



Tourist Attractions: Egypt



PYRAMID OF GIZA

The last surviving of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World, the Pyramids of Giza are one of the world's most recognizable landmarks. Built as tombs for the mighty Pharaohs and guarded by the enigmatic **Sphinx**, Giza's pyramid complex has awed travelers down through the ages and had archaeologists (and a fair few conspiracy theorists) scratching their heads over how they were built for centuries.

Today, these megalithic memorials to dead kings are still as wondrous a sight as they ever were. An undeniable highlight of any Egypt trip, Giza's pyramids should not be missed.



LUXOR'S KARNAK TEMPLE & THE VALLEY OF THE KINGS

Famed for the Valley of the Kings, Karnak Temple, and the **Memorial Temple of Hatshepsut**, the Nile-side town of Luxor in Upper Egypt has a glut of tourist attractions. This is ancient Thebes, power base of the New Kingdom pharaohs, and home to more sights than most can see on one visit.

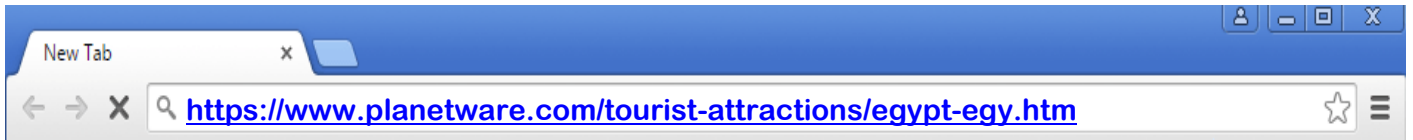
While the **East Bank** brims with vibrant souk action, the quieter **West Bank** is home to a bundle of tombs and temples that has been called the biggest open-air museum in the world. Spend a few days here exploring the colorful wall art of the tombs and gazing in awe at the colossal columns in the temples, and you'll see why Luxor continues to fascinate historians and archaeologists.



ISLAMIC CAIRO

The atmospheric, narrow lanes of the capital's Islamic Cairo district are crammed full of mosques, madrassas (Islamic schools of learning), and monuments dating from the Fatimid through to the Mameluke eras. This is where you'll find the labyrinth shopping souk of **Khan el-Khalili**, where coppersmiths and artisans still have their tiny workshops, and stalls are laden with ceramics, textiles, spice, and perfume.

Surrounding the market is a muddle of roads, home to some of the most beautiful preserved architecture of the old Islamic empires. There is a wealth of history here to explore. Visit **Al-Azhar Mosque** and the dazzling **Sultan Hassan Mosque**, and make sure you climb to the roof of the ancient medieval gate of **Bab Zuweila** for the best minaret-speckled panoramas across the district.



ASWAN

Egypt's most tranquil town is Aswan, set upon the winding curves of the **Nile**. Backed by orange-hued dunes, this is the perfect place to stop and unwind for a few days and soak up the chilled-out atmosphere. Take the river ferry across to **Elephantine Island** and stroll the colorful streets of the **Nubian villages**. Ride a camel to the desert monastery of **St. Simeon** on the **East Bank**. Or just drink endless cups of tea on one of the riverboat restaurants, while watching the lateen-sailed feluccas drift past.

There are plenty of historic sites here and numerous temples nearby, but one of Aswan's most popular things to do is simply kicking back and watching the river life go by.



ABU SIMBEL

Even in a country festooned with temples, Abu Simbel is something special. This is Ramses II's great temple, adorned with colossal statuary standing guard outside, and with an interior sumptuously decorated with wall paintings. Justly famous for its megalithic proportions, Abu Simbel is also known for the incredible feat, which saw the entire temple moved from its original setting — set to disappear under the water because of the

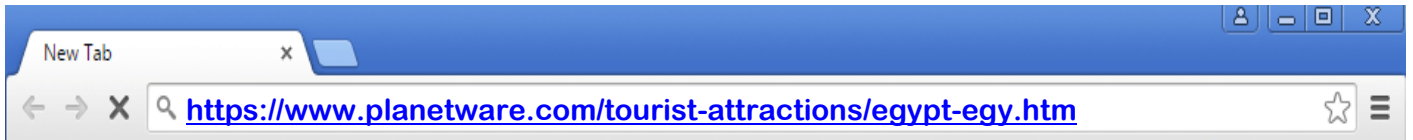
Aswan dam — during the 1960s in a massive UNESCO operation that took four years.



EGYPTIAN MUSEUM

A treasure trove of the Pharaonic world, Cairo's Egyptian Museum is one of the world's great museum collections. The faded pink mansion is home to a dazzling amount of exhibits. It's a higgledy-piggledy place with little labeling on offer and not much chronological order, but that's half of its old-school charm.

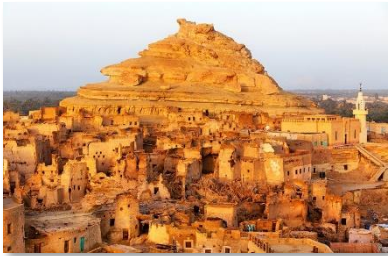
Upstairs is the golden glory of **King Tutankhamen** and the fascinating **royal mummies** exhibits, but really every corner you turn here is home to some wonderful piece of ancient art or statuary that would form a highlight of any other museum.



WHITE DESERT

Egypt's kookiest natural wonder is the White Desert, where surreally shaped chalk mountains have created what looks like a snowy wonderland in the middle of the arid sand. The landscapes here look like something out of a science fiction movie, with blindingly white boulders and iceberg-like pinnacles. For desert fans and adventurers, this is the ultimate weird playground, while anybody who's had their fill of temples

and tombs will enjoy this spectacular natural scenery.



SIWA OASIS

Way out west, Siwa is the tranquil tonic to the hustle of Egypt's cities. This gorgeous little oasis, surrounded by date palm plantations and numerous fresh water springs, is one of the Western Desert's most picturesque spots. The town is centered around the ruins of a vast mud-brick citadel that dominates the view. This is a top spot to wind down and go slow for a few days, as well as being an excellent base from which to plan adventures into the surrounding desert.



ALEXANDRIA

The most European of Egypt's cities, Alexandria has a history that not many others can match. Founded by Alexander the Great, home of Cleopatra, and razzmatazz renegade city of the Mediterranean for much of its life, this seaside city has an appealing days-gone-by atmosphere that can't be beaten. Although today, there are few historic remnants of its illustrious past — feted in songs and books — this is a place made for aimless strolling along the seashore **Corniche**, café-hopping, and souk

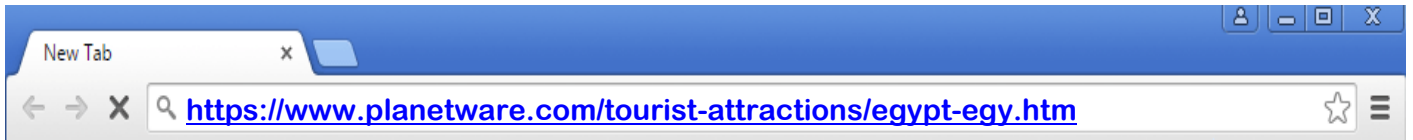
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ST. CATHERINE'S MONASTERY

One of the oldest monasteries in the world, St. Catherine's stands at the foot of **Mount Sinai**, where Moses is said to have received the Ten Commandments. This desert monastery is home to an incredible collection of religious iconography, art, and manuscripts (some of which can be seen in the on-site museum), as well as the **burning bush**. For most visitors here, a trip to St. Catherine's also involves a hike up Mount Sinai to see sunrise or sunset. Take the camel path for the easy route or

climb the famous **Steps of Repentance** if you want better views.



SOUTH SINAI

Egypt's center for beach fun is the South Sinai region on the **Sinai Peninsula**. **Sharm el-Sheikh** is a European-style resort full of luxury hotels, international restaurants, and bags of entertainment options. **Dahab** is a low-key beach town with a budget-traveler heart, which is just as much about desert excursions and adventures as the sea.

Up the coast, between the port town of **Nuweiba** and the border town of **Taba**, are the bamboo hut retreats that offer complete get-away-from-it-all respites from life. Wherever you choose, the South Sinai is all about diving. The **Red Sea** is one of the top diving destinations in the world, and the South Sinai region is home to most of the best dive sites.



ABYDOS TEMPLE

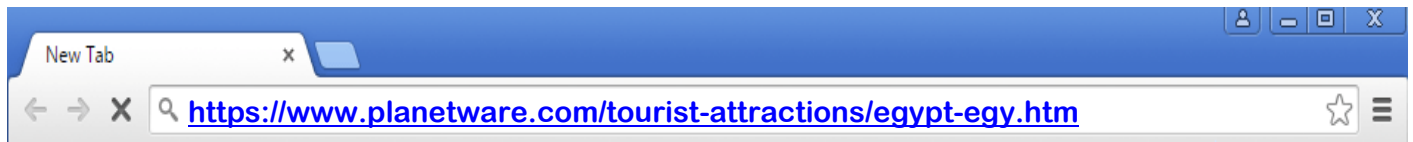
Dusty Abydos town wouldn't make much of a rating on the tourism radar if it wasn't for the incredible temple on its doorstep. Abydos' **Temple of Osiris** is one of ancient Egypt's most fascinating artistic treasures. Its chunky columns and walls, covered in beautiful hieroglyphics and intricate paintings, are spellbinding sights, and even better, you can admire them without the crowds as despite its dazzling beauty, it receives few visitors compared to the temples in nearby **Luxor**.



THISTLEGORM DIVE SITE

Below the Red Sea's surface is another world as fascinating as the temples and tombs on land. Among the many coral reefs off the coast there's also a glut of shipwrecks that have sunk in the Red Sea's Gulf of Gubal and Gulf of Aqaba. Of all the wrecks, the most famous is the **Thistlegorm**, an English WWII cargo ship that was on its way to resupply British troops when it was bombed by the Germans in 1941.

Today the site is regarded by divers as one of the top five wreck dives in the world due to the vast cargo of cars, motorbikes, and WWII memorabilia that can be seen both scattered on the sea bed around the wreck and inside the ship itself. Dive boat trips to the wreck are organized from both **Sharm el-Sheikh** and **Hurghada**.



NILE CRUISING

Egypt is defined by the Nile. For many visitors a multi-day cruise upon this famed waterway that saw the rise of the Pharaonic era is a highlight of their Egypt trip. Cruising the Nile is also the most relaxing way to see the temples that stud the banks of the river on the route between **Luxor** and **Aswan**, plus sunrise and sunset over the date-palm-studded river banks, backed by sand dunes, is one of Egypt's most

tranquil vistas.

The two famous sights on a Nile Cruise are the **Temple of Kom Ombo** and **Edfu's Temple of Horus**, where all the big cruise boats stop. If you'd prefer a less crowded and slower experience though, and don't mind "roughing it" a bit, you can also cruise the Nile by felucca (Egypt's traditional lateen-sailed wooden boats), which also allows you to create your own itinerary. Cruise boats depart from both Luxor and Aswan, but feluccas can only be chartered for multi-day trips from Aswan.



SAQQARA

Everyone's heard of Giza's Pyramids, but they're not the only pyramids Egypt has up its sleeve. Day-tripping from Cairo, **Saqqara** is the vast necropolis of the Old Kingdom pharaohs and showcases how the Ancient Egyptians advanced their architectural knowledge to finally create a true pyramid with the **Step Pyramid**, **Bent Pyramid**, and **Red Pyramid** being among the highlights here. The various tombs of court administrators, with interior walls covered with friezes describing daily scenes, scattered

throughout the archaeological site are just as much a reason to visit as the pyramids themselves.



RAS MOHAMMED NATIONAL PARK

Ras Mohammed National Park is what put Sharm el-Sheikh on the tourist map. Surrounded by some of the world's most incredible dive sites, this peninsula is home to glorious beaches with excellent snorkeling just offshore, the world's second most northerly **mangrove forest**, and a **saltwater lake**. A trip here is a must-do for anyone staying in Sharm el-Sheikh. The best beaches are **Old Quay Beach** (with its top-notch coral

reef easily reached from the shore) and **Aqaba Beach**.

Travelers seeking a good view should head to the **Shark Observatory cliff top** right on the southern edge of Ras Mohammed, where views stretch across both sides of the Red Sea.



GIFTUN ISLANDS

The Giftun Islands are one of Hurghada's most popular boat excursions, with prime swaths of white sand to soak up the rays, and snorkeling opportunities galore on offer. For those who aren't scuba diving enthusiasts, the easily accessed coral reefs surrounding the island shore are an excellent taster of the Red Sea's beauty. Snorkeling or even just paddling close to shore, you can spot plenty of fish life flitting through the clear water. Those not interested in underwater exploits can simply claim

a palm-frond shelter on the beach, sit back, and enjoy the sun.



STRAITS OF GUBAL

Egypt's Straits of Gubal, a narrow strip of water squeezed between the Red Sea Coast and the Western shore of the **Sinai Peninsula**, is one of the country's major diving destinations and is easily accessed from Hurghada. This strait's vast coral pinnacles have proved a tricky customer for seafarers trying to navigate through here across the centuries, and today, it is renowned for its wreck diving. Egypt's most famous wreck, **The Thistlegorm** (a WWII cargo ship that French diver Jacques Cousteau

discovered while exploring the area in the 1950s) is among the strait's many dive sites.

