

Directory

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ACCOMMODATION

Egypt offers visitors the full spectrum of accommodation: hotels, flotels (Nile cruisers), all-inclusive resorts, pensions, bed and breakfasts, youth hostels, camping grounds and even ecolodges.

Prices cited in this book are for rooms available in the high season and include taxes. Breakfast is included in the room price unless indicated otherwise in the review. We have roughly defined budget hotels as any that charge up to E£120 for a room, midrange as any that charge between E£120 and E£600 and top end as those that charge E£600 or more for a room. However, there is some variation in pricing brackets throughout

the book as certain destinations are pricier than others.

Be advised that rates often go up by around 10% during peak times, including the two big feasts (Eid al-Fitr and Eid al-Adha; see p511), New Year (20 December to 5 January) and sometimes for the summer season (approximately 1 July to 15 September).

Also note that just because a hotel has its rates displayed it doesn't mean they aren't negotiable. In off-peak seasons and during the middle of the week, haggling will often get you significant discounts, even in midrange places.

Resorts in Egypt typically offer half board (two meals), full board (three meals) or all-inclusive rates that usually include most drinks as well as some activities. Although prices are given throughout the book for all-inclusive resorts, it's worth booking these accommodation options in advance as considerable discounts are sometimes available.

Hotels rated three-star and up generally require payment in US dollars, which technically is illegal, though no-one seems to be paying much attention. With that said, upmarket hotels are increasingly accepting credit-card payments, but you shouldn't take this as a given.

Most top-end hotels and a few midrange hotels in Egypt offer nonsmoking rooms, though you can't always count on one being available. The smoking culture is extremely pronounced in Egypt, which is something that nonsmokers will be forced to get used to quickly.

Camping

Officially, camping is allowed at only a few places around Egypt, such as at Harraniyya near Giza in Cairo, Luxor, Aswan, Farafra and Ras Mohammed National Park. A few private hotels around the country also allow campers to set up in their backyards, such as at Abu Simbel, Al-Kharga, Nuweiba, Basata, Qena and Abydos. Facilities in most of these places, including official sites, are extremely basic. In Sinai the most popular budget choices are beach-side camps – all have electricity and 24-hour hot water unless noted in our reviews.

PRACTICALITIES

- *Egyptian Gazette* (50pt) is Egypt's flimsy and embarrassingly bad daily English-language newspaper. *Al-Ahram Weekly* (E£1) appears every Thursday and does a much better job of keeping English-readers informed of what's going on. There's an online version at www.ahram.org.eg/weekly. *Egypt Today* (E£15) is an ad-saturated general-interest glossy with good listings.
- You can pick up the BBC World Service on various radio frequencies, including 1323AM in Alexandria, the Europe short-wave schedule in Cairo and the Middle East short-wave schedule in Upper Egypt. See www.bbc.co.uk/worldservice for details. In Cairo, 95FM 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.

Hostels

Egypt has 15 hostels recognised by **Hostelling International** (HI; www.hihostels.com): in Cairo, Alexandria, Al-Fayoum, Aswan, Asyut, Dammanhur, Hurghada, Ismailia, Luxor, Marsa Matruh, Port Said, Sharm el-Sheikh, Sohag, Suez and Tanta. Having an HI card is not absolutely necessary as nonmembers are admitted, but a card will save you a dollar or two depending on the hostel.

Generally speaking, however, HI hostels tend to be noisy, crowded and often a bit grimy. In some there are rooms for mixed couples or families, but on the whole the sexes are segregated. Most of the time you'll be much better off staying at a budget hotel instead. Reservations are not usually needed.

The offices of the **Egyptian Youth Hostels Association** (☎ 02-794 0527; fax 795 0329; 1 Sharia Ibrahimy, Garden City, Cairo) can give you the latest information.

Hotels

BUDGET

The two-, one- and no-star hotels form the budget group. Of course, often the ratings mean nothing at all as a hotel without a star can be as good as a two-star hotel, only cheaper. Clearly, luck of the draw often applies – you can spend as little as E£25 a night for a clean single room with hot water, or E£80 or more for a dirty room without a shower. Generally, the prices quoted include breakfast, but don't harbour any great expectations – more often than not, it's usually a couple of

pieces of bread, a frozen patty of butter, a serving of jam, and tea or coffee.

Competition among the budget hotels in cities such as Cairo and Luxor is fierce, which is good news for travellers as it leads to an overall improvement in standards and services offered. Increasingly, hotels are offering rooms with private bathrooms and air-con (this costs an extra E£20 or so), improving the quality of their breakfasts and providing welcoming lounges with satellite TV, internet access and backgammon boards.

Some hotels will tell you they have hot water when they don't. They may not even have warm water. Turn the tap on and check, or look for an electric water heater when inspecting the bathroom. If there's no plug in your bathroom sink and you forgot to bring your own, then try using the lid of a Baraka mineral-water bottle – according to one cluey traveller, they fit 90% of the time.

Many budget establishments economise on sheets. If you aren't carrying your own sleeping sheet, just ask for clean sheets – most hotels will oblige. Toilet paper is usually supplied, but you'll often need to bring your own soap and shampoo.

MIDRANGE

Egypt has a great range of budget and top-end hotels, but midrange options are surprisingly limited. This is particularly so in Cairo and Alexandria, where foreign investment is channelled into top-end accommodation. In these cities local establishments often pitch

BOOK YOUR STAY ONLINE

For more accommodation reviews and recommendations by Lonely Planet authors, check out the online booking service at www.lonelyplanet.com/hotels. You'll find the true, insider lowdown on the best places to stay. Reviews are thorough and independent. Best of all, you can book online.

themselves as midrange establishments but end up offering no-star facilities at three-star rates. Also, beware the extras: sometimes you'll be charged extra for the fridge, air-con and satellite TV in your room – before agreeing to take the room, always confirm what the quoted cost actually covers. This is particularly important when it comes to taxes, which are as high as 24% in many midrange and top-end establishments.

TOP END

Visitors are spoilt for choice when it comes to top-end hotels in Egypt. While prices and amenities are usually up to international standards, in some instances service and food can fall short. As always, it's a good idea to inspect your room before handing over any hard-earned cash

ACTIVITIES

The incredibly varied desert and aquatic landscapes of Egypt are rife with opportunities for a wide range of activities. The following is a brief listing of some of the possibilities.

Bird-Watching

Egypt is an ornithologist's delight. The country boasts several excellent bird-watching areas holding a plethora of birds, both native and migrant species (p103). The prime bird-watching spot among these areas is Lake Qarun, in the Al-Fayoum region, where species range from the spoonbill to the marsh sandpiper. The saltwater lagoons in the northern Delta and the Zerenike Protectorate on Lake Bardawil in northern Sinai are home to the greater flamingo, white pelican and spoonbill (all winter visitors). It is also possible to see huge flocks of pelicans around the small lakes near Abu Simbel in southern Egypt. In the desert you may see – or hear – eagle owls. In spring the cliffs at Ain Sukhna on the Red Sea coast offer

opportunities for viewing eagles, vultures and other birds of prey.

A Photographic Guide to Birds of Egypt and the Middle East by Richard Porter and David Cottridge (E£40) and *Common Birds of Egypt* by Bertel Bruun and Sherif Baha el Din (E£35) are good illustrated references published by the American University in Cairo Press. Both are available in Egypt. Or visit the website of the Egyptian birding community, www.birdingegypt.com, which lists top birding sites, rarities reports and travel tips.

Cycling

High temperatures, extreme distances and a limited road network don't exactly make for great cycle touring, though it's definitely doable – see p528 for ideas on making the best of what there is.

Desert Safaris

For desert safaris the options are the Western Desert, with its fantastic sand landscapes, weirdly eroded rocks and Roman ruins, or the more rugged, rocky surrounds of Sinai. Western Desert trips can be arranged cheaply in the oases (particularly Farafra) or, more expensively (involving 4WDs), in Cairo; for details see p329.

Sinai safaris are perhaps easier to arrange. These typically involve a day or two (with overnight camping) trekking through desert canyons on foot, by camel or in a jeep. These expeditions can be organised on the ground at either Dahab or Nuweiba.

A growing number of travellers are choosing to combine an Eastern Desert safari with a diving holiday – see p435 for more details.

Diving & Snorkelling

Many visitors to Egypt rarely have their heads above water. No wonder, as some of the best diving in the world is to be found along the Red Sea coast (for more information, see 'Diving the Red Sea', p439).

It isn't necessary to dive to enjoy the marine life of the Red Sea. You can see plenty with just a snorkel, mask and flippers. Along the Sinai coast, the reefs are only 15m out, and in some places you don't need to go out of your depth to be among shoals of brightly coloured fish. The best places are Sharm el-Sheikh, Nuweiba and Dahab, all of which have equipment for hire for between E£25 and E£40 per day.

Fishing

Angling is seen as more a means of living rather than a pastime in Egypt. With that said, sport fishing does occur on Lake Nasser where a couple of outfits organise 'big game' fishing safaris for Nile perch. There is also an annual International Fishing Tournament every February in Hurghada; for more details contact the **Egyptian Federation for Fishing** (☎ 02-395 3953; fax 395 3516).

Balloonng

Hod Hod Suleiman (Map pp244-5; Sharia Televizyon; ☎ 237 0116), **Sky Cruise of Egypt** (Map pp244-5; ☎ 237 6515; Sharia Khalid ibn al-Walid) and **Magic Horizons** (Map pp244-5; ☎ 012 226 1697; www.magic-horizon.com; Sharia Khalid ibn al-Walid) offer early morning balloon flights over Luxor's West Bank. When the air is clear, the view over the monuments and the mountains is truly amazing. Changing winds mean that the trips are subject to cancellation at the last minute. The prices are not fixed, varying from US\$70 to US\$120 per person, and it definitely pays to bargain, particularly out of season.

Horse Riding

Horse riding is possible in Cairo around the Pyramids and in Luxor on the West Bank, where there are a couple of stables just up from the local ferry landing; see the relevant chapters for further details. There are also stables at the Sinai resorts of Sharm el-Sheikh, Dahab and Nuweiba that rent out steeds to tourists by the hour.

Sadly, most of the animals are not very well looked after. If a horse looks obviously unwell, request another.

Sandboarding

Avid sand-dune buffs can try out sandboarding at some of the Oases in the Western Deserts. Several hotels in Bahariyya and Siwa rent out sandboards (mostly just planks of wood with foot straps) for around E£10 per day and will arrange transport to nearby dunes for some sand-surfing action. Note that sandboarding is considerably more difficult than snowboarding, and clambering back up the steep, sandy hills in the heat of the day can get exhausting pretty fast.

Windsurfing

If you're keen on windsurfing, Sinai is the place to go. Several resorts and hotels along

the coastline have windsurfing centres on-site, which offer full equipment rental and professional instruction.

BUSINESS HOURS

The following information is a guide only. The official weekend is Friday and Saturday. Note that during Ramadan, all offices, museums and tourist sites keep shorter hours.

Banks From 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. During Ramadan, banks are open between 10am and 1.30pm.

Bars and nightclubs Early evening until at least 3am, often later (particularly in Cairo).

Government offices From 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 From 10am to 2pm and 4pm to 9pm, except Friday and holidays.

Restaurants and cafés Between noon and midnight daily. All restaurants except for those in top-end hotels remain closed throughout the day during the month of Ramadan, opening only at sundown. Cafés tend to open earlier and close a bit later. Their business hours are around 7am to midnight in the big cities, earlier in other parts of the country.

Shops From 9am to 1pm and 5pm to 10pm in summer, 10am to 6pm in winter. Hours during Ramadan are 9.30am to 3.30pm and 8pm to 10pm. Most large shops tend to close on Friday and holidays; many also close on Sunday.

CHILDREN

Egypt is a very child-friendly place and having kids with you can be a great icebreaker with locals. There's a lot to keep the under-aged contingent happy – pyramids and temples can be explored by junior archaeologists, felucca rides please all aspiring pirates and beach outings are always popular. Also see p156 for things to see and do with children in Cairo.

Bookshops at most five-star hotels in Cairo and the major tourist centres stock a wide variety of Egyptology-related children's books that will help kids relate to what they're seeing. Locally produced history books, such as Salima Ikram's *The Pharaohs*, are excellent and reasonably priced. For books set in modern Egypt, look for *The Day of Ahmed's Secret* by Florence Parry Heide and Judith Heide Gilliland, a wonderful story of a day in the

life of a small boy who delivers gas canisters in one of Cairo's poor neighbourhoods.

Apart from antiquities, there are the ever-popular camel or donkey rides. And horse riding can be great fun – the stables on Luxor's West Bank (p276) and around the Pyramids in Cairo (p147) have plenty of horses docile enough for young people and hard hats in all sizes.

Practicalities

There are a couple of things to keep in mind while you're out and about with kids in Egypt. One is that child-safety awareness is minimal. Seat belts and safety seats are nonexistent in the back seats of most cars and taxis; if you're renting a car remember to specify that you want them. Also, don't expect felucca or other boat operators to have children's life-jackets. If you can't do without them, bring your own.

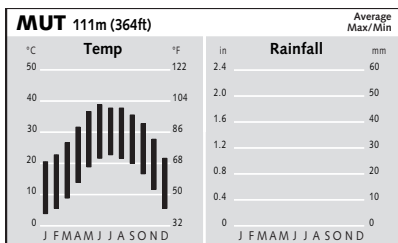
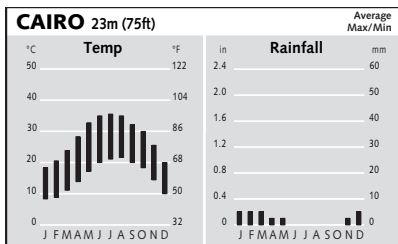
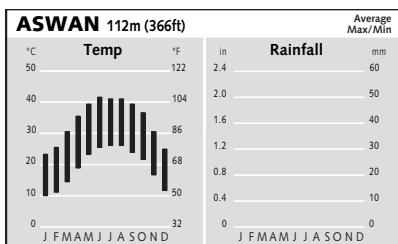
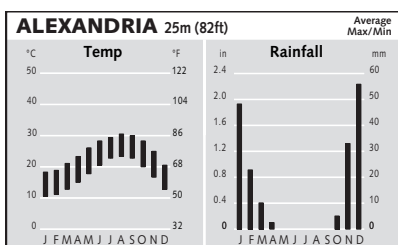
Another potential worry is the high incidence of diarrhoea and stomach problems that hit travellers in Egypt. If children get sick, they tend to dehydrate more quickly than adults, and given the country's dry climate it is crucial to keep giving them liquids, even if they just throw them up again.

It's worth having some rehydration salts on hand. These are available at all pharmacies (ask for Rehydran) and usually cost less than a dollar for a box of six sachets. They can prevent a bad case of the runs from turning into something more serious. Just stir a packet into 200mL of bottled water and keep giving it until the diarrhoea has passed. See p535 for more details on preventing and dealing with potential health problems.

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.

CLIMATE CHARTS

Egypt's climate is easy to summarise: hot and dry, with the exception of the winter months of December, January and February, which can be quite cold in the north. Average temperatures range from 20°C (68°F) on the Mediterranean coast to 26°C (80°F) in Aswan. Maximum temperatures for the same places can get up to 31°C (88°F) and 50°C (122°F), respectively. At night in winter the temperature sometimes plummets to as low as 8°C in Cairo and along the Mediterranean coast.



In the desert it's even more extreme – often scorching during the day and bitterly cold at night.

Alexandria receives the most rain, approximately 19cm a year, while far to the south in Aswan the average is about 10mm over five years. Al-Kharga in the Western Desert once went 17 years without any rain at all.

Between March and April the *khamisin* (a dry, hot wind) blows in from the parched

Western Desert at up to 150km/h. The sky becomes dark orange and choked with dust and, even when everyone closes all doors and windows tightly, the inside of every house is covered with a patina of grit so that they resemble undisturbed tombs.

For more information on the best time to visit Egypt, see p17.

COURSES

Belly Dancing

For information about the belly-dancing courses available in Cairo, see p154.

Diving

For information on the various dive courses offered in Egypt, see p439.

Language

If you're serious about learning Arabic, the best option is to sign up at the **Arabic Language Institute** (Map pp118-19; ☎ 02-797 5055; www.aucegypt.edu; 113 Sharia Qasr al-Ainy, 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 running over five months.

A cheaper option is to study at the **International Language Institute** (ILI; Map pp144-5; ☎ 02-346 3087; www.arabicegypt.com; 4 Sharia Mahmoud Azmy, Sahafayeen, Mohandiseen, Cairo). This offers courses in modern standard Arabic and Egyptian colloquial Arabic over eight levels.

Another highly regarded school, **Kalimat** (Map pp144-5; ☎ 02-761 8136; www.kalimategypt.com; 22 Sharia Mohamed Mahmoud Shaaban, Mohandiseen, Cairo) offers courses in modern standard Arabic and Egyptian colloquial Arabic over multiple levels.

Other Courses

The American University in Cairo is one of the premier universities in the Middle East. It offers degree, nondegree and summer-school programmes. Any of the regular courses offered can be taken. Popular subjects include Arabic Language and Literature, Arab History and Culture, Egyptology, Islamic Art and Architecture, Middle East Studies and Social Science courses on the Arab world. Up to 15 unit hours can be taken per semester at the undergraduate level.

The summer programmes offer similar courses. The term lasts from mid-June to

the end of July. Two three-unit courses can be taken and several well-guided field trips throughout Egypt are usually included.

Applications for programmes with the Arabic Language Institute (left) or undergraduate and graduate studies at the university are separate. Specify which you want when you request an application form. A catalogue and programme information can be obtained from the **Office of Admissions** (☎ 212-730 8800; fax 730 1600; American University in Cairo, 420 Fifth Ave, New York, NY 10018-2719, USA), or you can write to the **American University in Cairo** (AUC; ☎ 02-754 2964; www.aucegypt.edu; PO Box 2511, Cairo 11511).

It is also possible to study at Egyptian universities such as Cairo University, Al-Azhar (in Cairo), Ain Shams (in Cairo) and Alexandria University. Courses offered to foreign students include Arabic Language, Islamic History, Islamic Religion and Egyptology. For information on courses, tuition fees and applications, contact the cultural counsellor at the **Egyptian Educational Bureau** (☎ 202-296 3888; 2200 Kalorama Rd NW, Washington DC 20008, USA). In London, contact the **Cultural Affairs Office** (☎ 020-7491 7720).

CUSTOMS

The duty-free limit on arrival is 1L of alcohol, 1L of perfume, 200 cigarettes and 25 cigars. On top of that, once in the country, you can buy another 3L of alcohol plus a wide range of other duty-free articles, but this must be done within 24 hours of arrival at one of the special Egypt Free shops in the arrival and departure areas of the airport.

Sometimes the Customs Declaration Form D is given to arriving tourists to list all cameras, jewellery, cash, travellers cheques and electronics (personal stereos, computers, radios, VCRs etc). No-one seems to be asked for this form on departure, and few tourists are given it on arrival. Travellers are, however, regularly asked to declare their video cameras and some have reported being hit with a hefty 'import tax'.

There are prohibited and restricted articles, including books, printed matter, motion pictures, photographs and materials that the government considers 'subversive or constituting a national risk or incompatible with the public interest'. Articles for espionage, or 'intelligence activities', and explosives are banned.

DANGERS & ANNOYANCES

The incidence of crime, violent or otherwise, in Egypt is negligible compared with most Western countries. Most visitors and residents would agree that Egyptian towns and cities are safe to walk around in during the day or night. Unfortunately, the hassle factor often means that this isn't quite the case for an unaccompanied foreign woman – for details, see p518.

Apart from the issues discussed here, you should be aware that the Egyptian authorities take a dim view of illegal drug use (see p512).

Terrorist acts against foreign tourists in 1997, 2004, 2005 and 2006 resulted in a great many deaths, and have led to the government giving security the highest possible priority. This can be annoying for travellers, as convoys (see p530) and tourist-police escorts can be a real drag.

That said, we can't blame the government for doing its utmost to convince tourists that

their security is of paramount importance to Egypt. After all, the income derived from tourism constitutes an extraordinary 20% or so of the country's GDP. Generally speaking, we'd say that Egypt is presently no more or less dangerous than any other country, your own included.

Theft

Theft never used to be a problem in Egypt but it seems to be becoming a bigger one. In the past couple of years we've received a stream of letters from readers concerning money disappearing from locked rooms, even hotel safes. Our advice is to keep your cash and valuables on your person at all times.

There are also a few areas where pickpockets are known to operate, notably on the Cairo metro and the packed local buses from Midan Tahrir to the Pyramids. Tourists aren't the specific targets, but be careful how you carry your money in crowded places.

SCAMS, HUSTLES & HASSLE

Egyptians take hospitality to strangers seriously. You'll receive a steady stream of *salaams* (greetings) and the odd *ahlan wa sahlan* (hello/welcome) inviting you to sit and have *shai* (tea). A lot of this is genuine, particularly in rural areas, where drink, food and transport are frequently offered with no expectation of remuneration.

But in more touristy places – notably around the Egyptian Museum and Pyramids in Cairo, and all around Luxor – a cheery 'Hello, my friend' is double-speak for 'This way, sucker'. One traveller wrote to us about feeling like a 'walking wallet' in Egypt, and we knew exactly what she meant.

Be warned that you'll become a magnet for instant friends who just happen to have a papyrus factory they'd like to show you. You'll be showered with helpful advice such as 'the museum is closed, take *shai* with me while you wait' – of course the museum isn't closed and refreshments will be taken at a convenient souvenir shop. As an English-speaker you might be asked to spare a moment to check the spelling of a letter to a relative in the USA, and while you're at it how about some special perfume for the lady...

It's all pretty harmless stuff but it can become very annoying. Everyone works out a strategy to reduce the hassle to a minimum. Years ago, we heard a story about a traveller keeping touts away by jabbing his finger at his chest and saying, '*Ya Russski!*' (I'm Russian). Not only were the hustlers defeated by the language, everyone knew that the Russians had no money. But now that Egypt is a popular holiday destination for newly rich Muscovites, the street entrepreneurs are just as fluent in Slavic sales patter as they are in English, German, French, Dutch and Japanese.

About the only way to deal with unwanted attention is to be polite but firm, and when you're in for a pitch cut it short with 'Sorry, no thanks'.

Aside from the hustling, there are countless irritating scams. The most common involves touts who lie and misinform to get newly arrived travellers into hotels for which they get a commission – see p158 for examples of their ever-ingenuous strategies.

If you do get stung, or feel one more 'Excuse me, where are you from?' will make you crack, simmer down and wise up – by acting rudely or brusquely you may offend one of the vast majority of locals who would never dream of hassling a foreigner and is only trying to help a guest to the country.

TRAVEL ADVISORIES

Government websites that offer travel advisories and information on current hot spots:

Australian Department of Foreign

Affairs (☎ 1300 139 281; www.smarttraveller.gov.au)

British Foreign Office (☎ 0845-850-2829; www.fco.gov.uk/countryadvice)

Canadian Department of Foreign Affairs (☎ 800-267 6788; www.dfait-maeci.gc.ca)

US State Department (☎ 888-407 4747; <http://travel.state.gov>)

Generally though, unwary visitors are parted from their money through scams, and these are something that you really do have to watch out for.

DISCOUNT CARDS

Proof of student status is required before an International Student Identity Card (ISIC) will be issued. That proof must be a university ID card or letter from your own college or university. You'll also 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.

ISIC works in Egypt exclusively with Cairo-based **Egyptian Student Travel Services** (ESTS; Map p148; ☎ 02-531 0330; www.estseypt.com; 23 Sharia Manial, Midan El Mammalek, El-Roda). ESTS issues the ISIC, the International Teacher Identity Card (ITIC) and the International Youth Travel Card (IYTC). It also provides a full range of student travel services. For more information, contact ESTS.

In Luxor if you're under 30 years old (or have proof of student status) you can get an ISIC card from the ESTS office **Nada Travel Service** (NTS; Map pp244-5; ☎ 095-238 2163; elnada91@hotmail.com; Petra Travel Agency Bldg, Sharia Ahmed Orabi; ☎ 8am-11pm) near the Luxor temple.

Most of Cairo's backpacker hotels and budget travel-agencies can also get the cards but require proof of your student status.

Be aware that fake ISIC cards are sold by scam artists in Downtown Cairo. In Luxor you are also likely to be directed to an office issuing ISE (International Student & Youth Exchange) cards. They claim that these cards will give you the same discounts as ISIC cards. They won't – they give discounts in some

shops but will not work for antiquities sites, trains or buses.

It's worth having a student card as it entitles you to a 50% discount on admission to nearly all the antiquities and museums, as well as significant reductions on train travel. The ISIC card may sometimes get you a discount on your bus ticket, but this is quite rare. Still, it's always worth asking.

Travellers have reported using a wide range of other cards to get student discounts for museum entry and transport, from HI cards to Eurail cards.

EMBASSIES & CONSULATES**Egyptian Embassies & Consulates**

There is a comprehensive listing of Egyptian diplomatic and consular missions overseas at www.mfa.gov.eg.

Australia Canberra (☎ 02-6273 4437/8; fax 02-6273 4279; 1 Darwin Ave, Yarralumla, ACT 2600); Melbourne (☎ 03-9654 8869/8634; consngened@primus.com.au; 9th fl, 124 Exhibition St, Melbourne VIC 3000); Sydney (☎ 02-9281 4844; www.egypt.org.au; 3rd fl, 241 Commonwealth St, Surry Hills NSW2010)

Canada Ottawa (☎ 613-234 4931/5; www.egyptembassy.ca; 454 Laurier Ave East, Ottawa, Ontario K1N 6R3); Quebec (☎ 514-866 8455; www.egyptianconsulatemontrreal.org; 1 Place Sainte Marie, 2617 Montreal, H3B 4S3)

France Paris (☎ 01 53 67 88 30/2; www.ambassadeegypte.com; 56 Ave d'Iena, 75116); Marseilles (☎ 04 91 25 04 04; 166 Ave d'Hambourg, Marseilles 13008)

Germany Berlin (☎ 30-477 5470; www.egyptian-embassy.de; Stauffenberg Strasse 6-7, 10785); Frankfurt am Main (☎ 69-955 1340/1; Eyseneckstrasse 34, 60322)

Ireland Dublin (☎ 01-660 6566; www.embegyptireland.ie; 12 Clyde Rd, Ballsbridge, Dublin 4)

Israel Tel Aviv (☎ 23-546 4151/2; fax 23-544 1615; 54 Rehov Basel St); Eilat (☎ 972-637 6882; fax 972-637 1026; 68 Afrouni St)

Italy Rome (☎ 06 84 24 18 96; fax 85 30 11 75; Villa Savoia, Via Salaria 267); Milan (☎ 02 951 6360; fax 02 951 8194; Via Gustavo Modena 3/5)

Japan Tokyo (☎ 813-37 70 80 22; www.embassy-ave.nue.jp/egypt; 1-5-4 Aobadai, Meguro-ku, Tokyo 153-0042)

Jordan Amman (☎ 26-560 5175/6; www.embegyptjordan.com; 14 Riyad Mefleh St, Jebel Amman); Aqaba (☎ 23-201 6181; fax 23-201 5159)

Lebanon Beirut (☎ 01-867 917; fax 01-863 751; Thomas Edison St, El-Ramla, El-Baida, Beirut)

Libya Benghazi (☎ 61-222 3099; fax 61-223 2523; El-Awarsi St, Western Fuwaihat); Tripoli (☎ 21-444 8909; egyemlib@hotmail.com; El-Shatt St)

Netherlands The Hague (☎ 70-354 4535; ambegnl@wanadoo.nl; Badhuisweg 92, 2587 CL, The Hague)

Spain Madrid (☎ 3491-577 6308/9/10; fax 3491-578 1732; Velazquez 69, 28006, Madrid)

Syria Damascus (☎ 11-333 0756; fax 11-333 7961; Sharia El-Galaa, Abu Roumana, Damascus)

UK London (☎ 020-7235 9777; www.egyptianconsulate.co.uk; 2 Lowndes St, SW1); London (☎ 020-7499 2401; 26 South St, Mayfair W1)

USA Washington DC (☎ 202-895 5400; www.egypt embassy.us; 3521 International Court NW, Washington DC 20008); New York City (☎ 212-759 7120/1/2; 1110 2nd Ave, NY 10022); San Francisco (☎ 415-346 9700/2; 3001 Pacific Ave, CA 94115); Houston (☎ 713-961 4915/6; Ste 2180, 1990 Post Oak Blvd, TX 77056); Chicago (☎ 312-828 9162/4/3; Ste 1900, 500 N Michigan Ave, IL 60611)

Embassies & Consulates in Egypt

Most embassies and consulates are open from around 8am to 2pm Sunday to Thursday. The addresses of some of the foreign embassies and consulates in Egypt in the following list. If you need to ask directions to find an embassy ask, '*feyn sifarat*' (where's the embassy), followed by the country name.

Australia (Map pp144-5; ☎ 02-575 0444; fax 578 1638; 11th fl, World Trade Centre, 1191 Corniche el-Nil, Cairo)

Canada (Map pp110-11; ☎ 02-794 3110; fax 796 3548; 26 Sharia Kamal el-Shenawy, Cairo)

Denmark (Map pp144-5; ☎ 02-735 7411; fax 736 1780; 12 Hassan Sabry, Zamalek)

Ethiopia (Map pp144-5; ☎ 02-335 3696; 3 Sharia al-Misaha, Doqqi)

France Cairo (Map p148; ☎ 02-570 3916; fax 571 0276; 29 Sharia al-Giza, Giza); Alexandria (Map pp374; ☎ 487 5615; fax 487 5614; 2 Midan Orabi, Mansheyya)

Germany Cairo (Map pp144-5; ☎ 02-735 3687; fax 02-736 0530; 8 Hassan Sabry, Zamalek); Alexandria (Map pp380-1; ☎ 4867 503, fax 484 0977; 9 Sharia el-Fawateem, Azarita)

Iran (Map p148; ☎ 02-748 6400; fax 748 6495; 12 Sharia Rifa'a, off Midan al-Misaha, Doqqi)

Ireland Cairo (Map pp144-5; ☎ 02-735 8547; 3 Sharia Abu el-Feda, Zamalek); Alexandria (Map pp380-1; ☎ 03-485 2672; 9 Sharia El-Fawateem)

Israel Cairo (Map p148; ☎ 02-761 0545; fax 02-761 0414; 18th fl, 6 Sharia Ibn al-Malek, Giza); Alexandria (Map pp372-3; ☎ 03-544 9501; fax 544 8136; 15 Rue Mina Kafr Abdou, Rushdy)

Italy Cairo (Map p148; ☎ 02-794 3194; 15 Sharia Abdel Rahman Fahmy, Garden City); Alexandria (Map p374; ☎ 03-487 9470; 25 Sharia Saad Zaghloul)

Jordan (Map p148; ☎ 02-748 5566; fax 760 1027; 6 Sharia Gohainy, Cairo)

Kenya Cairo (Map p148; ☎ 02-345 3628; fax 344 3400; 7 Sharia al-Quds al-Sharif, Mohandiseen)

Lebanon Cairo (Map pp144-5; ☎ 02-738 2823; fax 738-2818; 22 Sharia Mansour Mohammed St, Zamalek); Alexandria (Map pp380-1; ☎ 03-484 6589; 64 Sharia el-Horreya)

Libya Cairo (Map pp144-5; ☎ 02-735 1269; fax 735 0072; 7 Sharia el-Saleh Ayoub, Zamalek); Alexandria (Map pp380-1; ☎ 03-494 0877; fax 494 0297; 4 Sharia Batris Lumomba, Bab Shark)

Netherlands (Map pp144-5; ☎ 02-736 8752; az-cz@hollandemb.org.eg; 18 Sharia Hassan Sabry, Zamalek)

New Zealand (☎ 02-574 9360; emeco@attmail.com; 4th fl, 2 Talaat Harb, Cairo)

Saudi Arabia Cairo (Map p148; ☎ 02-349 0775; fax 02-349 3495; 2 Sharia Ahmed Nessim, Giza); Alexandria (Map pp380-1; ☎ 03-482 9911; 9 Sharia Batalsa, Alexandria); Suez (Map p415; ☎ 497 7591-2; 12 Sharia el-Guabarty; Port Tawfiq, Suez) The consulate in Suez is around the corner from the tourist office.

Spain (Map pp144-5; ☎ 02-735 6462; Embespeg@mail.mae.es; 41 Sharia Ismail Mohamed, Cairo)

Sudan Cairo (Map pp110-11; ☎ 02-794 9661; fax 354 2693; 3 Sharia al-Ibrahimi, Garden City); Aswan (Map p302; ☎ 097-230 7231; fax 234 2563; Bldg 20, Atlas; h9am-3pm) Both consulates can issue same-day visas to Sudan. You need your passport, four passport photos, a letter from your embassy and US\$100.

Syria Cairo (Map p148; ☎ 749 4528; fax 02-749 4560; 18 Abdel Rahim Sabry, Doqqi)

Turkey Cairo (Map pp110-11; ☎ 02-794 8364; 25 Sharia al-Falaky, Cairo); Alexandria (Map pp380-1; ☎ 03-393 9086; 11 Sharia Kamel el-Kilany)

UK Cairo (Map p148; ☎ 02-794 0852; 7 Sharia Ahmed Ragheb, Garden City); Alexandria (Map pp372-3; ☎ 03-546 7002; 03-546 7001/023; Sharia Mena, Rushdy)

USA (Map pp118-19; ☎ 02-797 3300; fax 797 3200; 8 Sharia Kamal el-Din Salah, Garden City)

FESTIVALS & EVENTS

There aren't many events on the Egyptian cultural calendar, and those that are there don't always take place. With that said, the only events worth going out of your way to attend are possibly the *moulids* (saints' festivals; see opposite).

JANUARY/FEBRUARY

Book Fair Held at the Cairo Exhibition Grounds over two weeks, this is one of the major cultural events in the city. It draws massive crowds, but far more burgers, soft drinks and balloons are sold than books.

FEBRUARY

Ascension of Ramses II 22 February – one of the two dates each year when the sun penetrates the inner sanctuary of the temple at Abu Simbel, illuminating the statues of the gods within.

THE MOULID

A cross between a funfair and a religious festival, a *moulid* celebrates the birthday of a local saint or holy person. They are often a colourful riot of celebrations attended by hundreds of thousands of people. Those from out of town set up camp in the streets, close to the saint's tomb, where children's rides, sideshows and food stalls are erected. In the midst of the chaos, barbers perform mass circumcisions; snake charmers induce cobras out of baskets; and children are presented at the shrine to be blessed and the sick to be cured.

Tartours (cone-shaped hats) and *fanous* (lanterns) are made and sold to passers-by and in the evenings local Sufis usually hold hypnotic *zikrs* in colourful tents. A *zikr* (literally 'remembrance') is a long session of dancing, chanting and swaying usually carried out to achieve oneness with God. The *muggzabin* (Sufi followers who participate in *zikrs*) stand in straight lines and sway from side to side to rhythmic clapping that gradually increases in intensity. As the clapping gains momentum, the *zikr* reaches its peak and the *muggzabin*, having attained oneness with Allah, awake sweating and blinking. Other *zikrs* are formidable endurance tests where troupes of musicians perform for hours in the company of ecstatic dancers.

Most *moulists* last for about a week and climax with the *leila kebira* (big night). Much of the infrastructure is provided by 'professional' *mawlatiyya*, or *moulid* people, who spend their lives going from one *moulid* to another.

For visitors, the hardest part about attending a *moulid* is ascertaining dates. Events are tied to either the Islamic or Gregorian calendars and dates can be different each year. You'll need to be prepared for immense crowds (hold onto your valuables) and females should be escorted by a male.

One of the country's biggest *moulists*, the *moulid* of Sayyed al-Badawi, is held in Tanta in October, while Cairo hosts three major *moulists* dedicated to Sayyida Zeinab, Sayyidna al-Hussein and Imam ash-Shafi (held during the Islamic months of Ragab, Rabei al-Tani and Sha'aban, respectively). You'll need to ask a local for the exact dates in any particular year.

There are a number of smaller *moulists* in the area around Luxor – see p252 for more details on these celebrations.

International Fishing Tournament Held at Hurghada on the Red Sea and attended by anglers from all over the world.

Luxor Marathon (egyptianmarathon@egypt.net) Held on the West Bank. Competitors race around the main antiquities sites.

Nitaq Festival Excellent arts festival centred on Downtown Cairo with two weeks of exhibitions, theatre, poetry and music at galleries, cafés and a variety of other venues.

APRIL/MAY

South Sinai Camel Festival Camel races that prove these animals have fire in their bellies.

JUNE

Al-Ahram Squash Tournament International competitors play in glass courts set up for the occasion beside the Pyramids on the Giza Plateau.

International Festival of Oriental Dance (www.nilegroup.net) Held in Cairo, this is a festival of belly dancing in which famous Egyptian practitioners give showcase performances and lessons to international attendees.

AUGUST

Tourism & Shopping Festival A countrywide promotion of Egyptian products. Participating shops offer discounted prices.

SEPTEMBER

Experimental Theatre Festival Held over 10 days, this theatre festival brings to Egypt a vast selection (40 at the last outing) of international theatre troupes and represents almost the only time each year when it's worth turning out for the theatre in Cairo.

OCTOBER

Alexandrias of the World Festival A four-day celebration attended by delegations from all the cities bearing the name Alexandria (there are over 40 in the world).

Birth of Ramses 22 October – the second date in the year when the sun's rays penetrate the temple at Abu Simbel.

Pharaohs' Rally An 11-day, 4800km motor-vehicle (4WDs and bikes) race through the desert, beginning and ending at the Pyramids, that attracts competitors from all over the world.

NOVEMBER

Arabic Music Festival A 10-day festival of classical, traditional and orchestral Arabic music held at the Cairo Opera House early in the month. Programmes are usually in Arabic only but the tourist office should have details.

DECEMBER

Cairo International Film Festival (www.cairofilmfestival.com) This 14-day festival, held early in the month, gives Cairenes the chance to watch a vast range of recent films from all over the world. The main attraction is that the films are all supposedly uncensored. Anything that sounds like it might contain scenes of exposed flesh sells out immediately.

FOOD

In this book, budget eateries are usually defined as those where you can get a meal (no drinks) for less than £15. Midrange restaurants serve up main courses for under £75 and often serve alcohol. Top-end joints are usually in five-star hotels, serve up main courses for over £75, almost always serve alcohol and require diners to dress for dinner. Tipping is appreciated in budget places, advisable in midrange places and essential in all top-end restaurants.

For more information about eating out in Egypt, see p93.

GAY & LESBIAN TRAVELLERS

Homosexuality in Egypt is no more or less prevalent than elsewhere in the world, but it's a lot more ambiguous than in the West. Men routinely hold hands, link arms and give each other kisses on greeting – but don't misread the signals: this is not gay behaviour; it's just the local take on male bonding.

Beyond this a strange double standard goes on whereby an Egyptian man can indulge in same-sex intercourse but not consider himself gay because only the passive partner is regarded as queer. So it's not uncommon for foreign male visitors to receive blatant and crudely phrased propositions of

sex from Egyptian men. But if a lot of man-to-man sex goes on, there's not necessarily any sort of gay scene – any that does exist is strictly underground. The concept of 'gay pride' is totally alien, and bar the occasional young crusader, no Egyptian man would openly attest to being homosexual for fear of being shunned by society and labelled as weak and feminine.

While there is no mention of homosexuality in the Egyptian penal code, some statutes criminalising obscenity and public indecency have been used against gay men in the past. Most recently, in May 2001, 55 Egyptian men were arrested when police raided a floating bar/restaurant moored on the Nile in Cairo. The state prosecutor's office labelled the men 'deviants', and following a retrial in 2003 (the sentences handed down at the first trial weren't tough enough on reconsideration), 21 of the men received prison time of three years.

The bottom line is that Egypt is a conservative society that condemns homosexuality but, at the same time, plenty of same-sex intercourse goes on.

There are no national support groups or gay- or lesbian-information lines but you could try searching the internet. The premier gay and lesbian Egypt site is www.gayegypt.com.

HOLIDAYS

Egypt's holidays and festivals are primarily Islamic or Coptic religious celebrations, although all holidays are celebrated equally by the entire population regardless of creed.

The *Hejira* (Islamic calendar) is 11 days shorter than the Gregorian (Western) calendar, so Islamic holidays tend to fall 11 days earlier each Western year. The 11-day rule is not entirely strict though as the holidays can fall from 10 to 12 days earlier. The precise dates are known only shortly before they fall as they're dependent upon the sighting of the moon. See the Islamic Holidays table below

ISLAMIC HOLIDAYS

| Hejira year | Ras as-Sana | Mould an-Nabi | Ramadan begins | Eid al-Fitr | Eid al-Adha |
|-------------|-------------|---------------|----------------|-------------|-------------|
| 1429 | 09.01.08 | 20.03.08 | 02.09.08 | 02.10.08 | 08.12.08 |
| 1430 | 29.12.09 | 09.03.09 | 22.09.09 | 21.09.09 | 28.11.09 |
| 1431 | 19.12.10 | 26.02.10 | 11.09.10 | 10.09.10 | 17.11.10 |

Please note that dates can vary slightly.

MOHAMMED, MUHAMMAD...MU7AMMAD?

People have been wrestling Arabic into Roman letters for centuries, and now the rise of mobile phone and internet communication in the Middle East has spawned another method. Once you get over the confusion that it involves numbers, the so-called 'Arabic chat alphabet' might be the most sensible transliteration system to come along in a while. All the sounds peculiar to Arabic have been assigned a number, based very loosely on their shape in Arabic. A 3 for the back-of-the-throat letter 'ayn' is the most common, so you could type 'Assalaam 3aleikum!' as a greeting. A 7 represents the aspirated 'h' ('Al-7amdulillah!'), and a 9 is the emphatic 's'. The system is popping up in ads, names of cool clubs and the like. Who knows – if it really catches on, we might be using it in the next edition of this book.

for the approximate dates of the major holidays for the next few years.

The following list details public holidays in Egypt:

New Year's Day 1 January – Official national holiday but many businesses stay open.

Coptic Christmas January – Coptic Christmas is a fairly low-key affair and only Coptic businesses are closed for the day.

Coptic Easter March/April – The most important date on the Coptic calendar although it doesn't significantly affect daily life for the majority of the population.

Sham an-Nessim March/April – A Coptic holiday with Pharaonic origins, it literally means 'smell of the breeze'. It falls on the first Monday after Coptic Easter and is celebrated by all Egyptians, with family picnics and outings.

Sinai Liberation Day 25 April – Holiday celebrating Israel's return of Sinai in 1982 (Sinai only).

May Day 1 May – Official national holiday.

Liberation Day 18 June

Revolution Day 23 July – Official national holiday commemorating the date of the 1952 coup, when the Free Officers seized power from the puppet monarchy.

Wafa'a el-Nil 15 August – Literally 'the flooding of the Nile'.

Coptic New Year 11 September; 12 September in leap years

Armed Forces Day 6 October – Official national holiday celebrating Egyptian successes during the 1973 war with Israel. The day is marked by military parades and air displays and a long speech by the president.

Suez Victory Day 24 October

Victory Day 23 December

Islamic Holidays

Eid al-Adha Also known as Eid al-Kebir (Great Feast), this marks the time of the *hajj* (the pilgrimage to Mecca). Those who can afford it buy a sheep to slaughter for the feast, which lasts for three days (many businesses reopen on the second day). Many families go out of town, so if you want to travel at this time, book your tickets well in advance.

Ras as-Sana Islamic New Year's Day. The entire country has the day off but celebrations are low-key.

Moulid an-Nabi This is the birthday of the Prophet Mohammed. One of the major holidays of the year, the streets are a feast of lights and food.

Ramadan Observant Muslims fast for a whole month during daylight hours. People are tired, listless and hungry during the day, but they come back to life again when the sun goes down and they can feast and get festive.

Eid al-Fitr A three-day feast that marks the end of Ramadan fasting.

INSURANCE


A travel insurance policy to cover theft, loss and medical problems is a good idea. There is a wide variety of policies available, so check the small print. Some policies specifically exclude 'dangerous activities', which can include scuba diving, motorcycling and trekking. A locally acquired motorcycle licence is not valid under some policies.

Check that the policy covers ambulances and an emergency flight home. For more information on health insurance, see p535.

INTERNET ACCESS

Travelling with a laptop is a great way to stay in touch with life back home, but unless you know what you're doing, it's fraught with potential problems. If you plan to carry your notebook or palmtop computer with you, remember that the power-supply voltage may vary from that at home, which may damage your equipment. The best investment is a universal AC adaptor for your appliance, which will enable you to plug it in anywhere without frying the innards.

The good news is that Egypt has taken up the internet in a big way, and there are internet cafés throughout the country. We have listed the best of these throughout the book, and have also indicated which hotels offer

internet access for guests (look for the icon ). Most internet cafés will charge between £5 and £10 per hour for online access, will print for around £1 per page and will burn CDs for between £15 and £25. Unfortunately, outside Cairo, Alexandria and tourist destinations in the Sinai and along the Red Coast, internet connections can be infuriatingly slow at times, a result of too much demand on insufficient international bandwidth.

In recent years, a surprising number of wireless hotspots are starting to appear in major tourist destinations. At the time of writing, wireless hotspots were a good bet to be found at hotels and resorts in major tourist destinations such as Luxor, Sinai and the Red Sea Coast, Western-style cafés in both Cairo and Alexandria, and a select number of airports, cafés and fast food restaurants across the country. Considering that more and more travellers are lugging around their laptops, it's likely that this much-welcomed trend will continue to gain momentum.

LEGAL MATTERS

Foreign travellers are subject to Egyptian laws and get no special consideration. If you are arrested you have the right to telephone your embassy immediately (see p508).

One of the first signs visitors see when entering the country via Cairo airport is a prominent billboard warning that the possible penalty for drug use in Egypt is hanging. Executions for such offences have been taking place since 1989 and you'll get no exemption from penalties just because you're a tourist – be very careful.

With that said, travellers tend to take a lax attitude towards smoking hashish in Sinai, particularly in the backpacker-friendly towns of Dahab and Nuweiba. Although you will no doubt be offered drugs during your travels, and will be surrounded by other travellers who are indulging in a spliff or two, trust us – there are far better places to spend your golden years than rotting away in an Egyptian prison.

MAPS

The pick of the country maps available commercially is the Kümmerly & Frey map, which covers all of Egypt on a scale of 1:950,000. The same company also produces a map of Sinai and a pictorial (but fairly useless) map of the Nile. Similarly good is the Freytag & Berndt

map, which includes a plan of the Pyramids of Giza and covers all of Egypt except the western quarter, at a scale of 1:1,000,000. It includes insets of Cairo and central Alexandria.

Nelles Verlag has one of the most complete, though dated, general maps of Egypt (scale 1:2,500,000) including a map of the Nile Valley (scale 1:750,000) and a good enlargement of central Cairo.

Map of Egypt (scale 1:1,000,000), published by Macmillan, includes a map of the Nile Valley and a map of the country, plus good maps of Cairo and Alexandria and a variety of enlargements and temple plans.

Clyde Surveys of England has an excellent map of eastern Egypt titled *Clyde Leisure Map No 6: Egypt & Cairo*. It covers the Nile region from the coast to Aswan, and has detailed maps of Cairo, Alexandria, Luxor and Thebes, and the Pyramids, with notes in English, French and German.

MONEY

The official currency is the Egyptian pound (££) – in Arabic, a *guinay*. One pound consists of 100 piastres (pt). There are notes in denominations of 5pt, 10pt and 25pt, but these are rarely spotted. The 50pt, £1, £5, £10, £20, £50 and £100 notes are widely used. There's also a rarely seen £200 note. Coins in circulation are for denominations of 10pt, 20pt and 25pt, 50pt and £1, but they seem to be almost nonexistent and are sometimes thought of as collector's items. Prices can be written in pounds or piastres; for example, £3.35 can also be written as 335pt. In practice, however, vendors tend to round up, especially if you're a tourist.

There is a severe shortage of small change in Egypt, a reality that quickly becomes a nuisance for travellers frequenting ATMs. The 50pt, £1, £5 and £10 notes, which are useful for tips, taxi fares and avoiding the painfully repetitious incidents of not being given the correct change, are not always easy to come by. Even worse is that staff in businesses including upscale hotels and restaurants will sometimes scowl at you if you pay your bill in £100 notes, thus forcing them to take to the streets to round up change.

As a good rule of thumb in Egypt, make sure you hoard small change wherever possible. Also, be sure to cash out large bills in upscale establishments, even if they initially appear unwilling. These two simple prac-

tices will save you an indescribable amount of frustration.

The black market for hard currency is negligible; few travellers can be bothered hunting it out for the fraction of difference it makes.

Because of the dire state of the national currency, many tour operators and hotels will only accept payment in American dollars or euros. This applies when it comes to purchasing tickets for the Abela Sleeping Car train running between Alexandria, Cairo, Luxor and Aswan; the Nuweiba to Aqaba (Jordan) ferry; and all international buses. Although technically illegal but never enforced, it is also becoming increasingly common for upscale hotels to demand payment in US dollars, though more times than not you can charge your room on a credit card. To be on the safe side, it's a good idea to travel around Egypt with a modest supply of dollars.

Exchange rates for a range of foreign currencies are given on the inside front cover of this book. For information on costs in Egypt, see p18.

ATMs

It's possible to travel in Egypt now relying solely on plastic as ATMs are becoming more and more widespread. Tourist-friendly cities such as Cairo, Alexandria, Luxor, Sharm el-Sheikh and Hurghada are saturated with cash dispensers, and you'll also find them in Alexandria, Dahab, Nuweiba and Aswan. Where you will be hard-pushed to find ATMs is anywhere between Cairo and Luxor (the towns of Minya and Asyut have just the occasional one) and out in the oases (there's just one each in Siwa and Kharga).

Of the numerous types of ATM in Egypt, the vast majority are compatible with Visa, MasterCard and any Cirrus or Plus cards. ATMs at Banque Misr, CIB, Egyptian American Bank (EAB), National Bank of Egypt and HSBC are particularly reliable.

Credit Cards

Amex, Visa, MasterCard and Diners Club are becoming ever more useful in Egypt. Generally speaking, they are accepted quite widely in foreign-friendly hotels, shops and restaurants, though away from tourist establishments, they are far less common, and in remote areas they remain useless. In many places you will be charged a percentage of the sale (anywhere between 3% and 10%) to use them.

Make sure you retain any receipts to check later against your statements as there have been cases of shop owners adding extra zeros. It's a dumb, easily detected crime, but the swindlers are playing on the fact that they will only be found out once the victim has returned home, and is thousands of kilometres from Egypt.

Visa and MasterCard can be used for cash advances at Banque Misr and the National Bank of Egypt, as well as at Thomas Cook offices.

To report lost cards in Egypt, call **Amex** (☎ 02-870 3152); **MasterCard** (☎ 02-797 1179, 796 2844); **Visa** (☎ 02-796 2877, 797 1149); or **Diners Club** (☎ 02-578 3355).

International Transfers

Western Union, the international money-transfer specialist, operates jointly in Egypt with Misr America International Bank and IBA business centres.

Alexandria (Map pp380-1; ☎ 03-420 1148; 281 Tariq al-Horreyya)

Alexandria (Map pp372-3; ☎ 03-492 0900; 73 Tariq al-Horreyya)

Cairo Downtown (Map pp118-19; ☎ 02-393 4906; 19 Qasr el-Nil, Cairo); Garden City (Map p148; ☎ 02-357 1385; 1079 Corniche el-Nil, Garden City); Garden City (☎ 02-355 7071; 8 Ibrahim Naguib, Garden City); Heliopolis (☎ 02-249 0607; 67 Sharia Hegaz, Heliopolis); Heliopolis (☎ 02-258 8646; 6 Sharia Boutros Ghali, Heliopolis); Mohandiseen (☎ 02-331 3500; 24 Sharia Syria, Mohandiseen)

Dahab (Map p474; ☎ 069-364 0466; just north of Bamboo House Hotel, Masbat)

Hurghada (Map p428; ☎ 065-442 772; Unit 19, Redcon Mall, Sheraton Rd, Hurghada)

Luxor (Map pp244-5; ☎ 095-372 292; Mina Palace Hotel, Corniche el-Nil, Luxor)

Port Said (☎ 066-326 404; Unit 621, Sonesta Shopping Centre, Port Said)

Sharm el-Sheikh (Map p466; ☎ 062-602 222; Rosetta Hotel, Na'ama Bay)

The opening hours for these offices are the same as those of the banks. For further details, call the Western Union hotline on ☎ 02-355 5023.

Moneychangers

Money can be officially changed at Amex and Thomas Cook offices, as well as commercial banks, foreign exchange (forex) bureaux and some hotels. Rates don't tend to

THE ART OF BARGAINING

Bargaining is part of everyday life in Egypt, and almost everything is open to haggling, from hotel rooms to the price of imported cigarettes. Even in shops where prices are clearly marked, many Egyptians will still try to shave something off the bill. Of course, when buying in souqs such as Cairo's Khan al-Khalili, bargaining is imperative unless you are willing to pay well over the odds. It can be a hassle for anyone not used to shopping this way, but keep your cool and remember it's a game, not a fight.

The first rule is never to show too much interest in the item you want to buy. Second, don't buy the first item that takes your fancy. Wander around and price things up, but don't make it obvious; otherwise, when you return to the first shop, the vendor knows that it's because he or she is the cheapest.

Decide how much you would be happy paying and then express a casual interest in buying. The vendor will state a price. So the bargaining begins. You state a figure somewhat less than the one you have fixed in your mind. The shopkeeper will inevitably huff about how absurd that is and then tell you the 'lowest' price. If it is not low enough, then be insistent and keep smiling. Tea or coffee might be served as part of the bargaining ritual but accepting it doesn't place you under any obligation to buy. If you still can't get your price, walk away. This often has the effect of closing the sale in your favour. If not, there are thousands more shops in the bazaar.

It is considered very bad form to offer an amount, have the shopkeeper agree and then to change your mind or try to get the price even lower – make sure you don't do this.

If you do get your price or lower, never feel guilty – no vendor, no matter what they may tell you, ever sells below cost.

vary much, especially for the US dollar, but if you're keen to squeeze out the last piastre, then the forex bureaux generally offer slightly better rates than the banks, and usually don't charge commission.

Most hard currencies can be changed in Egypt, though US dollars and euros are the easiest to switch out. As a rule of thumb, always look at the money you're given when exchanging, and don't accept any badly defaced, shabby or torn notes (there are plenty of them around) because you'll have great difficulty off-loading them later. The same goes for transactions in shops, taxis etc.

Egyptian pounds can be changed back into hard currency at the end of your stay at some banks, forex bureaux, and Thomas Cook and Amex offices.

It is also possible to have money wired to you from home through Amex. This service operates through most Amex branches, and can be used by anyone, regardless of whether you have an Amex card or not. The charge is about US\$80 per US\$1000, payable in the country from which the money is sent.

Taxes

Taxes of up to 25% will be added to your bill in most upmarket restaurants. There are also hefty taxes levied on four- and five-star ac-

commodation – these have been factored into the prices we have cited.

Tippling

For information on tipping, see the boxed text, p63.

Travellers Cheques

While there is no problem cashing well-known brands of travellers cheques at the major banks such as Banque Misr or the National Bank of Egypt, many forex bureaux don't take them. Cheques issued on post office accounts (common in Europe) or cards linked to such accounts cannot be used in Egypt.

Banks can have a small handling charge on travellers cheques, usually a few Egyptian pounds per cheque. Always ask about commission as it can vary. Forex bureaux that take cheques tend not to charge any commission.

In addition, Amex and Thomas Cook travellers cheques can also be cashed at their offices, found in Cairo, Alexandria, Luxor, Aswan, Hurghada and Sharm el-Sheikh. A small handling charge usually applies.

POST

Postcards cost less than a dollar and take four or five days to get to Europe and a week to 10 days to the USA and Australia.

Sending a letter is also less than a dollar, and stamps are usually available at post offices, and some souvenir kiosks, shops, newsstands and the reception desks of major hotels. Sending mail from the post boxes at major hotels instead of from post offices seems to be quicker. If you use the post boxes, blue is for international airmail, red is for internal mail and green is for internal express mail.

Post offices are usually open from 8.30am to 2pm Saturday to Thursday. Poste restante in Egypt functions remarkably well and is generally free (though in Alexandria there's a small fee to collect letters). If you plan to pick up mail there, ensure that the clerk checks under Mr, Ms or Mrs in addition to your first and last names.

If you receive a package, you'll get a card (written in Arabic; you'll need a local to help you) directing you to some far-flung corner of the city to collect it. Take your passport, money and lots of patience and time.

For more information on Egypt Post, contact ☎ 0800-800 2800 or check www.egyptpost.org.

Parcels

Packages going by normal sea mail or airmail are sent from the main post office, although in Cairo they can only go from the huge post traffic centre located on Midan Ramses. As an indication of fees, a parcel that weighs 1kg costs between £100 and £200 to send via surface mail to the USA, Australia or Europe. Parcels of more than 20kg for Western Europe and Africa, and 30kg for the USA, will not be accepted. Parcels should also not be bigger than 1m long and deep, and 50cm wide.

There is usually a long and complicated process of customs inspection and form filling – don't close the parcel until the process is over. You may have to get export licences or have goods inspected, depending on what they are. Printed matter and audio and visual material will be checked and foodstuffs (except dried food) and medicines also need clearance.

The easiest way to send a package is to pay someone else a small fee and have them do it for you. Some shopkeepers will provide this service, especially if you've bought the article in their bazaar. It should include obtaining an export licence, packaging and mailing.

SHOPPING

Egypt is a shopper's dream – from traditional papyrus scrolls and original artwork to hand-made jewellery and the obligatory hookah, there is no shortage of trinkets and souvenirs on sale in souqs across the country. Of course, a good portion of tourist offerings tend to be low-quality junk, though anyone with a discerning eye can pick out the diamonds in the rough.

The undisputed shopping capital of Egypt is Khan al-Khalili in Cairo, which is just as much a tourist circus as it is one of the Middle East's most storied and historic markets. Although you're going to have to navigate a gauntlet of slimy touts and rip-off shops, there are some great finds to be had assuming you have the time (and the patience) to shop around.

Other top-notch shopping areas include the tourist markets in Luxor, Aswan and Sharm el-Sheikh. Also, be on the lookout for traditional Siwan, Bedouin and Nubian handicrafts in the Western Desert, Sinai and Aswan, respectively.

SOLO TRAVELLERS

Other than where common sense dictates – for example, don't go wandering off into the desert on your own, don't go snorkelling or diving unaccompanied – there is nowhere in Egypt that can't be travelled solo, if you are a man, that is. Solo travel for women is slightly more difficult (see p518 and various warnings throughout the book), but is still viable as long as you use sensible caution and dress appropriately.

TELEPHONE

The country code for Egypt is ☎ 20, followed by the local area code (minus the zero), then the 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. The most common mobile phone prefixes in Egypt are ☎ 010 and ☎ 012.

Two companies sell phonecards in Egypt. Menatel has yellow-and-green booths, 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.

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.

You will find fax services are available at the main centres in the big cities. A one-page fax costs ££7.65.

International Calling Cards

The following cards can be accessed through these Cairo numbers: **AT&T** (☎ 02-510 0200), **MCI** (☎ 02-355 5770) and **Global One & Sprint** (☎ 02-356 4777).

Mobile Phones

Egypt's mobile-phone network runs on the GSM system.

There are two mobile-phone companies in Egypt: **MobiNil** (☎ 02-760 9090; www.mobinil.com) and **Vodafone** (☎ 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 air-time 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 wireless connection to the internet through your laptop.

TIME

Egypt is two hours ahead of GMT/UTC and daylight-saving time is observed (it begins on the last Thursday in April and ends on the last Thursday in September). So, without allowing for variations due to daylight saving, when it's noon in Cairo it is 2am in Los Angeles, 5am in New York and Montreal, 10am in London, 1pm in Moscow, and 7pm in Melbourne and Sydney.

TOILETS

Public toilets, when they can be found, are bad news. Some toilets are of the 'squat' variety. Only in midrange and top-end hotels will toilet paper be provided; most toilets simply come equipped with a water squirter for washing yourself when you're finished. It's a good idea to adopt this practice as toilets in Egypt are not capable of swallowing much toilet paper and it's not uncommon to find toilets absolutely choked with the stuff in

hotels frequented by Westerners. If you do use toilet paper, put it in the bucket that's usually provided.

In cities it's a good idea to make a mental note of all Western-style fast-food joints and five-star hotels, as these are where you'll find the most sanitary facilities.

When trekking in the desert, climbing Mt Sinai or camping on a beach, do not leave used toilet paper lying around. Don't bury it as strong winds can still blow it away. Place the paper in a plastic bag to throw away later or take matches to burn the paper.

TOURIST INFORMATION

The Egyptian government has tourist information offices throughout the country, some of which are better than others. The usefulness of the offices depends largely on the staff. The Aswan, Luxor, Dakhla, Siwa, Alexandria and Suez offices are staffed by people who have wide-ranging local knowledge and who will go out of their way to help you. Government-produced reference materials, such as maps and brochures, tend to be out of date and too general.

Egyptian tourist offices abroad tend to be well stocked with brochures, free maps and booklets and have fairly helpful staff.

Following is a selected list of tourist offices outside Egypt. Note that there is no office in Australia.

Canada (Egyptian Tourist Authority; ☎ 514-861 4420; eta@total.net; Suite 250, 1253 McGill College Ave, Montreal, Quebec H3B 2Y5)

France (Bureau de Tourisme; ☎ 01 45 62 94 42; fax 01 42 89 34 81; Ambassade de la RAE, 90 Ave des Champs Élysées, Paris)

Germany (Aegyptisches Fremdenverkehrsamt; ☎ 69-25 23 19; fax 23 98 76; 64A Kaiserstrasse, 60329, Frankfurt am Main)

Italy (Egyptian Tourist Authority; ☎ 396-482 79 85; fax 487 4156; Via Bissolati 19, Rome)

Japan (☎ 03-3589 0653; fax 3589 1372; Annex 2F, 19-18, Akasaka 2-chome, Minato-ku, Tokyo)

Spain (Oficina de Turismo Egipto; ☎ 341-559 2121; fax 547 5165; Torre de Madrid Planta 5, Oficina 3, Madrid)

UK (Egyptian Tourist Authority; ☎ 020-1493 5282; egypt@freenetname.co.uk; 3rd fl W, Egyptian House, 170 Piccadilly, London W1V 9DD)

USA Chicago (Egyptian Tourist Authority; ☎ 312-280 4666; fax -280 4788; Suite 829, 645 North Michigan Ave, Chicago, IL 60611); Los Angeles (☎ 323-653 8815; egypt@etala.com; San Vicente Plaza, Suite 215, 8383 Wilshire Blvd, Beverly Hills, CA 90211); New York (☎ 212-332

2570; egyptours@aol.com; Suite 1706, 630 Fifth Ave, New York, NY 10111)

TRAVELLERS WITH DISABILITIES

Egypt is not well equipped for travellers with a mobility problem. Ramps are few and far between, public facilities don't necessarily have lifts, curbs are high (except in Alexandria, which has wheelchair-friendly sidewalks), traffic is lethal and gaining entrance to some of the ancient sites – such as the Pyramids of Giza or the tombs on the West Bank near Luxor – is all but impossible due to their narrow entrances and steep stairs.

Despite all this, there is no reason why intrepid travellers with disabilities shouldn't visit Egypt. In general you'll find locals quite willing to assist with any difficulties. Anyone with a wheelchair can take advantage of the large hatchback Peugeot 504s that are commonly used as taxis. One of these, together with a driver, can be hired for the day. Chances are the driver will be quite happy to help you in and out of the vehicle. Getting around the country should not be too much of a problem as most places can be reached via comfortable internal flights.

We have heard excellent reports of **Egypt for All** (☎ 02-311 3988; www.egyptforall.com; 334 Sharia Sudan, Mohandiseen, Cairo), an Egyptian company specialises in organising travel arrangements for travellers who are mobility impaired.

Organisations

See the website **Access-Able Travel Source** (www.access-able.com) for general information for travellers with disabilities. Before leaving home, travellers can also get in touch with their national support organisation. Ask for the 'travel officer', who may have a list of travel agencies that specialise in tours for people with disabilities.

Access, The Foundation for Accessibility by the Disabled (☎ 516-887 5798; PO Box 356, Malverne, NY 11565, USA)

CNFLRH (☎ 01 53 80 66 66; 236 Rue de Tolbiac, Paris, France)

Radar (☎ 020-7250 3222; www.radar.org.uk; 12 City Forum, 250 City Rd, London EC1V 8AF, UK) Produces holiday fact-packs that cover planning, insurance, useful organisations, transport, equipment and specialised accommodation.

Society for the Advancement of Travel for the Handicapped (SATH; ☎ 212-447 7284; www.sath.org; 347 Fifth Ave, No 610, New York, NY 10016, USA)

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.

Visas are available on arrival for nationals of all Western European countries, the UK, the USA, Australia, all Arab countries, New Zealand, Japan and Korea. At the Cairo airport, the entire process takes only 20 minutes or so, and costs US\$25 – the seriously old-school stamps are bought from one of the 24-hour bank exchange-booths just before passport control. No photo is required.

Nationals from other countries must obtain visas in their countries of residence. Processing times and costs for visa applications vary according to your nationality and the country in which you apply.

If you are travelling overland, you can get a visa at the port in Aqaba, Jordan before getting the ferry to Nuweiba. However, 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).

Visa Extensions & Re-entry Visas

Six-month and one-year extensions of your visa for tourist purposes can easily be obtained

at passport offices, and only cost a few dollars. 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 E£100, and you'll require a letter of apology from your embassy.

If you don't have a multiple-entry visa, it's also possible to get a re-entry visa that is valid to the combined expiry dates of your visa and any extensions. A re-entry visa for one to several entries costs less than US\$5.

Travel Permits

Military permits issued by either the Ministry of Interior or Border Police are needed to travel in the Eastern Desert south of Shams Allam (50km south of Marsa Allam), on or around Lake Nasser, off-road in the Western Desert and 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.

WOMEN TRAVELLERS

Egyptians are conservative, especially on matters concerning sex and women – Egyptian women that is, not foreign women.

An entire book could be written from the comments and stories of women travellers about their adventures and misadventures in Egypt. You're almost certain to hear chat-up lines such as 'I miss you like the desert misses the rain', which might be funny if they weren't so constant and intimidating. Most of the incidents are nonthreatening nuisances, like a fly buzzing in your ear: you can swat it away and keep it at a distance, but it's always out there buzzing around.

The presence of foreign women presents, in the eyes of some Egyptian men, a chance to get around these norms with ease and without consequences. This belief is reinforced by distorted impressions gained from Western TV and by the inappropriate clothing worn by some female tourists. As a woman traveller you may receive some verbal harassment at the very least. Serious physical harassment and rape do occasionally occur, but more rarely than in most Western countries.

Attitudes Towards Women

Some of the biggest misunderstandings between Egyptians and Westerners occur over

the issue of women. Half-truths and stereotypes exist on both sides: many Westerners assume all Egyptian women are veiled, repressed victims, while a large number of Egyptians just see Western women as sex-obsessed and immoral.

For many Egyptians of both genders, the role of a woman is specifically defined: she is mother and matron of the household. The man is the provider. However, as with any society, generalisations can be misleading and the reality is far more nuanced. There are thousands of middle- and upper-middle-class professional women living in Egypt who, like their counterparts in the West, juggle both work and family responsibilities. Among the working classes, where adherence to tradition is the strongest, the ideal may be for women to concentrate on the home and family, but economic reality means that millions of women are forced to work (but are still responsible for all the domestic chores).

The issue of sex is where the differences between Western and Egyptian women are most apparent. Premarital sex (or, indeed, any sex outside marriage) is taboo in Egypt. However, as with anything forbidden, it still happens. Nevertheless, it is the exception rather than the rule – and that goes for men as well as women.

For women, however, the issue is potentially far more serious. With the possible exception of the upper classes, women are expected to be virgins when they marry and a family's reputation can rest upon this point. In such a context the restrictions placed on a girl – no matter how onerous they may seem to a Westerner – are to protect her and her reputation from the potentially disastrous attentions of men.

What to Wear

Away from the Sinai and Red Sea beaches, Egyptians are quite conservative about dress. As with anywhere, take your cues from those around you: if you're in a rural area and all the women are in long, concealing dresses, you should be conservatively dressed. If you're going out to a hip Cairo nightspot, you're likely to see middle- and upper-class Egyptian girls in the briefest designer gear and can dress accordingly – just don't walk there.

It is particularly important to cover up when visiting mosques and churches – you'll

TIPS FOR WOMEN TRAVELLERS

- Wear a wedding ring. Generally, Egyptian men seem to have more respect for a married woman.
- If you are travelling with a man, it is better to say you're married rather than 'just friends'.
- Avoid direct eye contact with an Egyptian man unless you know him well; dark sunglasses help, mirrored ones are even better.
- Try not to respond to an obnoxious comment from a man – act as if you didn't hear it.
- Be careful in crowds and other situations where you are crammed between people as it is not unusual for crude things to happen behind you.
- On public transport, sit next to a woman if possible. This is not difficult on the Cairo metro where the first compartment is reserved for women only.
- If you're in the countryside (off the beaten track) be extra conservative in what you wear.
- Keep your distance. Remember that even innocent, friendly talk can be misconstrued as flirtation by men unused to close interaction with women. Ditto for any physical contact.
- If you need help for any reason (directions etc), ask a woman first.
- Be wary when horse or camel riding, especially at touristy places. It's not unknown for a guy to ride close to you and grab your horse, among other things. Riding with an unknown man on a horse or camel should be avoided.
- Egypt is not the place for acquiring a full suntan. Only on private beaches in the top-end resorts along the Red Sea and in southern Sinai are you likely to feel comfortable stripping down to a bikini. Along the Mediterranean coast and in oasis pools, you'll have to swim in shorts and a T-shirt at the very minimum, and even then you'll attract a flock of male onlookers. Egyptian women rarely go swimming at public beaches; when they do, they swim fully clothed, scarf and all.
- You may find it handy to learn the Arabic for 'don't touch me' (*la' tilmasni*). Also worth memorising are *ihthirim nafsak* (literally 'behave yourself') or *haasib eedak* (watch your hand). Swearing at would-be Romeos will only make matters worse.
- If you do get groped, don't expect people to be ashamed or apologise if you call them out. Most guys will just sort of stare at you blankly and wander away. So all the advice to ignore, ignore, ignore is really wiser – you won't be standing there with your adrenaline running, shouting and feeling like an idiot.
- Being befriended by an Egyptian woman is a great way to learn more about life in Egypt and, at the same time, have someone totally nonthreatening to guide you around. Getting to know an Egyptian woman is, however, easier said than done. All we can say is seize on whatever opportunities you get.

find that carrying a shawl to use as a head covering will come in very useful, particularly when visiting areas such as Islamic and Old Cairo.

Unfortunately, although dressing conservatively should reduce the incidence of harassment, it by no means guarantees you'll be left alone. Although it may or may not be comforting, Egyptian women get verbal and physical harassment as well – it's not just because you're foreign (see www.ecwr.org for info on sexual harassment surveys in Egypt).

WORK

More than 40,000 foreigners live and work in Egypt. It is possible to find work with one of the many foreign companies, especially if you begin your research before you leave home. *Cairo: A Practical Guide*, edited by Claire E Francy and published by the American University in Cairo Press (E£60), has lots of information about working in Cairo. Once you have an employer, securing a work permit through an Egyptian consulate or from the Ministry of the Interior (if you are in Egypt) should not be difficult.

The most easily available work for native or fluent English-speakers is teaching the language to the locals. The best places to do this are reputable schools such as the ILI in Cairo (see p505). However, all of these places require qualifications and the minimum requirement is a Certificate in English Language Teaching to Adults (Celta). The ILI runs several one-month intensive Celta courses each year and sometimes employs course graduates.

If you have no qualifications or experience, you could try one of the 'cowboy schools' such as central Cairo's **International Living Language Institute** (ILLI; 34 Talaat Harb, Cairo), which is on the top floor above El-Abd bakery. These are fly-by-night places (that said, the ILLI has been around for nearly 20 years) that take on unqualified staff and work them hard for little financial return. But they do pay enough to allow you to stay on and maybe earn enough to take the Celta and gravitate to better-paid employment.

If you are a dive master or diving instructor you can find work in Egypt's diving resorts fairly easily. As many divers fund their travels

through such work the turnover is high and you're likely to find an opening if you can hang around for a couple of weeks. Owners say that apart from the basic diving qualifications, they look for languages and an ability to get along with people. If you're interested in a job, a dive centre will usually take you along on a few dive trips to assess your diving skills and to see how you interact with others before offering you work.

It is sometimes possible to find other types of work in resort towns. Sharm el-Sheikh and Dahab in particular have a relatively large number of travellers who find short-term work as bartenders or workers in the many hotels and dive centres dotted along the beach. There are also a few enterprising travellers who've financed their stay by setting up shop as masseurs, acupuncturists and herbalists.

Away from the beaches, some of the larger hotels in Luxor and Aswan occasionally take on foreigners as entertainment directors, but many of the large chains have their own staff sent in from abroad.

Transport

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GETTING THERE & AWAY

If you're heading to Egypt from Europe, the easiest way to get there is to fly direct. If you're coming from any other continent, it can sometimes be cheaper to fly first to Europe and then make your way to Egypt. And, of course, there are also the overland combinations of bus, taxi and ferry from other European, African and Middle Eastern countries to consider.

ENTERING THE COUNTRY

If you enter the country via Cairo International Airport, there are a few formalities. After walking past the dusty-looking duty-free shops, you'll come to a row of exchange booths. If you haven't organised a visa in advance, you'll need to pay US\$25 to receive a visa stamp (see p517). You then fill in one of the pink immigration forms available on the benches in front of the immigration officials before queuing to be processed. The whole procedure usually takes about 20 minutes, but this being Egypt, it's probably best to expect delays.

Entering overland or by ferry is more arduous as baggage checks are routine, and there are departure and entry taxes to be

paid. Although formalities vary depending on which border you're crossing, generally speaking it's fairly straightforward to enter Egypt by land or sea.

Regardless of the means by which you enter Egypt, be sure that you have a passport that is valid for at least six months from the date of entry into the country.

If you're leaving Egypt by air, your departure tax will usually have been prepaid with your airfare. If you're departing by land, you'll need to pay E£2 (travellers who entered Egypt on a Sinai-only visa are exempt). Also note that Egyptian international ferries charge E£50 port tax per person on top of the ticket price.

AIR Airports & Airlines

Egypt has quite a few airports, but only seven of these are official international ports of entry: Cairo, Alexandria, Luxor, Aswan, Hurghada, Sharm el-Sheikh and Marsa Alam. With that said, most air travellers enter Egypt through Cairo, Alexandria or Sharm el-Sheikh, while the other airports tend to be used by charter and package-deal flights only.

Most tickets are sold for flights in and out of Cairo, but sometimes it's possible to get cheaper deals to the airports serving resorts, such as Sharm el-Sheikh. While you could use Sharm as a starting point for travelling around the country, it is a good six-hour bus ride from Cairo, and the loss of time may outweigh any potential savings in money. However, Sharm serves as an excellent base for exploring Sinai or as a jumping-off point for Jordan and Israel & the Palestinian Territories.

Egypt's international and national carrier is **EgyptAir** (MS; ☎ national call centre 0900 70000; www.egyptair.com.eg; ✉ 8am-8pm), which has its hub at Cairo International Airport. Humorously (or perhaps terrifyingly) dubbed 'Egypt Scare' or 'Insh'allah Air' by jaded travellers the world over, EgyptAir's service isn't particularly good, and its fleet is in serious need of an upgrade, unless of course, you're a fan of rapidly ageing Russian planes. If you're looking for an international flight to Egypt, you'd do better flying with a different airline – anyone will do.

WARNING – THINGS CHANGE

The information contained in this chapter is particularly vulnerable to change: prices for international travel are volatile, routes are introduced and cancelled, schedules change, special deals come and go, and rules and visa requirements are amended. Airlines and governments seem to take pleasure in making price structures and regulations as complicated as possible. You should check directly with the airline or your travel agency to make sure you understand how a fare (and ticket you may buy) works. In addition, the travel industry is highly competitive, and there are many lurks and perks.

The upshot of this is that you should get opinions, quotes and advice from as many airlines and travel agencies as possible before parting with your hard-earned cash. The details given in this chapter should be regarded as pointers and are not a substitute for your own careful, up-to-date research.

For details of Egypt Air offices in Egypt, see the Getting There & Away sections of destination chapters throughout the book. For airport details, see To/From the Airport in the Getting Around section of destination chapters throughout the book.

If you're planning on booking your accommodation online, be sure to check out www.lonelyplanet.com/travel_services.

Airlines that fly to/from Egypt include the following:

Air France (AF; ☎ in Cairo 02-575 8899; www.airfrance.com; 2 Midan Talaat Harb, Downtown) Hub: Charles de Gaulle Airport, Paris.

Alitalia (AZ; ☎ in Cairo 02-578 5823; www.alitalia.it; Nile Hilton, 1113 Corniche el-Nil, Downtown) Hub: Fiumicino, Rome.

British Airways (BA; www.britishairways.com) Cairo (☎ 02-578 0741-6; 1 Sharia Abdel Salam Aref, Midan Tahrir, Downtown); Cairo International Airport (☎ 02-690 1690) Hub: Heathrow Airport, London.

BMI (BMI; ☎ in the UK 0870 6070 555; www.flybmi.com) Hub: Heathrow Airport, London.

El Al Israel Airlines (LY; ☎ in Cairo 02-736 1620; www.elal.com; 5 Sharia al-Maqrizi, Zamalek) Hub: Ben-Gurion Airport, Tel Aviv.

Emirates Airlines (EK; www.emirates.com) Cairo (☎ 02-336 1555; 18 Sharia Wizeraat El Zeraah, Mohandiseen); Cairo International Airport (☎ 02-418 0305) Hub: Dubai International Airport, UAE.

KLM (KL; www.klm.com) Cairo (☎ 02-580 5700; 11 Sharia Qasr el-Nil, Downtown); Cairo International Airport (☎ 02-418 2386) Hub: Amsterdam International Airport.

Lufthansa (LH; ☎ in Cairo 02-739 8339; www.lufthansa.com; 6 Midan Sheikh al-Marsafy, Zamalek) Hub: Munchen Airport, Frankfurt.

Malaysia Airlines (MH) Cairo (☎ 02-576 6777; Nile Hilton, 1113 Corniche el-Nil, Downtown); Cairo International Airport (☎ 02-266 3146) Hub: Kuala Lumpur International Airport.

Middle East Airlines (ME; ☎ in Cairo 02-574 3422; www.me.com.lb; 12 Sharia Qasr el-Nil, Downtown) Hub: Beirut International Airport.

Olympic Airways (OA; ☎ in Cairo 02-393 1277; www.olympic-airways.gr) Hub: Eleftherios Venizelos International Airport.

Royal Jordanian (RJ; ☎ in Cairo 02-575 0905; www.rja.com.jo; 6 Sharia Qasr el-Nil, Downtown) Hub: Amman International Airport.

Singapore Airlines (SQ; ☎ in Cairo 02-575 0276; www.singaporeairlines.com; Nile Hilton, 1113 Corniche el-Nil, Downtown) Hub: Changi Airport, Singapore.

Syrian Arab Airlines (RB; ☎ in Cairo 02-392 8284/5; www.syrianair.com; 25 Sharia Talaat Harb, Downtown) Also known as Syrianair; hub: Damascus Airport.

Africa

Rennies Travel (www.renniestravel.com) and **STA Travel** (www.statravel.co.za) have offices throughout Southern Africa. Check their websites for branch locations.

Asia

STA Travel (www.statravel.com/worldwide.htm; Bangkok ☎ 02-236 0262; www.statravel.co.th); Hong Kong ☎ 2736 1618; www.statravel.com.hk; Japan ☎ 03 5391 2922; www.statravel.co.jp; Singapore ☎ 6737 7188; www.statravel.com.sg) proliferates in Asia. Check its website for a complete list of locations. Another resource in Japan is **No 1 Travel** (☎ 03-3205 6073; www.no1-travel.com); in Hong Kong try **Four Seas Tours** (☎ 2200 7760; www.fourseastravel.com/english).

Australia

For the location of **STA Travel** (www.statravel.com.au) branches call ☎ 1300 733 035 or visit its website. **Flight Centre** (☎ 133 133; www.flightcentre.com.au) has offices located throughout Australia. For online bookings, visit **Travel** (www.travel.com.au).

Canada

Canada's national student travel agency is **Travel Cuts** (☎ 800-667-2887; www.travelcuts.com). For online bookings try **Expedia** (www.expedia.ca) and **Travelocity** (www.travelocity.ca).

Continental Europe

FRANCE

Recommended travel agencies:

Anyway (☎ 08 92 89 38 92; www.anyway.fr)

Lastminute (☎ 08 92 70 50 00; www.lastminute.fr)

Nouvelles Frontières (☎ 08 25 00 07 47; www.nouvelles-frontieres.fr)

OTU Voyages (www.otu.fr) Specialises in student and youth travellers.

Voyageurs du Monde (☎ 01 40 15 11 15; www.vdm.com)

GERMANY

Recommended travel agencies:

Expedia (www.expedia.de)

Just Travel (☎ 089 747 3330; www.justtravel.de)

Lastminute (☎ 01805 284 366; www.lastminute.de)

STA Travel (☎ 01805 456 422; www.statravel.de) For travellers under 26 years.

ITALY

A recommended travel agent is **CTS Viaggi** (☎ 06 462 0431; www.cts.it), for student/youth deals.

THE NETHERLANDS

A recommended travel agency is **Airfair** (☎ 020 620 5121; www.airfair.nl).

SPAIN

Recommended travel agencies include **Barcelo Viajes** (☎ 902 116 226; www.barceloviajes.com) and **Nouvelles Frontières** (☎ 90 217 09 79; www.nouvelles-frontieres.es).

India

STIC Travels (www.stictravel.com Delhi ☎ 11-233 57 468; Mumbai ☎ 22-221 81 431) has offices in dozens of Indian cities. Check its website for a complete list of locations. Another agency is **Transway International** (www.transwayinternational.com).

Middle East

Recommended travel agencies:

Al-Rais Travels (www.alrais.com) In Dubai.

Egypt Panorama Tours (☎ 02-359 0200; www.eptours.com) In Cairo.

Israel Student Travel Association (ISTA) (☎ 02-625 7257) In Jerusalem.

Orion-Tour (www.orientour.com) In Istanbul.

New Zealand

Both **Flight Centre** (☎ 0800 243 544; www.flightcentre.co.nz) and **STA Travel** (☎ 0508 782 872; www.statravel.co.nz) have branches throughout the country. Try **Travel** (www.travel.co.nz), which is recommended for online bookings.

South America

Recommended travel agencies:

ASATEJ (☎ 54-011 4114-7595; www.asatej.com) In Argentina.

IVI Tours (☎ 0212-993 6082; www.ividiomas.com) In Venezuela.

The Student Travel Bureau (☎ 3038 1555; www.stb.com.br) In Brazil.

UK & Ireland

Discount air travel is a huge business in the UK and Ireland. Advertisements for many travel agencies appear in the travel pages of the weekend broadsheet newspapers, in *Time Out*, the *Evening Standard* and in the free online magazine *TNT* (www.tntmagazine.com).

Recommended travel agencies:

Bridge the World (☎ 0870 444 7474; www.b-t-w.co.uk)

Flightbookers (☎ 0870 814 4001; www.ebookers.com)

Flight Centre (☎ 0870 890 8099; flightcentre.co.uk)

North-South Travel (☎ 01245 608 291; www.northsouthtravel.co.uk) Donates part of its profit to projects in the developing world.

Quest Travel (☎ 0870 442 3542; www.questtravel.com)

Soliman Travel (☎ 020 7370 5130; www.solimantravel.co.uk) A long-established Egypt specialist.

STA Travel (☎ 0870 160 0599; www.statravel.co.uk) For travellers under 26 years.

Trailfinders (www.trailfinders.co.uk)

Travel Bag (☎ 0870 890 1456; www.travelbag.co.uk)

USA

Discount travel agents in the USA are known as consolidators (although you won't see a sign on the door saying 'Consolidator'). San Francisco is the ticket consolidator capital of the USA, although some good deals can be found in Los Angeles, New York and other big cities.

The following travel agencies are recommended for online bookings:

Cheap Tickets (www.cheaptickets.com)

Expedia (www.expedia.com)

Kayak (www.kayak.com)

Lowest Fare (www.lowestfare.com)

CLIMATE CHANGE & TRAVEL

Climate change is a serious threat to the ecosystems that humans rely upon, and air travel is the fastest-growing contributor to the problem. Lonely Planet regards travel, overall, as a global benefit, but believes we all have a responsibility to limit our personal impact on global warming.

Flying & Climate Change

Pretty much every form of motorised travel generates CO₂ (the main cause of human-induced climate change) but planes are far and away the worst offenders, not just because of the sheer distances they allow us to travel, but because they release greenhouse gases high into the atmosphere. The statistics are frightening; two people taking a return flight between Europe and the US will contribute as much to climate change as an average household's gas and electricity consumption over a whole year.

Carbon Offset Schemes

Climatecare.org and other websites use 'carbon calculators' that allow travellers to offset the level of greenhouse gases they are responsible for with financial contributions to sustainable travel schemes that reduce global warming – including projects in India, Honduras, Kazakhstan and Uganda.

Lonely Planet, together with Rough Guides and other concerned partners in the travel industry, support the carbon offset scheme run by climatecare.org. Lonely Planet offsets all of its staff and author travel.

For more information check out our website: www.lonelyplanet.com.

Orbitz (www.orbitz.com)

STA Travel (www.sta.com) For travellers under 26 years.

Travelocity (www.travelocity.com)

LAND

Israel & the Palestinian Territories

The two official borders with Israel & the Palestinian Territories are 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 writing there were problems with border security – large groups of Palestinians illegally crossed into Egypt to shop and visit extended family as soon as the security handover took place, greatly upsetting the Egyptians. As a result, the situation is unsettled and foreigners are unlikely to be able to use the border crossing in the near future.

TABA

The border crossing at Taba is used for the majority of travel between Egypt and Israel

& the Palestinian Territories. Travellers make their way to Taba from destinations across Egypt, and then walk across the border, which is open 24 hours, into Israel & the Palestinian Territories. An Israeli visa is not required for most nationalities. Once the border is crossed, taxis or buses (city bus E£15) can be taken the 4km to Eilat, from where there are frequent buses onward to Jerusalem and Tel Aviv. Keep in mind that there are no buses operating in Israel & the Palestinian Territories on Friday evenings or before sundown Saturday, the Jewish holy day of Shabbat.

Heading back to Egypt, you must have a visa in advance unless your visit is limited to eastern Sinai or you have prearranged your entry with an Egyptian tour operator (see p517). If you don't have a visa, there is an **Egyptian embassy** (☎ 03-546 4151; Rehov Basel 54; ☎ applications 9-11am Sun-Thu) in Tel Aviv and a **consulate** (☎ 972-637 6882; fax 637 1026; 68 Afrouni St; ☎ 9-11am Sun-Thu) in Eilat. An Egyptian visa sourced through either of these offices will cost 65NIS for US and German citizens and 100NIS for everyone else. Deliver your passport, application and one passport-sized photo during opening hours in the morning and you'll be able to pick up the visa around 2pm on the same day.

At the **border crossing** (☎ 08-637 2104, 636 0999) you'll need to pay a 68NIS fee to leave Israel & the Palestinian Territories. Once you've crossed the border, you'll need to pay an Egyptian entry tax of E£30 at a booth about 1km south of the border on the main road. Alternatively, you can pick up a free Sinai-only entry permit (see p517).

Vehicles can be brought into Egypt from Eilat (you will pay around 32NIS on the Israel & the Palestinian Territories side and E£180 on the Egyptian side), but no private vehicles are permitted to cross at Taba *from* Egypt to Israel & the Palestinian Territories.

At the time of research **Misr Travel** (☎ 02-335 5470; Cairo Sheraton, Midan al-Galaa, Doqqi) and **Mazada Tours** (☎ 972 3 544 4454; www.mazada.co.il; 141 Ibn Guirli St, Tel Aviv) were both running an express service (US\$55, 12 to 14 hours) leaving the Cairo Sheraton hotel on Sunday, Monday and Thursday at 9am, travelling via Taba to Tel Aviv and then heading on to Jerusalem. Contact the companies for details.

The **East Delta Travel Company** (☎ 02-2574 2814) runs several daily buses to Taba (E£70 to E£80, nine hours) from Cairo's Turgoman Garage. If you're at one of the south Sinai resorts, such as Dahab, Nuweiba or Sharm el-Sheikh, there are plenty of buses heading north up the coast or you can jump in a service taxi if no other means are available.

Jordan

From Cairo, there's a twice-weekly **Superjet** (☎ 02-2290 9017) service to Amman (US\$85) leaving from Al-Mazah Garage on Sunday and Thursday at 5am. There is also a daily East Delta Bus Co service from Cairo to Aqaba (US\$45) at 8pm.

From Alexandria, there's one daily Superjet service to Amman (US\$80) at 4pm and one service to Aqaba (US\$40) at 6pm.

Both of these bus services use the ferry between Nuweiba and Aqaba, so you will be liable for the port tax and the cost of a ferry ticket (see p526).

Libya

The border-crossing point of Amsaad, just n **Libya** orth of Halfaya Pass, is 12km west of Sallum. Service taxis run up the mountain between the town and the Egyptian side of the crossing for E£5. Once you've walked through passport control and customs, you can get a Libyan service taxi on to Al-Burdi for

about LD1. From there, buses run to Tobruk and Benghazi.

Be advised that at the time of writing it was still not possible to get a Libyan visa at the border. However, you should check with the Libyan embassy in Cairo (p508) as the regulations do seem to be becoming more user-friendly. It is also not possible to get an Egyptian visa at the border, but this may change in the near future. Departure tax from Egypt is E£20; there is no Libyan departure tax.

Superjet has buses to Benghazi leaving on Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday at 11am (E£135, 17 hours), as well as buses to Tripoli leaving on Tuesday, Friday and Sunday at 10am (E£250, 24 hours). East Delta Bus Co also has buses to Benghazi, which leave at noon on Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday (E£120, 17 hours). East Delta has 11am buses to Tripoli on Tuesday and Friday (E£230, 24 hours).

Sudan

Despite sharing an enormous land border, the only way to travel between Egypt and Sudan is to fly or take the Wadi Halfa ferry (see p526).

SEA Cyprus

From Port Said, boats to Limassol in Cyprus depart twice weekly from May to November (one-way US\$120). For information and tickets, visit one of the many shipping agents in town. These include **Canal Tours** (☎ 066-332 1874, 012 798 6338; canalstours@bec.com.eg; 12 Sharia Palestine, Port Said; ☎ 8am-3pm & 7pm-midnight), a few blocks up from the tourist office. Note that some nationalities (mainly those from the subcontinent) must be in possession of a valid visa for Cyprus to be allowed on board the boats.

Europe

Mena Tours (☎ 066-322 5742, 323 3376; Sharia al-Gomhuriyya, Port Said) acts as the agency for the limited passenger-ship services that operate between Port Said and various Mediterranean destinations, including Beirut (Lebanon) and Antalya (Turkey). At the time of research no passenger boats were operating between Egyptian ports and any ports in Europe.

Israel & the Palestinian Territories

There's been talk about resuming the boat service from Port Said to Haifa in Israel & the

PORT TAX

All Egyptian international ferries charge ££50 port tax per person on top of the ticket price.

Palestinian Territories. At the time of writing, however, this service was still nonexistent.

Jordan

There's an excellent fast-ferry service between Nuweiba in Egypt and Aqaba in Jordan leaving Nuweiba at 3pm and taking one to two hours depending on sea conditions. Heading back to Egypt, fast ferries depart from Aqaba and head back to Nuweiba at 11am. One-way tickets cost US\$59 for adults, US\$39 for children aged three to 12 years. You must be at the port two hours before departure in order to get through the shambolic departure formalities in the main ferry terminal building.

Note that there's also a slow ferry (adult/child US\$49/29, 2½ hours) leaving at noon daily, though we can't stress how much more comfortable it is to shell out the extra US\$10 and take the fast ferry.

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-noon), in a small building near the port. Note that the only exception to this rule is during the hajj (pilgrimage to Mecca) when boats fill up weeks prior to departure. During this period, it's necessary to buy your ticket as far in advance as possible.

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 to the immigration officers along with your passport and – hey presto – your passport and visa are collected when you pass through Jordanian immigration at Aqaba. (Visas are free only for travellers entering via Aqaba. For travellers entering via other borders, fees are payable.) Other nationalities will need to organise a visa in advance.

Saudi Arabia

Telestar Tours runs an irregular service on its *El-Salaam* ferry between Suez and Jeddah (about 36 hours). Tickets (one way) cost ££300 for deck class, ££400 for

3rd class, ££500 for 2nd class and ££600 for 1st class (or the US dollar equivalent). Once in Jeddah, you can arrange an onward ticket to Port Sudan. Note that getting a berth during the hajj is virtually impossible.

Mena Tours (☎ 062-322 8821, 322 0269, 010 516 9841; Sharia Al-Marwa; ☎ 9am-3pm Sat-Thu) in Suez can organise tickets.

There is a daily fast ferry that runs between Hurghada and Duba (three hours), though prices and schedules vary depending on the time of year. For more information, it is recommended that you contact **International Fast Ferries Co** (☎ 065-344 7571; www.internationalfastferries.com) or inquire at the Hurghada port. Note that you will not be allowed to board this ferry unless you have a valid Saudi visa in your passport.

Sudan

The **Nile River Valley Transport Corporation** (Aswan ☎ 097-303 348; in the shopping arcade behind the tourist police office; ☎ 8am-2pm Sat-Thu; Cairo ☎ 02-575 9058; next to the 3rd-class ticket window at Ramses station) runs one passenger ferry per week from Aswan to Wadi Halfa. One-way tickets cost ££385 for 1st class with bed in a cabin, ££240 for an airline seat and ££165 for deck class. At the time of research, the ferry was departing on Monday at around noon, though departure times regularly change. Tickets are also issued on Monday at the company's **office** (☎ 097-480 567) in Aswan Port. No tickets will be issued, nor will you be able to board the ferry, unless you have a valid Sudanese visa in your passport.

The trip takes between 16 and 24 hours (usually closer to 24), though tea, soft drinks and snacks are available on board. Passengers should arrive at about 8.30am to allow time to clear customs and fight for a decent seat. Some of the Sudanese immigration formalities are carried out on the boat, and you will occasionally be asked for a yellow-fever certificate. The return trip departs from Wadi Halfa on Wednesday.

The Nile Navigation Company attaches a pontoon to the ferry whenever it is needed. Prices are ££400 for a motorcycle and ££2500 for a car or 4WD. Drivers and passengers travel inside the ferry, for which they must also buy tickets. If you are taking a vehicle, you must have the usual *carnet de passage en douane* and allow plenty of time for customs procedures.

Other Destinations

It's sometimes possible to find passage on private yachts from Suez to destinations such as India, South Africa and even Australia. Mohamed Moseilhy at **Canal Tours** (☎ 066-6332 1874, 012 798 6338; canalstours@bec.com.eg; 12 Sharia Palestine, Suez; ☎ 8am-3pm & 7pm-midnight) is a good contact if you are keen to investigate this.

TOURS

There are countless possibilities for arranging organised tours in Egypt, with a plethora of agencies dealing with everything from guided trips and overland safaris to Nile cruises (see p78) and dive trips (see p439). The programmes on such trips are usually fairly tight, leaving little room for roaming on your own. However, the advantages are that many of the time-consuming hassles, such as waiting for public transport and finding accommodation, are taken care of, maximising time for exploring and sightseeing. There's also the security that comes with being in a group, which allows you to do things such as camping in the desert or participating off-the-beaten-track activities that might be unsafe for individuals or couples.

It pays to shop around. When considering a tour, ask what the price includes (ie flights, admission fees, food etc) – some companies include these in their prices, while others don't – you need to be aware of what you're paying for when you compare prices.

For updated listings of recommended tour operators, be sure to check out www.lonelyplanet.com/travel_services.

Adventure & Overland Safaris

In this kind of tour, you travel in a specially adapted 'overland truck' with anywhere from 16 to 24 other passengers and your group leader-cum-driver/navigator/nurse/mechanic/guide/fixer/entertainer. Accommodation is usually a mix of camping and budget hotels. Food is bought along the way and the group cooks and eats together, though you are expected to chip in with the chores.

Recommended tour companies:

African Trails (☎ 020-7706 7384; www.africantrails.co.uk) Offers a three-week Istanbul-to-Cairo trip, a five-week 'Middle East Trail' trip and a two-week Egypt tour. Offices in the UK, Australia, New Zealand and Europe.

Dragoman (☎ 870-499 4475; www.dragoman.co.uk) A UK-based overland specialist with numerous itineraries throughout North Africa and the Middle East.

Other Tours

Following is a list of specialist operators that organise Egypt packages tailored for independently minded travellers looking for more than just two weeks in the sun.

AUSTRALIA

Intrepid Travel (☎ 03-8602 0500; www.intrepidtravel.com) Highly regarded small-group tours with an emphasis on responsible tourism. Also has a London office.

Peregrine Adventures (☎ 03-9663 8611; www.peregrineadventures.com) An agent for the UK's Drago-man, Exodus and the Imaginative Traveller.

EGYPT

Abercrombie & Kent (☎ in the US 800-554-7094, 630-954-2944, www.abercombient.com) Offers first-class packages using top-end hotels, domestic flights and its own custom-built Nile cruisers.

Egypt Panorama Tours (☎ 02-359 0200; www.eptours.com; 4 Rd 79, Ma'adi, Cairo) One of the best and most reputable agencies in Egypt; accepts bookings from overseas.

Experience Egypt (☎ 02-302 8364; www.experience-egypt.com; 42 Sharia Abu el-Mahassen el-Shazly, Mohandiseen, Cairo) Part of Lady Egypt Tours. Organises small-group tours of Sinai, Alexandria and the Nile Valley that are marketed in the UK and Canada.

UK

Bales Tours (☎ 0870 752 0780; www.balesworldwide.com) Runs upmarket tours using five-star accommodation.

Egypt On The Go (☎ 020-7371 1113; www.egyptonthe-go.com) Tours of Egypt and PADI diving-course holidays. Also has an Australian office.

Exodus (☎ 0870 240 5550; www.exodus.co.uk) Includes Nile cruises and tours around Sinai and through the Western Desert.

Explore Worldwide (☎ 0800 227 8747; www.exploreworldwide.com) A variety of short and long itineraries.

Hayes & Jarvis (☎ 0870 366 1636; www.hayes-jarvis.com) A respected Egypt specialist.

Imaginative Traveller (☎ 0800 316 2717; www.imaginative-traveller.com) Small-group tours.

Wind, Sand & Stars (☎ 020-7359 7551; www.wind-sandstars.co.uk) A Sinai specialist that organises trips involving climbing and walking, desert camping, bird watching and snorkelling.

USA & CANADA

Bestway Tours & Safaris (☎ 604-264 7378; www.bestway.com) Canadian company offering small-group tours, including a tour from Siwa to Ghadames in Libya and one visiting Egypt, Israel & the Palestinian Territories and Jordan.

GETTING AROUND

Egypt has a very extensive public and private transport system, and you can travel just about anywhere in Egypt relatively cheaply. However, it's worth mentioning that most of Egypt lacks street names, which can make navigating on your own difficult. Fortunately, locals – when they do speak English – are usually more than willing to help you find your way (for a little *baksheesh*, of course!).

In recent years there have been a number of highly publicised bus crashes and ferry disasters that have claimed local and foreign lives alike. Although there is no cause for alarm, it's worth keeping this in mind, particularly when debating the merits of questionable transport options, such as night buses or dodgy-looking taxis.

AIR

EgyptAir is the main domestic carrier, and flights – however dodgy they may be – are a surprisingly cheap and convenient means of bypassing countless hours on buses or

trains. Fares vary considerably depending on season and availability, but sometimes it's possible to snag domestic one-way fares for as low as US\$35. Keep in mind, however, that prices can increase dramatically during the high season (October to April), and high-demand means that it's wise to book as far in advance as possible. For EgyptAir contact details, see the Getting There & Away sections of individual cities and towns throughout this book.

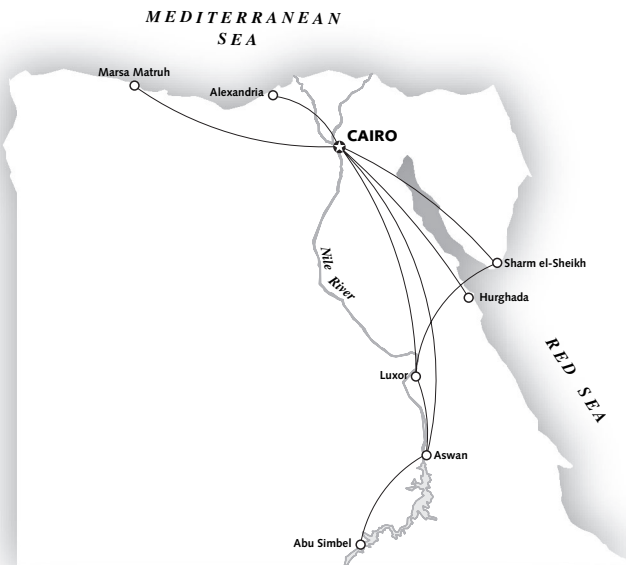
BICYCLE

You meet very few cyclists touring Egypt – long distances combined with intense heat is the main deterrent. The blazing sun is at its worst from June to August, and even from May to mid-June and September to October, it's necessary to make an early morning start and finish by early afternoon.

Carrying a full kit with you is recommended, as spares are hard to come by, although in a pinch, Egyptians are generally excellent 'bush mechanics'.

Members of **Cairo Cyclists** (☎ 02-519 6078) reckon the best place in Cairo for repairs is

DOMESTIC AIRLINES



Ghoukho Trading & Supplies near St Mark's Cathedral, 800m south of Midan Ramses. It's quite hard to find, so be prepared to ask for directions.

If you are considering cycling Egypt but have a few pressing questions that first need answering, check the Thorn Tree on Lonely Planet's website (www.lonelyplanet.com). Post your query on the Activities branch and there's a strong likelihood that somebody will respond with the information you're looking for.

Alternatively, you could contact the **Cyclists' Touring Club** (CTC; ☎ 01483-417 217; www.ctc.org.uk), a UK-based organisation that, among other things, produces information sheets on cycling in different parts of the world. At the time of research it had a dossier on Egypt. The club also publishes a good, glossy bi-monthly magazine that always carries one or two travel-type cycling pieces.

BOAT

No trip to Egypt is complete without a trip down the Nile River. Egyptians have been plying these muddy waters for countless generations, and you can still take the trip on a felucca (a traditional sailing vessel) or opt for a modern steamer or cruise ship. For information on Nile cruises and felucca trips, see p78.

Travellers heading to the Sinai can bypass hours of bumpy roads and frustrating police checkpoints by taking the speedboat from Hurghada to Sharm el-Sheikh. Although you may have to deal with a bit of sea sickness on this route, the journey is safe and reasonably affordable. It's also one of the few chances you have to boat from Africa to Asia! For more information on the ferry, see p430.

BUS

Buses service just about every city, town and village in Egypt. Ticket prices are generally comparable with the cost of 2nd-class train tickets. Intercity buses, especially on shorter runs and in Upper Egypt, tend to become crowded, and even if you're lucky enough to get a seat in the first place, you'll probably end up with something or somebody on your lap. The prices of tickets for buses on the same route will usually 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 com-

fortable you travel and the quicker you get to your destination.

Relatively comfortable, air-con 'deluxe' buses travel between Cairo, Alexandria, Ismailia, Port Said, Suez, St Katherine's Monastery, Sharm el-Sheikh, Hurghada and Luxor. Tickets cost a bit more than those for standard buses but they're still cheap. The best of the deluxe bus companies is Superjet – try to travel with them whenever possible.

The bulk of buses servicing other routes are uncomfortable, dirty and noisy. Arabic videos, pop music or Quranic dirges are played at ear-splittingly loud levels – it's a good idea to take earplugs. You might also find a sweater or scarf handy on overnight buses as the air-con brings the temperature way down.

Today most buses have a strict no-smoking rule. On some trips passengers are offered water (no charge, but remember that it's from the tap) and on the deluxe or VIP services snacks and tea are sometimes offered (beware: these are not included in the price of the ticket). These buses also sometimes have toilets on board, but they are often filthy – you're usually better off waiting for the designated toilet stop en route.

Tickets can be bought at bus stations or often on the bus. Hang on to your ticket until you get off, as inspectors almost always board to check fares. You should also always carry your passport, as buses are often stopped at military checkpoints for random identity checks. This is particularly common on the bus between Aswan and Abu Simbel, and on all Sinai buses.

It is advisable to book tickets in advance, at least on very popular routes (such as from Cairo to Sinai) and those with few buses running (from Cairo to the Western Desert). An International Student Identification Card (ISIC) now enables passengers to get discounts on some bus routes, so always remember to ask. Where you are allowed to buy tickets on the bus, you generally end up standing if you don't have an assigned seat with a booked ticket. On short runs there are no bookings and it's a case of first on, best seated.

CAR & MOTORCYCLE

Driving in Cairo is a crazy affair, so think seriously before you decide to hire a car there.

THE CURSE OF THE CONVOYS

If you're planning on travelling by road in the Nile Valley or along parts of the Red Sea coast, you have no choice but to do so in a police-escorted convoy. A legacy of the Islamist insurgency of the 1990s, which reached its apogee with the 1997 terrorist attack at the Temple of Hatshepsut in Luxor, the convoy system was introduced by the Egyptian government so as to give foreign tourists a sense of personal security when travelling through the Nile Valley and across to Hurghada. Fast forward to the present day, and what the government is providing for these valuable tourists is just one enormous pain in the neck. Put simply, the convoys are a farce, with their only real purpose being to provide much-needed duties for the country's large and underemployed tourist police force.

Take the daily convoy from Aswan to Abu Simbel, for instance, which comprises a long line of coaches, minibuses and taxis all driving dangerously fast on poor roads at the same time every morning of every day of every week. All this convoy does is ensure that any would-be terrorists will know exactly when and where large groups of foreign tourists can be targeted. The few police who do accompany the convoys are inadequately armed and spend all of their time driving faster than the average Formula One competitor, which in turn forces every driver in the convoy to drive in the same irresponsible way. It's like the *Wacky Races*, with minibuses overtaking coaches and the occasional clapped-out Peugeot that is trying to assert itself by dodging dangerously between the bigger vehicles. And having braved the convoy, its frustratingly rigid schedule means that all tourists only get two hours or so at one of the most significant sites Egypt has to offer.

The convoys between Luxor and Aswan and Luxor and Hurghada are equally ridiculous, and are also frustrating in that they end up dictating whole itineraries – most only leave a couple of times per day, and don't allow stops at major sites in the afternoon (no doubt so the tourist police can knock off work early; see also the boxed text, p220). This results in many tourists missing sites such as Abydos altogether purely because the convoy won't stop en route. Appalling.

We say it's high time that this curse is lifted.

Driving in other parts of the country, at least in daylight, isn't so bad, though you should avoid intercity driving at night. And having a car – or better still a 4WD – opens up entire areas of the country where public transport is nonexistent.

A motorcycle would be an ideal way to travel around Egypt. The only snag is that you have to bring your own, and the red tape involved is extensive. Ask your country's automobile association and Egyptian embassy about regulations.

Petrol and diesel are readily available and very cheap, though unleaded petrol is only available at a handful of pumps in Cairo (mainly in Mohandiseen, Zamalek and Ma'adi) and Alexandria. When travelling out of Cairo, remember that petrol stations are not always that plentiful – as a rule, when you see one, fill up.

Bringing Your Own Vehicle

If you're bringing a car or motorcycle into the country, you'll need the vehicle's registration papers, liability insurance and an

International Driving Permit in addition to your domestic driving licence. You will also need multiple copies of a *carnet de passage en douane*, which is effectively a passport for the vehicle, and acts as a temporary waiver of import duty. The carnet may also need to list any expensive spare parts that you're planning to carry with you, such as a gearbox. If you're driving a car, you'll also need a fire extinguisher. Contact your local automobile association for details about all documentation.

At the Egyptian border, you'll be issued with a licence valid for three months (less if your visa is valid for less time). You can renew the licence every three months for a maximum of two years, but you'll have to pay a varying fee each time. There is a customs charge of approximately US\$200, and you must pay another US\$50 for number-plate insurance.

If you plan to take your own vehicle, check in advance which spares are likely to be available. You may have trouble finding some parts for your car.

ahead of you and cuts across your path suddenly, you'll be liable if you hit it.

When driving through the countryside, keep in mind that children and adults are likely to wander onto your path, even on main roads. If you do have an accident, get to the nearest police station as quickly as possible and report what happened.

HITCHING

Hitching is never entirely safe in any country in the world, and it is not recommended. Travellers who decide to hitch should understand that they are taking a small but potentially serious risk. People who do choose to hitch will be safer if they travel in pairs and let someone know where they are planning to go. Women must never hitch on their own in Egypt, as the general assumption about such behaviour is that only prostitutes would do such a thing.

LOCAL TRANSPORT

As well as the local transport services described here, some cities and towns have their own options – most are variations on the pony-and-trap theme.

Bus & Minibus

Cairo and Alexandria are the only cities with their own bus systems. Taking a bus in either place is an experience far beyond simply getting from A to B. Firstly there's getting on board. Egyptians stampede buses, charging the entrance before the thing has even slowed. Hand-to-hand combat ensues as they run alongside trying to leap aboard. If you wait for the bus to stop, the pushing and shoving to get on is worse. Often several passengers don't quite manage to get on and they make their journey hanging off the back doorway, clinging perilously to the frame or to someone with a firmer hold.

The scene inside the bus in this case usually resembles a *Guinness World Record* attempt on the greatest number of people in a fixed space. At some point during the trip, a man will somehow manage to squeeze his way through to sell you your ticket.

The buses rarely completely stop to let you off. You stand in the doorway, wait for the opportune moment and launch yourself onto the road.

Taking a minibus is an easier option. Passengers are not allowed to stand (although

this rule is frequently overlooked), and each minibus leaves as soon as every seat is taken.

Metro

Cairo is the only city in Egypt with a metro system (for more details, see p182).

Microbus

Privately owned and usually unmarked microbuses shuttle around all the larger cities. For the average traveller they can be difficult to use, as it is unclear where most of them go. However, quite often there's a small boy hanging out of the doorway yelling the destination. In Cairo, you might have occasion to use a microbus to get out to the Pyramids, while in Alexandria they shuttle the length of Tariq al-Horreyya and the Corniche to Montazah, and in Sharm el-Sheikh they carry passengers between Old Sharm, Na'ama Bay and Shark's Bay. Most of the smaller cities and towns have similar microbuses doing set runs around town.

Pick-Up

As well as servicing routes between smaller towns, covered pick-up trucks are sometimes used within towns as local taxis. This is especially so in some of the oases towns, on Luxor's West Bank and in smaller places along the Nile. Should you end up in one of these, there are a couple of ways you can indicate to the driver that you want to get out: if you are lucky enough to have a seat, pound on the floor with your foot; alternatively, ask one of the front passengers to hammer on the window behind the driver; or, lastly, use the buzzer that you'll occasionally find rigged up.

Taxi

Almost every second car in Egypt (whether labelled or not) is a taxi, and they are by far the most convenient way of getting about. Stand at the side of the road, stick your hand out, shout your destination and get ready for some potential Indy race-car driving.

As a general rule in Egypt, taxi etiquette is that you get in knowing what to pay, and when you arrive, you get out and hand the money through the window. With that said, if a driver suspects you don't know what the correct fare is, you're fair game for fleecing. Since most travellers in Egypt don't speak fluent Arabic, it's probably best to agree on a price before getting into the taxi.

'TAXI!'

Taxis are at once a blessing and a curse. They're a remarkably convenient and easily affordable way of getting around the city, but they can also be a frequent source of unpleasantness when it comes to paying the fare. The problem stems from the unmetered system of payment, which can lead to discontent. Passengers frequently feel that they've been taken advantage of (which they often have), while drivers are occasionally genuinely aggrieved by what they see as underpayment. So why don't the drivers use the meter? Because they were all calibrated at a time when petrol was ludicrously cheap. That time has long passed and any driver relying on his meter would now be out of pocket every time he came to fill up.

Taxi driving is far from being a lucrative profession. Of the more than 60,000 taxis on the road in Cairo, it would be a safe bet to assume that none of the drivers are yet millionaires. Average earnings after fuel has been paid are about ££8 per hour. Consider, too, that many drivers don't even own their car and have to hand over part of their earnings as 'rent'.

Which isn't to say that the next time you flag a taxi for a short hop across town and the driver hisses '10 pounds' that you should smile and say 'OK', but maybe you can see that from a certain point of view, it was worth his while trying. After all, if you can afford to make it all the way to Egypt, you can probably afford to pay a bit more than the going rate for a taxi and help make the taxi driver's hard slog of a life just that tiny bit easier.

Often when it comes to bargaining, a driver will demand absurd amounts of money – don't be intimidated, and don't be drawn into an argument. It's nothing but bluster, and the driver is playing on the fact that you're a *khwaga* (foreigner) and don't know better. Eventually, the driver is likely to accept your offer if it's appropriate, though you can always walk away if you feel like you're being taken advantage of and try again with another taxi.

Tram

Cairo and Alexandria are the only two cities in the country with tram systems. While Alexandria still has a fairly extensive and efficient network, Cairo now only has a handful of lines. See p184 for more details.

MICROBUS

A slightly bigger version of the service taxi, the *meecrobus* is a Toyota van that would normally take about 12 people, but in Egypt takes as many as 22. These run on the same principle as service taxis and cost about the same, but operate on fewer routes.

PICK-UP

Toyota and Chevrolet pick-up trucks cover a lot of the routes between the smaller towns and villages off the main roads. The general rule is to get 12 people inside the covered rear of the truck, often with an assortment of goods squeezed in on the floor. After that,

it's a matter of how many can and want to scramble on to the roof or hang off at the rear.

SERVICE TAXI

Travelling by *servees* is one of the fastest ways to go from city to city. Service taxis are generally 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 want to pay for all of the seats. Fares are usually cheaper than either the buses or trains and there are no set departure times, you just turn up and find a car.

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). Most services are grimy and battered and are a poor second option to the deluxe bus. The exceptions are the *Turbini* and *Espani* services from Cairo to Alexandria and the tourist and sleeping trains from Cairo down to Luxor and Aswan – on these routes the train is the preferred option over the bus.

If you have an International Student Identification Card (ISIC), discounts are granted on all fares, except those for the sleeping-car services.

Classes & Services

Trains with sleeping cars are the most comfortable and among the fastest in Egypt. The cars, which are run by Abela Egypt, are the same as those used by trains in Europe. At least one sleeping train travels between Alexandria, Cairo, Luxor and Aswan daily. For details, see the Getting There & Away sections of those cities.

The Abela sleeping trains are 1st class only and reservations must be made in advance. Compartments come with a seat that converts into a bed, a fold-down bunk (with clean linen, pillows and blankets) and a small basin with running water. Beds are quite short, and tall people may spend an uncomfortable night as a result. It is worth requesting a middle compartment, as those at the ends of the carriages are located near the toilets and can sometimes be noisy. Shared toilets are generally clean and have toilet paper. Aircraft-style dinners and breakfasts are served in the compartments, but you

should not expect a gourmet eating experience. Drinks (including alcohol) are served by the steward.

Regular night trains with and without sleeper compartments and meals included leave for Luxor and Aswan daily and cost much less than the sleeping trains. Reservations must be made in advance at Ramses Station in Cairo. Unless you specify otherwise, you'll be issued with a ticket that includes meals on board. You may want to flout the rules and bring your own food. Both 1st- and 2nd-class compartments have air-con and they can get chilly at night; bring something warm to wear.

Trains without air-conditioning are next down the scale. Classes are divided into 2nd-class ordinary, which generally has padded seats, and 3rd class, where seating is of the wooden bench variety. These trains are generally filthy, tend to spend a lot of time at a lot of stations and can be subject to interminable delays.

Health

Dr Caroline Evans

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Prevention is the key to staying healthy while travelling in Egypt. Infectious diseases can and do occur here, but these are usually associated with poor living conditions and poverty, and can be avoided with a few precautions. The most common reason for travellers needing medical help is as a result of accidents – cars are not always well maintained and poorly lit roads are littered with potholes. Medical facilities can be excellent in large cities, but may be more basic in other areas.

BEFORE YOU GO

A little planning before departure, particularly for pre-existing illnesses, will save you a lot of trouble later. See your dentist before a long trip; carry a spare pair of contact lenses and glasses (take your optical prescription with you); and carry a first-aid kit.

It's tempting to leave planning to the last minute – don't! Many vaccines don't ensure immunity for the first two weeks, so visit a doctor four to eight weeks before departure. Ask your doctor for an International Certificate of Vaccination (also known as the yellow booklet), which lists all the vaccinations you've received. This is mandatory for countries that require proof of yellow-fever

vaccination, but it's a good idea to carry it wherever you travel.

Travellers can register with the **International Association for Medical Assistance to Travellers** (IAMAT; www.iamat.org). Its website can help travellers to find a doctor with recognised training. Those heading off to very remote areas may like to do a first-aid course (Red Cross and St John's Ambulance can help) or attend a remote medicine first-aid course such as the one offered by the **Royal Geographical Society** (www.rgs.org).

Bring your medications in their original, clearly labelled containers. A signed and dated letter from your physician describing your medical conditions and medications, including generic names, is also a good idea. If you're carrying syringes or needles, be sure to have a physician's letter documenting their medical necessity.

INSURANCE

Find out in advance if your insurance plan will make payments directly to providers or reimburse you later for overseas health expenditures (in many countries doctors expect payment in cash). It's also worth ensuring your travel insurance will cover repatriation home or to better medical facilities elsewhere. Not all insurance covers an emergency flight home or to a hospital in a major city, which may be the only way to get medical attention for a serious emergency. Your insurance company may be able to locate the nearest source of medical help, or you can ask at your hotel. In an emergency contact your embassy or consulate.

RECOMMENDED VACCINATIONS

The World Health Organization (WHO) recommends that all travellers, regardless of the region they are travelling in, should be vaccinated against diphtheria, tetanus, measles, mumps, rubella and polio, as well as hepatitis B. While making travel preparations, take the opportunity to ensure that your routine vaccination cover is complete. The consequences of these diseases can be very severe and outbreaks do occur in the Middle East.

TRAVEL HEALTH WEBSITES

It's usually a good idea to consult your government's travel health website before departure, if one is available.

Australia (www.dfat.gov.au/travel)

Canada (www.travelhealth.gc.ca)

UK (www.doh.gov.uk/traveladvice)

USA (www.cdc.gov/travel)

MEDICAL CHECKLIST

Following is a list of other items you should consider packing in your medical kit.

- Acetaminophen/paracetamol (Tylenol) or aspirin
- Adhesive or paper tape
- Antibacterial ointment (eg Bactroban) for cuts and abrasions
- Antibiotics (if travelling off the beaten track)
- Antidiarrhoeal drugs (eg loperamide)
- Antihistamines (for hay fever and allergic reactions)
- Anti-inflammatory drugs (eg ibuprofen)
- Bandages, gauze, gauze rolls
- DEET-containing insect repellent for the skin
- Iodine tablets (for water purification)
- Oral rehydration salts
- Permethrin-containing insect spray for clothing, tents, and bed nets
- Pocket knife
- Scissors, safety pins, tweezers
- Steroid cream or cortisone (for allergic rashes)
- Sun block
- Syringes and sterile needles (if travelling to remote areas)
- Thermometer

INTERNET RESOURCES

There is a wealth of travel health advice on the internet. For further information, the **Lonely Planet** (www.lonelyplanet.com) website is a good place to start. The **World Health Organization** (www.who.int/ith) publishes a superb book, *International Travel and Health*, which is revised annually and is available online at no cost. Another website of general interest is **MD Travel Health** (www.mdtravelhealth.com), which provides complete travel-health recommendations for every country, updated daily, also at no cost. The **Centers for Disease Control & Prevention** (www.cdc.gov)

website is also a useful source of travel-health information.

FURTHER READING

Lonely Planet's *Healthy Travel* is packed with useful information including pretrip planning, emergency first aid, immunisation and disease information, as well as what to do if you get sick on the road. Other recommended references include *Travellers' Health* by Dr Richard Dawood (Oxford University Press); *International Travel Health Guide* by Stuart R Rose, MD (Mosby); and *The Travellers' Good Health Guide* by Ted Lankester (Sheldon Press), an especially useful health guide for volunteers and long-term expatriates working in the Middle East.

IN TRANSIT**DEEP VEIN THROMBOSIS (DVT)**

Deep vein thrombosis (DVT) occurs when blood clots form in the legs during plane flights, chiefly because of prolonged immobility. The longer the flight, the greater the risk. Though most blood clots are reabsorbed uneventfully, some may break off and travel through the blood vessels to the lungs, where they may cause life-threatening complications.

The chief symptom of DVT is swelling or pain of the foot, ankle or calf, usually but not always on just one side. When a blood clot travels to the lungs, it may cause chest pain and difficulty breathing. Travellers with any of these symptoms should seek medical attention immediately.

To prevent the development of DVT on long flights, you should walk around the cabin, contract the leg muscles while sitting, drink plenty of fluids and avoid alcohol and tobacco.

JET LAG & MOTION SICKNESS

Jet lag is common when crossing more than five time zones; it results in insomnia, fatigue, malaise or nausea. To avoid jet lag try drinking plenty of fluids (nonalcoholic) and eating light meals. Upon arrival, seek exposure to natural sunlight and readjust your schedule (for meals, sleep etc) as soon as possible.

Antihistamines such as dimenhydrinate (Dramamine) and meclizine (Antivert, Bonine) are usually the first choice for treat-

ing motion sickness. Their main side effect is drowsiness. A herbal alternative is ginger, which works like a charm for some people.

IN EGYPT

AVAILABILITY & COST OF HEALTH CARE

The health care systems in Egypt are varied. Care can be excellent in private hospitals and those associated with universities, but patchier elsewhere. Reciprocal payment arrangements with other countries rarely exist and you should be prepared to pay for all medical and dental treatment.

Medical care is not always readily available outside major cities. Medicine, and even sterile dressings or intravenous fluids, may need to be bought from a pharmacy. Nursing care may be limited or rudimentary, as this is something families and friends are expected to provide. The travel assistance provided by your insurance may be able to locate the nearest source of medical help, otherwise ask at your hotel. In an emergency contact your embassy or consulate.

Standards of dental care are variable and there is an increased risk of hepatitis B and HIV transmission via poorly sterilised equipment. Keep in mind that your travel insurance will not usually cover you for anything other than emergency dental treatment.

For minor illnesses such as diarrhoea, pharmacists, who are well qualified, can often provide valuable advice and sell over-the-counter medication. They can also advise whether more specialised help is needed.

INFECTIOUS DISEASES

The following diseases are all present within Egypt.

Diphtheria

Spread through close respiratory contact, diphtheria causes a high temperature and severe sore throat. Sometimes a membrane forms across the throat requiring a tracheostomy to prevent suffocation. Vaccination is recommended for those who are likely to be in close contact with the local population in infected areas. The vaccine is given as an injection alone or with the tetanus vaccine, and lasts 10 years.

Hepatitis A

This is spread through contaminated food (particularly shellfish) and water. It causes jaundice and, although it is rarely fatal, can cause prolonged lethargy and delayed recovery. Symptoms include dark urine, a yellow colour to the whites of the eyes, fever and abdominal pain. Hepatitis A vaccine (Avaxim, Vaqta, Havrix) is given as an injection: a single dose will give protection for up to a year, while a booster 12 months later will provide a subsequent 10 years of protection. Hepatitis A and typhoid vaccines can also be given as a single-dose vaccine (Hepatyrix or ViATIM).

Hepatitis B

Hepatitis B is transmitted by infected blood, contaminated needles and sexual intercourse. It can cause jaundice and affects the liver, occasionally causing liver failure. All travellers should make this a routine vaccination. (Many countries now give hepatitis B vaccination as part of routine childhood vaccination.) The vaccine is given alone, or at the same time as the hepatitis A vaccine (Hepatyrix). A course will give protection for at least five years. It can be given over four weeks or six months.

HIV

HIV is spread via infected blood and blood products, sexual intercourse with an infected partner and from an infected mother to her newborn child. It can be spread through 'blood to blood' contacts such as contaminated instruments during medical, dental, acupuncture and body-piercing procedures, and sharing used intravenous needles.

Malaria

Malaria is found in certain parts of some oases; risk varies seasonally. Risk of malaria in most cities is minimal, but check with your doctor if you are considering travelling to any rural areas. It is important to take anti-malarial tablets if the risk is significant. For up-to-date information about the risk of contracting malaria, contact your local travel health clinic.

Anyone who has travelled in a country where malaria is present should be aware of the symptoms of malaria. It is possible to contract malaria from a single bite from an infected mosquito. Malaria almost always starts with marked shivering, fever and sweating. Muscle pains, headache and vomiting are common.

Symptoms may occur anywhere from a few days to three weeks after the infected mosquito bite. The illness can start while you are taking preventive tablets if they are not fully effective, and may also occur after you have finished taking your tablets.

Poliomyelitis

This generally spreads through contaminated food and water. The vaccine is given in childhood and should be boosted every 10 years, either orally (a drop on the tongue) or as an injection. Polio may be carried asymptotically, but it can cause a transient fever and, in rare cases, potentially permanent muscle weakness or paralysis.

Rabies

Rabies spreads through bites or licks from an infected animal on broken skin. Rabies is fatal. Animal handlers should be vaccinated, as should those travelling to remote areas where a reliable source of postbite vaccine isn't available within 24 hours. Three injections are needed over a month. If you have not been vaccinated, you will need a course of five injections starting within 24 hours or as soon as possible after the injury. Vaccination does not provide you with immunity, it merely buys you more time to seek appropriate medical help.

Rift Valley Fever

This haemorrhagic fever is spread through blood and blood products, including those from infected animals. It causes a flulike illness with fever, joint pains and occasionally more serious complications. Complete recovery is possible.

Schistosomiasis

Also known as bilharzia, this is spread by the freshwater snail. It causes infection of the bowel and bladder, often with bleeding. It is caused by a fluke and is contracted through the skin from water contaminated with human urine or faeces. The Nile is known to be a source of bilharzia, but paddling or swimming in *any* suspect freshwater lakes or slow-running rivers should be avoided. Possible symptoms include a transient fever and rash. Advanced cases of bilharzia may cause blood in the stool or in the urine. However, there may be no symptoms. A blood test can detect antibod-

ies if you have been exposed, and treatment is then possible in specialist travel or infectious-disease clinics.

Tuberculosis

Also known as TB, this is spread through close respiratory contact and occasionally through infected milk or milk products. BCG vaccine is recommended for those likely to be mixing closely with the local population. It is more important for people visiting family or planning on a long stay, and those employed as teachers and health-care workers. TB can be asymptomatic, or symptoms can include cough, weight loss or fever, months or even years after exposure. An X-ray is the best way to confirm if you have TB. BCG gives a moderate degree of protection against TB. It causes a small permanent scar at the site of injection, and is usually only given in specialised chest clinics. As it's a live vaccine it should not be given to pregnant women or immunocompromised individuals. The BCG vaccine is not available in all countries.

Typhoid

This is spread through food or water that has been contaminated by infected human faeces. The first symptom is usually fever or a pink rash on the abdomen. Septicaemia (blood poisoning) may also occur. Typhoid vaccine (Typhim Vi, Typherix) will give protection for three years. In some countries the oral vaccine Vivotif is also available.

Yellow Fever

This vaccination isn't required for the Middle East. However, the mosquito that spreads yellow fever has been known to be present in some parts of the Middle East. It is important to consult your local travel-health clinic for the latest details, as part of your predeparture plans. Any travellers from a yellow-fever endemic area will need to show proof of vaccination against yellow fever before entry. This normally means if arriving directly from an infected country or if the traveller has been in an infected country during the previous 10 days. We would recommend, however, that travellers carry a certificate if they have been in an infected country during the previous month, to avoid any possible difficulties with immigration. There is always the possibility that a traveller without an up-to-date certificate

will be vaccinated and detained in isolation at the port of arrival for up to 10 days, or even repatriated. The yellow-fever vaccination must be given at a designated clinic. It is valid for 10 years. It is a live vaccine and must not be given to immunocompromised or pregnant travellers.

In Cairo, you can obtain a yellow-fever vaccine at the medical clinic in Terminal 1 of Cairo airport (approximately E£60). Note that you must show proof of having a yellow-fever vaccination before being allowed entry to or from Sudan.

TRAVELLER'S DIARRHOEA

To prevent diarrhoea, avoid tap water unless it has been boiled, filtered or chemically disinfected (iodine tablets). Eat only fresh fruits or vegetables if cooked or if you have peeled them yourself, and avoid dairy products that might contain unpasteurised milk. Buffet meals are risky. Food should be piping hot; meals freshly cooked in front of you in a busy restaurant are more likely to be safe.

If you develop diarrhoea, be sure to drink plenty of fluids, preferably an oral rehydration solution containing lots of salt and sugar. A few loose stools don't require treatment but, if you start having more than four or five stools a day, you should start taking an antibiotic (usually a quinolone drug) and an anti-diarrhoeal agent (such as loperamide). If diarrhoea is bloody, persists for more than 72 hours, is accompanied by fever, shaking chills or severe abdominal pain, you should seek medical attention.

ENVIRONMENTAL HAZARDS

Heat illness

Heat exhaustion occurs following heavy sweating and excessive fluid loss with inadequate replacement of fluids and salt. It is particularly common in hot climates, if you take unaccustomed exercise before full acclimatisation. Symptoms include headache, dizziness and tiredness. You're already dehydrated by the time you feel thirsty – aim to drink sufficient water so that you produce pale, diluted urine. Treatment consists of fluid replacement with water or fruit juice or both, and cooling by cold water and fans. The treatment of the salt-loss component consists of taking in salty fluids such as soup or broth, and adding a little more table salt to foods than usual.

Heat stroke is much more serious. This occurs when the body's heat-regulating mechanism breaks down. Excessive rise in body temperature leads to sweating ceasing, irrational and hyperactive behaviour and eventual loss of consciousness and even death. Rapid cooling by spraying the body with water and fanning is an ideal treatment. Emergency fluid and electrolyte replacement by intravenous drip is usually also required.

Insect Bites & Stings

Mosquitoes may not carry malaria but can cause irritation and infected bites. They also spread dengue fever. Using DEET-based insect repellents will prevent bites.

Bees and wasps only cause real problems to those with a severe allergy (anaphylaxis). If you have a severe allergy to bee or wasp stings, you should carry an adrenaline injection or similar.

Sandflies are located around the Mediterranean beaches. They usually only cause a nasty itchy bite, but can also carry a rare skin disorder called cutaneous leishmaniasis. Bites may be prevented by using DEET-based repellents.

Scorpions are frequently found in arid or dry climates. They can cause a painful bite which is rarely life threatening.

Bed bugs are often found in hostels and cheap hotels. They lead to very itchy, lumpy bites. Spraying the mattress with an appropriate insect killer will do a good job of getting rid of them.

Scabies are also frequently found in cheap accommodation. These tiny mites live in the skin, particularly between the fingers. They cause an intensely itchy rash. Scabies is easily treated with lotion available from pharmacies; people who you come into contact with also need treating to avoid spreading scabies between asymptomatic carriers.

Snake Bites

Do not walk barefoot or stick your hand into holes or cracks. Half of those bitten by venomous snakes are not actually injected with poison (envenomed). If bitten by a snake, do not panic. Immobilise the bitten limb with a splint (eg a stick) and apply a bandage over the site and firm pressure, similar to a bandage over a sprain. Do not apply a tourniquet, or cut or suck the bite. Get the victim to medical

help as soon as possible so that antivenin can be given if necessary.

Water

Tap water is not safe to drink throughout Egypt. Stick to bottled water or boil water for 10 minutes, use water-purification tablets or a filter. Do not drink water from rivers or lakes, as it may contain bacteria or viruses that can cause diarrhoea or vomiting.

TRAVELLING WITH CHILDREN

All travellers with children should know how to treat minor ailments and when to seek medical treatment. Make sure the children are up to date with routine vaccinations, and discuss possible travel vaccinations well before departure as some vaccines are not suitable for children aged under one year.

In hot, moist climates any wound or break in the skin may lead to infection. The area should be cleaned and then kept dry and clean. Remember to avoid contaminated food and water. If your child is vomiting or experiencing diarrhoea, lost fluid and salts must be replaced. It may be helpful to take rehydration powders with you, to be reconstituted with boiled water. Ask your doctor about this.

Children should be encouraged to avoid dogs or other mammals because of the risk of rabies and other diseases. Any bite, scratch or lick from a warm-blooded, furry animal should immediately be thoroughly cleaned. If there is any possibility that the animal is infected with rabies, immediate medical assistance should be sought.

WOMEN'S HEALTH

Emotional stress, exhaustion and travelling through different time zones can all contrib-

ute to an upset in the menstrual pattern. If using oral contraceptives, keep in mind that some antibiotics, diarrhoea and vomiting can stop the pill from working and lead to the risk of pregnancy – remember to take condoms with you just in case. Condoms should be kept in a cool, dry place or they may crack and perish.

Emergency contraception is most effective if taken within 24 hours after unprotected sex. The **International Planned Parent Federation** (www.ippf.org) can advise about the availability of contraception in different countries. Tampons and sanitary towels are not always available outside major cities in the Middle East.

Travelling during pregnancy is usually possible, but there are important things to consider. Have a medical checkup before embarking on your trip. The most risky times for travel are during the first 12 weeks of pregnancy, when miscarriage is most likely, and after 30 weeks, when complications such as high blood pressure and premature delivery can occur. Most airlines will not accept a traveller after 28 to 32 weeks of pregnancy, and long-haul flights in the later stages can be very uncomfortable. Antenatal facilities vary greatly between countries in the Middle East and you should think carefully before travelling to a country with poor medical facilities or where there are major cultural and language differences from your home country. Taking written records of the pregnancy, including details of your blood group, is likely to be helpful if you need medical attention while in a foreign country. Try to find an insurance policy that covers pregnancy, delivery and postnatal care, but remember that insurance policies are only as good as the facilities available.

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