

The essential Cairo guide

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The 'Jewel of the Nile' has much to offer visitors in addition to its famous landmarks

Cairo is like no other place on earth. And while the pyramids are certainly a draw, most visitors could get more out of the city by connecting with the locals, or by daring to stray from the beaten track; the monumental stuff will take care of itself. The traffic, as well as the size of the city and confusing street signs, rule out renting a car. Hire a driver and venture out anywhere without worrying about parking.

Hotels

Among the best hotel options are the **Fairmont Hotel Nile City Towers**, the **Four Seasons Hotel Cairo at Nile Plaza**, the **Sofitel El Gezirah**, and the **Marriott Cairo Hotel & Omar Khayyam Casino**, all with outstanding views over the Nile, and veritable oases of calm and coolness.

Eating and drinking

Sequoia, at the end of Zamalek Island, is a favourite of fashionable young Cairenes. Sit outside and puff on a shisha as the sun sets, or relax on expansive cushions under the marquee.

Tamarai, tucked away in the Nile City Towers, is



The Fairmont Hotel,
Nile City Towers

Cairo's cutting edge bar and eatery, and popular with the smart set. Aside from its trademark Asian cuisine the two-story **Buddha Bar** in the Sofitel has relaxing views across the Nile... and of course chilled sounds.

The Moghul Room, in the Mena House Oberoi Hotel, is still one of the best restaurants in Cairo, and definitely the best Indian. The open, split-level dining room is art deco, and the location, with views of the pyramids, is unbeatable. **Abou el Sid**, on Zamalek Island, has authentic Egyptian cuisine in atmospheric surroundings. Décor is traditional Arabesque, and the atmosphere is lively and down to earth.

Things to do

For those who prefer a quieter, more intimate Nile experience, head down to the southern end of Gezira Island to rent a private yacht. Most hotels can arrange the rental of private yachts, as well as catering aboard. The newest addition to Nile cruising is the **New Solitaire**, a luxurious yacht for more formal or professional events.

Another daytime option for those with equestrian interests is a visit to any of the stables in the area that breed and train the famed Arabian horse. **El Zahraa** started as the official stud of the Egyptian State. **Albadeia** is an oasis of tranquility very close to the pyramids where the Marei family breed world-champion horses. Another outdoor option near the pyramids is to play a round of golf at one of the many clubs in the area. Again, your hotel will have details, reservations and options.

For a fascinating look at how solutions are being found to improve life for Cairo's poorer communities, take the Solar Cities Urban Eco Tour. Since 2005, the Solar Cities project helps build solar water heaters and biogas generators out of low-cost, locally available materials. The project has been covered by National Geographic magazine.

And for the romantics...

Ask the concierge to arrange a small picnic. An hour before sundown, head to the Corniche al-Nil, the riverfront thoroughfare, toward a felucca at Dok-Dok landing, located between the Grand Hyatt and the Four Seasons for a sunset trip along the Nile.

Dinner at an outdoor table at the **Citadel View Studio Misr** restaurant, in Islamic Cairo's Al-Azhar Park, with views of the illuminated Citadel, and its iconic Mohammed Ali Mosque. **F**