

Egypt Travel Tips

by
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The following information is provided for your consideration. Realizing that each person has individual needs, these travel tips are to be used as a guide only. You should feel free to adjust them to your own individual situation. **Our thanks to Dennis McDonald of the Egyptian Study Society for his helpful insights in preparing this guide.**

LUGGAGE

We recommend that you travel with one carry-on and one checked bag. If you plan carefully this should be adequate.

- Carry-on:** We carry either a small wheeled carry-on or a day-pack style backpack. Just be sure it is easy and light to carry. It should be roomy enough for all of your really important items and a change of clothes. You should be able to buy one at any big box store (WalMart, Target, etc.) or sporting goods store, for about \$30
- Checked bag:** We recommend a carry-on style bag (or perhaps the next larger size) with self contained wheels. You can buy one at WalMart, Target, etc for about \$50. You should assume your bag will get beat up pretty badly. It probably won't, but if it does you don't want it to spoil the mood of your trip.

CLOTHES

After you select your trip wardrobe, go back and try to eliminate half of it - you'll still probably have more than you need. As a general rule, if you can't fit it all comfortably in one slightly-larger-than-carry-on size suitcase, you're taking too much. This trip is casual at all times, so you won't need any dressy clothes (although some travelers do like to dress up for dinner). Laundry is available almost everywhere we will be staying, so you don't need to bring too many changes of clothes. But remember, Egypt can get rather cool in the evenings and in the winter so be prepared to "layer up" to keep comfortable. Egypt's temperature is NOT the same all year round, so if you are traveling in summer you will want to pack lighter clothes; if in winter, bring somewhat heavier than these suggestions.

- Bill takes:**
- 2 pair of walking shoes, so I can trade off every other day
 - 4 pair of permanent press cotton trousers (modest shorts are generally okay)
 - 6 light permanent press, cotton shirts (long and short sleeve)
 - 2 T-shirts
 - 1 light wool sweater
 - 1 windbreaker or light jacket
 - 1 lightweight sports coat (foldable) and tie (both optional)
 - 6 sets underwear, socks and handkerchiefs
 - 1 bathing suit
 - 1 light weight pajamas
 - 1 set of toiletries consisting of toothbrush, toothpaste, battery powered electric razor, comb, deodorant, dental floss
 - 1 hat with brim, or baseball cap

Nancy takes: 2 pair of walking shoes
1 pair of shoes for evening wear (optional)
4 pair of permanent press cotton trousers (modest shorts are generally okay)
1 skirt
8 light permanent press, blouses (long and short sleeve)
2 scarves
1 light wool sweater
1 windbreaker or light jacket
4 pair stockings
6 sets of underwear, socks and handkerchiefs
1 bathing suit
1 light weight nightgown
1 set of toiletries consisting of toothbrush, toothpaste, 110/220 volt hair dryer with plug adapter, brush, deodorant, makeup
1 hat with brim

Together: hand lotion & chapstick
sun screen
washcloth and small soap (some hotels don't have washcloths)
small package of laundry soap (for washing small things in the sink)
shampoo

OTHER IMPORTANT ITEMS TO BRING

Clothes are important but don't forget:

Airline Ticket: Either paper or e-ticket ... without this you stay home. Don't forget it!

Passport: Don't forget your passport. If you don't have a passport you can't get into Egypt (actually you can't get out of America, as they will check your passport at Kennedy before you board). But New York is not the place you want to find out you can't continue on the trip. If you don't have a Visa, you can obtain one upon arrival in Egypt. This is what we do and recommend.

ATMs: Many places take credit cards, and we do use our credit cards for large purchases, but, in general, we find it most convenient to deal in the local currency. All of the main hotels have ATMs, and they are also located in many other convenient places. We do not change any money until we arrive in Egypt. The rate is much better there and you should not need any local currency upon your arrival as dollars can be used almost everywhere.

Safety wallet: Bill carries a holder for passport, travelers checks, and money that attaches to his belt, flips over his waistband and stores inside his trousers. Nancy carries a holder that has a strap for around her neck and is carried inside her shirt. In any case bring some kind of wallet that you can carry securely.

- Still camera:** Few travelers bring film cameras anymore. If you do, bring film and batteries as film is getting harder to find and batteries can be hard to find, depending on the specific type. Most people, including us, travel with a digital camera. Ours uses an SD card and we bring enough cards to last for the entire trip. Start the trip with fresh batteries, as you may not be able to find replacements. Photography is no longer allowed at most indoor sites. This includes tombs and museums. Photography is allowed almost everywhere outdoors. Photography is allowed in most, but not all, temples. But bring your camera as there are many beautiful shots just waiting.
- Film:** If you bring a film camera remember that it's bright outside and dark inside. ASA 800 is probably the best all-around choice. ASA 1000 is preferred in some especially dark areas. Flash is not allowed so you won't have much luck with ASA 100 and 200 speeds. Most experts will not trust their film to their checked baggage, and be careful going through the airport X-rays. Hand it around if you can.
- Video camera:** Bring enough tape (or memory cards) and batteries for the trip. You may not be able to find either of them on our trip. Currently video is allowed in any place that allows regular photography. But photography is restricted in many places so be prepared.
- Flashlight:** A small flashlight is a "must have". Some of the monuments are not well lighted and a flashlight will enhance the experience. We carry small belt-mounted flashlights at all times.
- Water bottle:** In Egypt you don't drink any non-bottled water. And for safety, it is best to buy this from our hotel or in SEALED bottles elsewhere. In order to have water all day (and you will need it), you can either carry a purchased bottle with you or pour it into a handy water bottle that hangs from your belt. You can buy these at any sporting goods store for about \$10.
- Guide books:** It's nice to be able to reference what we see with its history, maps, etc. But carry only a minimum of these as they can be heavy and take up a lot of space. We also bring one or two, paperback novels to read on the flight.
- Electrical converter:** We try to make sure everything we bring is either battery operated or 110/220 volt operation, but if you must bring 110 volt appliance make sure you bring a converter as Egypt uses a 220 volt electrical system. Most hotels have 110 volts in the bathroom for razors, but these cannot be used for hair dryers and you can't count on them.
- Plug adapters:** Even if your electrical items are rated 110/220 volt they will not fit the Egyptian plugs which are two round holes about an inch apart. You will need a plug adapter, available at the airport or any luggage store.

- Binoculars:** A small set of travel binoculars is fun to have, if you have room.
- Note book & pen:** You may, or may not, want to keep a diary, but you should, absolutely, keep a photo log. It's amazing, how once your pictures are developed, you can't tell where they were taken, and identifying pictures is one service we can not provide.
- Sun glasses:** Egypt is all sand and water, and it is bright. Bring sunglasses.
- Small hip Pack:** For small items like sunglasses, etc.
- Snacks:** Granola bars can substitute for a meal when there is none convenient or you don't feel like going out. It's amazing how good an Oreo or chocolate chip cookie can taste. Also, Bill can't abide drinking tepid water, so he brings some powered Kool-Ade along, to make a weak mix. Otherwise he tends not to drink as much water as he should.
- A flat bag:** If you plan to buy anything, it's a good idea to bring an extra, fold-up bag in your checked baggage, so you'll have room to bring your treasures home.
- Zip-Lock bags:** Bring several LARGE zip-lock bags. They have many uses, from keeping your packed items separated to acting as sand proof cases for your cameras and snacks if the wind picks up suddenly. We always keep a couple in our backpack.

HOW TO PACK

If you have followed all of our recommendations, you will be traveling with two bags. One carry-on and one checked bag. When packing it's a good idea to replace all glass bottles with plastic ones and to put any thing that can possibly leak in a zip-lock bag.

We put everything in our checked bag except:

- Clothes we are wearing** on the plane which will include:
- one full set of clothes
 - light wool sweater (November through March)
 - windbreaker or jacket
 - hat or cap

Security wallet with passport, money, credit card, etc.

- Carry-on bag** with
- sun glasses
 - Air line e-ticket receipt
 - camera
 - Laptop computer or net-book
 - one paperback, e-book reader or media player for in-flight entertainment
 - one complete change of clothes, except shoes
 - toiletory kit
 - first aide kit

HELPFUL HINT - If possible get a friend to pack with you and put half of your things in each others checked baggage for the trip over. That way, if one bag gets lost (it can appen) you will still have half of your clothes.

MEDICINE, HEALTH AND FITNESS:

Egypt is a developing country and does not have the same standards of health and sanitation that we do. It is inevitable that some travelers will get "gippy tummy", "pharaoh's revenge" or what-ever you want to call it. Be prepared. Before you leave see a doctor who specializes in travel medicine (eg. the travel section at Rose Medical Center in Denver) and take his advice on possible health risks associated with travel in Egypt. Most travelers take a dose of a prescription antibiotic with them on the trip. If you get sick in Egypt it may not be possible to go to a doctor right away, so plan ahead.

PLEASE NOTE: We are not doctors, nor are we qualified to give medical advice, so see you own physician before you leave. The following is not in the form of a recommendation, but just to let you know what we take in the way of medicine.

Aspirin, Tylenol or other like medicine

Eye drops

Immodium AD

Pepto-Bismal tablets (we take these each day as a preventative.)

Band aids and antiseptic

Antibiotic, as recommended by our doctor.

We bring an elastic knee brace. We usually don't need it, but when we do ...

Misc. medications that apply to our own personal condition.

To get maximum benefit from the trip, you should expect to walk ... and walk ... and walk. Of course, you can decide what you do and don't want to do, but keep in mind Egypt is largely desert and the monuments are expansive. So if you expect to walk a lot and keep up, get in shape now. Do not wait till you get there and see if you can do it. Our travels will be about like playing a round of golf a day, on hilly terrain and in lots of sand. And sometimes there will be opportunities to climb. If you want to take advantage of all of these, prepare now. If you can't do a lot of walking, or otherwise engage in strenuous activity, don't worry, you'll still have a great time. But realize there will definitely be some things you won't be able to do.

MONEY MATTERS

How much money should I bring and what extra costs will I incur? It's too bad there is no simple answer to these questions, but the following might help. Remember one Egyptian Pound is about 18 cents or roughly 5 1/2 pounds to the dollar. Check you itinerary to see which meals and tips are included in the trip and for which you will be responsible yourself. Of course you don't have to worry about the cost of the included meals or tips, EXCEPT that beverages and tips for personal services are not included. You might consider the following costs as reasonable (please remember you can make them go either way based on your personal preferences):

Lunch - 30 to 60 pounds

Dinner - 60 to 200 pounds

Bottled water - 2 to 4 pounds per liter

Cab Fare - by negotiation, usually 5 to 10 pounds for a short run up to 50 pounds or more for half a day. Specify that the price is for everyone together and not per person.

NOTE: When buying ANY service (cab ride, horse carriage ride, camel ride, etc) always negotiate a firm price first. Do not accept "Whatever you think is fair" as settling it, as it may will end up "Whatever I think is fair" and it will always be far more than whatever you had in mind. Settle on a specific amount but NEVER, NEVER pay anything until after the service has been performed, or you may end up paying twice. Often we will even try to settle on the bakshesh (see below) in advance. (For example: "I'll give you five pounds to take all three of us to the Winter Palace Hotel and 3 pounds bakshesh. OK?")

Tips or bakshesh - is a way of life in Egypt. You are expected to tip for any service provided, and anything at all constitutes a service, from letting you take a picture to standing by a door and doing nothing as you walk through. Always carry a pocket full of one pound notes and consider them as good will.

for little or no service (just being there) - 1/2 to 1 pound

minimal service - 1 pound

meals - 5% of meal total (except for meals included in itinerary, in which case

Museum Tours covers the tip)

cab driver - 10% with 1 pound minimum, paid per person

bus driver - 5 pounds per person per day (unless included)

As you can see, if you allocate about 50 to 100 pounds (\$10 - \$20) per person per day for tips you should be covered. But remember, even though tips are expected, they are generally optional and the amount is up to you. You should also not be surprised if monument guards, camel drivers, cab drivers, restroom attendants or anyone else you are not likely to ever see again (as opposed to hotel and restaurant personnel) act insulted at the tip you give them. You could never tip them enough, so don't try, just be fair and don't let anyone bully you.

Gratuities - We are often asked about gratuities for the guide and tour manager. Remember these are totally optional, but if you feel that you have received excellent service, a gratuity is an excellent way to show your appreciation. You can use this guide in determining the amount.

tour guide - 25 to 75 pounds (\$5 to \$15) per person per day, paid at the end of the tour

tour manager - 15 to 45 pounds (\$3 to \$9) per person per day, paid at the end of the tour

TOURIST POLICE

It doesn't happen often, but problems can develop over misunderstandings or, sometimes, over a vendor trying to cheat you. Of course, a Museum Tours representative will always help, but if you should find yourself alone and unable to resolve a problem, don't hesitate to call for the Tourist Police. Tourism is important to the Egyptian economy and they take problems seriously. They will generally be on your side because they know abuse hurts tourism.

SAFETY AND SECURITY

Safety and security should not be a problem and we have personally never felt unsafe in Egypt. In our experience Egyptians are an honest and friendly people, the country has a very low crime rate and violent crime is rare. However, it is a dangerous world we live in, and terrorist acts occur in Egypt, as they do in most countries of the world. Some of these acts have been aimed at tourists and American interests have been threatened. The Egyptian government has increased security dramatically over the several couple of years in an effort to reduce any possible risk which may exist.

Do not travel alone. This is especially true for women who may find that some Egyptian men act in ways which would almost certainly be considered as "sexual harassment" in the U.S.. But Egypt is not the U.S., so try to take them with a grain of salt. If you are offended, say so and be firm.

Dress conservatively. We make a point of not standing out in a crowd.

Make a copy of your passport and send it to us. This will provide a backup in case yours gets lost or stolen and will make checking into hotels quicker and easier.

Make copies of your credit cards and keep them in a safe place.

Don't bring any credit cards you won't really need. We bring only one credit card each.

Don't carry your wallet where it can be easily stolen (eg. hip pocket) or dangling purse.

Don't bring valuables on the trip. We always travel with a cheap \$10 watch and leave our rings at home (except our wedding rings). The only things of value we have is our cameras and electronics, and we keep them with us or leave them in the hotel room.

FOOD

In Egypt we have a few simple rules of diet. Eat or drink only:

- Cooked food, served while still hot (not reheated)

- Breads

- Fruits you can peel yourself

- Bottled beverages wherein you break the seal or actually see it broken

- Hot coffee or tea

- Commercially packaged foods

- Alcoholic beverages

Do **NOT** eat or drink:

- Unbottled water or Ice**

- Unpackaged milk products (it may not be pasteurized), except in the hotels.

- Foods that are served cold or reheated, even if cooked earlier (sadly, this includes many desserts and most buffets)

- Anything from a street vendor, except sealed, bottled beverages

- Salads (they look wonderful, so just tell yourself that you'll get plenty of vegetables in the hot portion of the meal)

Remember you are going to Egypt for the sights, not the cuisine. You'll get plenty to eat, but be careful. A day spent sick is a day lost.

JET LAG

Everyone has a theory on how to avoid Jet Lag, and it is important to try because we "hit the ground running" in Egypt and you don't want to be "zapped". Remember Egypt is 7 hours ahead of New York and 10 hours ahead of California. It is said that it takes about four days to recover from Jet Lag, so to the extent possible, we put those adjustment days before we arrive in Egypt.

Here's what we do:

We depart from New York on Day 0 of the itinerary, so ...

- Day -1 - We get up at 4:00 AM, turn on all the lights (to help reset our body clocks), and live the entire day 2 hours in advance. That is, breakfast at 5:00 AM, lunch at 10:00 AM, supper at 5:00 PM and bed at 9:00 PM (this is relatively easy).
- Day 0- We get up at 2:00 AM, turn on all the lights, and live the entire day 4 hours in advance (this is tough, but we keep to it to the extent possible), with lunch at 8:00 AM and supper at 3:00 PM. We go to sleep as soon as we board the flight in New York so that by ...
- Day 1- We arrive in Cairo in around noon, local time, and our body clocks have already had two and a half days of adjusting at two hours a day. We force ourselves to live the rest of the day on Cairo time, so by ...
- Day 2- We are pretty well adjusted and ready to go.

Some people, like Nancy, are unable to go to sleep early or to sleep on planes. Bill doesn't have these problems, but if you do, there are a number of products available that might assist, from eye shades to neck pillows to antihistamines to melatonin. We are not recommending any of them. You have to decide what works for you.

HAVE A GREAT TRIP!

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