

Leyla's Travel Tips for Egypt

Getting Ready

It's an exciting time! Whether you are a seasoned traveler or this is your umpteenth time to go to Egypt. The following tips are helpful in making your adventure run smooth.

Always make sure you have 6 months leeway on your passport and make a photo copy and stash it away in a safe place.

Going thru Domestic Air check-in

With all the new security rules, if you are not sure, contact the airport and ask what is required at check-in. As of now you will have to take off your shoes and jacket and check thru the x-ray machine along with your required size carry on bag. Wear easy off and easy on shoes. Put lipsticks and small bottles in a small baggie in your purse.

Baggage

Most airlines will allow you to check your bags straight thru to your final destination. This saves lugging it from one airline to the next. If you are unsure about your luggage making the connection, then check it in at each destination of your flight. Some of the airlines are now charging extra for each bag. Check the procedure of your domestic carrier.

The rules keep changing so make sure to inquire as to recent rules of travel before you depart. International flights allow 2 bags at 70 lbs each. In reality you will want space for all the goodies you will be returning with after shopping. So....pack as light as you possible can get away with. I like to pack for about 7 days, then I will usually wash things in my room to dry over night or you can get laundry service at the hotel. The hotels offer irons for use.

Excursions

If you are doing any type of extended excursion from Cairo, such as a Nile Cruise, trip to Alexandria, Oasis, etc. Then pack only what you will need for that trip, which may not be all you have in luggage. Your carrier space is usually smaller for the in Egypt flights, trains and vehicles. Remember to save space for the shopping! Your extra luggage will be stored at your return hotel or with your tour operator. Please do not leave valuables in the stored luggage and do lock.

Air Travel

For International flights arrive at least 3 hrs. before departure time. Air travel to anywhere can be hard on your body. The flight to Cairo straight from NY takes about 11 ½ hrs. Add this time to your already flight to get to NY and your body will fight back by swelling. To keep the swelling to a minimum avoid: alcohol, soda pop, high carbs and large amounts of food. Do try to drink a lot of water, and eat foods full of protein and fiber. I also take fiber pills to keep things moving since my body isn't. I have found it helpful to wear control top panty hose with gentle support also in the legs and alternate shoes or slippers that are loose, once on the plane. Moving around the plane once in a while also helps... along with some stretchies. If you are shy ...do the stretchies in the bathroom or back of the plane.

Carry a light jacket to help control your body temperature.

I personally do not take sleeping pills, but some people find it useful to help them sleep on the long flight. Natural sleep inducers are L-Tryptophan, Valerian, and Melatonin. Any one or a combination taken with milk works for me, when needed.

Cairo Arrival

When you arrive in Cairo you will depart the plane and board a bus that will take you to the airport terminal. As a foreigner you will be required to purchase a visa first (\$15 to \$20 exact change). You will then proceed to the passport check in. After you get stamped... move on to retrieve your bags, pass thru customs, and then it's out the door to begin your adventure!

If you are traveling with a group or company, you will have assistance thru the airport procedure, with your vehicle waiting for you. If you have traveled on your own...there are taxi's waiting to service you.

Currency

Egyptian currency is pounds LE or piaster PT (like dollars and cents). The rate does change, but as of now it is about 5.50 LE equals 1 dollar. The airport changes money as do the hotels. Keep in mind they don't like to change back when you leave. Having small amounts for tipping and paying for bottled water or a snack from the street is always handy. Many places for shopping except dollars and euro as payment and some except credit card, but may require an extra service fee. Contact your CC Company before departing to let them know that you will be using the card abroad.

What to Pack

Summer in Egypt in one word is... hot! The heat usually starts in April and is full blast.. oven on.. by June, July and August. There is also some humidity.

Weather starts cooling down in September and gets progressively coldest by Dec., Jan. & Feb. The warming trend starts to begin in March.

When you are in Upper Egypt, Luxor and on, it is usually warmer than Cairo. When you are in Lower Egypt, Alexandria, it is generally cooler than Cairo.

Don't let the desert day heat fool you in the winter. The nights can get pretty cold.

Always bring jackets to layer for the cold of the day or night or a wrap for air-conditioning in the hotels.

For winter months: light wools, pants, long sleeves, closed shoes, sweaters, and layers will work. This will give you flexibility to adjust for the degree of cold.

For summer months: Light cottons, cotton/poly mix, pants, walking shorts , capris, loose clothing, skirts or dresses.

Out of respect for the culture I recommend that you do not wear tank tops (unless you wear a jacket over), short shorts, low cut cleavage showing tops, skimpy bathing suits, see thru tops, skirts, pants or dresses. Give them the sun test. Things can, become quite revealing when the sun hits your back.

You will see such wear out of the foreign visitors, but following these guidelines will avoid potential overly friendly men whose attention you may not wish to encourage.

Also I do not give direct eye contact so again as not to attract attention.

Sight Seeing: It is important that you dress comfortably for your sightseeing. Do not wear flip flops or sandals into the desert.

You will be doing, in some instances, climbing, animal riding and walking in sand and need sure footing.

You also need foot protection against any bug-like critters that may be crawling on the ground. ICK!!!! I Hate Bugs!

Tennies with socks always works for me.

I usually carry a small scarf to cover my head for when I go into a Mosque or Church as a sign of respect but it is not mandatory.

Always wear a hat or sun visor, sunglasses and full spectrum sunscreen. Nothing ruins a vacation like a painful sunburn, plus it makes wrinkles!

When you are inside a tomb you can remove the hat to help cool you down. I also use a good old fashion hand fan, manual or electric. (*Please don't touch the walls or paintings in the tombs*).

Another strategy is to hop from shade to shade and not stay in the direct sun if at all possible, for too long.

It is an absolute must to always carry bottled water with you and tissues. Bottled water is easily obtainable at the hotel and for less expense you can stop at the little stands all over to buy at a better price.

Evening: You may at some point have an evening on the town for dinner and a show. If you are in Cairo or Alexandria... dress is usually "nice to very nice" and not casual. Remember your feet may be swollen from all your sight seeing, so wear shoes that allow for this. Lots of times after I've been out all day, I will take a quick cool shower or soak my feet to keep the swelling down.

If you are in Luxor or Aswan dress is a little more casual.

If you are taking a Nile Cruise. they will have a last night hafla that everyone dresses native. Galabayas (dress of Egypt) for men and women can be bought at the bazaar or bring your own if you have one.

Dance Classes: If you are taking dance classes while in Egypt, be sure to bring a pair of dance shoes that are comfortable always. You can never know what the condition of a dance floor may be and you may need foot protection. I like to take several styles to rotate out. Normal dance class clothes are sufficient.

If you are performing bring your costume and CD of music.

Voltage

Egypt is 220 V. The hotel has hair dryers, ironing boards and irons for use.

There is a plug in provided for men's shavers.

You will need a converter for your video or camera to recharge the batteries. Bring extra "digital chips" film and batteries for your video or camera if necessary. I also take a mini fan to keep the air circulating in the room and it provides "white noise" for me to sleep.

Jewelry

Please do not travel with your good jewelry or a lot.

Custom dance costume

Bring with you your desired bra and have the cups positioned and pinned in place with the distance between the cups where you want. This eliminates guess work and gives you an important custom fit for your body. Do all your measurements: straps, around bottom of bra, around neck, hips, length of skirt from hip to floor, etc.

If you have a certain design...draw it out as best as you can. There will be plenty of styles to choose from also, that you can buy off the rack and many will adjust the size to help fit you better. Arrange this at the beginning of your trip to allow for sufficient time to complete your costume.

Food

Any one who has ever eaten Middle Eastern food knows how yummy it can be. When you are traveling in Egypt, I recommend that you take some precaution in where you eat and what you eat. As a general rule summer will cause you more problems because of the heat which makes for a higher bacteria count in the food. I have had dysentery twice and believe me it is no fun.

I recommend that you do not eat salads of any kind, not even from the hotels. Your trip is short and you don't want down time because of any tummy troubles.

Any food that has been cooked is generally safe... eggs, beef, chicken, lamb or vegetables dishes, tea or coffee, cereal. Other selections to be careful of are fruits and fruit juices. If you can peel the fruit it is ok, try to wash the outside first. Juices are made with the tap water and can cause problems.

Don't use ice. Use bottled water to brush your teeth.

Packaged food is ok, such as yogurt. Packaged snacks are ok but they usually taste different and have high sodium. Bread is ok.

Most of the dips and pickled foods are non problematic.

If you are in a 1st class hotel you can feel comfortable with most of your food choices or if your tour operator suggest an out side native restaurant it should be ok also.

I always travel with raw almonds in case I need a quick healthy snack if no food is available that I feel comfortable with.

Always but always drink only bottled water.

Tummy woes

If you do get a troubled tummy use Imodium for the relief. If it has progressed into something other than minor (usually from bacteria), there are products in Egypt especially designed to clear up the problem.

Do not hesitate or wait to ask for help in buying the medication as it will stop the problem almost overnight before it progresses worse.

Transportation

If you are on an organized tour your transportation in a weather controlled vehicle will be arranged for you for your itinerary.

If you desire optional excursions your tour operator can provide this and the cost will usually include all fees and guides that go with the tour or excursion.

Cairo can be overwhelming and I personally advise going with a group or have a company service. I do not advise that you make deals with private car owners who may solicit you for transportation opportunities.

Taxi cabs

If you want to hoof it alone there are the black and white cabs that may not have air-conditioning and you are charged by the deal you make. You can usually find one around the hotel, or stand by the street and yell your destination as he drives by.

Cairo now, also, has yellow cabs and the cost is determined by a running meter.

The yellow cab usually has more limitations as to where they will take you.

Either way, always have written and with you your hotel phone and your destination phone.

Bus, tram or sub

I do not recommend the bus...when you see you will know why.

I have never had the occasion to ride the tram, so I can't comment. It looks ok. As far as the subway...I've heard positive things, but again I have not had the occasion to use.

Car rental

Now here is a real adventure! Yes... I have driven... and talk about crazy!!!!!! I would not recommend you rent a car unless you can get an experienced driver to go with it!

Shopping

Shopping in Egypt, especially Cairo can have a life of its own.

One of the most well known for tourist is Khan el Khalili Bazaar.

One of the oldest bazaars in the world it is a maze of little shops that offers you everything a tourist could want and then some.

Dancers will go crazy at the glut of scarves, costumes and supplies that are available. Along with the jewelry, perfume oil, Gold, plus much, much more...it is a shoppers heaven!

Downtown Cairo or Heliopolis shopping is also inspiring especially if you are a shoe lover like me! Ooooh the sandals!

Tips

Tips in Egypt are an every day part of life and for many the only way to make a descent living, as wages are so low. Most organized tours will pay for the s/s tour tips. At the end of the tour, the group usually chips in to tip the driver and the guide who has been with them thru out the tour.

Baggage handlers, waiters, taxis, restroom attendants, etc. are a few to mention. Tipping and money giving is always at your discretion.

In conclusion

Egypt is a fascinating country! A contrast of ancient, middle ages and new, all living next to each other, each offering a different era of life that makes your trip a living history lesson.

In spite of the political situations in the Middle East, the people are always a gracious host to the oceans of people who travel to visit and live in their home land.

A show of respect in someone else's home always brings respect back to you.

I hope these tips help make your stay the adventure of your life.