

# The Arab Republic of Egypt



## *Basic Facts*

Size:	385,229 square miles (about two times the size of the State of California)
Capital:	Cairo
Population:	70 Million
Per capita income:	About \$1,200
Religion:	Muslim (88%); Coptic Christian (12%)
Language:	Arabic
President:	Mohamed Hosni Mubarak

## ***Geography and Climate:***

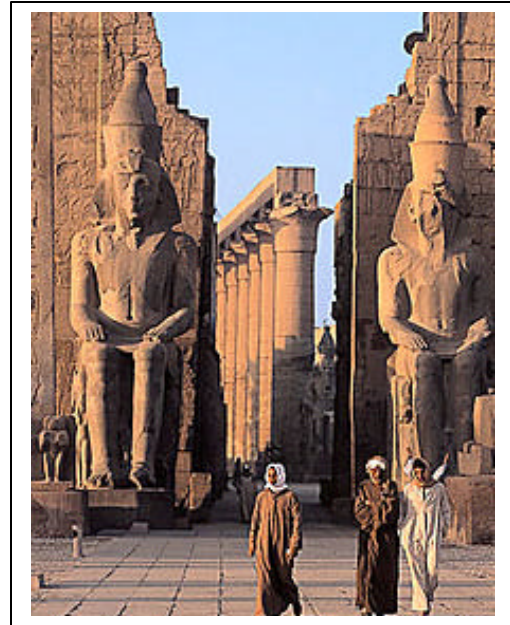
Egypt is located in the northeast corner of Africa. Its immediate neighbors are Libya in the West, Sudan in the South, Saudi Arabia in the East, and Israel in the Northeast. Egypt covers 385,229 square miles, or approximately twice the size of the state of California. Egypt is uniquely situated on the African continent but culturally and historically it has been more closely associated with the Arab World and the Middle East. The capital of Egypt is Cairo, a sprawling metropolis of over 16 million people. Egypt's second most populous city is Alexandria, another historically significant city that lies on the North Coast of the country. Although Egypt is a relatively large country in terms of the territory that it covers, it is also one of the most densely populated countries in the world. This is because about 97% of the country is barren desert and the vast majority of Egyptians live in the Nile Valley, a strip of fertile farmland that is irrigated by the Nile, the world's longest river.

Egypt's climate is hot and dry from May through October. The summer temperature in Cairo averages around 94 degrees but in the south of the country it soars to temperatures well over a hundred degrees. During the winter months - December, January, and February - average daily temperatures in Cairo drop to an average of about 60 degrees in the day and fall to about 50 degrees at night. Alexandria receives the most rain with 19 centimeters each year, while Aswan receives just .2 centimeters annually. Between March and April a dry desert sandstorm (called the *khamasiin* in Arabic) blows in from the Western Desert at up to 150 km per hour.

## ***History***

Egypt was the home of one of the most important civilizations of the ancient Middle East and was one of the earliest urban and literate societies. Northern and Southern Egypt were unified by in 3100 B.C. under the rule of King Menes and Egypt was on the way to becoming one of the greatest civilizations the planet has ever seen. The Egyptian Empire reached its height during the reign of Thutmose III in 1400 B.C. when it controlled all territory stretching from modern-day Syria to Ethiopia. Later, Egypt became part of the Greek and Roman Empires. Another defining moment in Egypt's history came in 642 A.D. when the country was conquered by the Arabs and Egypt became part of an expanding Islamic Empire that would stretch across North Africa and into Spain, up to Southeastern Europe, and Eastward all the way to modern-day Afghanistan. Islam became the dominant religion of Egypt and a new capital was established at Fustat, the same location as modern day Cairo. Eventually, the Fatimids came to control Egypt and Cairo (*al-Qahira* in Arabic) became a vibrant center for trade, commerce, and culture.

In 1517, Egypt formally became a part of the expanding Ottoman Empire but this control was interrupted by a French invasion in 1798 led by Napoleon. The French were forced out of Egypt only three years later and in turn they were expelled by Mohamed 'Ali, an Albanian lieutenant in the Ottoman army. In 1869, the Suez Canal was built, making Egypt an even more prized and contested piece of real-estate. The Suez Canal made travel and commerce from Europe to Asia much cheaper but the strategic geographic location ultimately made the militarily superior European powers much more eager to regain control of the country.



The Temple of Luxor in Thebes. Giant statues of King Ramses II line the walkway.

Crippling national debt gave the British the pretext to occupy Egypt in 1882 and to formally declare it a protectorate in 1914. For the next several decades, Egyptian nationalists would push for independence from British rule. Egypt participated in the first and second world wars on the side of the British and the allied powers. Egypt also participated in the 1948 war in Palestine, where Arab forces were unable to block the creation of the state of Israel on land historically occupied by Arabs.

In 1952 a group of military officers, led by Colonel Gamal Abdel Nasser, carried out a coup. They abolished the monarchy and declared a new, independent republic. Nasser's attempt to regain Egyptian control of the Suez Canal in 1956 brought an invasion of British, French, and Israeli forces but after diplomatic pressure was exerted from the United States the tripartite aggression was brought to an end. Nasser became a hero not only in Egypt but also throughout the Arab world. Nasser became the focal point of Arab nationalism and he forcefully argued for a union between Arab states. In 1958 this dream was partially fulfilled in one of the few events of its kind in history - Egypt and Syria entered into a union called the United Arab Republic. This union only lasted until 1961. However, Arab nationalism continues to be an important rallying cry for Egyptians and others who appeal to common bonds of language and history.

Commitment to a common Arab cause made many Egyptians sympathetic to the plight of Palestinians who had lost their homes in the 1948 war that

created the state of Israel. Following months of heightening tension, Israel attacked Egypt in 1967, beginning the Six Day War. Israel destroyed the Egyptian air force, captured Sinai, and closed the Suez Canal. The 1967 war was a disastrous defeat for the Egypt and for Nasser's leadership.



Gamal Abdel Nasser

In the economic sphere, Nasser was responsible for shifting Egypt towards socialism through nationalizing industry, instituting sweeping land reform, and making the state the main provider of goods and services to citizens. Nasser is still revered by many today for his leadership of Arab nationalism and the programs that he instituted to provide for the poor. However, he is also harshly criticized by others who point to his dictatorial style of rule and the damage that the socialist system caused to Egypt's long-term development prospects.

After Nasser's death in 1970 vice president Anwar Sadat took over. On 6 October 1973, Egypt launched a surprise attack on Israel in order to regain control of the Suez Canal. The war ended in a ceasefire and a dialogue was opened that lead to a peace treaty with Israel. Egypt regained control of the Suez Canal and the Sinai Peninsula in stages and Egypt formally recognized the state of Israel. Egypt benefited from greatly improved relations with Western countries, but many in the Arab world felt that Sadat had betrayed them. Sadat was assassinated in 1981.



Anwar Sadat

Hosni Mubarak, Sadat's vice president, was sworn in after Sadat's assassination and he has been the president of Egypt ever since. Mubarak continued many of Sadat's political legacies. He has honored the peace treaty with Israel and he continued economic reforms that were begun under Sadat. He has also maintained close relations with Western governments, particularly the United States. This was illustrated by Egypt's participation in a 35,000 strong force in the 1991 Persian Gulf War against Iraq. Despite this close partnership with the United States, Mubarak has managed to maintain political control through heavy-handed means. The government can be classified as a one-party, authoritarian state where

the government engages in election fraud, intimidation, torture, and political manipulation to maintain its control. Many Egyptians hope to see a more democratic political arrangement emerge, but severe economic difficulties mean that a more democratic future any time soon is not very probable.

### ***The People and Culture***

Islam is the official religion of Egypt. About 88% of Egyptians are Muslims and in general Egyptians are quite religious. Islam recognizes all of the same prophets as in Judaism and Christianity, however Islam also recognizes the prophet Mohammed as the last in a line of prophets. The mosque plays a central role in the lives of most Egyptians and it engages in many of the same programs of charity that we are familiar with in Churches in the West. The other twelve percent of the Egyptian population is Christian. Egyptian Christians belong to the Coptic Church, a sect that split from the Orthodox Church in the 5<sup>th</sup> Century. In language, dress, and way of life Coptic Christians are indistinguishable from Muslim Egyptians.

Egypt is a poor country with an average per person income of about \$1,200 per year. Like many other less developed countries, Egypt has a high rate of population growth, which puts a significant strain on the economy. Also similar to most developing countries, there is a tremendous gap between the rich and the poor. The top ten percent of the country are accustomed to comfortable lives and a living standard much like our own in the United States but the majority of the population in both urban and rural areas has an extremely hard time making ends meet. These harsh economic conditions are reflected in a relatively high rate of infant mortality, low rates of literacy, and chronic poverty for much of the population.

Egyptian culture is an intensely social one. Extended families are still very close and

### ***Important Dates in Egyptian History***

*3100 BC*

King Menes unifies Upper and Lower Egypt and establishes a capital at Memphis, near present-day Cairo.

*2600 BC*

The Great Pyramid of Khufu at Giza was built.

*1400 BC*

The Egyptian Empire reached its height during the reign of Thutmose III. At this time, Egypt controlled an Empire stretching from modern-day Syria to Ethiopia.

*332 BC*

Alexander the Great conquers Egypt and founds Alexandria.

*31 BC*

Egypt becomes a province of the Roman Empire.

*AD 642*

The Arabs conquer Egypt. Islam becomes the majority religion and the Arabic language replaces Coptic.

*973*

Fatimid rulers move the capital from Alexandria to the new city of Cairo. Cairo soon becomes a center of the Islamic world.

*1250*

Mameluke bodyguards overthrow the sultan and seize control of Egypt.

friendships made during childhood last throughout one's lifetime. Most social activities revolve around gatherings of friends and family, whether at the home to share a meal or out of the home at a local coffee shop or restaurant. Hospitality is valued highly in Egyptian society and Egyptians are extremely generous when hosting guests. This makes travel to Egypt a wonderful experience!

Painting has been part of Egyptian life since ancient times and tourists can still admire the breathtaking works that were created four thousand years ago. Arabic calligraphy and Islamic architecture reached its height during the Fatimid era (969-1171) and the Mamluk era (1250-1517), though both traditions are still strong today.

Without a doubt, the most famous Egyptian singer of all times was Umm Kalthum. She died in 1975 but her music and her legend outlive her. Her songs, based on poetry and operettas, are treasured not just by Egyptians but by Arabs throughout the Middle East. Other notables were Abdel al-Halim Hafez and Mohammed Abdel Wahaab. Elements of western pop music are increasingly being integrated into contemporary Egyptian music, and a synthesis of styles is being produced by pop artists like Mohammed Fouad and Amr Diab.

Egypt also has a strong literary tradition and historically Egypt was a cultural center for the Arab world. Naguib Mahfouz became perhaps the most well-known of Egyptian authors in the United States when he won the Nobel Prize for literature in 1988. Mahfouz has more than 40 novels and 30 screenplays to his name. Other Egyptian authors that are less known in the United States but widely read in Egypt and throughout the Arab world include Tawfiq al-Hakim and Yusuf Idris.

*1517*

The Ottoman Empire conquers Egypt. The Mamelukes retain local authority and eventually challenge Ottoman power in Egypt.

*1798*

Napoleon Bonaparte leads a French invasion of Egypt.

*1805*

Muhammad Ali secures control of Egypt and steers the country on an ambitious modernization program.

*1869*

The Suez Canal is opened.

*1882*

British troops occupy Egypt.

*1914*

Great Britain declares Egypt a protectorate.

*1922*

Egypt becomes independent, but Britain retains many powers and maintains military control of the country.

*1945*

Arab League Founded in Cairo

*1948*

Egypt and other Arab countries invade the newly created state of Israel, but are defeated.

*1952*

Free Officer's military coup against the Egyptian monarchy. Two years later Gamal Abdel Nasser gains complete executive authority.

**Would you like more information on Egypt?  
Check out these great Internet sites!**

**General**

<http://www.sis.gov.eg/>

<http://www.geocities.com/Pentagon/3435/>

[http://www.sas.upenn.edu/African\\_Studies/County\\_Specific/Egypt.html](http://www.sas.upenn.edu/African_Studies/County_Specific/Egypt.html)

[http://www.arab.net/egypt/egypt\\_contents.html](http://www.arab.net/egypt/egypt_contents.html)

**Egyptian Newspapers and Magazines in English:**

The Middle East Times: <http://metimes.com>

The Cairo Times: <http://www.cairotimes.com/>

Al-Ahram Weekly: <http://www.ahram.org.eg/weekly/>

Egypt Today Magazine: <http://egypttoday.com/>

**Culture:**

Art: <http://www.egyptart.org.eg/>

Music: <http://www.sis.gov.eg/umm/html/tumm.htm>

**Ancient History:**

General:

<http://www.geocities.com/amenhotep.geo>

<http://www.sis.gov.eg/ancient/front.htm>

<http://www.discoveringegypt.com/>

King Tut: <http://www.sis.gov.eg/tut/html/tut00.htm>

**Modern History and Politics:**

General History:

<http://www.cad.strath.ac.uk/~ayman/modern-egypt.html>

<http://lcweb2.loc.gov/frd/cs/egtoc.html>

Gamal Abdel Nasser:

<http://www.geocities.com/CapitolHill/Lobby/5270/>

History of Cairo:

<http://ce.eng.usf.edu/pharos/cairo/>

*1956*

Egypt nationalizes the Suez Canal to finance the Aswan High Dam project. French, British, and Israeli armies invade and capture the Sinai Peninsula. The US and United Nations help negotiate a settlement.

*1958*

Egypt and Syria form the United Arab Republic. Syria withdraws from the union in 1961.

*1967*

Egypt loses the Sinai Peninsula and much of its military during the Six-Day War with Israel.

*1970*

Nasser dies of a heart attack. Anwar al-Sadat becomes the president of Egypt.

*1973*

Egypt fights Israel in the Arab-Israeli War of 1973.

*1974*

Sadat initiates Egypt's open-door policy, inviting foreign investment in the Egyptian economy.

*1979*

Egypt and Israel sign a peace treaty arranging for the return of the Sinai Peninsula to Egypt.

*1981*

President Sadat is assassinated. He is succeeded by Egypt's Vice-President, Hosni Mubarak.

*1991*

Egyptian forces participate in the Persian Gulf War against Iraq.