and it will then be served with a large, very tasty array of side dishes, as well as a small *muhlabiyaya* (a combination of ground rice, milk, sugar and rose or orange water, topped with chopped pistachios and almonds) for dessert. Credit cards are accepted.

Pizza Pino (☎ 323 9949; cnr Sharias 23rd of July & al-Gomhuriyya; pasta ££7-22, pizza ££11-25) Port Said's version of Pizza Express, this bright and friendly place overlooking the seashell fountain serves good food, fresh juice and a wide range of ice-cream sundaes in an interior sporting the colours of the Italian flag. It offers kids' meals and accepts credit cards.

There's a popular terrace *ahwa* at the front of the Grand Albatross Building on the New Corniche where locals linger over *sheeshas*.

Getting There & Away

BOAT

For details of boats from Port Said to Cyprus and Israel, see p664 and p177.

BUS

The bus station is 3km from the centre of town.

Two companies travel to Cairo: East Delta Bus Co has buses (££13.50 to ££16,

three hours) hourly between 6am and 10pm. Superjet buses (££17, three hours) leave hourly between 7am and 8pm.

To Alexandria, East Delta Bus Co has services (££20 to ££22, four hours) at 7am, 11am, 3.30pm and 7pm. Superjet has a bus (££22, four hours) departing every day except Friday at 3.30pm or 4.30pm.

There are buses to Ismailia (££4 to ££5.50, one hour) on the hour between 6am and 6pm, and services to Suez (££10.50, three hours) at 10am and 3.30pm. A daily 5pm bus travels to Luxor (££60) via Hurghada (££45).

A taxi from the bus station into town costs ££5. Taxis within town cost ££2.

SERVICE TAXI

These leave from an area in the bus station. Fares include Cairo (££15), Qantara (££5), Ismailia (££7) and Suez (££10).

TRAIN

Slow and uncomfortable trains to Cairo leave daily at 5.30am, 9.45am, 1pm, 5.30pm and 7.30pm (££14 to ££18 in 2nd class, five hours).

SUEZ

☎ 062 / pop 488,000

Watching the constant procession of massive cargo ships and tankers make their way in and out of the canal is surprisingly hypnotic. Many travellers, discovering in themselves a strange and hitherto submerged fascination with this maritime equivalent of trainspotting, end up extending by a day or two what was originally intended as only a transit stop en route between Cairo and the Sinai peninsula. Consider yourself warned.

The town is in two parts: Suez proper and Port Tawfiq, at the mouth of the canal. There's nothing to do other than watch the maritime traffic.

Information

There are ATMs at the National Bank of Egypt and Banque Misr on Sharia Saad Zaghloul, and at the Commercial International Bank, opposite the entrance to the Corniche.

CACE (Sharia al-Geish; per hr ££2; ☎ 9am-8pm) Internet access. Has branches near Midan Nesima and next to the Green House Hotel.

Main post office (Sharia Hoda Shaarawi) In Suez.

السويس

Telephone centrale (Sharia Saad Zaghloul) In Suez.
Tourist office (☎ 333 1141; 🕒 8am-8pm Sat-Thu, 8am-3pm Fri) The extremely helpful tourist office in Port Tawfiq overlooks the canal.

Sleeping

All hotels are fully booked during the month of the haj.

Sina Hotel (☎ 333 4181; Sharia Bank Misr, Suez; s/d with shared bathroom E£23/35, d with private bathroom E£45; 🛏) A slightly grubby place that's very popular with Egyptian tourists, the Sina has certainly seen better days. Beds are hard and though some rooms have air-con, we're not convinced it works. It's located smack-bang in the centre of Suez and is surrounded by shops and cheap eateries. No breakfast is served.

Arafat Hotel (☎ 333 8355; 7 Sharia Arafat, Port Tawfiq; s/d with shared bathroom E£27/34, with private bathroom E£33/43) This quiet place offers basic but clean rooms with fans, satellite TV and extremely hard beds. A few rooms have private bathrooms and balconies. Little English is spoken and no breakfast is available.

Red Sea Hotel (☎ 333 4302; www.redseahotel.com; 13 Sharia Riad, Port Tawfiq; s/d with city view E£271/332, with canal view E£313/374; 🛏) A very good three-star hotel that's popular with international mariners, the Red Sea offers spotlessly clean rooms with satellite TV and air-con; half of these have balconies overlooking the canal. The 6th-floor restaurant has a panoramic view and serves decent fresh seafood meals (E£25 to E£40).

Eating & Drinking

The main cheap-eats area is in the street between the Al-Khalifa Fish Centre and the White House Hotel, off Sharia as-Salaam. The best of these is probably **Koshary Palace** (Sharia Saad Zaghloul, Suez; meals E£1.50-5), just around the corner from the Al-Khalifa Fish Centre.

Pizza Pronto (☎ 330 4443; Sharia as-Salaam; pizzas E£7-22) Locals dote on the pizzas served at this welcoming fast-food outlet. It's in the main drag, opposite the White House Hotel.

Al-Khalifa Fish Centre (☎ 333 7303; Sharia as-Salaam; salads E£1.50-2, mains E£15-35; 🛏) A no-nonsense place that sells the day's catch by weight and then cooks it according to your preference. You'll find it close by the White House Hotel – look for the big glass windows and fishy décor.

Safsafa Seafood Restaurant (☎ 366 0474; mains around E£18-48; 🛏) You can choose between the air-conditioned dining room and the outdoor tent at this popular eatery. It serves up fresh seafood and a wide range of pastas (E£10 to E£30). There's no view, but locals rate the food highly. You'll find it at the end of the Corniche, opposite the stadium.

Alf Lila Italian Restaurant & Coffee Shop (Sharia al-Marwa; dishes E£5-25) One of several cafés in Port Tawfiq, this is a decent spot to while away a few hours sipping a drink or puffing on a *sheesha*, and watching ships on the canal.

Getting There & Away

BOAT
 For details of international boats from Suez, see p664.

BUS

The New Bus Station is 5km from central Suez, on the road to Cairo. Arriving by bus, it's possible to get off before the bus station at the highway on the edge of the centre. Taxis (E£10) and minibuses (50pt to E£1) congregate here to take passengers into the centre of town or Port Tawfiq – it's cheaper than going all the way to the bus station. A taxi between the New Bus Station and Suez costs E£15.

Upper Egypt Bus Co buses to Cairo (E£8, 1½ hours) leave every 15 minutes from 6am to 9pm. Four services travel to Alexandria (E£25, three to four hours) at 7am, 9am, 2.30pm and 5pm. To Hurghada (E£33 to E£40, four to five hours), buses depart almost every hour from 5am to 11pm. Services to Luxor (E£46 to E£55, seven to eight hours) via Safaga (E£35 to E£43) and Qena (E£43 to E£50) depart at 8am, 2pm and 8pm. Buses to Aswan (E£54 to E£62, 11 to 12 hours) leave at 5am, 11am and 5pm. There are two services to Qena via Hurghada and Safaga at 6am and 6.30pm. Buses leave at 10am and 2.30pm for Al-Quseir (E£40, seven hours).

East Delta Bus Co services to Ismailia (E£5, 1½ hours) depart every 30 minutes between 6am and 4pm. There are five buses to Port Said (E£10, 2¼ hours) at 7am, 9am, 11am, 12.15pm and 3.30pm.

East Delta Bus Co buses travel along the direct route down the Gulf of Suez to Sharm el-Sheikh (E£30, 5½ hours) at 8.30am,

11am, 1.30pm, 3pm, 4.30pm, 5.15pm and 6pm. The 11am bus goes on to Dahab (E£35, 6½ hours) and Nuweiba (E£35, 7½ hours). Two extra services travel to Nuweiba (E£35) at 3pm and 5pm. To Taba, (E£35) there is a bus at 3pm via Dahab and a direct service at 5pm. A bus leaves for St Katherine's Monastery (E£25, five hours) via Wadi Feiran at 2pm.

MICROBUS & TAXI

Small blue minibuses travel between Port Tawfiq and Suez (50pt). A taxi will cost E£3 to E£5.

SERVICE TAXI

Minibuses and clapped-out taxis depart from beside the bus station to Cairo (E£7), Ismailia (E£5), Port Said (E£10) and Nuweiba (E£30). There is an occasional service to Hurghada (E£30). To get to Sharm el-Sheikh you'll need to travel to Al-Tor (E£16) and catch an onward service.

TRAIN

Six trains depart for Cairo (E£3.50/1.25 in 2nd/3rd class, 2¼ hours) daily between 5.45am and 9.25pm, but they only make it as far as Ain Shams, 10km northeast of central Cairo. There is also one daily slow train (E£5.50) to Cairo's Ramses train station at 3.20pm.

RED SEA COAST

ساحل البحر الأحمر

Stretching from Suez in the north to the disputed border with Sudan in the south, the once-idyllic Red Sea Coast is suffering from the curse of unfettered overdevelopment. The coast around its main city, Hurghada, is the Egyptian version of Spain's Costa del Sol, full of package tourists from eastern and central Europe, and afflicted with the ugliest construction projects you could possibly imagine. Up till now, the villages of Al-Quseir and Marsa Alam have avoided the same fate, and offered a welcome refuge to those interested in world-class diving or in getting away from the tourist madness. Unfortunately, recent developments hint that this might change, with the rash of resorts to the north starting to spread down

south. If you are keen to explore the area before this happens, contact **Red Sea Desert Adventures** (☎ 012 399 3860; www.redseadesertadventures.com; Marsa Shagra), a highly recommended safari outfit offering tailored walking, camel and jeep safaris, or **Shagara Eco-Lodge** (in Cairo ☎ 02-337 1833; www.redsea-divingsafari.com; Marsa Shagra; d in tents/huts/chalets full board US\$88/100/125), a simple place offering first-rate diving.

HURGHADA

☎ 065 / pop 96,000

It's incumbent on travel writers to tell it like it really is, and to this end we've vowed to spare no punches when describing this ever-sprawling tourist enclave on the Red Sea Coast. The Egyptian Tourist Authority might see it as the jewel in Egypt's crown, the place where 'the sun always shines, every day', but we see it differently. In short, if there's a holiday hell on earth, Hurghada is it. Visit at your peril and avoid it if you can.

Little more than 20 years ago, Hurghada (an anglicised version of its Arabic name Al-Gharadaka) had two hotels separated by nothing more than virgin beach. Once an isolated and modest fishing village, it's now home to more than 96,000 people – most of them drunk package tourists – and is crammed with hundreds of tacky and environmentally disastrous resorts, overpriced souvenir shops and money-grubbing con men. Even its once-glorious coral reefs have been degraded. This is tourism gone terribly, terribly wrong.

Orientation

Most budget hotels are in the main town area, Ad-Dahar. This is at the northern end of the stretch of resorts that makes up the whole area. A main road connects Ad-Dahar with Sigala, where the town's port is. South of Sigala, a road winds 15km down along the coast through the glitzy 'resort strip', which is the town's upmarket tourism enclave.

Information

Most banks in Hurghada have ATMs.
El Baroudy Internet (Sharia Sheikh Sabak, Ad-Dahar; per hr E£4; 🕒 24hr; 🛏)
Express.Net (☎ 012 316 2770; per hr E£12; 🕒 noon-midnight) In Kotta's West Side Mall on the resort strip.
Main post office (Sharia an-Nasr) Towards the southern end of Ad-Dahar.

Oznet (Sharia Sheraton; per hr E£5; ☎ 24hr) Opposite the Seagull Resort in Sigala.

Telephone centrale (Sharia an-Nasr; ☎ 24hr) Further northwest from the main post office, along the same road.

Thomas Cook Ad-Dahar (☎ 354 1870/1; Sharia an-Nasr; ☎ 9am-2pm & 6-10pm); resort strip (☎ 344 6830; ☎ 9am-5pm); Sigala (☎ 344 3338; Sharia Sheraton; ☎ 9am-3pm & 4-10pm) Changes travellers cheques.

Tourist office (☎ 344 4421; ☎ 8am-8pm) On the resort strip.

Activities

There's nothing to do in Hurghada itself other than sit on a beach and wish you were elsewhere. Besides the less-than-appealing **public beach** in Sigala, the main option for enjoying sand and sea is to go to one of the resorts, most of which charge nonguests between E£20 and E£60 for beach access.

If you decide to go diving or snorkelling, there are innumerable operators. We've heard good things about the following:

Dive Too (☎ 340 8414; www.divetoo.net; Seagull Resort, Sharia Sheraton, Sigala)

Easy Divers (☎ 354 7816; www.easydivers-redsea.com; Triton Empire Beach Hotel, Corniche, Ad-Dahar)

Red Sea Scuba Schools/Emperor Divers (☎ 344 4854; www.emperordivers.com; Hilton Hurghada Resort, good resort strip)

Sleeping

AD-DAHAR

Al-Arosa Hotel (☎ 354 8434; elarosahotel@yahoo.com; s/d US\$25/40; ☎ ☎) This faded but spotless place, off the Corniche, has views to the sea in the distance and offers air-con rooms with private bathrooms, satellite TV and sea-facing balconies. There's a roof garden serving Stella (E£10) and an indoor pool.

Snafer Hotel (☎ /fax 354 0260; s/d E£55/85; ☎ ☎) A friendly place, behind the National Hospital off Sharia Sayyed al-Qorayem, offering clean and large rooms. Some have balconies and views to the water.

SIGALA

Royal City Hotel (☎ 344 7729; fax 344 7195; s/d E£80/120; ☎ ☎) It doesn't have too many frills, but this long-running option, near the port off Sharia Sheraton, charges reasonable prices for its clean, freshly painted rooms. All come with private bathroom, satellite TV and comfortable bed.

Zak Royal Wings Hotel (☎ 344 6012; www.zakhotel.com; Sharia al-Hadaba; s/d US\$21/32; ☎ ☎) This

small, good-value place is next to Papas Bar and offers clean rooms clustered around a pool.

RESORT STRIP

Giftun Beach Resort (☎ 346 3040; www.giftunbeachresort.com; s/d all-inclusive US\$52/81; ☎ ☎ ☎) If you're keen on sampling the full resort-hotel shebang at a reasonable price, this is a good option. It offers pleasant chalet-style rooms, a popular diving centre and excellent windsurfing facilities (from E£25 per hour).

Oberoï Sahl Hasheesh (☎ 344 0777; www.oberoïhotels.com; Sahl Hasheesh; ste from US\$310; ☎ ☎ ☎) This utterly indulgent hotel features stunning suites decorated in minimalist Moorish style that come complete with sunken marble baths, walled private courtyards, and panoramic sea views. Some even have private pools.

Eating

AD-DAHAR

Cheap eateries include **Pizza Tarboush** (☎ 354 8456; Sharia Abdel Aziz Mustafa; pizzas E£10-20), on the edge of the souq, and **Taibeën** (☎ 354 7260; Sharia Soliman Mazhar; dishes E£3-15), which serves up good kebabs and *kofta*.

Portofino (☎ 354 6250; Sharia Sayyed al-Qorayem; ☎ ☎) An old-fashioned trattoria serving up generous homemade pasta and meat dishes to a constant stream of tourists. The food is good (the local salad, *insalata baladi*, was fabulous), and it's made from fresh local ingredients. With its very clean toilets and three-course set menus of E£26.50 or E£34.50, it's one of Hurghada's best eating options. Stella is E£8.

SIGALA

The best cheap eats are found in Sharia Sheery, off Sharia Sheraton in Sigala, close to McDonald's.

Abu Khadigah (☎ 344 3768; Sharia Sheraton; meals E£3-15) This no-frills place is known for its *kofta*, stuffed cabbage leaves and other Egyptian staples.

Moby Dick (Sharia Sheraton; ☎ noon-2am; ☎ ☎) Once you've recovered from the shock of finding a faux-Austrian chalet in the middle of Sigala, this laid-back place is sure to appeal. Dine under the bougainvillea-laden trellis or in the pleasant and very clean air-conditioned dining room. The

lentil soup (E£6) is excellent, and though the rest of the dishes are on the bland side, they're better and a lot cheaper than those you'll find elsewhere. A spaghetti bolognese or napoli costs E£8 to E£10. Stella is E£6.

Rossi Restaurant (☎ 344 7676; Sharia Sheraton; mains E£17-50) This popular hang-out for divers and expat residents serves a variety of pizza toppings on crispy crusts, as well as pasta dishes. The service is laid-back, and women on their own can relax without being hassled.

RESORT STRIP

Felfela Restaurant (☎ 344 2410/1; Sharia Sheraton; dishes E£10-60; ☎ 8.30am-midnight) Perched on the coastline and overlooking the turquoise sea, this branch of the Felfela chain wins a prize for its view, which you can enjoy while dining on serviceable Egyptian classics at reasonable prices. If you're on a tight budget, be prepared for the extra charges (bread E£1 per piece).

Shanghai Chinese Restaurant (☎ 012 239 6840; Esplanada Bay Mall; mains E£30-40; ☎ ☎) About as stylish as Hurghada comes, the Shanghai manages to transcend its mall location with a minimalist interior and sea-fronting terrace. BBQ fish with ginger (E£35) and a glass of wine (E£18) almost made us forget we were trapped in holiday hellsville.

Drinking

Papas Bar (www.papasbar.com; Sharia Sheraton) This popular, Dutch-run place is attached to Rossi Restaurant in Sigala. Filled with diving instructors and other foreign residents, it has a great atmosphere most nights. The same management team runs the equally popular Liquid Lounge and Papas II. All three places feature a constantly changing entertainment programme – watch for the flyers around town, or check the website.

Look out for information about the Chill, a popular and laid-back bar that was about to be re-housed when we visited town.

If you can overlook the affront of its misspelt name, the Shakespear Coffee Shop, on the *midan* at the end of Sharia Soliman Mazhar, is a good spot to enjoy a tea and *sheesha*.

The El-Arabi Coffee Shop, situated opposite Seagull Resort, is a popular local tea- and *sheesha* spot.

Getting There & Away

AIR

Hurghada International Airport (☎ 344 2592) is located 6km southwest of town. **EgyptAir** (☎ 344 3592/3; resort strip) has daily flights to Cairo (E£740 one way). There are no buses between the airport and town; a taxi costs somewhere between E£10 and E£20.

BOAT

A luxury high-speed ferry operated by **International Fast Ferries Co** (☎ 344 7571; www.internationalfastferries.com; one way adult E£250 or US\$40, child 3-12 half price) plies the waters of the Red Sea between Hurghada and Sharm el-Sheikh, departing at 5am each Monday and 8am each Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday from the port in Sigala. The trip takes 1½ hours, but can be cancelled or take longer when seas are rough (particularly in January and February). There is no student discount on tickets.

It's sensible to buy a ticket ahead of time, preferably the day before the trip, and you'll need to make your way to the ticket box at the harbour at least 30 minutes before the official departure time so as to obtain a boarding pass. You'll find the ticket office in the Fantasia building opposite the Hurghada Touristic Port entrance. The rate of the dollar against the Egyptian pound and the whim of the ferry officials determine which currency you'll need to use to purchase the ticket. Come prepared with dollars, as they're not available at banks in Hurghada, but be prepared to convert them to pounds.

For details of boats to Duba in Saudi Arabia see p664.

BUS

Three bus companies operate services from Hurghada.

Superjet's bus station is near the main mosque in Ad-Dahar. It offers services to Cairo (E£55 to E£57, six hours) at noon, 2pm, 5pm and midnight; and a 2.30pm service to Alexandria (E£83, nine hours).

The Upper Egypt Bus Co bus station is at the southern end of Ad-Dahar. There are 10 daily buses to Cairo (E£55) between 10am and 2am; the 7.30pm service goes on to Alexandria (E£75). There are four buses per day to Luxor (E£30, five hours) at 10am, 1pm, 10.30pm and midnight, all of which travel on to Aswan (E£35 to E£40, seven to eight hours). There's also an occasional

Luxor service (E£30, five hours) at 7.30pm. There are three daily buses to Marsa Alam (E£30, five hours) via Safaga (E£5, one hour) and Al-Quseir (E£20, three hours), leaving at 5am, 3pm and 8pm. To Suez (E£35, four to five hours), buses depart every two hours between 11.30am and midnight.

The newly established El Gouna Bus Co has a bus station next to the Red Sea Hospital on Sharia Al-Nasr in Ad-Dahar. It has 10 daily services to Cairo (E£40 to E£55) between 9am and 3am.

CONVOY

It is officially compulsory for foreigners to travel from Hurghada to Cairo and Luxor by convoy. Although we have met many travellers who have had no problems driving themselves independently to Cairo, it's not possible to dodge the convoy to Luxor (there are 10 checkpoints). The convoys to Cairo leave from the first checkpoint on the road to Cairo in Al-Gouna, 20km outside Hurghada, at 2.30am, 11am and 5pm. Convoys to Luxor depart from Safaga, 53km south of Hurghada, at 7am, 9am and 4pm.

SERVICE TAXI

The service taxi station is near the telephone centrale in Ad-Dahar. Taxis go to Cairo (E£35), Safaga (E£5) Al-Quseir (E£15 to E£20), Marsa Alam (E£20 to E£25) and Suez (E£27). They cannot take you to Luxor or Aswan except on a private basis in a police convoy. With bargaining, it costs about E£200 per vehicle (up to seven passengers) to Luxor.

Getting Around

Local minibuses function as service taxis in Hurghada. These can be hailed from the side of the road. To travel from the resort strip to Sigala costs E£1, and E£2 to Ad-Dahar. The trip between Sigala and Ad-Dahar costs 50pt. A taxi from Sigala to Ad-Dahar or the resort strip costs E£5; it costs E£10 between Ad-Dahar and the resort strip. You'll need to bargain to get these prices.

El Gouna Bus Co operates a more comfortable service (E£5) between Al-Gouna, Ad-Dahar and the end of Sharia Sheraton in Sigala about every half hour, beginning at 9am. You can flag the bus down at any point along the way and pay on board.

AL-QUSEIR

☎ 065 / pop 25,000

Until the 10th century, Al-Quseir was one of the most important exit points for pilgrims travelling to Mecca. Later it became an important entrepôt for Indian spices destined for Europe. These days, its long history and sleepy present lend it a charm absent from Egypt's other Red Sea towns.

There's a 24-hour telephone centrale, a National Bank of Egypt branch (no ATM) and a post office. For Internet access try **Hot Line Internet Café** (Sharia Port Said; per hr E£10; ☎ 9am-3am).

Sights & Activities

You'll find an **Ottoman fortress** (admission E£5; ☎ 9am-5pm), and old coral-block buildings line the waterfront. Mixed in among these are the domed tombs of various saints – mostly pious pilgrims who died en route to or from Mecca.

Arrange diving trips and excursions into the Eastern Desert with **Mazenar Tours** (☎ 333 5247, 012 265 5044; rockyvalleycamp@yahoo.dk; Sharia Port Said), located along the waterfront.

Sleeping & Eating

Sea Princess Hotel (☎ 333 1880; Sharia al-Gomhuriyya; s/tw/tr E£27/44/67) The only shoestring choice in Al-Quseir offers cubicle-like rooms and slightly dodgy shared bathrooms. Breakfast costs E£5 extra.

Al-Quseir Hotel (☎ 333 2301; Sharia Port Said; s/d E£112/157; ☎) This charming hotel has six simple but spacious rooms in a renovated 1920s merchant's house on the seafront. Bathrooms are shared between three rooms, but are large and clean. Sea-facing rooms have good views.

Mövenpick Sirena Beach (☎ 333 2100; www.movenpick-quseir.com; r from US\$200; ☎ ☎ ☎) This low-set, domed ensemble, 7km north of the town centre, is top of the line in Al-Quseir, and one of the best resorts along the coast. There are restaurants, a Subex diving centre and a refreshing absence of the glitz so common in other resort hotels. The hotel management is known for its environmentally conscious approach.

Dining options are limited. There are the usual ta'amiyya and fish joints around the seafront and the bus station. Locals hang out at the **Sahraya Coffeehouse** (Sharia Port Said) on the waterfront, which also serves snacks.

القصر

Diagonally opposite is **Restaurant Marianne** (☎ 333 4386; Sharia Port Said; dishes E£15-50), which serves grilled fish and other simple but filling meals.

Getting There & Around

The bus and service-taxi stations are next to each other, about 1.5km northwest of the Safaga road, and about 3km from the telephone centrale (E£2 to E£3 in a taxi).

BUS

There are daily buses to Cairo (E£57, 11 hours) via Safaga (E£5, two hours) and Hurghada (E£15, three hours), departing at 6am, 7.30am, 9am, 7pm and 8.30pm. The 6am bus continues to Suez (E£40, seven hours). Services to Marsa Alam (E£5, two hours) depart at 5am, 9am, 7pm and 8pm.

MICROBUS

You'll find that minibuses run along Sharia Al-Gomhuriyya from the roundabout near Sea Princess Hotel north to the administrative buildings on the road to Safaga. Some also go to the bus and service taxi stations. Fares are between 50pt and E£1, depending on the distance travelled.

SERVICE TAXI

Destinations include Cairo (E£43), Suez (E£30), Qena (E£20), Hurghada (E£10) and Safaga (E£6). As in Hurghada, you have to hire the entire taxi for the trip to Luxor, Qena or Aswan (all routes via Safaga). Expect to pay from E£250 after negotiating.

MARSA ALAM

☎ 065

If you're keen on diving and/or desert safaris, this little-visited corner of Egypt is sure to appeal.

Marsa Alam itself is not much more than a T-junction where the road from Edfu meets the coastal road. Just south of the junction is a modest collection of shops, a pharmacy, a telephone centrale and a bustling market. The coast to the south and north is sprinkled with resorts.

Activities

Trips to the many fascinating sites of the Eastern Desert can be organised with **Red Sea Desert Adventures** (☎ 012 399 3860; www.redseadesertadventures.com; Marsa Shagra), a highly rec-

مرسى علم

ommended safari outfit offering tailored walking, camel and jeep safaris throughout the area. Camel safaris cost approximately US\$100 per person per day; other prices are available on its website. In order that the necessary permits can be organised for multiday desert safaris, try to book at least one month in advance.

Sleeping & Eating

There is nowhere to stay in Marsa Alam village itself, but along the coast is an ever-expanding array of resorts, plus a handful of simple, diver-oriented 'ecolodges' (diving camps). These usually consist of no-frills reed or stone bungalows with generator-provided electricity and a common area for meals. They are run together with a dive centre, and offer a more down-to-earth alternative to the resort scene. In addition to diving, most of these places can also arrange desert excursions. If you're travelling during the winter and planning to stay in a tent or hut at one of the ecolodges, ask if they provide blankets; if not, it's a good idea to bring a sleeping bag along for warmth.

Shagara Eco-Lodge (in Cairo ☎ 02-337 1833; www.redsea-divingsafari.com; Marsa Shagra; d in tents/huts/chalets full board US\$88/100/125) The best of the camps is Shagara, a simple place owned by lawyer, committed environmentalist and diving enthusiast Hossam Helmi. It offers simple, spotless and comfortable accommodation designed to be as kind to the environment as possible – plus first-rate diving. It's along the main road, 24km north of Marsa Alam.

There are a couple of cafés at the junction of town where you can find ta'amiyya and similar fare, and there's a small supermarket with a modest selection of basics.

Getting There & Away

AIR

Marsa Alam International Airport (☎ 370 0005) is 67km north of Marsa Alam along the Al-Quseir road. There is no public transport, so you'll need to arrange a transfer in advance with your hotel. EgyptAir has indefinitely suspended flights to and from Cairo, and the airport is currently used only by charters.

BUS

There is no bus station in Marsa Alam. For transport to the Nile Valley, wait at the

petrol station in Marsa Alam, or at the T-junction about 1km further along on the Edfu road. Buses from Shalatein pass Marsa Alam en route to Aswan (E£15, six hours), via Edfu (E£12, four hours), at around 7am and 9am daily. Buses to Shalatein (E£20, four hours) come from Hurghada and depart Marsa Alam at around 5am, 7am, noon and 8.30pm.

There are four daily buses to Al-Quseir (E£5, two hours) and Hurghada (E£20, five hours), departing at 5am, 12.30pm, 2.30pm and 5pm. There's a direct bus to Cairo (E£80, 11 to 12 hours).

SINAI

سيناء

A region of extraordinary beauty and great historical significance, Sinai is the most typically 'Egyptian' part of the country. This is no surprise, of course, as it bears the physical and psychological legacies of Israeli occupation from 1967 to 1982. Before this, though, it was the place where Moses received the Ten Commandments, where ancient armies fought and where members of the very proud local Bedouin tribes established their homes. These days, it's the meeting spot of choice for the world's political leaders, a booming package-tour destination and nirvana for the members of the international diving fraternity, who make regular pilgrimages to its superb coral reefs.

In recent years Sinai resorts have been the targets of terrorist bombs. In October 2004 a bomb in Taba, on the border with Israel, killed 34 people; and in July 2005 three bombs in Sharm el-Sheikh and Na'ama Bay claimed 64 lives. Though tourism arrivals were relatively unaffected by the Taba bomb (the notable exception being tourism from Israel), international arrivals immediately dropped as a result of the Sharm el-Sheikh/Na'ama Bay bombings, taking a few months to stabilise.

RAS MOHAMMED NATIONAL PARK

محمية رأس محمد

Declared a **national marine park** (admission per person/vehicle US\$5/5; ☎ 8am-5pm) in 1988, the headland of Ras Mohammed is about 20km west of Sharm el-Sheikh. The waters surrounding the peninsula are considered the jewel in the crown of the Red Sea, and the

park is inundated with more than 50,000 visitors annually, enticed by the prospect of marvelling at some of the world's most spectacular coral-reef ecosystems. Camping permits cost US\$5 per person per night and are available from the visitors centre inside the park, but camping is allowed only in designated areas. Take your passport with you, and remember that it is not possible to go to Ras Mohammed National Park if you only have a Sinai permit in your passport.

You can hire a taxi from Sharm el-Sheikh to bring you here, but expect to pay at least E£150 for the day. If you don't mind company, the easiest option is to join one of the many day tours by jeep or bus from Sharm el-Sheikh and Na'ama Bay, most of which will drop you at the beaches and snorkelling sites. Expect to pay from E£10.

To move around the park you'll need a vehicle. Access is restricted to certain parts of the park and, for conservation reasons, it's forbidden to leave the official tracks.

SHARM EL-SHEIKH & NA'AMA BAY

شرم الشيخ & خليج نعمة

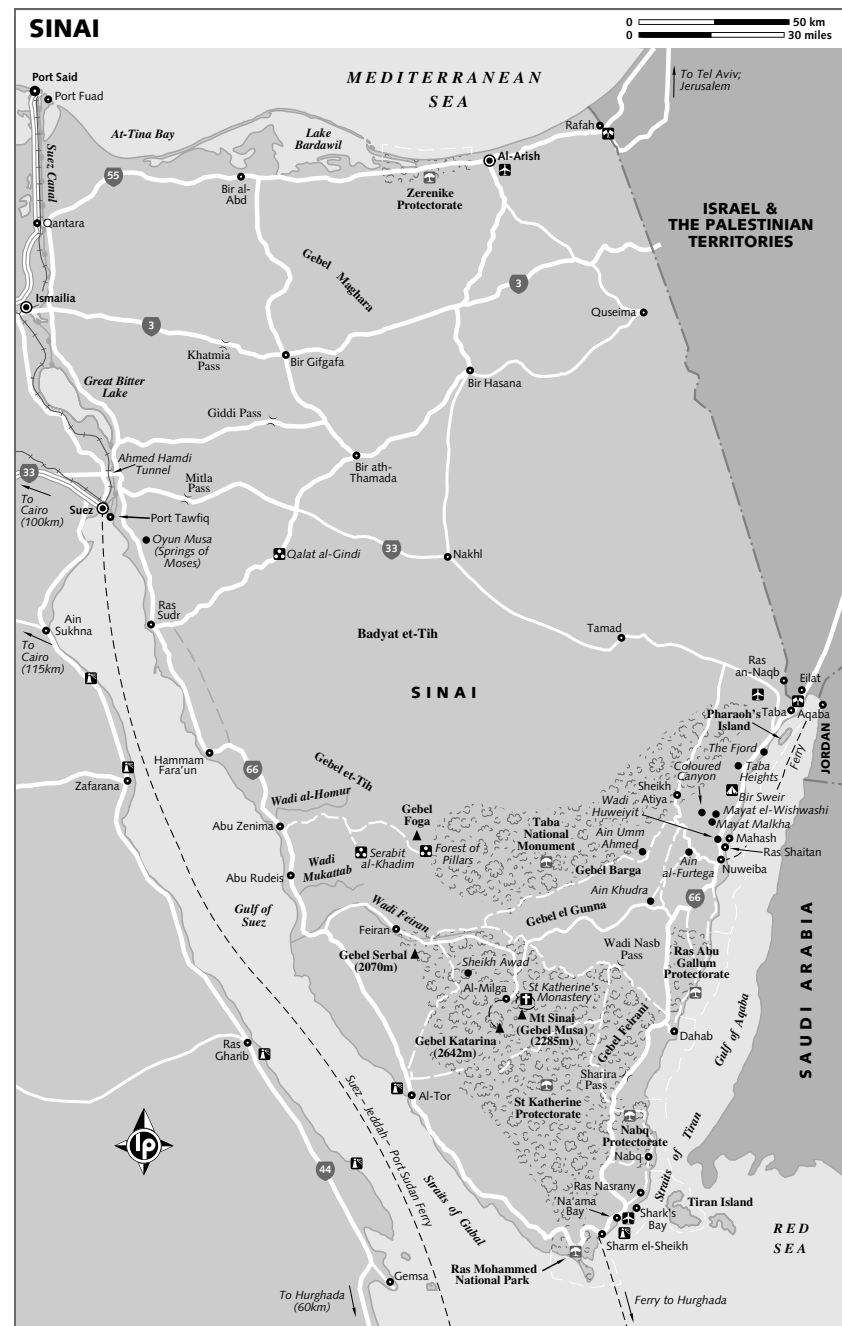
☎ 069

If you want to visit Egypt's version of Vegas, make your way to these settlements on the southern coast of the Gulf of Aqaba. These are the types of places where the gals from *Desperate Housewives* would choose to holiday – full of manicured estates, glitzy malls and overpriced brasseries and hotels. The best advice we can give most independent travellers is to move on as soon as possible, the only caveat being that the diving on offer around here is some of the best in the world.

Na'ama Bay is a throbbing resort that has grown from virtually nothing since the early 1980s, while Sharm el-Sheikh, initially developed by the Israelis, is a long-standing settlement. They are 6km apart, but are joining together with fast-growing, American-style suburban sprawl. Around 12km northeast of Na'ama Bay is Shark's Bay, home to the area's best budget accommodation.

Information

There are ATMs every few metres in Na'ama Bay. Most major banks have branches in Sharm; the National Bank of Egypt and the Banque Misr both have ATMs. **Thomas Cook** (☎ 360 1808; Gafy Mall, Sharm-Na'ama Bay Rd, Na'ama Bay; ☎ 9am-2pm & 6-10pm), near Pigeon's House



hotel in Na'ama Bay, will cash travellers cheques.

The **post office** (Sharm el-Sheikh; ☎ 8am-3pm Sat-Thu) is on the hill. There's a **telephone centrale** (☎ 24hr) nearby.

To access the Internet try **Sharm Phone Net Café** (☎ 366 4725; per hr ££7; ☎ 24hr) in the small mall opposite the Old Market in Sharm; **Speednet Internet Café** (Sharm-Na'ama Bay rd, Sharm el-Sheikh; per hr ££5; ☎ 24hr) in the Delta Sharm complex; or **Yes Business Centre** (per hr ££12; ☎ 11am-1am) between Mall 7 and Avis car hire on the main road in Na'ama Bay.

In Sinai, visa extensions are available only from the passport office in Al-Tor, approximately 90km northwest of here.

Activities

Any of the dive clubs and schools can give you a full rundown of the many underwater possibilities.

Camel Dive Club (☎ 360 0700; www.cameldive.com; Camel Hotel, King of Bahrain St, Na'ama Bay)

Oonas Dive Centre (☎ 360 0581; www.oonasdivers.com; Na'ama Bay)

Red Sea Diving College (☎ 360 0145; www.redsea.college.com; Na'ama Bay)

Sinai Divers (☎ 360 0697; www.sinaidivers.com; Na'ama Bay)

Subex (☎ 360 0122; www.subex.org; Na'ama Bay)

Sleeping

SHARM EL-SHEIKH

Youth Hostel (☎ /fax 366 0317; City Council St, Hadaba; per person member/nonmember ££25/56; ☎) The main attraction here is that it's the cheapest place to stay in the area. Rooms are bland but acceptable; all have private bathrooms. It's up on the hill in Hadaba, near the police station and mosque, and away from the beach.

Amar Sina (☎ 366 2222; www.minasegypt.com; Hadaba; s/d US\$35/40; ☎) In the middle of the new subdivision above Ras Um Sid, this vaguely eccentric place has a garden setting, friendly staff and attractively decorated rooms with domed ceilings, satellite TV, sitting areas and private bathrooms. A health-and-fitness centre, a dive centre and two restaurants are on site. Excellent value.

NA'AMA BAY

Pigeon's House (☎ 360 0996; pigeon@access.com.eg; Sharm-Na'ama Bay Rd, Na'ama Bay; s/d with shared bathroom ££75/95, with private bathroom ££120/170;

☎) This is one of the few budget hotels in Na'ama Bay, which is no doubt why it's often full. Rooms feature nylon sheets, utilitarian décor and hard beds. The more expensive rooms come with private bathrooms, air-con and satellite TV. It's cleanish and has a central courtyard serving meals and drinks.

Camel Hotel (☎ 360 0700; www.cameldive.com; King of Bahrain St, Na'ama Bay; s/d with street view US\$103/126, with pool view US\$120/143; ☎) You'll find this small and well-appointed four-star hotel in the mall at Na'ama Bay. Efficiently run and relatively quiet, it offers five rooms specially equipped for guests in wheelchairs. There are two good restaurants and a popular bar. Rates are discounted if you book in advance by email, which can be done via the hotel's website. Breakfast costs extra.

SHARK'S BAY

Shark's Bay Umbi Diving & Camp (☎ 360 0942; www.sharksbay.com; s/d huts with shared bathroom US\$15/19, cabins with private bathroom & air-con US\$25/37; ☎) This was once a secluded and primitive divers' camp run by a Bedouin family. These days it's the core of an overdeveloped small bay, 6km from Na'ama Bay, where cafés, dive centres and souvenir shops are starting to sprout, and new cabins are being constructed faster than you can say 'paradise lost'. That said, it's still the only truly laid-back camp on this part of the coast. Cliff-top huts and beachside cabins are refreshingly clean, there's 24-hour hot water and the *sheesha* café is a great place to relax at the end of the day. The dive centre is open from 8am to 6pm. A taxi from Na'ama Bay costs ££25; to the port at Sharm, it's ££50. Microbuses to and from Na'ama Bay cost ££3.

Eating
SHARM EL-SHEIKH
King (dishes ££2-7; ☎ from 7am) This clean and popular fuul and ta'amiyya takeaway, in the centre of the market, is worth considering.
Sinai Star (☎ 366 0323; set meals around ££20) The cheapest and best place to grab a seafood meal in Sharm, the Sinai Star has a few outdoor tables, a fondness for Arabic pop and very fresh fish. It's in the Old Market.
Safsafa Restaurant (☎ 366 0474; meals ££10-45) This is probably the most attractive restaurant in the Old Market, and it's popular

with locals. An intimate space filled with a few tables sporting white tablecloths, it serves good fresh seafood (1kg Red Sea fish ££85), as well as seafood pastas (spaghetti with shrimps ££30).

The reasonably priced **Sharm Express Supermarket** (☎ 8am-2am), in front of the Old Market, sells a limited range of toiletries, drinks and food.

NA'AMA BAY

Gado (☎ 24hr) This 'nouvelle Egyptian' fast-food place, at the start of the mall, has a pleasant outdoor terrace and a refreshingly cheap (for Sharm) price list. Felfel sandwiches cost ££1.75, shwarma sandwiches ££7 and fuul ££3.50 to ££4.25. You can also enjoy a tea (££4) and *sheesha* (££5) here.

Tam Tam Oriental Café (☎ 360 0150; mezze ££12, sandwiches ££8-14, mains ££29-66) On the beach strip off the main mall, this place offers a range of Egyptian fare at inflated prices, but its roof terrace is a decent spot to enjoy a *sheesha* (££8) and Stella (££20).

Tandoori Indian Restaurant (☎ 360 0700; mains ££24-110, set menus ££145-185; ☎ 6.30-11.30pm) In a courtyard within the Camel Hotel, Sharm's best Indian restaurant serves up an aromatic array of tandoori and North Indian dishes. It's inevitably full – make sure you book ahead. A Stella costs ££16.

La Rustichella (☎ 360 1154; meals ££35-60; ☎) Off the main strip and scandalously empty considering the quality of its food, this large and friendly trattoria has an outdoor terrace and an air-conditioned dining room and bar (Stella ££12). There's often live jazz to accompany your pasta, pizza or meat dishes. You'll find it on a hilly winding road that runs between the main road and the mall.

Drinking & Entertainment

Popular watering holes include the ubiquitous Hard Rock Café, in the mall at Na'ama Bay; the **Camel Roof Bar** (☎ 360 0700; Camel Hotel, Na'ama Bay); the pricey and very glam **Little Buddha** (☎ 360 1030; Na'ama Bay; ☎ 1pm-3am); and the **Pirates' Bar** (☎ 360 0137; Hilton Fayrouz Village, Na'ama Bay), which has a popular happy hour from 5.30pm to 7.30pm.

If you're keen to go clubbing, the most popular option is **Pacha** (☎ 012 399 5020; www.pachasharm.com; Sanafir Hotel; admission Fri-Wed ££100, Thu ££175; ☎ 10pm-4am), which absolutely heaves on Thursday nights.

THE AUTHOR'S CHOICE

Ristorante & Beach Club El-Fanar (☎ 366 2218; www.elfanar.net; Ras Um Sid; pastas ££35-50, seafood mains ££60-90; ☎ 10.30am-midnight) Imagine yourself relaxing in a place away from Sharm's mall madness. You've ordered a pizza with a perfectly crisp base that's topped with a simple but delectable mix of fresh mozzarella, capers, anchovies and tomato (££40), and you're enjoying this while sipping a chilled glass of white wine (££30) and looking over the Red Sea's turquoise waters. After your meal, you relax over a great espresso (££10) and then, feeling reinvigorated, decide to snorkel in the reef below. After that, it's back to the beach bar and another glass of wine...

Fortunately you can do all of this in the Italian-run El-Fanar beach compound, perched on the edge of a cliff next to the lighthouse in the quiet resort area of Ras Um Sid. Comprising a restaurant, beach bar and beach club (££40 for beach entrance, umbrella, lounge and soft drink), it's a wonderful place to spend the day and watch the sunset. There is even a beach party (admission US\$25, from 11.30am till 3am Wednesday) in summer.

Getting There & Away

AIR

Sharm el-Sheikh International Airport (☎ 360 1140) is about 10km north of Na'ama Bay at Ras Nasrany. **EgyptAir** (☎ 366 1056; Sharm el-Sheikh; ☎ 9am-9pm), at the beginning of the road to Na'ama Bay, has four daily flights to Cairo (££733 one way) and two flights per week to Luxor (Tuesday and Thursday, ££530 one way). Microbuses charge ££2 for the trip between the airport and Na'ama Bay or Sharm el-Sheikh; taxis charge ££20/40.

BOAT

A luxury high-speed ferry operated by **International Fast Ferries Co** (www.internationalfastferries.com; one way adult ££250 or US\$40, child 3-12 half price) runs between Sharm el-Sheikh and Hurghada, departing at 6pm each Saturday, Monday, Tuesday and Thursday from the port west of Sharm el-Maya. The trip takes 1½ hours, but can be cancelled or take longer when seas are rough, particularly in January and February. There is no student

discount on tickets and you need to be at the port one hour ahead of departure time to organise your boarding ticket.

Ferry tickets can be bought from various travel agencies in town. They are also sold at the ferry office at the port on days that the ferry runs, beginning at 4pm (two hours before departure time).

If you're arriving by ferry, don't be pressured into getting one of the overpriced taxis close to the ferry building's exit. If you walk up the hill to where the gates are, you'll be able to pick up a taxi for half the price (E£15 to the bus station, E£25 to Na'ama Bay).

BUS & SERVICE TAXI

The bus station is behind the Mobil Station, halfway between Na'ama Bay and Sharm el-Sheikh. Superjet has services to Cairo (E£68, six hours) at noon, 1pm, 3pm, 7pm, 11pm and 11.30pm. The 3pm service travels on to Alexandria (E£88, nine hours); there's also an East Delta Bus Co service to Alexandria (E£80) at 9pm. East Delta Bus Co has 11 daily services to Cairo (E£55 to E£65, seven hours), starting at 7.30am and ending at midnight. It travels to Suez (E£30, five hours) at 7am, 9am, 10am and 1pm daily.

East Delta Bus Co goes to Dahab (E£11, one hour) at 9am, 2.30pm, 5pm, 8.30pm, 9pm and 12.30am. The 2.30pm and 5pm services go on to Nuweiba (E£21.50, 2½ hours), and the 9am bus then continues all the way to Taba (E£26.50, three to four hours). If enough travellers get off the ferry from Hurghada and want to transfer directly to Dahab, an extra service may be provided. A bus to St Katherine's Monastery (E£28, 3½ hours) departs at 7.30am, but you may have to change at Dahab. To Luxor (E£95, 12 to 15 hours), there's one daily East Delta Bus Co service at 6pm.

Service taxis congregate around the bus station and charge slightly more per ticket than the bus. A private taxi to Dahab will cost around E£150.

Getting Around

The prices of local taxis and minibuses are regulated by the municipality. Minibuses travel regularly between Sharm el-Sheikh and Na'ama Bay for E£1. A taxi costs E£15, with larger Peugeots being slightly more expensive.

DAHAB

☎ 069

Galaxies away from the somnolent hippy haven it was a decade or so ago, Dahab (literally 'Gold') has managed to preserve its laid-back charm against the odds. There are plenty of touts, a highly competitive scene among the camp operators and the usual shops selling tourist tat, but somehow this unassuming village on a windy promontory has avoided the ignoble fate of those other once-idyllic diving destinations, Sharm el-Sheikh and Hurghada. It's a perfect place to chill out after exploring the rest of Egypt, particularly if diving and snorkelling are your things.

Orientation

There are two parts to Dahab: Dahab City is home to five-star hotels and the bus station; Assalah, once a Bedouin village, is about 2.5km north of here. It now has more budget travellers and Egyptian entrepreneurs than Bedouin in residence and is divided into two sections, Masbat and Mashraba.

Information

INTERNET ACCESS

Download.Net (per hr E£5; ☎ 24hr) Next to the Nesima Resort in Mashraba.

Felopater Internet (per hr E£5; ☎ 10am-midnight) There are three branches in Mashraba: next to Penguin Village, behind Nesima Resort and on the main street just down from Nesima Resort.

Seven Heaven Internet Café (per hr E£4; ☎ 8am-midnight) In the camp of the same name.

MONEY

Banque du Cairo (☎ 9am-2pm & 6-9pm Sat-Thu, 9-11am & 6-9pm Fri) The Mashraba branch doesn't have an ATM, but it will change cash and give advances on Visa and MasterCard.

National Bank of Egypt (☎ 9am-10pm) Has a branch on the promenade in Masbat that has an ATM and will change cash and travellers cheques. It has another ATM just up the road in front of the Ghazala Market, and a third in Dahab City.

POST & TELEPHONE

The post office and **telephone centrale** (☎ 24hr) are in Dahab City. The latter has a Menatel cardphone, and there are also a number of cardphones next to the Ghazala Market in Masbat. There's a postbox here, too.

دهاب

Activities

After loafing around and developing a milkshake addiction, diving is the most popular activity in Dahab. The town's various dive clubs all offer a full range of diving possibilities, including camel/dive safaris. However, you should choose your club carefully because some places have lousy reputations when it comes to safety standards. The following are among the best:

Fantasea Dive Centre (☎ 364 0483; www.fantasea-diving.net; Masbat)

Inmo (☎ 364 0370; www.inmodivers.de; Inmo Divers Home, Mashraba)

Nesima Dive Centre (☎ 364 0320; www.nesima-resort.com; Nesima Resort, Mashraba)

Orca Dive Club (☎ /fax 364 0020; Masbat)

In the morning, camel drivers and their charges congregate along the waterfront to organise camel trips into the dry interior of Sinai. Prices for a three-day trip, including food, are between E£600 and E£900.

Sleeping

BUDGET

Bish Bishi Village (☎ 364 0727; www.bishbishi.com; Mashraba; s/d with shared bathroom E£25/35, with private bathroom E£45/60, with private bathroom & air-con E£60/80; ☎) Despite the fact that it's removed from the seafront, this simple camp has a lot going for it. Freshly painted rooms are arranged around a well-maintained palm-filled courtyard and feature comfortable beds and screened windows; some have private bathrooms and air-con. It's extremely clean and offers free use of a washing machine and outdoor kitchen. No breakfast.

Penguin Village (☎ 364 1047; www.penguindivers.com; Mashraba; s/d E£60/80, with air-con E£75/100, with view E£80/120; ☎) With its great position right on the beach, attractive courtyard, dive centre and popular beachfront restaurant, the Penguin is hard to beat. Once a basic camp, it's gone upmarket and rooms now have private bathrooms; some also have air-con. The four beach-fronting rooms with balconies (singles/doubles E£100/140) are worth the splurge. Our only criticism is that the place is a tad grubby. Breakfast costs E£12.

Seven Heaven (☎ 364 0080; www.7heavenhotel.com; Masbat; huts E£10, concrete cabins E£15, r with private bathroom E£50, with private bathroom & air-con E£60; ☎) A bustling camp right on the

promenade but set back from the beach, Seven Heaven elicits praise from the many backpackers who stay here. There are four types of accommodation, friendly management, a cheap restaurant and a dive centre. Breakfast costs E£8 to E£10.

Deep Blue Hotel & Camp (☎ 012 722 5126; info@octopusdivers.net; Mashraba; huts per person E£5, s/d E£20/30, with air-con E£30/40; ☎) Deep Blue doesn't have the atmosphere of the other camps in town, but it's certainly cheap. Concrete-floored fibro huts come with filthy shared bathrooms. Much better value is offered by the rooms with private bathrooms, which are clean and comfortable. Breakfast costs E£8.

Bedouin Lodge (☎ 364 0317; bedouinlodgehotel@hotmail.com; Mashraba; s/d E£50/70; ☎) In a premier position on the beach, this place has a pleasant restaurant with Bedouin seating and offers 26 rooms with private bathrooms; half have double beds and air-con. If it were cleaner our recommendation would be more enthusiastic. Ask for one of the three rooms with balconies and sea views (E£120 to E£150).

Jasmine Pension (☎ 364 0852; webmaster@jasminepension.com; Mashraba; s & d E£60, s/d with view E£80/90; ☎) Shoestringers who don't want to stay at one of the larger camps may be attracted by this tiny pension on the promenade. Rooms are minute and pretty basic, albeit with private bathrooms; four have balconies with sea views. The excellent Jasmine Restaurant is based here. Breakfast costs E£13.

MIDRANGE & TOP END

Inmo Divers Home (☎ 364 0370; www.inmodivers.de; Mashraba; s/d US\$37/46; ☎) You must be a diver to stay at this excellent midrange hotel and it's always fully booked. Rooms are comfortable, attractively decorated and very clean; terrace rooms (singles/doubles US\$45/60) have balconies with good sea views. Backpacker rooms (singles/doubles US\$17/22) are tiny but they have good mattresses and screened windows. The shared bathrooms come with 24-hour hot water. The hotel houses a restaurant, a children's playground and a small pool.

Nesima Resort (☎ 364 0320; www.nesima-resort.com; Mashraba; s/d E£385/501; ☎) This comfortable hotel has an attractive garden setting and the best beachfront pool (day use E£30) in Dahab. Rooms don't offer views and are a

bit dark, but they are extremely clean. There are two pleasant restaurant-bars.

Blue Beach Club (☎ 364 0411; www.bluebeachclub.com; Mashraba; s/d E£240/300; ♿ ♿) Blue Beach's twenty attractively decorated rooms come with private bathrooms and plump white continental quilts; some upstairs ones have sea-fronting balconies. Features include the

freshwater pool, a stylish restaurant with great views, Arabic classes, a dive centre, regular yoga workshops and Dahab's most popular bar, the Furry Cup. It's windy at this end of town.

Sunsplash Divers (☎ 364 0932; www.sunsplash-divers.com; Mashraba; cabanas E£40, s/d cabins E£60/120) The small wooden cabins here are utilitarian

and very clean, with mosquito nets, cotton mattresses and private bathrooms. Cabanas offer a foam mattress on the floor and use of pristine shared bathrooms. There's a restaurant, rooftop lounge, dive centre and small garden. Buffet breakfast costs E£15.

Hilton Dahab Resort (☎ 364 0310; www.hilton.com/worldwideresorts; Dahab City; s US\$65-76, d US\$90-101, ste US\$97-132; ♿ ♿ ♿) Far away from the Assalah action, this resort is designed around a garden-and-lagoon concept and has a tranquil atmosphere. Leisure facilities are impressive: a large pool area, a sand beach on the (real) lagoon where you can windsurf (\$41 for two hours), a kids club and the highly regarded Sinai Divers Dive Centre (open 8am to 1pm, and 2pm to 5.30pm). Rooms are extremely comfortable and the suites come with hammock-equipped terraces.

Eating

Jasmine Restaurant (☎ 364 0852; Mashraba; ☎ 7am-1am) Serving enormous and delicious dishes right at the water's edge, this casual eatery is understandably popular with locals and travellers. The chicken satay (E£35) is excellent and the chocolate brownie with ice cream (E£19) goes down a treat. A Stella costs E£10, a *sheesha* is E£7 and there's a wide variety of fresh fruit juices (E£11).

Shark Restaurant (Masbat; pastas E£12-25, pizzas E£18-20; ☎ 6pm-midnight) If you can't find the local diving fraternity sinking a few pints at the Furry Cup, they're likely to be on the rooftop terrace of this popular eatery on the promenade. Food is fresh and served in generous portions. Though no alcohol is sold, management doesn't mind if you bring your own.

Lakhbatita (☎ 364 1306; Mashraba; mains E£15-60) Dahab's best restaurant is at the Mashraba end of the promenade. Its charming interior features *mashrabiyya* (wooden lattice screens), rich red cushions and shelves of home-bottled preserves. The menu mixes traditional Egyptian food with the influences of Asia and Europe, and includes daily specials and a lavish salad/antipasto bar (small/medium/large plate E£8/15/22). Its beach bar opens at 6am and is a good place for breakfast.

Carm Inn (☎ 364 1300; Masbat; dishes E£25-65) Vegetarians will be happy indeed when they peruse the menu at this stylish restaurant.

The owners claim that their food is all about 'vitality, building a strong body, muscular development and fun', and while this might be overstating the case, there's no doubt that dishes such as the veggieburger (E£8) and nasi goreng (E£30) are healthy and tasty in equal measure. Herbal teas are E£4.50.

Jay's Restaurant (☎ 364 1228; Masbat; dishes E£7-10; ☎ 11am-3pm & 5pm-10pm) This perennial favourite serves the usual mixture of Egyptian and Western fare at very cheap prices. The dinner menu changes daily, but lunch is limited to pizzas, pastas and salads.

The **Ghazala Market** (☎ 24hr) in Masbat stocks a good range of food and toiletries. The restaurant at **Seven Heaven** (☎ 364 0080; Masbat; meals E£10-25) is famous for its spaghetti bolognese, which is enormous and costs only E£10. Other recommended cheap eateries include **Sea Pride Restaurant** (☎ 364 0891), which serves a set meal of fresh fish, salad, soup, tahini, aubergine, bread and soup for E£20 to E£25; and the neighbouring **Al-Hussein**, which has a set chicken meal for E£11. Both are near the taxi set-down in Masbat.

Drinking

Furry Cup (Blue Beach Club, Mashraba; ☎ noon-2am) Divers decompress every evening at the Furry Cup. It has a happy hour from 6pm to 8pm (Stella E£6, spirits E£15) and serves up non-Egyptian nosh such as bangers and mash.

Other popular watering holes include **Tota** and **Crazy House** (Stella E£10 at both), on the Masbat stretch of the promenade.

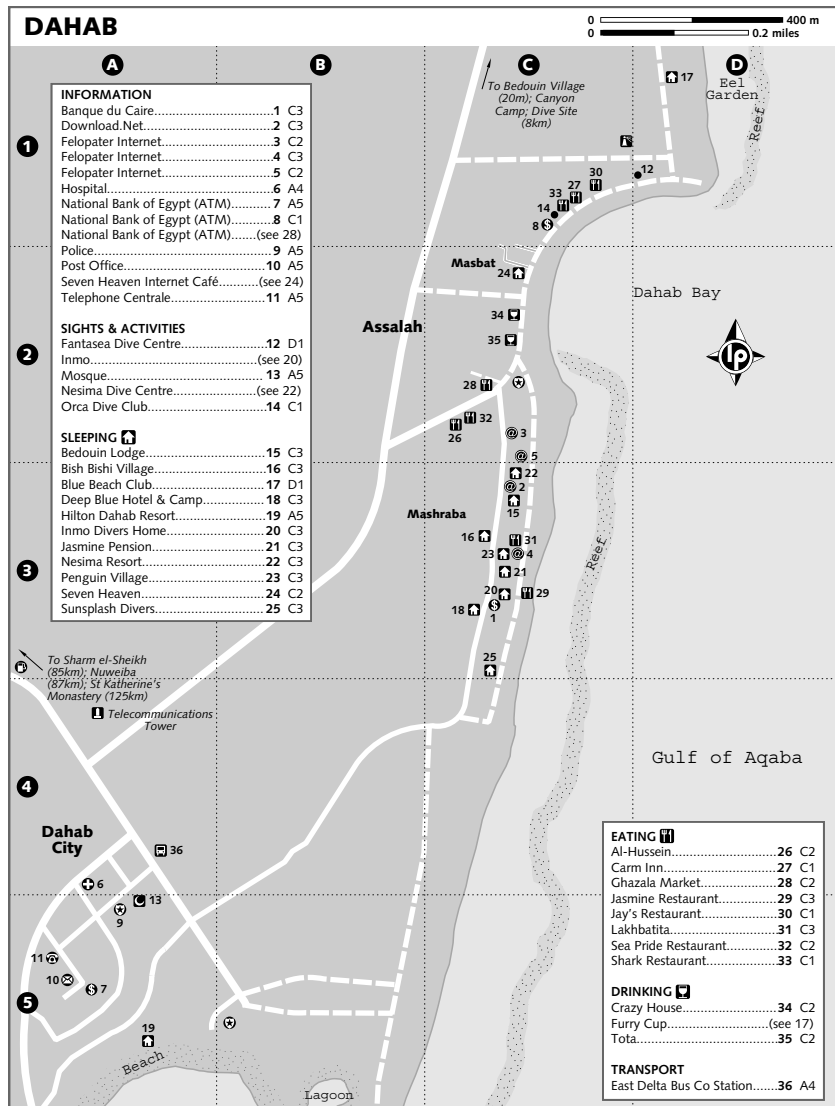
Entertainment

Gold Soul Productions organises **full moon parties** (☎ 012 370 7774; admission E£100; ☎ 6pm-6am) at a canyon outside town. These feature overseas DJs and live music. The price covers music and a transfer from town.

Getting There & Around

BUS

The new **East Delta Bus Co station and ticket office** (☎ 7.30am-11pm) is located in Dahab City, close to the mosque. The most regular connection is to Sharm el-Sheikh (E£11 to E£16, one hour), with buses at 8am, 8.30am, 10am, 11.30am, 12.30pm, 2.30pm, 4pm, 5.30pm, 8.30pm and 10pm. There are four daily buses to Nuweiba (E£11, one hour)



at 10.30am, 3pm, 4pm and 6.30pm. The 10.30am service goes on to Taba (E£22). There is a bus at 9.30am going to St Katherine's Monastery (E£16, 1½ hours). Buses to Cairo (E£62 to E£75, 10 hours) leave at 8.30am, 12.30pm, 2.30pm and 10pm. Buses for Suez (E£35 to E£47, 6½ hours) depart at 8am and 4pm, and there's one daily service to Hurghada (E£90) and Luxor (E£110) at 4pm. If you're going to Luxor, this is a cheaper and faster (but less comfortable) option than the bus-ferry-bus alternative.

Tickets for a battered old bus from the bus station to Assalah cost E£1.50. It's always there to pick up passengers arriving in Dahab by scheduled bus service, but it only provides a one-way service (it doesn't take passengers back from Assalah to the bus station).

TAXI

A taxi (usually a pick-up) between Assalah and Dahab City costs E£5.

ST KATHERINE'S MONASTERY

دير القديسة كاترينا

☎ 069

There are 22 Greek Orthodox monks living in this ancient monastery at the foot of Mt Sinai. The monastic order was founded in the 4th century AD by the Byzantine empress Helena, who had a small chapel built beside what was believed to be the burning bush from which God spoke to Moses. The chapel is dedicated to St Katherine, the legendary martyr of Alexandria, who was tortured on a spiked wheel and then beheaded.

In the 6th century, Emperor Justinian ordered the building of a fortress with a basilica and a monastery, as well as the original chapel. It served as a secure home for the monks of St Katherine's and as a refuge for the Christians of southern Sinai. There's no charge to visit the **monastery** (☎ 9am-noon Mon-Thu & Sat, except religious holidays), but you'll need to pay to see the wonderful collection of manuscripts and icons in the **Sacred Sacristy** (adult/student E£25/10). Be warned that the monastery is inevitably overrun by tour groups and can be unpleasantly crowded.

St Katherine Protectorate is a 4350-sq-km national park that encompasses Mt Sinai and the monastery. You will need to pur-

chase a **ticket** (US\$3) at the entrance to the park, 10km before the monastery. The local camps offer all-inclusive camel safaris for around E£150 per person per day.

Information

In the village of Al-Milga, about 3.5km from the monastery, there's a post office, centrale, bank and variety of shops and cafés. The **Banque Misr** (☎ 10am-1pm & 5-8pm Sat-Thu) will change cash and give Visa and MasterCard advances. There's no Internet café and no ATM.

Sleeping & Eating

Monastery Guesthouse (☎ /fax 347 0353; s/d half board US\$180/320) If you fancy a taste of monastic life, this hotel, inside the monastery walls, could be just the thing. Rooms aren't too spartan, with clean private bathrooms, comfortable beds and plenty of blankets for cold mountain nights. There's also a reasonable restaurant that serves beer and wine. Nonguests can leave baggage here (E£5) while they hike up Mt Sinai.

El-Malga Bedouin Camp (☎ 347 0042; sheik mousa@yahoo.com; tent per person E£10, dm E£10-15, r with 2 beds E£30; 📺) This new and very friendly camp offers mattresses on straw floors in stone buildings. Three rooms have sagging beds. Shared bathrooms are extremely clean, there's 24-hour hot water, and free Internet and kitchen use. The Bedouin owners organise popular desert safaris. The camp is a 10-minute walk from the bus station.

In Al-Milga there's a bakery opposite the mosque and a couple of well-stocked supermarkets in the shopping arcade. A few small restaurants are just behind the bakery.

Getting There & Away

BUS

All buses leave from the East Delta Bus Co office behind the mosque in Al-Milga. A daily bus at 6am travels to Cairo (E£37, seven hours) via Suez (E£27, four hours) and another Suez service leaves at 1pm. To Dahab (E£16, two hours) and Nuweiba (E£21, three hours), there's one bus at 1pm.

SERVICE TAXI

Taxis travel in and out of Al-Milga village irregularly and infrequently, although there are plenty available if you are willing to pay

for the extra places to fill the vehicle (up to seven people). Per person fares are E£30/45 to Dahab/Sharm el-Sheikh.

NUWEIBA

☎ 069

By rights, Nuweiba should be a tourist hot spot. Its location is true picture-postcard stuff, with turquoise waters lapping long

نويبع

sandy beaches, and craggy pink mountains providing a dramatic backdrop. It's also far more peaceful than nearby Dahab, and offers similar opportunities for desert and diving safaris. If you want to avoid the scenes at Sharm and Dahab and just relax in a basic beach camp while gazing over to Saudi Arabia (only 13km away), it could well be the place for you. But go soon – if

CLIMBING MT SINAI *Mary Fitzpatrick*

Rising up out of the desert and jutting above the other peaks surrounding the monastery is the towering 2285m Mt Sinai, known locally as Gebel Musa – and not to be confused with the far-lower mountain directly up the valley behind the monastery. Although some archaeologists and historians dispute Mt Sinai's biblical claim to fame, it is revered by Christians, Muslims and Jews, all of whom believe that God delivered his Ten Commandments to Moses at the summit. The mountain is beautiful, easy to climb, and – except at the summit, where you'll invariably be overwhelmed by crowds of other visitors – it offers a taste of the serenity and magnificence of southern Sinai's high mountain region. For those visiting as part of a pilgrimage, it also provides a moving glimpse into Biblical times.

There are two well-defined routes – the camel trail and the Steps of Repentance – that meet about 300m below the summit at a plateau known as Elijah's Basin. Here, everyone must take a steep series of 750 rocky and uneven steps to the top. Both the climb and the summit offer spectacular views. Most people make the climb in the predawn hours to take in the magnificence of the sun rising over the surrounding peaks, and then arrive back at the base before 9am, when the monastery opens for visitors.

The **camel trail** is the easier route, and takes about two hours to ascend, moving at a steady pace. En route are several kiosks selling tea and soda, and vendors hiring out blankets (E£5) to ward off the chill at the summit. The trail is wide, clear and gently sloping as it moves up a series of switchbacks, with the only potential difficulty – apart from the sometimes-fierce winds – being gravelly patches that can be slippery on the descent. Most people walk up, but it's also possible to hire a camel at the base, just behind the monastery, to take you all or part of the way to where the camel trail meets the steps. If you decide to try a camel, it's easier on the anatomy to ride up the mountain, rather than down.

The alternative path to the summit, the taxing 3750 **Steps of Repentance**, was laid by one monk as a form of penance. The steps – 3000 up to Elijah's Basin, and then the final 750 to the summit – are made of roughly hewn rock and are steep and uneven in many places, requiring strong knees and concentration in placing your feet. If you want to try both routes, it's best to take the path on the way up and the steps on the way back down.

During the summer, try to avoid the heat by beginning your hike by 3am. Although stone signs have been placed on the trail as guides, it can be a bit difficult in parts and a torch is essential. The start of the camel trail is reached by walking along the northern wall of the monastery, past the end of the compound. The Steps of Repentance begin outside the southeastern corner of the compound.

Due to the sanctity of the area and the tremendous pressure that large groups place on the environment, the Egyptian National Parks Office has instituted various regulations. Apart from creating a basic hikers code (see p640 for information on responsible hiking), the office asks that you sleep below the summit at the small Elijah's Basin plateau. Here, you'll find several composting toilets, and a 500-year-old cypress tree that marks the spot where the prophet Elijah heard the voice of God. Bring sufficient food and water, warm clothes and a sleeping bag; there is no space to pitch a tent. It gets cold and windy, even in summer, and light snows are common in winter. Even as late as mid-May, be prepared to share the summit with up to 500 other visitors, some carrying stereos, others Bibles and hymn books.

an end is called to the intifada, Nuweiba's previous popularity among young Israelis may well be resurrected, and its peaceful, almost catatonic, ambience farewellled.

Orientation

The town is divided into three parts. To the south is the ugly port, with the bus station and banks. About 8km further north is Nuweiba City, a small but spread-out settlement with a variety of accommodation options, a small bazaar and several cheap places to eat. About a 10-minute walk further north along the beach is Tarabin, which models itself on Dahab's Assalah backpacker colony.

Information

The post and telephone offices are next to the bus station. There are Menatel card-phones in the port building opposite the Misr Travel office. The Banque Misr, Banque du Caire and National Bank of Egypt branches near the bus station have ATMs but will not always supply US dollars, meaning that you should bring these with you if you intend on purchasing ferry tickets to Aqaba. Neither will they change Jordanian dinars. The National Bank of Egypt and Banque du Caire will change travellers cheques. There's also a branch of the **National Bank of Egypt** (☎ 9am-1pm & 7-9pm Sat-Thu, 9-11am Fri) in front of the Nuweiba Village hotel. The **Almostakbal Internet Café** (☎ 350 0090; per hr E£6; ☎ 10am-midnight) is behind Dr Sheesh Kebab in Nuweiba City.

Activities

Once again, underwater delights are the feature attraction, and scuba diving and snorkelling the prime activities. **Diving Camp Nuweiba** (☎ 012 249 6002; www.scuba-college.com), in the Nuweiba Village hotel, and **Emperor Divers** (☎ 352 0321; www.emperordivers.com), which operates out of the Nuweiba Coral Hilton Resort, have good reputations.

Nuweiba is the place to organise Jeeps or camel treks to sights such as **Coloured Canyon**, **Khudra Oasis**, **Ain Umm Ahmed** (the largest oasis in eastern Sinai) and **Ain al-Furtaga** (another palm-filled oasis). Try your luck with the Bedouin people of Tarabin or head to the camps at Mahash or Ras Shaitan, further up the coast. All-inclusive camel treks cost around E£150 per day.

Sleeping

Soft Beach Camp (☎ 364 7586; info@softbeachcamp.com; s/d E£15/20; 📶) Soft Beach, the best camp in Sinai, has a very enthusiastic owner who is trying hard to create a slice of paradise in Nuweiba. He's succeeding, too. Hammocks and chairs are placed along the camp's large and tranquil stretch of sand beach, and there's a palm-frond beachside restaurant serving fresh food (spaghetti bolognese E£15) and Stella (E£10). Forty-five huts come with padlocks; some have mosquito nets. Shared bathrooms are basic but clean. Breakfast costs E£15. If you ring ahead, the owner will pick you up from the bus.

Fayrouza Village (☎ 350 1133; fayrouza@sinai4you.com; s/d US\$10/14) On the beach at the edge of Nuweiba City and in front of a good reef, Fayrouza offers simple but spotless huts, all with fans, window screens and good beds. The shared bathrooms have hot water, and the restaurant serves up filling, tasty meals.

Sababa Camp (☎ 350 0382; sababa_sinai@hotmail.com; huts E£15) On a quiet stretch of the promenade in Tarabin, this well-maintained Bedouin-run place offers palm-frond huts set around a grassed garden. All have fans and mosquito nets; some have beds. There's a restaurant right on the water, and a Bedouin tent for *sheesha* and tea at the rear of the camp. The shared bathrooms have cold water only.

Habiba Village (☎ 350 0770; www.sinai4you.com/habiba; cabins with shared bathroom per person US\$11, bungalows with private bathroom s/d US\$22.50/55; 📶) Though it's attractive and very well run, this beachside hotel in Nuweiba City is a less-than-restful proposition due to an expensive restaurant in its central courtyard that serves loads of tour groups every lunchtime. It's a great place to come for a meal, though, with fresh and delicious food cooked in clean surroundings (buffet lunch E£50, tea E£7).

Nuweiba Village (☎ 350 0401; www.nuweiba-resort.com; s/d huts US\$15/20, r from US\$40/50; 📶) A good four-star choice in Nuweiba City, with a private beach, comfortable rooms, a large pool and children's playground.

Eating

Eating options in Nuweiba are limited.

Dr Sheesh Kebab (☎ 350 0273; ☎ 7am-11pm) This welcoming eatery in Nuweiba City offers *kofta* (E£20) and kebabs (E£25), as well

as ta'amiyya with salad and bread (E£8), and can usually supply a beer under-the-counter.

Cleopatra Restaurant (☎ 350 0503; ☎ 8am-midnight) Opposite the Nuweiba Domina Resort, Cleopatra serves staples such as grilled chicken (E£22) and mezze (E£5 to E£20) in a small courtyard and offers Stella (E£10) to go with it.

There are a couple of supermarkets and a sprinkling of open-air eateries among the camps on Tarabin's promenade, including the ever-popular Blue Bus and the well-located Hlaa.

Getting There & Away

BOAT

For information about ferries to Aqaba in Jordan, see p177.

BUS

Buses going to or from Taba stop at both the port and the nearby bus station. You can also request that they stop outside the hospital in Nuweiba City, but this is on the whim of the driver. They don't stop at Tarabin. A seat in a service taxi from the bus station to Tarabin costs E£5; the whole taxi will cost E£15. The drivers will always try to charge more, so be ready to haggle.

There are three daily buses to Cairo (E£60, nine hours) via Taba (E£11, one hour) at 9am, 11am and 3pm. There is an extra service to Taba at 6.30am. Buses to Sharm el-Sheikh (E£21, 2½ hours) via Dahab (E£11, one hour) leave at 6.30am, 9.30am and 4pm. There's one daily service to St Katherine's (E£21, three hours) at 8.30am.

SERVICE TAXI

There is a service taxi station by the port, but unless you get there when the ferry has arrived from Aqaba, you'll have to wait a long time for the car to fill up. Per person fares (multiply by seven for the entire car) average about E£30 to Sharm el-Sheikh, E£15 to Dahab and E£60 to Cairo (usually changing vehicles in Suez).

TABA

☎ 069

This busy border crossing between Egypt and Israel is open 24 hours. There's a small post and telephone office opposite the New Taba Beach Resort in the 'town', along with

a few shops. You can change money at the 24-hour Banque Misr booth in the arrivals hall, and there's an ATM just outside the border. The Taba Hilton will usually change travellers cheques.

When you exit the arrivals hall, the bus station is a 10-minute walk straight ahead on the left-hand side of the road. East Delta Bus Co has a 7am service that goes to St Katherine's Monastery (E£26, four hours) via Nuweiba (E£11, one hour) and Dahab (E£21, 2½ hours). Services at 9am and 3pm travel to Sharm el-Sheikh (E£26, 3½ hours) via Nuweiba and Dahab, and a 7.15am service goes to Suez (E£35, four hours). Buses travel to Cairo (E£55 to E£60, six to seven hours) at 10.30am, 12.30pm and 4.30pm.

Peugeot taxis and minibuses function as service taxis but are really expensive. You're much better off getting the bus. To Nuweiba they charge E£50 per person, to Dahab E£70, to Sharm el-Sheikh E£120 and to Cairo E£100 to E£120.

AL-ARISH

☎ 068 / pop 129,000

Al-Arish boasts a long, palm-fringed beach, a collection of holiday villages and chalets, and a small town centre bustling with Bedouin traders. The town comes alive during the height of summer, when vacationing Cairenes arrive en masse. Otherwise, it's rarely visited. In the winter months, the waterside areas resemble a ghost town, and you're likely to have the windswept beach to yourself.

Information

There's a **National Bank of Egypt ATM** (Sharia Tahrir), a telephone centrale and a post office (both just off Sharia Tahrir) in town. **El Basha.Net** (per hr E£2; ☎ 11am-3am) is just off Midan al-Gamma at the southern edge of town, signposted on the second storey of a small white building.

Sights & Activities

There's a lively **Bedouin market** (signposted in Arabic as Souq al-Hamis) every Thursday between about 9am and 2pm at the southern edge of town, near the main market. The **Sinai Heritage Museum** (Coast Rd; admission E£1, camera/video E£5/25; ☎ 9.30am-2pm Sat-Thu) is on the outskirts of town along the coastal road to Rafah.

طابا

Sleeping

Hotel Sinai Sun (☎ /fax 336 1855; Sharia 23rd of July; s/d from E£60/70; 🏠) The rooms at this ageing yet respectable hotel are quite faded, but linen is clean, and overall it's a reasonable deal for the price. Most rooms have TV and phone; breakfast costs extra.

El-Arish Resort (☎ 335 1321; Sharia Fuad Zikry; s/d US\$60/80; 🏠) This faded but pleasant five-star establishment (formerly the Oberoi) is well located on a good stretch of beach. All rooms have sea views, balconies and the usual amenities.

Eating

Try the good-value **El-Arish Resort restaurant** (☎ 335 1321; Sharia Fuad Zikry; dishes E£25-75; 🍴) or **Aziz Restaurant** (☎ 335 4345; Sharia Tahrir; dishes E£5-25), which serves fuul and ta'amiyya, as well as grilled chicken, *kofta*, rice and spaghetti.

Getting There & Away

The main bus and service taxi stations are next to each other, about 3km southeast of the town centre (about E£2 in a taxi).

BUS

Superjet has buses for Cairo (E£21 to E£25.50, five hours) departing at 8am and 4pm. The similarly priced East Delta Bus Co has buses to Cairo (E£18 to E£25) at 8am, 4pm and 5pm, and departures to Ismailia (E£10, three to four hours) at 7am, 10.30am, 11.30am, 1pm, 2pm, 3pm and 4pm.

SERVICE TAXI

Service taxis to Cairo cost about E£15 per person. Service taxis to Qantara cost E£7, to Ismailia E£8, and to the border (or vice versa) for anywhere between E£10 and E£20.

EGYPT DIRECTORY

ACCOMMODATION

There are a few youth hostels in Egypt, and many excellent budget hotels. In Sinai the most popular budget choices are beachside camps – all have electricity and 24-hour hot water unless noted in our reviews. Good midrange hotels are much harder to find. When it comes to the top end, travellers are spoiled for choice, with the major inter-

national chains represented in most of the larger cities.

Generally speaking, winter (December to February) is the tourist high season and summer (June to August) the low season in all parts of the country except on the coasts, and to a lesser degree in Cairo. Hotel prices reflect this distinction. Prices cited in this chapter are for rooms in the high season and include taxes. Breakfast and private bathrooms are included in the price unless indicated otherwise in the review. We have defined budget hotels as any that charge up to E£100 (US\$17) for a double room; mid-range as any that charge between E£100 and E£580 (US\$17 to US\$100) and top end as any that charge more than E£580 (US\$100) for a room. In the low season you should be able to negotiate significant discounts at all hotels, including those at the top end.

Hotels rated three-star and up generally require payment in US dollars. They are increasingly accepting credit-card payments but you shouldn't take this for granted.

ACTIVITIES

As the tourism-advertisement mantra goes, Egypt is 'more than just monuments'. There are plenty of nonarchaeological pursuits on offer. These include desert safaris, horse riding, and world-class diving and snorkelling. Opportunities for these are mentioned throughout the chapter.

BUSINESS HOURS

The following information is a guide only. The official weekend is Friday and Saturday. Note that during Ramadan, all banks, offices, shops, museums and tourist sites keep shorter hours.

Banks Open 8.30am to 1.30pm Sunday to Thursday. Many banks in Cairo and other cities open again from 5pm or 6pm for two or three hours, largely for foreign-exchange transactions. Some also open on Friday and Saturday for the same purpose. Exchange booths are open as late as 8pm.

Government offices Open 8am to 2pm Sunday to Thursday. Tourist offices are generally open longer.

Post offices Generally open from 8.30am to 2pm Saturday to Thursday.

Private offices Open 10am to 2pm and 4pm to 9pm, except Friday and holidays.

Restaurants Open between noon and midnight daily. Cafés tend to open earlier and close a bit later.

Shops Open 9am to 2pm and 5pm to 10pm summer, 10am to 7pm winter. Most large shops tend to close on Sunday and holidays.

CHILDREN

Though Egyptians are extraordinarily welcoming to children, Egypt's budget and midrange hotels almost never have child-friendly facilities (the five-star chains do). Towns and cities don't have easily accessible public gardens with playground equipment, or shopping malls with amusement centres. Fortunately, there are other things kids find cool: felucca and camel rides, exploring the interiors of pyramids and snorkelling on Sinai reefs are only a few. Restaurants everywhere are very welcoming to families.

Formula is readily available in pharmacies, and supermarkets stock disposable nappies. Highchairs are often available in restaurants. Baby-sitting facilities are usually available in top-end hotels.

COURSES

If you're serious about learning Arabic, the best option is to sign up at the **Arabic Language Institute** (☎ 02-797 5055; www.aucegypt.edu; 113 Sharia Qasr al-Ainy, Downtown, Cairo), a department of the American University in Cairo. It offers intensive instruction in both modern standard Arabic and Egyptian colloquial Arabic at elementary, intermediate and advanced levels in semester courses (US\$7024) running over five months. The

institute also offers intensive summer programmes (US\$3475).

One less expensive option is studying at the **International Language Institute** (IL; Map p109; ☎ 02-346 3087; www.arabicegypt.com; 4 Sharia Mahmoud Azmy, Sahafayeen, Cairo). This offers courses in modern standard Arabic and Egyptian colloquial Arabic over eight levels. Prices start at US\$240 for 32 hours over four weeks.

DISABLED TRAVELLERS

Egypt for All (☎ 02-311 3988; www.egyptforall.com; 334 Sharia Sudan, Mohandiseen, Cairo) specialises in organising travel arrangements for travellers who are mobility-impaired.

DISCOUNT CARDS

If you have an officially recognised student card you'll be eligible for major discounts to museums and sites throughout Egypt. The best is the International Student Identity Card (ISIC), and it's possible to organise this in Egypt if you didn't get a chance before you left home. You'll need one photo, proof of being a student, a photocopy of the front page of your passport and E£65. There are no age limits. In Luxor you can do this at the **Nada Travel Service** (NTS; Map p125; ☎ 095-238 2163; elnada91@hotmail.com; Petra Travel Agency Bldg, Sharia Ahmed Orabi; 🕒 8am-11pm), near Luxor Temple. In Cairo, go to **ESTS** (☎ 02-531 0330; www.estsegypt.com; 23 Sharia Manial, Midan el-Mammalek, El-Roda).

PRACTICALITIES

- *Egyptian Gazette* (50pt) is Egypt's flimsy and embarrassingly bad daily English-language newspaper. **Al-Ahram Weekly** (www.ahram.org.eg/weekly; E£1) appears every Thursday and does a much better job of keeping English readers informed of what's going on. *Egypt Today* (E£12) is an ad-saturated general-interest glossy with good listings.
- You can pick up the **BBC World Service** (www.bbc.co.uk/worldservice) on various frequencies, including AM 1323 in Alexandria, the Europe short-wave schedule in Cairo and the Middle East short-wave schedule in Upper Egypt. In Cairo, FM95 broadcasts on 557kHz between 7am and midnight daily, including news in English at 7.30am, 2.30pm and 8pm. Nile FM (104.2kHz) is an English-language music station broadcasting out of Cairo.
- Satellite dishes are common in Egypt, and international English-language news services such as CNN and BBC World can be accessed in hotel rooms throughout the country.
- Electrical current is 220V AC, 50Hz in most parts of the country. Exceptions are Alexandria, and Heliopolis and Ma'adi in Cairo, which have currents of 110V AC, 50Hz. Wall sockets are the round, two-pin European type.
- Egypt uses the metric system for weights and measures.

EMBASSIES & CONSULATES

Egyptian Embassies & Consulates

There is a comprehensive listing of Egyptian diplomatic and consular missions overseas at www.mfa.gov.eg. For the addresses of Egyptian embassies and consulates in the Middle East, see the relevant country chapter.

Australia Canberra (☎ 02-6273 4437/8; fax 02-6273 4279; 1 Darwin Ave, Yarralumla 2600, ACT); Melbourne (☎ 03-9654 8869, 03-9654 8634; consenged@primus.com.au; 9th fl, 124 Exhibition St, Melbourne 3000, Vic); Sydney (☎ 02-9281 4844; www.egypt.org.au; 3rd fl, 241 Commonweath St, Surry Hills 2010, NSW)

Canada Montreal (☎ 514-866 8455; www.egyptianconsulatmontreal.org; 1 Place Sainte Marie, 2617 Montreal, Quebec H3B 4S3); Ottawa (☎ 613-234 4931-5; www.egyptembassy.ca; 454 Laurier Ave E, Ottawa, Ontario K1N 6R3)

France Marseilles (☎ 04 91 25 04 04; 166 Ave d'Hambourg, 13008); Paris (☎ 01 53 67 88 30/2; www.ambassade-egypte.com; 56 Ave d'Iena, 75116)

Germany Berlin (☎ 30-477 5470; www.egyptian-embassy.de; Stauffenberg Str 6-7, 10785); Frankfurt-am-Main (☎ 69-955 1340/1; Eysseneckstrasse 34, 60322)

Ireland (☎ 01-660 6566; www.embegyptireland.ie; 12 Clyde Rd, Ballsbridge, Dublin 4)

Israel Eilat (☎ 08-637 6882; 68 HaAfroni St); Tel Aviv (☎ 03-546 4151; fax 03-544 1615; 54 Basel St, 64239)

Italy Milan (☎ 02 951 63 44; fax 02 951 81 94; Via Gustavo Modena 3/5); Rome (☎ 06 84 24 18 96; fax 06 85 30 11 75; Villa Savoia, Via Salaria 267)

Japan (☎ 813-37 70 80 22; www.embassy-avenue.jp /egypt; 1-5-4 Aobadai, Meguro-ku, Tokyo 153-0042)

Netherlands (☎ 70-354 4535; ambegn@wanadoo.nl; Badhuisweg 92, 2587 CL, The Hague)

Spain (☎ 3491-577 6308/9/10; fax 3491-578 1732; Velazquez 69, 28006, Madrid)

UK London (☎ 020-7499 2401; www.egyptianconsulate.co.uk; 26 South St, Mayfair W1); London (☎ 020-7235 9777; 2 Lowndes St, SW1)

USA Chicago (☎ 312-828 9162/4/3; Suite 1900, 500 N Michigan Ave, IL 60611); Houston (☎ 713-961 4915/6; Suite 2180, 1990 Post Oak Blvd, TX 77056); New York City (☎ 212-759 7120/1/2; 1110 2nd Ave, NY 10022); San Francisco (☎ 415-346 9700/2; 3001 Pacific Ave, CA 94115); Washington, DC (☎ 202-895 5400; www.egyptembassy.us; 3521 International Court NW, Washington, DC, 20008)

Embassies & Consulates in Egypt

Most foreign embassies and consulates are open from around 8am to 2pm Sunday to Thursday.

Australia (Map p109; ☎ 02-575 0444; fax 02-578 1638; 11th fl, World Trade Centre, 1191 Corniche el-Nil, Bulag, Cairo)

Canada (Map pp98-9; ☎ 02-794 3110; fax 02-796 3548; 26 Sharia Kamal el-Shenawy, Garden City, Cairo)

France Alexandria (☎ 03-480 9038; 2 Midan Orabi, Mansheyya); Cairo (Map pp98-9; ☎ 02-570 3916; fax 02-571 0276; 29 Sharia al-Giza, Giza)

Germany Alexandria (☎ 03-545 7025; 5 Sharia Mena, Rushdy); Cairo (Map p109; ☎ 02-735 3687; fax 02-736 0530; 8 Hassan Sabry, Zamalek)

Iran (☎ 02-748 6400; fax 02-748 6495; 12 Sharia Rifa'a, Doqqi, Cairo) Off Midan al-Misaha.

Ireland Alexandria (☎ 03-484 3320; 9 Sharia el-Fawateem); Cairo (Map p109; ☎ 02-735 8547; 3 Sharia Abu el-Feda, Zamalek)

Israel Alexandria (☎ 03-544 9501; 10 Sharia Mena, Kafer Abdou); Cairo (Map pp98-9; ☎ 02-761 0545; fax 761 0414; 6 Sharia ibn Malek, Giza)

Italy Alexandria (☎ 03-487 9470; 25 Sharia Saad Zaghloul); Cairo (Map pp98-9; ☎ 02-794 3194; 15 Sharia Abdel Rahman Fahmy, Garden City)

Japan Alexandria (☎ 03-583 1859; 41 Sharia Mostafa Abou Heif); Cairo (☎ 02-795 3962; 106 Sharia Qasr el-Aini, Garden City)

Jordan (Map pp102-3; ☎ 02-748 5566; fax 02-760 1027; 6 Sharia Gohainy, Doqqi, Cairo)

Lebanon Alexandria (☎ 03-484 6589; 64 Sharia el-Horreya); Cairo (Map pp98-9; ☎ 02-361 0623; fax 02-361 0463; Sharia Ahmad Nasim, Giza)

Libya Alexandria (☎ 03-494 0877; fax 03-494 0297; 4 Sharia Batris Lumomba, Bab Shark); Cairo (Map p109; ☎ 02-735 1269; fax 02-735 0072; 7 Sharia el-Saleh Ayoub, Zamalek)

Netherlands (Map p109; ☎ 02-739 5500; fax 02-735 5959; 18 Hassan Sabry, Zamalek, Cairo)

New Zealand (☎ 02-574 9360; emeco@attmail.com; 4th fl, 2 Sharia Talaat Harb, Downtown, Cairo)

Spain (Map p109; ☎ 02-735 6462; embespeg@mail.mae.es; 41 Sharia Ismail Mohammed, Zamalek, Cairo)

Sudan (Map pp98-9; ☎ 02-794 9661; fax 02-354 2693; 3 Sharia al-Ibrahimi, Garden City, Cairo)

Syria (Map pp98-9; ☎ 02-335 8806; fax 02-749 4560; 18 Abdel Rahim Sabry, Doqqi, Cairo)

Turkey Alexandria (☎ 03-393 9086; 11 Sharia Kamel el-Kilany); Cairo (Map pp102-3; ☎ 02-794 8364; 25 Sharia al-Falaky, Downtown)

UK Alexandria (☎ 03-546 7002; 3 Sharia Mena, Rushdy); Cairo (Map pp98-9; ☎ 02-794 0852; 7 Sharia Ahmed Ragheb, Garden City)

USA (Map pp102-3; ☎ 02-797 3300; fax 02-797 3200; 8 Sharia Kamal el-Din Salah, Garden City, Cairo)

FESTIVALS & EVENTS

Surprisingly, there aren't very many headline events on the national cultural calendar. The most notable are the **Cairo International Book Fair** in January/February, the **Ascension**

of Ramses II at Abu Simbel on 22 February and 22 October each year, and the **Egyptian Marathon** (egyptianmarathon@egypt.net) in February, when competitors race around the monuments on Luxor's West Bank.

GAY & LESBIAN TRAVELLERS

While homosexuality is not actually illegal according to Egypt's penal code, arrests on the charge of 'debauchery and contempt of religion' do occur. The website www.gayegypt.com is a good source of information.

HOLIDAYS

In addition to the main Islamic holidays (p648), Egypt celebrates the following public holidays:

New Year's Day 1 January

Coptic Christmas 7 January – only Coptic businesses are closed for the day

Coptic Easter March/April

Sham an-Nessim (The Smell of the Breeze) First Monday after Coptic Easter

Sinai Liberation Day 25 April

May Day 1 May

Liberation Day 18 June

Revolution Day 23 July

Wafa'a el-Nil (The Flooding of the Nile) 15 August

Coptic New Year 11 September (12 September in leap years)

Armed Forces Day 6 October

Suez Victory Day 24 October

Victory Day 23 December

MONEY

The official currency is the Egyptian pound (E£) – in Arabic, a *guinay*. One pound consists of 100 piastres (pt). There are notes in denominations of 5pt, 10pt, 25pt and 50pt, and one, five, 10, 20, 50, 100 and 200 *guinay*. Coins in circulation have denominations of five, 10, 20 and 25 piastres. You should try to hoard as many E£1 and E£5 notes as you possibly can, as these come in very handy for baksheesh and taxi fares.

See the table for the rates for a range of currencies at the time of going to press.

ATMs

These have spread rapidly throughout the country; you'll find them everywhere in Cairo, Hurgada and Sharm el-Sheikh, and less commonly in Alexandria, Luxor, Aswan and Dahab. They are very rare in the Western Desert and in smaller towns

Country	Unit	Egyptian pound (E£)
Australia	A\$1	4.21
Canada	C\$1	4.87
euro zone	€1	6.79
Israel & the Palestinian Territories	1NIS	1.23
Japan	¥100	4.93
Libya	1LD	4.58
New Zealand	NZ\$1	3.95
UK	UK£1	10.03
USA	US\$1	5.75

throughout the country. ATMs are run by a number of different banks and not all are compatible with credit cards issued outside Egypt. In general, those belonging to Banque Misr, Egyptian American Bank, Banque du Caire, the National Bank of Egypt and HSBC will accept Visa and MasterCard and any Cirrus- or Maestro-compatible cards.

Credit Cards

These have become widely accepted in Egypt over recent years, but keep in mind that they usually aren't accepted in budget hotels and restaurants, nor in remote areas such as Siwa and the Western Oases. Visa and MasterCard can be used for cash advances at Banque Misr, the National Bank of Egypt and Thomas Cook offices. To report lost cards in Egypt:

Amex (in Cairo ☎ 02-870 3152)

Diners Club (in Cairo ☎ 02-578 3355)

MasterCard (in Cairo ☎ 02-797 1179, 796 2844)

Visa (in Cairo ☎ 02-796-2877, 797 1149)

Moneychangers

Money can be officially changed at commercial banks, foreign exchange (forex) bureaus and some hotels. Rates don't tend to vary much but forex bureaus generally offer marginally better rates than the banks and they usually don't charge a commission fee.

Look at the money you're given when exchanging and don't accept any badly defaced, shabby or torn notes as you'll have great difficulty off-loading them.

Taxes

Taxes of up to 25% will be added to your bill in most restaurants. There are also hefty taxes levied on upmarket accommodation;

these have been factored into the prices we have quoted.

Tippling & Bargaining

Bargaining is a part of everyday life in Egypt and people haggle for everything from hotel rooms to clothes. There are rare instances where it's not worth wasting your breath (supermarkets, for example), but in any tourist-type shop, even marked prices can be fair game.

Tippling, called *baksheesh*, is another fact of life in Egypt. Salaries are extremely low and are supplemented by tips. In hotels and restaurants the 12% service charge goes into the till; an additional tip of between 10% and 15% is expected for the waiter. A guard who shows you something off the track at an archaeological site should be given a pound or two.

Travellers Cheques

There is no problem cashing well-known brands of travellers cheques at major banks and at Amex and Thomas Cook offices, but most forex bureaux don't take them. Most banks charge a small commission per cheque plus £2 or £3 for stamps. You must have your passport with you.

POST

Postcards cost £1.15 to post and will take four or five days to get to Europe and around a week to 10 days to the USA and Australia. Letters of 20g cost between £1.60 and £2.20 (depending on the destination) and 1kg parcels cost between £65.40 and £88.40 to send by surface mail. If you use postboxes, blue is for international airmail, red is for internal mail and green is for internal express mail.

TELEPHONE & FAX

Fax

Fax services are available at the main centrals in the big cities. A one-page fax costs £7.65 to send.

Mobile Phones

Egypt's mobile-phone network runs on the GSM system.

There are two mobile-phone companies operating in Egypt: **MobiNil** (in Cairo ☎ 02-760 9090; www.mobinil.com) and **Vodafone** (in Cairo ☎ 02-529 2000; www.vodafone.com.eg, www.mobileconnect

.vodafone.com). Both sell convenient prepaid cards from their many retail outlets across the country. MobiNil sells its 'Alo Magic Scratch Card' in denominations of £10, £25, £50, £100, £200 and £300; these have a validity period of 30 days and airtime credit is carried over if you recharge the card before the end of the validity period. Vodafone has a similar card, available to Vodafone customers only, as well as a Mobile Connect card that enables wi-fi connection to the Internet through your laptop.

Phone Cards

Two companies have card phones in Egypt. Menatel has booths that are yellow-and-green, while Nile Tel's are red and blue. Cards are sold at shops and kiosks and come in units of £10, £15, £20 and £30. Once you insert the card into the telephone, press the flag in the top left corner to get instructions in English.

There are different rates for peak (8am to 8pm Sunday to Thursday) and off-peak (8pm to 8am Sunday to Thursday and all day Friday and Saturday) calls. Rates average £3 per minute to the USA and Canada (£2.25 off-peak); £3.50 per minute to Europe (£3 off-peak); and £4.50 per minute to Australasia (£3 off-peak).

Phone Codes

The country code for Egypt is ☎ 20, followed by the local area code (minus the zero), then the subscriber number. Local area codes are given at the start of each city or town section. The international access code (to call abroad from Egypt) is ☎ 00. For directory assistance call ☎ 140 or ☎ 141.

Telephone Centrales

Alternatively, there are the old telephone offices, known as *centrales*, where you can book a call at the desk, which must be paid for in advance (there is a three-minute minimum). The operator directs you to a booth when a connection is made.

VISAS

Most foreigners entering Egypt must obtain a visa. The only exceptions are citizens of Guinea, Hong Kong and Macau. There are three ways of doing this: in advance from the Egyptian embassy or consulate in

your home country; at an Egyptian embassy abroad; or, for certain nationalities, on arrival at the airport. This last option is the cheapest and easiest of the three.

The processing times and the costs for visa applications vary according to your nationality and the country in which you apply. Visas at the airport are available for nationals of all western European countries, the UK, the USA, Australia, all Arab countries, New Zealand, Japan and Korea. Nationals from other countries must obtain visas in their countries of residence. At Cairo airport the entire process takes only 20 minutes or so and costs US\$15 or £15. If you are travelling overland you can get a visa at the port in Aqaba, Jordan, before getting the ferry to Nuweiba, but if you are coming from Israel, you *cannot* get a visa at the border unless you are guaranteed by an Egyptian travel agency. Instead, you have to get the visa beforehand at either the embassy in Tel Aviv or the consulate in Eilat.

A single-entry visa is valid for three months and entitles the holder to stay in Egypt for one month. Multiple-entry visas (for three visits) are also available, but although good for presentation for six months, they still only entitle the bearer to a total of one month in the country.

Sinai Entry Stamps

It is not necessary to get a full visa if your visit is confined to the area of Sinai between Sharm el-Sheikh and Taba (on the Israeli border), including St Katherine's Monastery. Instead you are issued with an entry stamp, free of charge, allowing you a 15-day stay. Note that this does not allow you to visit Ras Mohammed National Park. Points of entry where such visa-free stamps are issued are Taba, Nuweiba (port), St Katherine's (airport) and Sharm el-Sheikh (airport or port).

Travel Permits

Military permits issued by either the Ministry of the Interior or the border police are needed to travel in the Eastern Desert south of Shams Allam (50km south of Marsa Alam), on or around Lake Nasser, off-road in the Western Desert, or on the road between the oases of Bahariyya and Siwa. These can be obtained through a

safari company or travel agency at least a fortnight in advance of the trip.

Visa Extensions & Re-entry Visas

Extensions of your tourist visa can easily be obtained. These cost £11 for an extension of less than six months, £16 for less than one year and £46 for one year, and are obtained at passport offices. You'll need one photograph and photocopies of the photo and visa pages of your passport. You have a short period of grace (usually 14 days) to apply for an extension after your visa has expired. If you neglect to do this there's a fine of approximately £100 and you'll require a letter of apology from your embassy.

If you don't have a multiple-entry visa, it's possible to get a re-entry visa that's valid to the expiry date of your visa and any extensions. Re-entry visas for one/two/several entries cost £13.10/15.10/16.10.

WOMEN TRAVELLERS

Egypt is a conservative society and a woman's sexuality is, by and large, controlled by her family. Not only are most Western women outside these strictures but, thanks to a steady diet of Western films and soap operas, they are perceived as sexually voracious and available. The comparatively liberal behaviour of some tourists reinforces these prejudices.

As a result, while the country is generally safe for women, hassling is more or less constant. Sometimes it is in the form of hissing or barely audible whispers; usually it is a lewd phrase. Very occasionally there is physical harassment. Rape is rare. Commonsense tips to avoid problems include wearing a wedding ring, dressing conservatively (ie no shorts, tank tops or above-the-knee skirts except in beach resorts), ignoring verbal comments, trying to sit beside women on public transport and avoiding eye-contact with men unless you know them. Take care not to get yourself into a situation of close proximity with men and stay alert in large crowds, particularly at *moulids* (religious festivals).

A couple of useful Arabic phrases for getting rid of unwanted attention are: *la tilmasni* (don't touch me); *ihtirim nafsak* (behave yourself); or *haasib eedak* (watch your hand). Swearing at would-be Romeos will only make matters worse.

EGYPT

TRANSPORT IN EGYPT

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Entering Egypt

If you enter the country via Cairo airport, there are a few formalities. After walking past the dusty-looking duty-free shops you'll come to a row of exchange booths, including a Thomas Cook booth. If you haven't already organised a visa, you'll need to pay US\$15 or €15 here to receive a visa stamp. You then fill in one of the pink forms available on the benches in front of the immigration officials before queuing to be processed.

Air

Egypt has a few airports, but only seven are international ports of entry: Cairo, Alexandria, Luxor, Aswan, Hurghada, Sharm el-Sheikh and Marsa Alam. Most air travellers enter Egypt through Cairo, Alexandria or Sharm el-Sheikh. The other airports tend to be used by charter and package-deal flights only.

Egypt's international and national carrier is **EgyptAir** (☎ 0900 70000; ✈ 8am-8pm). Its service isn't particularly good and its fleet is in need of an upgrade. You'll do better flying with a different airline.

Air tickets bought in Egypt are subject to hefty government taxes, which make them extremely expensive. Always try to fly in on a return or onward ticket.

Land

Egypt has land borders with Israel and the Palestinian Territories, Libya and Sudan, but for the latter there is no open crossing point. The only way to travel between Egypt and Sudan is to fly or take the Wadi Halfa ferry (p664).

Note that almost all international bus and ferry tickets must be paid for in US dollars.

DEPARTURE TAX

If you're leaving Egypt by air your departure tax will usually have been prepaid with your ticket. If you're departing by land, you'll need to pay ££2 (travellers who entered Egypt on a Sinai-only visa are exempt).

ISRAEL & THE PALESTINIAN TERRITORIES

There are officially two border crossings with Israel: Rafah and Taba.

Rafah

At the time of research, the Rafah border crossing, which services a direct route from Cairo to Tel Aviv through the Gaza Strip, was closed to individual travellers. Responsibility for policing the border was relinquished by the Israelis after their withdrawal from Gaza in September 2005, and the border is now jointly policed by the Palestinian Authority and the Egyptian government. At the time of research, there were problems with border security. The situation is unsettled and foreigners are unlikely to be able to use the border crossing in the near future.

Taba

This border crossing is used for the vast majority of travel between Egypt and Israel. Travellers make their way to Taba from destinations across Egypt and then walk across the border (open 24 hours) into Israel. Once the border is crossed, taxis or buses can be taken to Eilat (4km from the border), from where there are frequent buses onwards to Jerusalem and Tel Aviv.

Coming from Israel to Egypt, you must have a visa in advance unless your visit is limited to eastern Sinai (p175) or you have prearranged your entry with an Egyptian tour operator. Once you've crossed the border you'll need to pay an Egyptian entry tax of ££30 at a booth about 1km south of the border on the main road.

Vehicles can be brought into Egypt from Eilat; the amount of entry duty depends on the type of vehicle, but averages about ££100.

At the time of research, **Misr Travel** (Map pp98-9; ☎ 02-335 5470; Cairo Sheraton, Midan al-Galaa, Doqqi) and the Israeli travel company **Mazada Tours** (Map p298; ☎ 03-544 4454; www.mazada.co.il; 141 Ibn Gvirol St, Tel Aviv, Israel) were running an express service (US\$55, 12 to 14 hours) that left the Cairo Sheraton on Sunday, Monday and Thursday at 9am, travelling via Taba to Tel Aviv and then on to Jerusalem. Contact them for details.

JORDAN

From Cairo, there's a twice-weekly Superjet service to Amman (US\$70), leaving Al-

Mazar Garage on Sunday and Thursday at 5am. There is also a daily East Delta Bus Co service to Aqaba (US\$41) at 8pm.

From Alexandria, there's one daily Superjet service to Amman (US\$72) at 4pm and one service to Aqaba (US\$34) at 6pm.

These services use the ferry between Nuweiba and Aqaba, so you will be liable for the port tax.

LIBYA

The border crossing point of Amsaad, just north of the Halfaya Pass, is 12km west of Sallum. The bus from Marsa Matruh costs ££12; a service taxi costs ££15. Service taxis run up the mountain between the town and the Egyptian side of the crossing for ££3 to ££4. Once through passport control and customs on both sides (you walk through), you can get a Libyan service taxi on to Al-Burdi. From there you can get buses on to Tobruk and Benghazi. Note that Libyan visas are not issued at the border.

From Cairo, one Superjet service leaves Al-Mazar Garage for Benghazi (££140) at 7.30am daily. East Delta Bus Co services also travel to Benghazi (££114), leaving on Sunday, Tuesday, Wednesday and Friday at 8am. East Delta Bus Co services leave for Tripoli (££255) on Monday, Wednesday, Thursday and Saturday at 8am.

From Alexandria, there's one daily Superjet service to Benghazi and Tripoli (US\$60), leaving at 8.30am.

Sea & Lake

For information on ferries between Egypt and Cyprus, Saudi Arabia or Sudan, see p664.

ISRAEL

There's been talk about resuming the boat service from Port Said to Haifa in Israel; ask **Canal Tours** (in Port Said ☎ 066-332 1874, 012 798 6338; canalstours@bec.com.eg) for the latest information on this.

JORDAN

There's an excellent fast-ferry service between Nuweiba in Egypt and Aqaba in Jordan that leaves Nuweiba at 2pm and only takes one hour. One-way tickets cost US\$55 for adults, US\$39 for children aged three to 12 years old. You must be at the port at least two hours before departure so as to go

PORT TAX

All Egyptian international ferries charge ££50 port tax per person on top of the ticket price.

through the shambolic departure formalities in the main ferry terminal building.

Tickets must be paid for in US dollars (note that these are not always available at the banks in Nuweiba) and can be purchased on the day of departure only at the **ticket office** (☎ 9am), which is in a small sand-coloured building near the port. To find the office turn right when you exit the bus station, walking towards the water, and turn right again after the National Bank of Egypt. Continue one long block, and you'll see the ticket-office building ahead to your left. The office stops selling tickets approximately one hour before the ferry leaves.

There's also a slow ferry (US\$41/29 per adult/child, 2½ hours) leaving at noon daily.

No student discounts are available on these ferry services. Note that boats are always full during the haj, and you'll need to purchase your ticket through a travel agency a long way in advance.

Free Jordanian visas can be obtained on the ferry if you have an EU, US, Canadian, Australian or New Zealand passport. Fill out a green form on board, give it and your passport to the immigration officers and – hey presto – your passport and visa are collected when you pass through Jordanian immigration at Aqaba. Other nationalities will need to organise a visa in advance.

GETTING AROUND

Air

EgyptAir (☎ 0900 70000; ✈ 8am-8pm) is the main domestic carrier. Air Sinai, which to all intents and purposes is EgyptAir by another name, is virtually the only other operator. Fares are expensive and there are no student discounts.

During the high season (October to May), many flights are full so it's wise to book as far in advance as possible.

Bus

Buses service just about every city, town and village in Egypt. Deluxe buses travel between

some of the main towns such as Cairo and Alexandria, and around Sinai. These buses are reasonably comfortable, with decent seats, air-con and loud Arabic videos. The best of the deluxe bus companies is Superjet – try to travel with it whenever possible. The bulk of buses servicing other routes are horribly uncomfortable, dirty and noisy. Arabic pop or Quranic dirges are played at ear-splittingly loud levels – it's a good idea to take earplugs.

Often the prices of tickets for buses on the same route will vary according to whether or not they have air-con and video, how old the bus is and how long it takes to make the journey – the more you pay, the more comfort you travel in and the quicker you get there.

Tickets can be bought at the bus stations or often on the bus. Hang on to your ticket until you get off, as inspectors almost always board the bus to check fares. There are no student discounts on bus fares.

Car & Motorcycle

Driving in Cairo is a crazy affair, but in other parts of the country, at least in daylight, it isn't so bad. You should avoid intercity driving at night. Driving is on the right-hand side and you'll need an International Driving Permit. When travelling out of Cairo, remember that petrol stations are not always that plentiful; when you see one, fill up.

The official speed limit outside Cairo is 90km/h and 100km/h on major motorways. If you are caught speeding, your driving licence will be confiscated and you'll have to pick it up (and also pay a fine) at the nearest traffic police station several days later. Roads throughout the country have checkpoints, so make sure you have all of your documents with you, including your passport.

Several car-hire agencies have offices in Egypt. The following are all in Cairo.

Avis (www.avisegypt.com) Airport (☎ 02-291 4288); Nile Hilton (Map pp102-3; ☎ 02-579 2400; Corniche el-Nil, Downtown)

Budget Airport (☎ 02-265 2395); Zamalek (Map p109; ☎ 02-340 0070; 5 Sharia Makrizy)

Hertz (www.hertzegypt.com) Airport (☎ 02-265 2430); Ramses Hilton (Map pp102-3; ☎ 02-575 8914; Corniche el-Nil, Downtown)

Their rates match international charges and finding a cheap deal with local dealers is virtually impossible. You are much better off organising cheap car hire via the Web before you arrive in Egypt. Of the locals, **Max Rent A Car** (in Cairo ☎ 02-303 5630; maxrent@max.com.eg; 22 Sharia el-Kods el-Sherif, Mohandiseen; ☎ 9am-5pm Sun-Thu) has a good reputation. It also has a booth in the arrivals hall at the Taba border crossing.

As a rough guide, rates are around US\$50 a day for a small Toyota (100km included, US\$0.25 per km after this) to US\$90 a day for a Cherokee 4WD (US\$0.40 for the extra kilometres). This doesn't include taxes.

Local Transport

Travelling by *servees* is one of the fastest ways to get from city to city. Service taxis are either minibuses or big Peugeot 504 cars that run intercity routes. Drivers congregate near bus and train stations and tout for passengers by shouting their destination. When the car's full, it's off. A driver won't leave before his car is full unless you and/or the other passengers pay for all of the seats.

Train

Although trains travel along more than 5000km of track to almost every major city and town in Egypt, the system is badly in need of modernisation (it's a relic of the British occupation) and most services are grimy and battered and a poor second option to the deluxe buses. The exceptions are some of the trains to Alexandria, and the tourist and sleeping trains down to Luxor and Aswan – on these routes the train is the preferred option rather than the bus.

Students with an ISIC card can get discounts of about 33% on all fares except the sleeping-car services.

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