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EGYPT

GOOD TO KNOW



UTC +2hr



Egyptian Pound



Arabic



Cairo International Airport is Egypt's main air hub.



- *Taxi* Khaled Alkhamissi
- *The Yacoubian Building* Alaa Al Aswany
- *The Cairo Trilogy* Naguib Mahfouz

In 1922, Howard Carter's search for a then little-known pharaoh resulted in one of the most famous archaeological finds of all time. Egypt is gearing up to commemorate the 100 year anniversary of the discovery of Tutankhamun's tomb with a flurry of new museums that celebrate the country's cultural riches. But away from the temples and tombs, grassroots tourism start-ups are also making waves, reflecting an Egypt far removed from pyramids and ancient pharaonic glories.

NEW HOMES FOR ANCIENT TREASURES

2022 is a triple anniversary year. Along with the centenary of Carter's discovery, it's also 100 years since the Kingdom of Egypt was created (beginning the road to full independence), and Egyptology will commemorate the 200 year anniversary of French hieroglyph expert Champollion cracking the Rosetta Stone. For tourism though, 2022's all about Tutankhamun. Egypt's hoping to mark the occasion with the much-delayed Grand Egyptian Museum (GEM) in Giza flinging open its doors to become the new home for the young pharaoh's grave-goods bounty.

While the GEM's will-it-won't-it opening grabs headlines, in the background a host of museums and monument restorations have already been completed. Sohag and Sharm El-Sheikh have both opened long-awaited museums, while in Cairo, 2020 saw the eccentric Baron Empain Palace finally restored, followed by the

2021 full opening of the National Museum of Egyptian Civilization (NMEC). There's never been a shortage of fascinating objects to fill all these museums – but archaeologists have continued digging up more ancient prizes to add to the pile anyway. Outside the capital, the sands of Saqqara have surrendered a steady stream of riches recently, and on Luxor's west bank the major find of 30 coloured coffins at Al-Asasif in 2019 was only topped by 2021's discovery of a town from Pharaoh Amenhotep III's time (around 3400 years ago).

As the major museum shakeup gathered pace, in April 2021 Egypt pulled off an artefact move that will probably never be beaten for pomp and splendour. The Royal Mummies collection left their old digs at Tahrir Square's Egyptian Museum and travelled to their new home at NMEC via a dramatic parade through central Cairo's streets. It was rightly a moment of national pride – and a not-too-subtle reminder to



Pillars and heiroglyphics at Karnak temple in Luxor.



HIGHLIGHTS

- 1 Luxor Open-air museum of giant temples and tombs covered in vivid murals.
- 2 Cairo The core harbours incredible Islamic architecture; the outskirts hold pyramids you may have heard of.
- 3 Nile cruising Hemmed in by desert, the date-palm-lined banks of the Nile are Egypt at its most lush.
- 4 Ras Mohammed Colourful reefs rated among the world's top dive sites.
- 5 White Desert National Park Weird, white, wind-sculpted rock spires marooned in a sea of sand.

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Hop on board a traditional Egyptian felucca to cruise the Nile in style.



© MARK READ / LONELY PLANET

the world that few can match Egypt's depth of history and heritage.

AWAY FROM THE TEMPLES AND TOMBS

Increasingly, Egypt is about more than just its past. While pharaonic riches continue to be the calling-card, community-based tourism and niche tours that eschew the monument checklist are beginning to take off.

In Cairo, entrepreneurial food fans Laila Hassaballa and Mariam Nezar have gained international media attention for their company Bellies En-Route, which runs street-eats walking tours of the city. This local-focused style of tourism has long been missing from Egypt's capital and offers a ground-level introduction to Cairo very different to the typical museum-hop and Giza Pyramids visit most tourists limit themselves to.

Meanwhile, Egypt's rugged desert mountain landscapes have never been more accessible thanks to the country's two long-distance trekking trails. Opened in 2015, the Sinai Trail blazed the way and has steadily expanded, now incorporating 550km of trail. Run by eight of the Sinai Peninsula's Bedouin tribes, it has both provided work for local Bedouin, stimulating village economies, and been a catalyst for inter-tribal cooperation and a resurgence of Bedouin culture.

Thanks to the Sinai Trail's success, the Red Sea Mountain Trail soon followed with a 170km circuit-trekking route across the Red Sea coast's barren heartland. This sister trail is operated by the local Maaza Bedouin

tribe, in keeping with the community-focused ethos behind the Sinai Trail.

EGYPTIAN TOURISM TODAY

All of this is welcome news in a country where bad news has a habit of overshadowing anything positive. Since 2011 Egypt has been trying to build back its tourism economy to pre-revolution levels but has suffered several setbacks. The ongoing insurgency in North Sinai and a number of horrific terrorist attacks have kept many would-be travellers away, as has President Sisi's continuing crackdown on journalists, campaigners and other voices of opposition.

This tourism crisis has exacerbated the economic problems of many Egyptians who work in hospitality, at a time when rampant inflation has caused living standards to slip. A recent World Bank report stated that 60% of Egyptians now live in poverty. In 2019, Egypt's visitor numbers had finally begun to look rosy once again. Then Covid-19 hit and the tourists disappeared. 2022's anniversaries are the boost everyone involved in Egypt's travel industry is hoping will kick tourism back into high gear. And there's no lack of incredible old and new sights awaiting those who do return.

"The Sinai Trail helps the Bedouin preserve traditional culture, teach our youth about the desert and create work opportunities in the mountains where no tourists used to come."

NASSER MANSOUR, JEBELEYA TRIBE HEAD GUIDE, SINAI TRAIL

WHEN TO GO

NOV-FEB

Mostly blue skies and mostly warm, though chilly after dark.

JUN-AUG

Temperature levels zoom up to scorching during summer.

MAR-MAY & SEP-OCT

Not as uncomfortably hot as summer. Occasional dust storms in spring.