

## **Traveling & Diving in Egypt**

### **Entry Requirements**

Travelers to Egypt require a passport valid for at least 6 months after intended return. A Visa is also required which can be obtained in advance at an Egyptian Consulate or upon arrival in Egypt for Canadian and US citizen, payable in US\$. The cost upon arrival is \$20USD. Other citizen please check with your nearest Egyptian Consulate

### **Climate**

The diving season is year-round with visibility averaging 30m/90 ft. Water temperatures range from 20°C/70°F in the winter months to 29°C/88°F in summer. The topside air temperatures range between 22°C/74°F in winter to 40°C/106°F in summer. July and August are the hottest months. In winter, there can often be a breeze. The southern Red Sea typically is a few degrees warmer than the north.

Divers can use LYCRA, DARLEX or POLARTEC suits during late spring, summer and early autumn. Be prepared to bring a 3mm wetsuit, maybe with a shorty over top or go for a 5mm. A hood may be helpful for liveaboard diving. During winter, a 5mm two-piece suit is best. For evenings onboard, a light sweater or jacket is recommended.

### **Average Temperatures in Fahrenheit**

Month	Air	Water	Recomm. Wetsuit
January	68	68	full 5mm+
February	70	68	full 5mm+
March	73	70	full 5mm+
April	79	73	full 5mm+
May	84	75	full 3mm+
June	89	79	full 3mm+
July	95	80	full 3mm+
August	97	82	full 3mm+
September	91	80	full 3mm+
October	86	77	full 3mm+
November	77	73	full 5mm+
December	70	70	full 5mm+

### **Diving**

The Red Sea is a vast body of water. To do diving justice, it is best experienced from a liveaboard. Even then it would still take at least 3 – 4 different trips to cover most of the Red Sea. The most common start off points for liveaboards are Hurghada, Safaga and Marsa Ghalib/Marsa Alam, with occasional departures from Sharm El Sheikh and Hamata. Landbased diving is available from all these locations as well, in addition to the shore diving destination of Dahab.

Itineraries that include Marine Parks (Brothers, Daedalus, Rocky & Zabargad) require a minimum of 50 logged dives. We recommend a minimum of 30 - 40 logged dives for most other liveaboard routes. There is no night diving in the Marine Parks. If you haven't been diving for a year, a Scuba review is required before you start diving. If you need to do this onboard, it will be done on your first day of diving and there is a cost associated with this.

Diving often involves entry or exit off a dinghy/skiff/inflatable zodiac. The Red Sea has adopted a "no-glove" policy. A surface marker/safety sausage with line (min. 20 feet) & signaling device is required.

Standard liveaboard diving involves 3 dives per day, occasionally 4 and 2 dives on the last day. The first night is spent in port and last night may be at sea, in port or in a hotel (depending on the following departure).

All divers are required to complete a self declaration medical form, which will be made available upon booking. A doctor's note may be required depending on your answers.

Rental equipment needs to be booked in advance for liveaboards and must be paid for locally (full set is 25 Euros + tax per day). The standard 12 liter aluminum tanks (approx. 85 cubic ft) come with either international fittings or DIN valves. 15 liter steel tanks (approx. 107 cubic ft) are available upon request for a modest fee.

## **Currency**

The local currency is the Egyptian Pound. Euros and US Dollars are widely accepted and most major hotels will have currency exchanges/banks. ATM machines are also available in the major tourist centres. Please check with your bank before departure that you can withdraw money from an ATM machine abroad. When paying with credit cards, be vigilant and only use it with reputable companies (dive centre, major hotels). It is best to advise your credit card company prior to your trip where and when you will be traveling. Travelers cheques in USD or Euro are easily exchanged at local banks and hotels. It is advisable to carry some cash in the major currencies (Egyptian Pound, Euros or US Dollars). Charges on liveboards can be paid cash (Euro, Egyptian Pounds or USD) or via credit card.

## **Culture and Local Customs**

Egypt may be quite different from anything you have experienced before. Crowds, heat, pollution, poverty are part of the daily life. An estimated 80% of the population are Muslims and about 20% are Coptic Orthodox Christians. Religion widely influences day to day life. We recommend to respect local customs and dress codes. Cairo is a very cosmopolitan city and you can find anything from European fashion to conservation traditional dress. We still recommend modest dress (no shorts or short skirts for women) everywhere. Outside of Cairo and Alexandria and away from tourist areas (i.e. local markets, countryside), the tradition will be more conservative. It is appreciated if you think about this while visiting these areas. The further south you go, the more traditional. For men, don't go without a shirt in such areas, and for women - a knee length dress/skirt is recommended and a top covering your shoulders. To go inside a mosque, both sexes will have to remove their footwear. For both men and women, no shorts in Churches and Mosques. "Long, loose and cotton" is the basic rule as you also need protection against the sun most times of year. In the Red Sea resort areas (Sharm el Sheikh, Hurghada, Marsa Alam) you can wear beach wear, shorts, bathing suits, but again, in local markets etc., it is recommended to respect the more moderate Egyptian dress code.

Peddlers and merchants, offering their wares in a more aggressive "in-your-face-kind-of-way" than we are used to in N. America, are very common. Haggling is an expected practice. Do not let your vacation be influenced negatively by people doing their business in a different way than we are. Be prepared to be a bit uncomfortable with this and look at it as a cultural experience, rather than a nuisance. Be prepared for the unforeseen - attitudes towards time keeping, privacy, public cleanliness are quite different than in N. America.

## **Health Requirements & Considerations**

There is no vaccination required for entry into to Egypt, except if you are entering Egypt from another country (the Egyptian Government requires Yellow Fever Vaccination if you are entering Egypt from Kenya.). It is important to consult your doctor about any vaccination or medication that the doctor might recommend or prescribe to you..

It is recommended that you drink only bottled water. Although there is nothing wrong with the local water, our North American Digestive system is not used to it. Most hotels and Cruise boats have water purification station, which is used for cooking. Some guides recommend to eat only what you can peel and to keep away from salads etc.. Eat only at the main hotels and cruise restaurants (no eating from street vendors). Be careful, but if you are going to get the "Montezuma Attack" or "Mummy Tummy" you will get it any way!! Just make sure you take with you a supply of Imodium.

Due to the hot climate, some travelers return to their cruise or their hotel after a sightseeing trip and drink a glass of cold icy water. That will disturb your digestive system!

### **Food and drink:**

Egypt is a meeting point between Africa, Europe and Asia and this meeting point is clearly reflected in the different dishes. The last few hundred years were influenced by Turkish cuisine due to the Turkish presence in Egypt - and yes McDonalds and KFC more recently. Still there is something Egyptian going though the diversity of the local cuisine, much with roots back to Ancient Egypt. In the villages in the Luxor area you will soon see the traditional round "sun bread", and in the nobles or royal tombs you find the same bread painted on the walls.

Beer was as basic as bread in Ancient Egypt and the good beer of today will most likely surprise many. Egyptian wine was the favourite wine throughout the Roman Empire, but although wine in today's Egypt has been of a lesser standard than its good beer - this is in the process of changing. So do try Egyptian wine, a good restaurant will help you to find the best.

Egyptian food can be "hot" - but not like many other cuisines where everything is hot. In general Egyptian food is a pleasant surprise for most visitors. Lamb is a common item found on the menu. If you don't know where to go, it can sometimes be hard to find gourmet restaurants with real local dishes - but for international cuisine you will find nearly everything everywhere.

Due to the dry and hot climate, it is essential that you drink a lot of water.

### **Power Supply**

The voltage in Egypt is 220V, 50Hz. Check if your electronic device has a switch from 110V – 220V, or you may need to bring a power converter. You will need a 2 prong rounded adapter.

### **Tipping**

Baksheesh is a word that every traveler to Egypt gets well acquainted with. It means tip, and many people expect one. For this reason it is important to carry around a good number of 50p (50-piaster) notes and £e1 (1 Egyptian pound) bills in your pocket. US\$ bills are also widely accepted.

Porters, taxi drivers, doorkeepers, and many others will expect this of you.

There is no need to give a lot of money -- small tips are fine. It is customary to leave a 10% tip (before taxes) at a restaurant. The bill already has a 12% service charge included in the total.

For taxi drivers, the tip is usually covered in the fare; tip an extra pound if the driver has made an extra effort to get you to your destination. Rest-room and gas station attendants, ushers, and theater attendants usually receive between 50p and £e1 for their services.

If you have an especially good tour guide, a tip of \$5-\$10USD is in order, depending on the length of the tour. These often well educated professionals depend on tips for their income. If you are part of a group, your group leader will collect a lump sum amount for tipping during the tour. If you are taking an excursion that is not part of your tour, ask your guide for a recommended amount for tipping. You may experience people asking for more tips (ie. the young boys leading the camels at the Pyramids), but stay firm with what you were told by your guide.

In hotels, rates vary according to the level. In five-star hotels, a £e10 tip may be in order for the porter, particularly if you have lots of luggage; about half that is the norm for lower-scale hotels. Chambermaids get about £e5 for each visit, although

this depends on the level of service. Room-service waiters, like restaurant waiters, should be tipped approximately 10% of the total bill.

For day diving in Egypt it is customary to tip \$3 - \$5Euros per day. On liveaboards the recommendation is €5Euros/\$10USD per day for the boat crew and €5Euros/\$10USD for your dive guide. Tips during a liveaboard trip are collected on the last day. Tipping is at your discretion and should be given only if you are happy with the service you received.

### **Is it safe to visit Egypt?**

In a word, YES. Although there is a possible global terrorist threat that we all have to take into account, there is no indication that there is a higher risk of incidents in Egypt than anywhere else in the world as events over the last years have shown.

Geographically Egypt is located in Africa, not the Middle East. It has been a crossroads of civilization for thousands of years, and has a much different mentality than many nations in the Middle East. Furthermore, the vast majority of Egyptians have no love at all for terrorists. It is a country that does not officially, or in the minds of its people, support terrorists. On the contrary, many of its citizens depend on tourism, which is highly affected by such events.

Police and security forces employ considerable effort to ensure the safety and security of foreign visitors. Enhanced security arrangements are maintained, especially at airports and tourist sites, which all have a visible police presence. There is a dedicated tourist police, which is extremely focused on keeping the country calm and safe for tourists to travel there. Some routes are escorted by police convoys. Most 4 and 5 star hotels have metal detectors and restricted access entrances.

It should be noted that despite some terrorist attacks in the past, there is no current "Travel Warning" for Egypt from the US Department of State. To read the State Department's full travel report on Egypt, please visit [http://travel.state.gov/travel/cis\\_pa\\_tw/cis/cis\\_1108.html](http://travel.state.gov/travel/cis_pa_tw/cis/cis_1108.html)

The crime rate in Egypt is low. While incidents of violence are extremely rare, petty crime such as purse snatching and pick pocketing may occur. Visitors should ensure personal belongings are secure and respect any advice or instructions from local security authorities.

***Common sense is always advisable!*** If there is a loud gathering in a street or square, walk the other way. As anywhere, travelers may gain a measure of safety by remaining particularly alert to their surroundings, by avoiding crowded tourist areas and any demonstrations.

The vast majority of Egyptians are very friendly towards westerners, including Americans. This is a moderate country, whose people love life and their families, and they are a good people. The Egyptian people have been constantly in contact with western tourists for hundreds of years. Their attitudes are different than people in most other Muslim nations. They are a progressive people with an eye to the modern world.

The government of Egypt, as well as most Egyptians, are well aware that their tourism industry absolutely must be protected, and it has been our experience that they will take every single measure available to them in order to make tourism safe.