

Egypt Country Profile

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I. RECENT SECURITY INCIDENTS

20 APRIL 2008

Ehsan Jami, a former Dutch politician, announced the upcoming release of an animated film that he said is even more controversial than the cartoons of Mohammed that appeared in a Danish newspaper. Both the Egyptian and Dutch governments condemned the release of a previous film by Dutch lawmaker Geert Wilders and are expected to do the same for Jami's upcoming film release. Visitors should exercise extra caution when visiting Dutch and Danish consulates.

19 APRIL 2008

Israel issued a travel warning to Israeli citizens warning of potential attacks against them in the Sinai Peninsula during Passover and subsequent days.

16 APRIL 2008

Egyptian security forces went on a heightened state of alert in the Sinai Peninsula and were reportedly searching for a group of militants who were believed to be in the area to carry out attacks.

9 APRIL 2008

Egyptian authorities increased their state of alert in the Gaza Strip-Egypt border area of the Sinai Peninsula. They received reports that Hamas militants would attempt to breach the border again using bulldozers. This was a result of threats by Hamas to open the border by force if a blockade against their territory continued.

8 APRIL 2008

The World Economic Forum on the Middle East is scheduled to take place in Sharm el-Sheikh from 18 to 20 May 2008. Various Middle East leaders and high-level diplomats are expected to attend. Reports mentioned that U.S. President George W. Bush would also attend. Strict security measures are likely to be implemented for the WEF ME. There exists a potential for anti-Bush protests in Sharm el-Sheikh and major cities throughout Egypt, including Alexandria.

5 APRIL 2008

Authorities arrested two Sudanese men driving a truck packed with explosives. It was believed they were planning to attack an unidentified tourist attraction in the Sinai Peninsula.

3 APRIL 2008

Egyptian authorities arrested 45 members of the Muslim Brotherhood. The arrests were part of a crackdown on the banned group prior to the 8 April municipal elections. As many as 700 members have been detained in different cities, including several in Alexandria.

1 APRIL 2008

Security forces clashed with thousands of members of the banned Muslim Brotherhood organization throughout the country. The largest clash was in Tanta, which is north of Cairo. In Tanta, about 4,000 demonstrators clashed with police officers. No deaths or serious injuries were reported. Alexandria had much smaller demonstrations that were quite peaceful. The banned Muslim Brotherhood is Egypt's largest and strongest opposition force with thousands of members of which only a few hundred are believed to have participated in violent shows of force in recent years.

29 MARCH 2008

Local residents clashed with security forces in Luxor. Residents were protesting government plans to relocate several homes to make room for the construction of an open-air museum. Several people were arrested. Travel precautions must be taken if going to Luxor because further protests are expected.

27 MARCH 2008

Geert Wilders, a Dutch lawmaker, released a controversial film that was highly critical of the Koran. The film, which was released on the Internet, has been condemned by both Egyptian and Dutch governments.

23 MARCH 2008

Officials reportedly discovered several ammunition rounds and an explosive device in Triomphe Square in the business district of Heliopolis in eastern Cairo. No damages were reported.

18 MARCH 2008

Security officials found 40 anti-tank mines and 250 kilograms of TNT explosives hidden in a weapons cache in Rafah. It was not known if the weapons cache was related to the recent incidents and protests resulting from the border shutdown between Egypt and the Gaza Strip.

II. QUICK FACTS

COUNTRY

The Arab Republic of Egypt

POPULATION

71.9 million

CAPITAL

Cairo (city population: 7.7 million; metropolitan area: 17.2 million)

Largest city in Egypt and Africa's most populous city

Known as the city of a thousand minarets

OTHER MAJOR CITIES

Alexandria (population: 4 million) is Egypt's second largest city and has the largest port that serves 80 percent of the country's imports and exports. It is a top tourist attraction.

Luxor (population: 500,000) is one of Egypt's most famous resorts. It was the ancient city of Thebes. The Valley of the Kings and Valley of the Queens of ancient Egypt have drawn hundreds of thousands of tourists every year. This was the site of the Luxor Massacre where 59 tourists were killed on 17 November 1997 by the Islamic Group and Jihad Talaat al-Fath. This attack damaged tourism in the short term but ended up turning Egyptian public opinion against Muslim extremism, which helped improve Egypt's security in the long run.

LANGUAGES

Arabic (official)

Other local languages

RELIGIONS

Muslim (90 percent)

Christian (10 percent)

ETHNIC GROUPS

Egyptians (94 percent)

Bedouin, Siwiz, Nubian (6 percent)

GOVERNMENT

Constitutional republic

CURRENCY

Egyptian Pound (LE)

1 USD = 5.41 LE

1 Euro = 8.55 LE

CREDIT CARDS

Credit cards are widely accepted at most hotels, restaurants, and shops. In most major cities, one can get cash advances with Visa and MasterCard from most branches of the Banque Misr and the National Bank of Egypt.

TIME

Egypt is two hours ahead of UTC and seven hours ahead of US EST. During daylight savings time (late April until late September), Egypt is three hours ahead of UTC and eight ahead of US EST.

NATIONAL HOLIDAY

National Day: July 23, the anniversary of the 1952 Revolution

PHOTOGRAPHY

Visitors should refrain from photographing military zones, military assets and military personnel as well as bridges and the Suez Canal. During times of high alert, government buildings, embassies and public buildings associated with international organizations should not be photographed.

VISA REQUIREMENTS

All non-Egyptian visitors are required to have a valid passport. Entry visas may be obtained from Egyptian Diplomatic and Consular Missions abroad or from the Entry Visa Department at the Travel Documents Immigration and Nationality Administration (TDINA). It is possible for most tourists and visitors to obtain an entry visa at any of the major ports of entry.

It is best to obtain a visa at an Egyptian embassy or consulate prior to arrival. Visitors entering Egypt for tourism can obtain a visa for a maximum stay of 30 days at the port of entry. The visa fee is US\$15, payable in U.S. currency.

Please check with your nearest Egyptian consular mission for more details concerning visa regulations applying to your citizenship.

REGISTRATION REQUIREMENTS

Foreigners must register with the Egyptian Office of Foreigners and Nationality within seven days of arrival. Hotels sometimes require guests to surrender passports upon checking in. Hotel officials keep passports overnight in order to take all the information needed for registration. Travelers can avoid the need to hand over their passport—and thereby the possibility that the passport will get lost or stolen—by employing a "meet-and-greet" service. This service will make prior arrangements with the hotel to provide the required information, allowing travelers to keep the passport at all times.

III. SECURITY THREATS

Egypt is home to a number of radical Islamic groups who want to overthrow Mubarak's secular government and install a religious regime based on the Koran. Some of these groups have formed alliances with al-Qaeda and launched violent attacks both inside and outside Egypt. Tourists have been targeted in the past, with the most famous attack occurring in Luxor in 1997 when 59 tourists were killed.

The largest threat of attacks continues to be the Sinai Peninsula where Israeli citizens are often selected as targets. This was the case in the resort town of Sharm el-Sheik in July 2005 when three nearly simultaneous bombs killed 88 people and wounded over 200.

There were a total of 33 confirmed attacks against tourists during the 1990s, which forced the government to implement stricter security measures around the country. Tough security measures were implemented at airports, government buildings and tourist attractions. Airlines carry sky marshals on many key flights. Sky marshals have successfully intervened in several hijacking attempts.

The tourism industry as a whole, but primarily in the Sinai Peninsula, has been the main target of Islamic militants. The objective had been to disrupt the industry, deny valuable foreign currency to the Egyptian government and force a harsh uncontrolled reaction by the Egyptian security forces, thereby alienating the population from the secular government. The effect has been counterproductive as Egyptians rely heavily on the tourism industry as a source of income. As a result, militant groups have become quite unpopular amongst Egyptians.

From 1997 to 2004, tourism flourished again without incidents. Significant incidents that occurred since 2004 are described below. No other notable attacks against tourism have been reported after 2006.

2004

October 7

Islamic militants bombed resorts in the Red Sea. The Hilton Taba and camp sites used by Israelis in Ras al-Shitan were the targets. Thirty four (mostly Israeli) visitors were killed and more than 100 were wounded.

2005

April 7

A suicide bomber in a motorcycle from the Islamic Brigades of Pride attacked the historic shopping bazaar Khan al-Khalili in Cairo. The attack killed two tourists (a French woman and an American man) and wounded 18 others.

April 30

The Abdullah Azzam Brigades ordered two women in their 20s to open fire on a tour bus in a historic district of Cairo, wounding two passengers then killing themselves. Two hours earlier that same day, the brother of one of the women and fiancé of the other jumped from a bridge overpass during a police chase and detonated a bomb.

July 22

At around 1:15 a.m., Islamic terrorists detonated almost simultaneous bombings at the Red Sea resort city of Sharm el-Sheikh. The bombings killed at least 88 people and wounded over 200. Police said three explosions included two suicide car bombs and one planted bag bomb. It was Egypt's deadliest bombing in several years. The bombings happened on Egypt's National Day. One suicide car bomb killed 17 Egyptian workers in a coffee shop at the city's Old Market. The other suicide car bomber struck the Ghazala Garden Hotel, breaking through a security

checkpoint and slamming into the hotel's reception area before exploding. The hotel lobby area and its roof collapsed. The third bomb was an improvised device left in a bag that killed six tourists at a beachfront parking lot about two miles from the hotel. Several hours after the attacks, a group citing ties to al-Qaeda claimed responsibility for the attacks. Several additional groups with ties to al-Qaeda also claimed responsibility.

2006

April 24

At 7:15 p.m., three suicide bombers attacked the tourist resort of Dahab in the Sinai Peninsula. The bombs exploded at the Nelson restaurant, the Aladdin café and the Ghazala market. A total of 23 people were killed, including five tourists. Eighty others were wounded.

IV. TRAVEL ADVICE

TRAVEL TO THE SINAI IS RISKY

The Sinai by far has been the main point of instability inside Egypt. The recent border breaches in the Gaza Strip have potential for increasing insecurity. The resorts in the Sinai are the prime targets of al-Qaeda affiliated groups for attacks, especially during specific national or religious holidays.

Despite increasing Islamic fundamentalism throughout parts of the Middle East, Egypt has remained relatively stable, due in part to its secular government and the majority Sunni population. Attacks have been predominantly against the tourism industry and not necessarily targeted at any specific nationality and, so far, limited primarily to resorts along the Sinai.

Egypt's two biggest cities, Cairo and Alexandria, are fairly stable and have low risks of terrorist attacks when compared to other Middle Eastern cities. Nonetheless, precautions must be taken while traveling to Cairo and Alexandria.

LOCAL TRAVEL

The greatest threat to travelers in Egypt is being involved in a car accident. In the city, use taxis or the metro unless you are familiar with driving in the Middle East. Driving in Egypt, a country with one of the highest rates of road fatalities per mile driven in the world, is extremely dangerous. With a population of over 17 million, even local residents in Cairo are always on the defensive while navigating through its chaotic traffic patterns. Traffic rules are routinely ignored by impatient drivers.

Travelers who rent a car in Cairo or Alexandria should be extremely careful, take all necessary precautions and drive defensively. Drivers should be prepared for vehicles without lights at night, few road markings, speeding cars, vehicles driving the wrong way on one-way streets, divided highways and connecting ramps and pedestrians wondering haphazardly through the streets. Many traffic lights in Egypt do not function. Main intersections are staffed by policemen who manually attempt to control traffic.

Pedestrians should exercise extreme caution when crossing roadways on streets with heavy traffic.

In 2007, several serious accidents involving mini-buses and international tourist buses occurred on highways outside of Cairo resulting in the death of both local residents and foreign tourists. Intercity roads are generally in good condition. Yet, many unmarked surfaces, stray animals and disabled vehicles lacking lights or reflectors can be a hazard, especially after dark. U.S. Embassy personnel in Egypt are prohibited from traveling outside Cairo on official business after sunset. In addition, some roads, especially in the Sinai and southeastern part of the country, are off limits to foreigners without a proper travel pass.

Females walking alone during daylight hours are increasingly targeted by purse snatchers traveling in vehicles that slowly pass the victim and seize purses. More troublesome is the apparent increase in sexual harassment against women. Women dressed in Western garb are increasingly subjected to stares and offensive remarks from Egyptian men; however, physical harassment is not unheard of. It is recommended that females do not travel alone.

V. CRIME & SAFETY

CRIME

Although low, petty crime is on the rise in Egypt. Petty crimes range from pick-pocketing and assaults to female sexual harassment. Hotels are deemed generally safe. Tourists should store money and valuables in hotel safes.

POLICE RESPONSE

The Egyptian police are very concerned about the well being of foreigners, including tourists and business professionals. Foreigners who are crime victims usually receive more support from the police than local nationals. A designated police force helps tourists. They wear a tag with the words “tourist and antiquities police” in English and are found outside hotels and tourism sites throughout the country. In case of an emergency, you can reach them by dialing 122 from a local pay phone. Most of them speak very basic English.

Travelers should be aware of local Egyptian law and respectful of local culture. Police may detain a foreigner during a serious traffic accident until a statement can be taken. If you are detained by the police, ask to be put in touch with your local consular office.

DEMONSTRATIONS

Domestic and regional developments periodically influence local demonstrations in Egypt. When they occur, protests often take place near universities and mosques (usually following Friday noon prayers), and tend to remain confined to a particular location. Most gatherings cause only minor disturbances as they tend to be relatively small in size. However, security forces have a tendency to use force to disperse protests and may not differentiate between participants and observers. At times, protesters engage in acts of vandalism and can turn violent. Travelers should remain vigilant and avoid any gatherings, especially those that occur in the vicinity of university campuses.

DRUGS

Egypt traditionally tolerated the covert use of hashish. Recently, authorities have increasingly cracked down on it. Today, a death sentence or life in prison is mandatory for smugglers and dealers, and anyone caught even with a few ounces faces prison time and large fines. Foreigners receive no special treatment in this area.

MEDICAL SERVICES

There are many Western-trained medical professionals in Cairo, Alexandria, and Sharm El Sheikh. Luxor does not have advanced medical care facilities.

The U.S. Embassy can provide a list of local hospitals and English-speaking physicians. Medical facilities, particularly those in tourist areas, are adequate for non-emergency matters. Emergency and intensive care facilities are limited.

TRAVEL PRECAUTIONS

U.S. government employees are not permitted in the regions around Sohag, Qena and Assiut due to their remote location, lack of infrastructure and criminal elements. The U.S. Embassy strongly recommends that Americans avoid travel to these regions unless absolutely necessary.

In addition, due to the poor condition of roads, nighttime travel outside of urban areas is also strongly discouraged. Specific information about Egypt and the U.S. Embassy in Cairo can be obtained at www.travel.state.gov/travel.

EMERGENCY CONTACTS

American Embassy

5 Tawfik Diab Street
Garden City, Cairo
(20-2) 2797 3300 (phone)

The American Center Alexandria (ACA)

3 Pharaana Street, Alexandria
(20-3) 486-1009 (phone)

British Embassy

7 Ahmed Ragheb Street
Garden City, Cairo
(20)(2) 794-0852/0850/0858 (phone)

British Consulate

General 3 Mina Street
Kafr Abdou, Roushdi, Ramley
Alexandria 21529
(20)(3) 546-7001 or 7002 (phone)

VI. CULTURAL ADVICE

Incidents of militant Islamic violence against foreign travelers have occurred in recent years in Egypt. Yet most Egyptians welcome visitors because they bring hard currency into the country and because Egyptians are proud of their historical heritage and like to share it with the world. Egypt is an Islamic country but has a secular government, hence Shariah law is not enforced. Egyptians are more accepting of Western culture than other more traditional Islamic countries. Yet Islamic culture is part of Egyptian society and visitors should be aware of Islamic attitudes and practices.

- Devout Muslims pray five times daily. Islam prohibits alcohol, drugs, sexually explicit materials and pork products.
- Alcohol is served in hotels and restaurants, but the society disapproves of drunkenness, especially in public places.
- Do not walk in front of someone praying. In holy places, visitors should never wear shorts or sleeveless shirts.
- Always remove shoes before entering a mosque.
- When visiting mosques, cover hair and arms.
- Both men and women shake hands when meeting in a business setting.
- Tipping is highly recommended. Hotels and restaurants generally include a 10 percent gratuity, but 15 percent is recommended.
- Travelers should dress conservatively.
- Shorts should be limited to beach or resort areas.
- Women traveling together should use the buddy system to reduce the likelihood of harassment.
- Depending on the conservatism of the area, public places, transportation and business premises may be segregated.
- When out in public, women should avoid eye contact with men, except for official hosts or business contacts, because it is considered provocative.
- Always ask permission before photographing anyone.
- Avoid public displays of affection.

VII. SECURITY RECOMMENDATIONS

Alexandria is a very safe city and has been the site of multiple international conferences. Holding a conference there should not pose any significant threat to Wikimedia Foundation members attending the conference. However, the following precautionary measures should be taken into account when traveling to Egypt and Alexandria:

- Follow safe travel procedures. (See Clayton Consultants' *Personal Security Handbook*.)
- All participants should have an emergency point of contact while in Egypt.
- Use low-profile travel transportation when not visiting a tourist site.
- Avoid participating in any local demonstrations, especially those organized by the Muslim Brotherhood because that can be perceived as interfering in internal Egyptian politics.
- Stay alert of the latest developments in the Gaza Strip and general security events in the Middle East because they may affect security in Egypt.
- Be extremely alert during national holidays as historically they get chosen as days in which to conduct political/terrorist attacks against the tourism industry.
- Those staying after the conference (17-19 July) should be extremely vigilant during the national holiday on 23 July because the holiday increases the risk of an attack in tourist areas, primarily in the Sinai.
- Key high-net worth personnel and conference VIPs should have a dedicated driver and/or security person who can plan out an overall trip for an individual or select group.
- Conference organizers should develop a master crisis management plan that addresses how to react in case of an emergency.
- Have advance knowledge of medical emergency procedures and locations where adequate medical care is available.
- The WEF ME will draw international attention to Egypt, which can make it a desirable target for extremist groups. Security will undoubtedly be high so a secondary, lesser-profile target might be chosen. Hence, it is imperative that conference participants maintain a low profile while moving around Alexandria.

VIII. CONTACT INFORMATION

Clayton Consultants, a Triple Canopy company, specializes in the prevention and resolution of kidnapping, wrongful detention and extortion. Triple Canopy has extensive experience mitigating risks in high-threat environments.

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