

### **CONTEMPORARY EGYPT**

#### **International News**

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Surely the most iconic sight; the most extraordinary ancient feat; the most beautiful and mysterious place on earth ? the pyramids of Giza are a staggering testament to the extraordinary engineering and cultural vibrancy of the ancient Egyptians, and draw a huge number of tourists to the country every year.

Squatting by their side is the sphinx, queen of riddles ? an emblem to the mysteries of this civilisation that we will never know ? knowledge and beliefs that archaeology can never reveal. It is a shame, then, that the majority of visitors to this amazing country wish to immerse themselves totally in its past. Pharaohs, queens and death rites are the allure of this place, despite the fact that perhaps the best way to get to know its past is through its present; to see how long standing customs and traditions have shaped the way that modern Egyptians live.

The capital city of Cairo is the best place to base oneself for a trip into the contemporary beating heart of Egypt, and it quickly becomes apparent quite why: the city is full of life. Streets clamour with the sound of cars, bicycles, pedestrians and vendors; calls for prayer echo across the rooftops from the pinnacles of minarets; and the smell of the local cuisine ? all spices and grains ? waft down the tiny alleys.

It's a remarkable place that determinedly counters the pre-eminence of the dead, ancient culture that we all know so well. Tourists' preoccupation with the Pharaohs is analogous to tourists coming to England and only visiting Stone Henge: preposterous. The markets of Cairo are amazingly vibrant places where vendors are open to bartering, but are also some of the most persistent and insistent in the world ? and for this reason and others, many tourists see it as a mere necessary pit stop, somewhere unwelcoming and pushy. Within this there are amazing sites to see, however, which are largely ignored by the hordes of tourists lurking up in Khan al-Khalili.

The Mosque of Ibn Tulun is one of Egypt's earliest Islamic monuments, where, from the top of its minaret, you can see all the way back/out to the pyramids at Giza. The Mosque of Sultan Hasan, an extraordinary 19th-century mosque is a giant fortress-like building nearby that is one of the finest examples of Islamic architecture in the whole of Egypt.

There are many more mosques throughout the city, each worthy of your attention, and each more welcoming than the last. And, importantly, each still functioning as it always has.

Organising a trip to Cairo is predictably very easy ? due to the massive tourist industry there. [Travel Insurance](#) should be obtained from a reputable operator such as Go Travel, who can provide cover for the unique possibilities of Egypt. The ancient Egyptians were an extraordinary civilisation that are deserving of our attention, but do not forget the rest of Egypt's cultural heritage, not to mention its contemporary life.