Welcome to Cairo

By Christine Draeger | Submitted On September 26, 2009

As the capital of Egypt, its distinctiveness is based on history that goes back thousands of yea full of life and its lively personality is all its own. With crowded streets and non-stop activity, modern feel as well as a quaintness in which the city was built upon. Spanning the banks of th find a more colorful place than Cairo. There is so much to do in Cairo. It is a wonderful city lifestyle.

Upon arrival, newcomers find Cairo to be an exciting city bursting with energy, color and adv the immediate and overt friendliness of the locals. The official language in Cairo is Arabic. H French are widely spoken. For visitors who are not familiar with Arabic or French, adjusting easier if they take the initiative to learn some of the common phrases.

There are some things to remember in order to avoid offending the other residents of this city index finger, showing the bottom of your feet, using the "thumbs up" sign, gesturing with yo considered to be unclean), taking photographs without getting permission are all considered o avoided. It is against the law to photograph bridges, railway stations, anything military, airpo works.

Tipping (called "baksheesh" in Egypt) is a common practice for most services, regardless of h hotels and restaurants, a service charge of about 12% is added to the bill, but an extra 5% is c often include a tip, but if the driver has given especially good service, 10% is expected. Mode bellhops is also expected. Many people rely on tipping to supplement their incomes and it is p so it is important to be aware of the practice and to remember to carry small change.

People who like dry weather will like Cairo. Cairo experiences dry weather year-round. Wint fairly mild times of the year. However, in April, it is very hot and there are sandy "Khamsin" desert winds, followed by scorching summers. The average summer temperature is 98° F (37°

winter temperature is 47° F (8° C). Most buildings and homes have air conditioning.

Cairo is as ancient as history itself, but also showcases a modern flare. Its uniqueness is unexplainable until seen with monuments dating back to four different historical periods: the Pharaonic, the Roman, the Christian and the Islamic. People who enjoy history will love Cairo!

In order to enter Egypt, citizens of Australia, New Zealand, Canada, Europe, Japan and the United States need to provide a passport valid for at least six months beyond the intended length of stay, a visa, and a return or onward ticket are required. Nationals of Bahrain, Djibouti, Guinea, Libya, Mauritania, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, United Arab Emirates and Yemen do not need a visa for visits of up to 90 days.

All other citizens of countries not referenced above need to provide a passport valid for at least six months beyond the intended length of stay, a visa, and a return or onward ticket.

All visitors must register within seven days of arrival. This can be done at most hotels, any police station or at the Mugamma building in Cairo's Tahrir Square-where they are very well prepared to deal with foreign tourists. Every visitor must bring a passport with them when they register. These requirements are always subject to change so checking with the embassy or consulate of the visitor's home country is recommended.

There are two kinds of Visas available. A Tourist Visa is usually valid for a period not exceeding three months and granted on either a single or multiple entry basis. A Business Visa is required for any foreigner arriving in Egypt for purposes other than tourism, e.g. work, study, etc. The possession of a valid Entry Visa is needed to complete the residence procedure in Egypt.

Trailing spouses are permitted to work in Cairo, as long as all of the immigration steps and Visa processes are followed. To obtain an Egyptian Driver's License, visitors must show proof that they are at least 18 years old, provide a certificate from an Egyptian ophthalmologist and/or physician to verify blood type, visual and physical health, provide the Traffic Department at Attaba Square in Cairo, or at Giza, with all certificates, a valid driver's license from the home country, as well as two photographs, a completed LE 55 form and successful completion of both a verbal and a road test. All vehicles must carry a fire extinguisher and a red hazard triangle.

Alcohol, weapons of any sort, drugs, fireworks or explosives, pornographic material, any type of telephone, seeds, gold or silver (except tableware) are prohibited entry into the country. All animals must have a veterinary certificate stating that they are in good health and updated on all their shots, including rabies. Plants are handled on a case-by-case basis analyzed by type of plant and quantity.

The currency in Egypt is the Pound (EGP) abbreviated E£. In Arabic, the pound is called a guineh. The pound is divided into 100 piastres, and each piastre into 10 millims. Bills are available in denominations of E£ 1, 5, 10, 20, 50 and 100, and 25 and 50 piastres. Coins are available in denominations of 5, 10 and 25 piastres. The best way to exchange currency is at banks and hotels. Also, for convenience, private exchange agencies are located at several areas downtown and in the suburbs.

Cash is the preferred method of payment for every day purchases such as groceries, but credit cards are slowly becoming a popular way to pay for items in hotels, restaurants and tourist type shops. You may also use traveler's checks which can be exchanged at most banks and are accepted as a form of payment at many shops, hotels and restaurants. While in Egypt, one should always carry a small amount of cash, but be aware of pick pocketers in public places.

When it comes to opening a bank account, every bank has different requirements. Most banks offer services in English, Arabic and French and many banks can serve customers in many different languages. Having a colleague, friend or Crown representative, recommend a bank is suggested before setting up an appointment and meeting with a bank consultant. Automatic teller machines (ATMs) are available around the clock in various locations throughout Cairo. It is helpful to know that there is a shortage of small change in Egypt so asking for small denominations while banking will be helpful.

When searching for a place to live, some important factors to consider are safety, location preference, individual proximity to school work, etc., and in Cairo, traffic is an important issue to consider. There are many nice places to live in Cairo. Downtown is more lively with the many tourists and a variety of restaurants and stores to choose from.

Most expats tend to rent a home, which usually requires a deposit of three months rent in advance, along with a deposit equal to two month's rent. Typically, utilities and connection charges are not included in the price of rent.

As with most cities, some areas are safer and more desirable than others. This is usually evident in the cost of the accommodation. Checking out local police reports before deciding on an area to live is recommended. These reports provide factual information on types of crimes and how often they occur and should be used in deciding which neighborhood to live in.

Expats that move to Cairo, tend to enlist their children in International (private) schools. A few schools in Cairo that are worth considering are the New Cairo British International School, The Modern English School, Maadi British International School, Schutz American School, American International School in Egypt, International School of Choueifat and Cairo American College.

There are a vast range of pre-schools in Cairo too. Most international and pre-schools have limited spaces available and have long waiting lists. It is important to begin the application process as soon as possible. Transport to and from school will vary widely, depending on the location of the school and the home. Most independent schools run their own bus systems and some parents elect to drive or walk younger children to school. The school year in Cairo typically begins in September and ends sometime in June.

No vaccinations are required, but all travelers coming into Egypt should be up-to-date on tetanus-diphtheria, measles-mumps-rubella, polio and varicella immunizations. And, it is important to bring any medical certificates/records from the home country. It is also recommended that visitors check any other specific vaccination requirements carefully with their local Egypt consulate or embassy to confirm medical requirements.

Medical facilities in Cairo are adequate for non-emergency matters, but emergency and intensive care facilities are limited. Typically, most expatriates choose to leave the country if they incur any serious medical problems. Or, for regular check ups, they wait until they go back to their home country and see their regular doctor. However, there are many Western-trained medical professionals throughout Egypt and the U.S. Embassy in Cairo that can provide a list of local hospitals and English-speaking physicians. Do note however, that medical facilities outside Cairo, Alexandria, and Sharm El Sheikh fall short of U.S. standards.

Most insurance companies will provide a list of doctors and specialists in each area. Another alternative that is often helpful is asking a colleague or friend for a referral. The common phone numbers used for emergencies are: Police - 122; Ambulance - 123 and Fire Department - 125. If an emergency occurs in the middle of the night, one can either call one of the numbers referenced above and wait for an ambulance, or ride with a family member to the nearest major hospital.

In Arabic, the name for Pharmacy is Saydaliyya. Pharmacies are located all around the city and many are open 24 hours a day. In addition to selling medications, pharmacies also sell perfume and cosmetics during regular working hours. Drinking the tap water is not recommended. It is best to drink bottled water or water that has been boiled and avoid eating uncooked vegetables.

In Cairo, people drive on the left side of the road. Unless someone is used to driving around Cairo, it is highly recommended that they choose to take a taxi or the metro service rather than driving. The roads in Cairo are always crowded and during rush hour, many people drive aggressively. Parking is also very difficult. Egypt has one of the highest incidences of road fatalities per miles driven in the world. Driving in Cairo is a huge challenge even for seasoned residents. It is recommended that newcomers and visitors do not drive.

Taxis are a very efficient way to get around the city, but the price will have to be "negotiated" with the driver. The Metro is a breath of fresh air in the vast confusion of the city. Signs are in English and Arabic, and ticket purchases and route stops are straightforward. The first car of each train is reserved for women, but women can ride in any car. Only the north-south route is complete and the directions are named by the last stop on the route. El Marg travels North and Helwan travels South.

The most popular grocery stores amongst expats in Cairo are: The Metro Market, Carrefour and Spinneysand Alfa Market. Even though its prices are a little more expensive, the Metro Market is typically the grocery store that most expats choose when they first move to Cairo. It is set up very similar to what is found in the United States. The shops are very clean and organized; they have a deli which serves hot and cold foods, a nice meat market and a wonderful

bread selection. And, they have items that are imported from abroad. It is a good grocery store to start out with because they have prices listed in both Arabic and English. Plus, most of the shops accept credit cards and ATM Cards.

The one thing that might take some getting used to is that there is no "one-stop shopping." There are no stores in Cairo that carry everything under one roof, so one will need to shop at several different shops to get all of their necessities.

There are various newcomer groups that expats can join and there are all types of volunteer work available. Also, some cultures have established support groups. Joining local clubs or volunteering are excellent ways to meet people and make new friends. Families will often network through their children's schools, getting involved in sports, fundraisers and other activities. Single professionals often socialize in bars and pubs after work hours. There are also several reputable singles networking associations that arrange evening and weekend activities such as dinners at restaurants, sightseeing and touring.

Cairo is not the most equipped place for raising infants or toddlers, but people make do. There are a few nice parks for parents to take their children and most malls have playgrounds as well. Finding a reliable childcare provider or nanny usually depends on the area. Neighbors and colleagues are great resources for recommendations. Cairo is a safe environment for children, but children should always be accompanied and supervised by an adult and should never talk to strangers.

Some fun and cool places that kids love to go to in Cairo are: Dream Park, Fagnoon Park, Aqua Par, Citi Stars, Giza Pyramids and Cairo Tower. Most schools offer after school activities, such as competitive sports teams and various special interest clubs. They also enjoy going to the movies, game arcades and shopping with friends. And, they like to just hang out with their friends at each others homes. Being a teenager in Cairo is similar to other places. As mentioned above, they love to go to spend time with their friends and do fun things.

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Crown Relocations has been providing international moving and relocation services since 1965. With 200 offices in 52 countries, Crown has "people on the ground" in all the major Expat communities around the world. Crown provides a range of services to help Expats and their families move and settle into their new home ranging from Orientation Tours, Home finding, School Search and more. Crown also organizes Expat Clubs with regular events to help people meet and socialize with other Expats.

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