

Jumhuriyah Misr al-‘Arabiyyah

Did You Know?

- Ancient Egyptians believed that mummifying a body ensured that person would receive safe passage to the afterlife. The mummification process consisted of two stages: *embalming* (preserving with chemicals) and wrapping. The internal organs were taken out and stored in jars, each jar representing a different god.
- It is thought that the shape of the ancient Egyptian pyramids was inspired by the spreading rays of the sun.
- Blowing winds move sand dunes in the western deserts of Egypt almost 2 miles (about 3 km) every five years.
- Marriages in Egypt used to be arranged by family members, but people today have more say about whom they marry.
- Ancient Egyptians used *papyrus*, a plant that grows in the Nile, to make paper.
- Egyptian Christians celebrate Christmas on 7 January instead of on 25 December.
- Egyptians follow two calendars. One is the Western calendar. The other is the Islamic calendar, which is based on the moon and has about 11 fewer days in the year.
- Egyptians have been *irrigating* (using a system of ditches to water dry land) their crops for almost seven thousand years.
- There are more Facebook users in Egypt than in any other Middle Eastern country.
- Pharaoh Pepi II is believed to have had one of the longest reigns of any monarch in history. He ascended to the throne at age six.

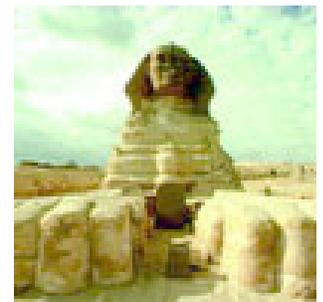
Flag

The three colors stand for different periods of Egyptian history. The red symbolizes bloody struggle. The black represents the end of oppression of the Egyptians at the hands of the monarchy and British colonialism. The white stands for the hope of a bright future. The eagle is a symbol of Saladin, a leader who fought Christian crusaders and captured Jerusalem in 1187.



National Image

The Great Sphinx of Giza is a giant statue that is half human and half lion. It guards the Great Pyramids, which are the last of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World. The Great Sphinx is the largest *monolith* (structure made from a single stone or rock) statue in the world.



People and Places

Land and Climate

Area (sq. mi.): 386,662
Area (sq. km.): 1,001,450



Egypt is about the same size as Bolivia, or roughly three times the size of the state of New Mexico. Egypt controls both the Sinai Peninsula (the only land bridge between Africa and the rest of the Eastern Hemisphere) and the Suez Canal (the important sea link between the Indian Ocean and the Mediterranean Sea).

Most of Egypt is covered by huge stretches of dry, dusty desert. In fact, western Egypt is part of the Sahara Desert, one of the driest places on earth. The Sahara's rock and sand desert stretches for thousands of miles across northern Africa. But even though most of Egypt is dry, it has some of the best farmland in the world. Around the Nile River, the land is green and perfect for growing crops. People have farmed there for thousands of years. Before the construction of the Aswan Dam, the waters of the Nile flooded every year. Although the dam helps make electrical power and controls water flow, the *silt* (leftover rocky material) that used to wash in with the floods each year is now trapped behind the dam. As a result, the soil is *depleted* (used up or exhausted) and farmers must rely on artificial fertilizers.

Summers in Egypt are hot, and winters are mild. Average rainfall depends on where you are. Desert areas can receive next to nothing, while regions around the Nile can get up to 8 inches (20 cm) per year. The *Khamasiin* winds blow hot, dry air across the country in the springtime. Droughts occur from time to time, as do sandstorms and flash floods.

Population

Population: 86,895,099

Because so much of the country is desert, most Egyptians live in cities and villages along the Nile. Almost all of the people descend from native Egyptians or Arabs who once conquered Egypt. People called Nubians lived mainly in southern Egypt, better known as Upper Egypt. Another group, called Bedouins, were *nomads* who wandered in the desert with their herds of camels and goats. A small population of Berbers inhabits the Siwa Oasis, in the Sahara Desert. But with the scarcity of water and the construction of the Aswan Dam, many of these groups have been scattered or forced to resettle in cities. Egyptians are a young people, with an average age of 25 years old. The capital city of Cairo is home to around 11 million people, with millions more living in the surrounding areas.



Language

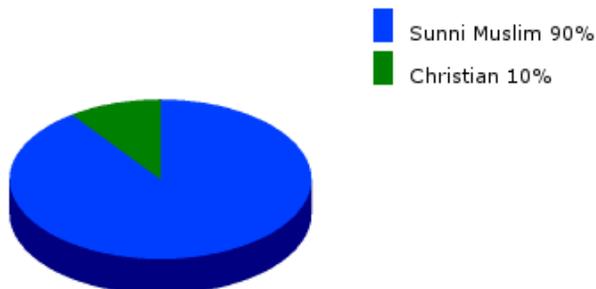
The official language of Egypt is Arabic, the language spoken by the other nearby nations of the Middle East. But Egyptians speak a special kind of Arabic called Egyptian Colloquial Arabic, which is made up of a wide variety of regional *dialects* (ways of speaking or pronouncing). It has different words and pronunciations from other forms of Arabic. Arabic is written from right to left (instead of from left to right as in English). Arabic letters are always cursive.



Can You Say It in Arabic?

Hello	<i>Assalaam 'alaikum</i>	(ah-sa-LAAM all-AY-koom)
Good-bye	<i>Ma'a salama</i>	(MA-ah sa-LAA-ma)
Please	<i>Min fadlak</i>	(min FAD-lak)
Thank you	<i>Shukran</i>	(SHUK-ron)
Yes	<i>Aywa</i>	(eye-wuh)
No	<i>La'</i>	(lah)

Religion



Source: *The World Factbook 2014*. Washington, DC: Central Intelligence Agency, 2014.

Most Egyptians are Muslims, but there is a small population of Christians known as Coptic Christians, or Egyptian Christians. Coptic churches are built facing the east, and Sunday is the most important day of worship. Coptic church services can last up to four hours. Muslims consider the *Qur'an* (Muslim scripture) to be the final, complete word of *Allah* (God). It influences everything from the way they dress to what food they eat. On Friday, the Islamic day of worship, men gather in the *mosque* (house of prayer) to offer a midday prayer and to hear a sermon. Women pray at home or in a separate part of the *mosque*. During the rest of the week, prayers may be performed elsewhere (at home, at work, or even in public places).

The lives of all Muslims around the world are governed by five basic duties or principles. First, Muslims must declare their faith that there is only one God and Muhammad is his prophet. Second, they are required to face Mecca, Saudi Arabia, five times each day to offer prayers to *Allah*. Third, they are asked to give a portion of their income to the poor. Fourth, they must *fast* (go without food and drink) from sunrise to sunset during the month of *Ramadan*. And fifth, if they are able to travel, Muslims must make a *hajj* (pilgrimage or journey) to Mecca at least once in their lives.

History

Time Line

7000 BC	
ca. 7000 BC	Settlement of the Nile Valley begins; people grow crops along the river banks
ca. 3000	The first Egyptian dynasty unites the Upper and Lower Kingdoms
ca. 2500	Construction of the pyramids begins
ca. 1380	The Temple of Luxor is built
1367–1350	Amenhotep IV (Akhenaton) reigns; he abandons <i>polytheism</i> (the belief in many gods) for <i>monotheism</i> (the belief in one god)
1182–1151	Ramses III reigns; the Hebrew migration out of Egypt takes place
669	Mesopotamia conquers Egypt
525	Egypt comes under Persian control
332	The Greek leader Alexander the Great invades Egypt and founds the city of Alexandria
	
31	The Romans defeat Queen Cleopatra's ships; Egypt comes under the rule of the Roman Empire
AD 300	
AD 391	Non-Christian religions are officially outlawed
639	Arab Muslims begin to invade
642	Egypt falls under Arab control
	
800	By this time, Egypt has become largely Muslim
969	Cairo is established as the capital of Egypt
1000	
1250	The Mamluks begin three centuries of rule
1517	The Turks invade, and Egypt becomes part of the Ottoman Empire
1700	
1798	French general Napoleon Bonaparte battles for Egypt

1869	The Suez Canal is completed	
1882	The Egyptian army revolts against the Ottoman-appointed king; the British navy invades the country	
1900		
1914	Egypt becomes a British <i>protectorate</i> (country protected by another country)	
1922	Egypt is granted independence, but Britain retains control over the Suez Canal and government institutions	
1928	The Muslim Brotherhood (a religious, political, and social organization) is founded	
1948	Egypt fights its first war with Israel	
1952	The British-supported monarchy is overthrown by the military	
1954	Gamal Abdel Nasser becomes Egypt's leader; British forces finally leave Egypt	
1956, 1967, and 1973	Egypt fights three wars with Israel	
1979	President Anwar el-Sadat signs a peace treaty with Israel	
1981	Sadat is assassinated	
1991	Islamic extremists begin their struggles to make Egypt an officially Islamic state	
2000		

2005	The government passes a constitutional amendment to allow multiple-party elections for the first time in Egypt; President Mubarak is reelected for a fifth term in a row	
2006	Egypt announces plans to build a nuclear power plant in order to meet the growing demand for electricity	
2011	Egyptians inspire the world in a peaceful uprising, demanding <i>democracy</i> (government by the people), more freedoms, and an end to emergency laws; President Mubarak steps down	
2012	Egypt hosts the first presidential debate in an Arab country; Mohamed Morsi is elected the nation's first <i>civilian</i> (non-military) president	
2013	Millions of Egyptians call for Morsi to <i>resign</i> (give up) his position; the military takes control of the government, suspends the constitution, and hands control over to a temporary government	
2014	Egyptians vote in favor of a new constitution that outlaws political parties based on religion	
PRESENT		

Pharaohs and Their Pyramids

Thousands of years ago, one of the world's greatest civilizations developed along the Nile River. During this time, great kings called *pharaohs* ruled Egypt. The word *pharaoh* actually means "great house," as the king's human body was thought to be home to a god. The *pharaohs* had huge pyramids built that still stand today. When a *pharaoh* died, he was buried deep inside a pyramid built just for him. Incredible treasures like gold statues and jewelry surrounded his body.



The famous Great Pyramid at Giza is the only one remaining of the original Seven Wonders of the Ancient World. It is also the oldest. The Great Pyramid was built as a burial place for King Khufu. It took more than 20 years to build and was built from more than two million blocks of limestone, each one weighing more than two elephants. It stands higher than the Statue of Liberty, and the base takes up as much space as five football fields. The Great Pyramid has vents pointing to the constellation of Orion so that the spirit of the pharaoh could fly straight up to the gods.

In ancient Egypt, both men and women wore an eye makeup called *kohl*. Made from ground-up minerals mixed with oil, it was believed to protect the eye from the sun's rays and fight off eye infections. They also frequently shaved their heads and wore wigs. The higher the person's rank, the nicer the wig they wore, with the richest people wearing wigs made of human hair and the poorer people wearing wigs made of wool and other materials. These ancient peoples worshipped more than a thousand different gods and goddesses, the most important being the sun god Ra. Other important deities were Anubis (the god of death) and the goddess Isis, whose tears were believed to cause the Nile River to overflow its banks each year. The rule of the *pharaohs* came to an end about 2,500 years ago. Today, the Egyptian government is trying to preserve the pyramids and treasures of their ancient ancestors.

Centuries of Invasions

After the time of the pharaohs, Egypt was ruled by powerful nearby kingdoms. First came the Assyrians and the Persians, then the Greeks, and later the Romans took over. Each of these kingdoms brought with them their own ideas and traditions, many of which the Egyptians adopted. The apostle Mark is believed to have brought Christianity to Egypt in AD 57. In AD 641, Arab Muslims from the east began invading. Some Egyptians chose to blend older native beliefs with these newer religions.



The Muslim rulers led Egypt for several centuries under a series of *caliphs* (spiritual and political leaders). Later, Egypt became part of an Islamic kingdom called the Ottoman Empire. Not long after the Ottoman invasion, the *Black Death* (plague) swept through Egypt, killing nearly half the population. A string of famines in the following centuries caused many more deaths. In 1798, under Napoleon's leadership, France invaded Egypt, but his forces were forced out by a combined effort from Ottoman and British troops.

The Fight for Independence

During the 1800s, both Britain and France tried to control Egypt. It eventually came under the authority of Britain in 1882, but most Egyptians disliked British rule. After World War I, *nationalists* (those in favor of independence) gained a majority in the *legislative assembly* (lawmaking body), and they went on to lead a revolt against the British. Although Britain gave Egypt its independence in 1922, Britain still controlled the Egyptian king. The Egyptian people overthrew the king in the 1952 revolution, and Egypt finally became a free nation.

War with Israel

In 1954, Gamal Abdel Nasser became the ruler of Egypt. He was very popular with Egyptians and with the leaders of other Arab nations. Under his leadership, Egyptian people saw many reforms, including free education for all children, and Egypt became a leader among Arab nations. Nasser and the other Arab leaders were angry that the Jewish state of Israel had been created. Egypt fought two wars against Israel, in 1956 and 1967. When Nasser died, Anwar el-Sadat became president. Although Sadat led a third war against Israel in 1973, he later signed a peace agreement with Israel in 1979. Sometimes the two nations still disagree, but they haven't fought each other since then.



Egypt Today

In 2011, in what became known as the 25 January Revolution, Egyptians rose up peacefully to overthrow President Hosni Mubarak, who had governed the country for 30 years. Inspired by an earlier revolution in Tunisia, hundreds of thousands of Egyptians gathered in Cairo's Tahrir Square and at other locations around the country, protesting against the government and their lack of freedoms. The military refused to attack the protesters, and after several weeks, President Mubarak stepped down. Parliament was dissolved, and the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces took control of the government.



This temporary government tried to change the constitution to limit the presidential term to four years, with a maximum of two terms total. In November 2011, Egyptians voted freely for the first time in history for a new parliament. In 2014, Egyptians voted in favor of a new constitution outlawing all political parties based on religion.

Lifestyle

Games and Sports

Egyptians love soccer—playing it, watching it on television, and going to matches. Kids play it all over the country. Sometimes the playing fields are only sandy patches of ground, but most kids still play as often as they can. There are two large stadiums in Cairo. Thousands of people go to the big games between Egypt’s top teams. Tennis and basketball are also popular sports.



Holidays

Because most Egyptians are Muslim, they celebrate the Muslim holy month of *Ramadan*. Muslims believe *Ramadan* is the month when the prophet Muhammad received the first revelations of the *Qur'an* (Muslim scripture) from *Allah* (God). During *Ramadan*, people don't eat or drink during the day. They wait until the sun sets to eat their meals. At the end of the *Ramadan*, Muslims spend three days celebrating *Eid al-Fitr*, or “the Little Feast.” Egyptians decorate their houses with flowers, and kids receive gifts of candy and clothing. Recently, Christmas became recognized as an official Egyptian holiday as well.



Food

Most Egyptians eat a dish called *foul* just about every day. It is a paste made with stewed fava beans, oil and butter, lemon, spices, and tomatoes. People eat it by using pieces of soft, flat bread (called *aish*) to scoop up the *foul* from a big bowl. Egyptians like to eat meats such as lamb, beef, and chicken. Among the lower classes, however, meat is very expensive, so they mainly eat vegetables, bread, and rice. But among the middle and upper classes, meat is eaten daily.



Schools

Adult Literacy: 74%

Most kids in Egypt go to *primary* (elementary) school, but often the classes are very crowded. There may be as many as 50 kids (and sometimes more) in one class. School is free, but many poor families need their kids to stay home and work on the family farm if they live in the countryside, or earn money with a low-paying job if they live in a city. That's one reason why about a quarter of Egyptians cannot read and write. It's also why some kids in Egypt feel that they *get* to go to school instead of *having* to work.



Families who can afford it send their kids to private schools, which often have better facilities, smaller classes, and more personal attention than public schools. Private schools concentrate on foreign languages, and kids who go to these schools are often fluent in French or English as well as Arabic.

Life as a Kid

Family ties in Egypt are very strong, and Egyptian kids often grow up near many relatives. Because most Egyptian families are religious, children must start learning about their religion at an early age. When they are old enough, they are expected to participate in family prayers and to attend prayers at their *mosque* (house of prayer) or church.



Both girls and boys go to school, but afterward, boys from the countryside work in the fields, while boys from the city help in their family's business or play in the streets. Girls help take care of younger children and learn such household skills as cooking, cleaning, and sewing. In addition, many children spend their after-school time doing homework, studying with a private tutor, or preparing for exams.

Egyptian kids also find time to have fun. They play hide-and-seek and soccer. They also enjoy computer games, if they are lucky enough to have a computer at home; otherwise, they spend many hours playing in an internet café. They also spend time with friends. Traditionally, starting at about age eight, Egyptian girls and boys were not supposed to be alone together or even talk with each other very much except at school. However, this is changing fast, and it is becoming more acceptable, especially at younger ages.

Society

Government

Capital: Cairo

Head of State: Pres. Abdel Fattah el-Sissi

Head of Government: Interim PM Ibrahim Mahlab

Egypt has a president and a prime minister. The president is appointed by the prime minister and serves four-year terms, with a limit of two terms. A law states that presidents must be born in Egypt to native Egyptian parents. Egypt also has a *legislature* (lawmaking body) called the House of Representatives. The House of Representatives has a minimum of 450 members who are elected to serve five-year terms and who make important decisions about what Egypt's laws should be. Egyptians are required to vote starting at age 18. The country is divided up into 27 *muhafazat* (regions).

Many Egyptians are active in politics and participate in large street protests when they feel their government is in need of change. Sometimes these protests turn violent when protesters clash with police or military forces. In July 2013, millions of Egyptians took to the streets calling for the president to *resign* (give up) his position. The military then took control of the government, suspended the constitution, and handed power over to a temporary government.

Money and Economy

Currency: Egyptian pound

Tourism is Egypt's biggest industry. More than five million people visit Egypt annually to see its pyramids and other sites, bringing in billions of dollars each year. Many Egyptians depend on tourists for their jobs. Tour guides, hotel workers, restaurant waiters, and street vendors all need tourism so they can make a living. Agriculture is also important. Egyptians grow corn, wheat, cotton, rice, barley, and fruit. They also produce cheese and other dairy products. In addition to tourism, the country's main industries include food processing, textiles, chemicals, cement, and metals. Egypt also gains income from the fees paid by fleets passing through the Suez Canal, as well as from its natural gas exports.



Getting Around

Water travel always has been one of Egypt's most important means of transportation, though nowadays boats are used mainly for fun. Tall sailboats called *feluccas* take tourists and Egyptians for leisure cruises along the Nile River. The sails are really big so they can catch lots of wind and move fast along the water. When Egyptians want to go long distances, they usually take the train or the bus. Traveling in Cairo is a lot more hectic. Getting around there is the same as it is in many big cities. The city is full of cars, taxis, and buses, and it also has a subway.



Culture Facts & Contacts

The Suez Canal

For centuries, ships sailing from Europe to Asia had to go all the way around Africa. Then, in 1869, the British, French, and Egyptians finished building the Suez Canal. It stretches for 100 miles (160 km) from the Mediterranean Sea to the Red Sea. Now the canal is always filled with giant ships taking oil and other goods across this shortcut. It takes between 11 and 16 hours for a ship to make its way through the canal.



Learn More

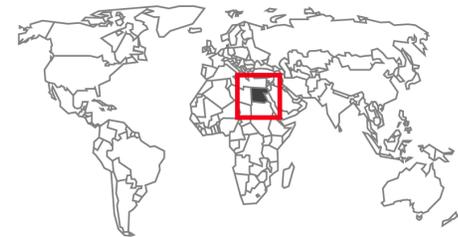
Contact the Embassy of Egypt, 3521 International Court NW, Washington, DC 20008; phone (202) 895-5400; web site www.egyptembassy.net. Or contact the Egyptian Tourist Authority, phone (212) 332-2570; web site www.egypt.travel.

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Egypt



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Egypt has a total area of 386,650 square miles (1,007,258 sq km), about the same size as Texas and New Mexico combined.



The Suez Canal, which joins the Red Sea and the Mediterranean Sea, took nearly 11 years to build. It was completed in 1869.

Completed in 1970, the Aswan High Dam helps Egypt control the flooding of the Nile, guaranteeing farmers year-round irrigation.