



Focus On EGYPT

School Program

Egypt's ancient temples and pyramids have lured vacationing tourists for more than two millennia. Today, the country embraces a unique social stew, incorporating ancient traditions, modern Islam and Christianity, Middle Eastern art and folk cultures, and Western music and films. Because 90% of Egypt is desert, almost everyone lives close to the Nile, and crowding intensifies the ferment. In sprawling, cacophonous Cairo, robes are as common as Levis, donkeys share roadways with BMWs, and buildings made of mud stand next to glass-and-steel high-rises. Buffeted by so many influences, Egyptians remain religiously pious, devoted to their families, hospitable toward strangers, and skeptical that economic progress—in the Western sense—improves the quality of their unhurried lives.

AFS & Your Experience

AFS Egypt has been in existence since 1960 and has hosted more than 700 students from all over the world.

AFS will be at your side throughout your intercultural exchange. Even before leaving your home country, you will participate in organized AFS orientations and have the assistance of experienced AFS volunteers. Once in your host country, you can rely on your local volunteer contact and other chapter volunteers to support you in your experience. Together we will ensure that you have an incredible experience abroad.

Landing in Egypt

Arrival Orientation

Upon arriving at Cairo International Airport and collecting your baggage, you will pass through customs and be met by AFS Egypt staff wearing red AFS T-shirts. They will escort you to a “survival” orientation that will last two to three days. There you will have a chance to relax, get to know other AFSers and learn about Egyptian culture, AFS in Egypt, school life, student life, what is expected of participants, family life in Egypt and the program's agenda. Participants also meet their counselors who will answer participants' questions. From this orientation, either your host family will pick you up, or you will travel by bus or train to your host community where you will be met by your host family.

Living in Egypt

Lifestyle of the Egyptians

While Egyptian life is centered on family and religion, there remains a great difference between the rural and urban peoples of Egypt. Generally speaking, life outside the country's major cities is in keeping with tradition. Communities are patriarchal, with men in dominant roles. Family ties are very strong and neighbors are often treated as family. People in urban centers such as Cairo and Alexandria still maintain these traditional values but to a lesser extent. They tend to follow a more modern and Westernized lifestyle.

Even though it has become commonplace on the streets of the main urban centers, particularly Cairo and Alexandria, to see women dressed in Western fashion (short skirts, tight trousers, sleeveless shirts), it is not very much accepted by the average Egyptian citizen. Women are still expected to comply with the traditional and conservative culture of Egypt by dressing conservatively and moderately.

In cities, the majority of Egyptians live in apartments due to the scarcity of land. Ornate furniture, colorful wall hangings and expensive ornaments are popular. In most houses (Muslim and Christian), families hang decorations reflecting their faith, such as ornaments of Jesus Christ, Mother Mary, different Saints, verses from the Quran and the name of God in different Arabic writing styles. Shopping at outdoor bazaars, shopping malls, going to the cinema, spending a day in a sports club and visiting relatives are favorite family activities. For the most part, Egyptians are extremely patriotic and are known for their helpfulness and friendliness.

Dress and Appearance

Egyptian men and women tend to dress conservatively, in accordance with their Islamic beliefs. Both must be decently covered, especially the women. In recent years, however, Western styles of dress have become popular throughout the country.

Even teenage boys and girls are required to cover their shoulders, and girls' skirts must be knee-length, due to religious customs. Girls may opt to wear long (to the floor) skirts. In fact, this is much cooler than jeans during Egypt's hot months. However, if you go clubbing on weekends, customs are different. You may dress very "out-on-the-town" Western but generally you must wear a jacket to cover up a snazzy outfit until you get inside the club. Wearing such dress on the street would be considered offensive to the public at large. It is advisable to remain conservative in your clothing while going to clubs to avoid being harassed by drunks and young men. It is very important to ask your host family about the appropriateness of dressing in such a way.

For men, shorts are only worn on the beach. Elsewhere, shorts are inappropriate. But T-shirts are no problem. Egyptians try to keep their clothes tidy. So you should avoid clothes that have holes or look scruffy. Men with long hair will get misunderstanding looks, as this is considered to be girlish. Dreadlocks are very uncommon in Egypt, so if you have them, you will be quite an attraction. Most people will think that you never wash nor comb your hair. It is neither common nor accepted for men to wear earrings, pierce their noses, tongues or other parts of their body. You are strongly advised to

remove any piercings before you arrive in Egypt. It is also not accepted for men to dye their hair.

Egypt is an Islamic country, and most women do not dress as revealingly as in some Western countries. So women should bring blouses, long trousers and long skirts. Because fast-changing fashion in other countries is usually totally different, you would be wise not to buy clothes in your country for Egypt but to do so after you arrive. You might have heard that some women wear scarves to cover their hair, but this is not true of all Egyptian women, and it will not be expected of you.

Diet and Meals

Egyptian cuisine reflects the country's melting-pot history. Native cooks have adapted Greek, Lebanese, Palestinian, Syrian and Turkish, dishes to accommodate the country's customs, tastes, local ingredients and budgets. The dishes are simple, made with fresh fruits and vegetables and seasoned with spices. Bread is the mainstay of Egyptian diets and comes in several forms. *Aysh shami*, a flat, pita-type bread made with refined white flour is the most common. Rice and fava beans, cooked in a variety of ways, are other staples.

Typically, most Egyptians begin the day with a light breakfast of *foul* and falafel (cooked beans or bean cakes), eggs and/or pickles, cheeses and jams. Most families eat a large, starchy lunch around mid-afternoon and follow it with a siesta. Dinner usually consists of lighter fare.

For most Egyptian families, beef is a luxury used in small amounts, cooked with vegetables and served with rice. So there are a lot of vegetarian dishes. If you are a vegetarian, it will not be hard to find something to eat. Few people in Egypt choose to be vegetarian, however, so your host family or others will probably not understand what the concept of vegetarianism is about.

School

Exchange students usually attend private language schools. Students there may have studied English from an early age and speak it well. Some classes may be taught in English and others in Arabic. Subjects can usually be chosen freely, depending on the school. A school day usually starts at 8:00 and ends at 3:00. The school year goes from September until May with a two-week vacation in January.

Students will receive certificates of attendance, but they will not receive diplomas, nor will they graduate at the end of the academic year. All students are expected to attend classes on a regular basis, to complete the work assigned in and out of class and to show effort in the fullest potential. Students will be expected to wear a school uniform and will be supervised by a counselor (volunteers) who will touch base with the student at least once a month. Students are encouraged to contact their counselors whenever they have a question, face a problem or need to talk.

Teen Life

Teen activities vary from each region. Most teenage Egyptians enjoy going to the movies or to cafés such as McDonalds, Chili's and Hardee's. Girls like to shop in malls.

Some families are members of clubs (*nadi*) where they drink and play sports. Often there is a range of sports facilities, which usually includes a swimming pool. You will not be

able to jog in the streets, however, or play sports in public, as this is not considered appropriate.

Most young people spend their free time socializing with friends in coffee shops. It is customary that in coffee shops, young men, and more commonly now young women, smoke water pipes (oriental smoking devices). Shopping malls are a popular attraction for young people as well. Most young people like going to movies, particularly since cinemas in Egypt have become up-to-date with the latest releases from the United States and Europe. Many young people like to attend concerts and performances. A large number of cultural centers can also introduce you to the different forms of Egyptian arts. Few young people in Egypt go to bars and clubs. It is very common, however, that young men spend time with friends playing soccer. It is also customary that young women spend an evening at a friend's home socializing, but slumber parties are uncommon. Egyptian families tend to have early curfews for their children, and you will be expected to respect the curfew your host family determines.

AFS Activities

In addition to an orientation at your arrival, AFS Egypt will provide you with several others. AFS orientations are a chance for participants to meet (often for a weekend or for a few days) and talk about expectations for the future program and past experiences. Orientations involve participating in group activities and self-examination. Sessions usually provide new information and ways of looking at things while also allowing participants to share points of view. AFS orientations are social, interactive and educational, bringing together young people from many countries and helping them to better understand their own intercultural learning experience.

The second AFS Egypt orientation takes place six weeks after you arrive. This orientation is dedicated to cultural issues and helps you and your fellow AFSers with the early stages of adjustment. The third orientation takes place half way through the program and focuses on AFSers sharing their stories and experiences. The final orientation takes place immediately before you leave Egypt. This orientation is dedicated to the evaluation of all aspects of the program. AFS Egypt will help you prepare to leave your host community and to return to your own country.

Travel

Although it is natural for you to want to travel while in Egypt, AFS is not designed as a tourist program. AFS offers the rare opportunity to be immersed in a culture and a country. It is likely, however, that you will have many opportunities to travel with your host family, school, community organization or local chapter of AFS Egypt. Traveling on your own or with friends is forbidden.

Spending Money

Host families are asked to pay only for ordinary family events in which you are expected to participate. When you do such things as shopping for yourself or going out with friends, the expenses are your responsibility. But remember that spending more than your peers and family may create a distance between you and them.

There are different ways to bring money into Egypt. Cash is not recommended because it is risky. Traveler's checks are safer, provided you use popular ones such as those issued by Thomas Cook or American Express. These can be exchanged in some banks and at American Express and Thomas Cook offices in all big cities. A credit card with a

PIN number is the easiest way to bring money. The most popular cards are MasterCard and Visa. There are ATM machines in bigger cities. You should also have no problem getting money using a normal bank card that belongs to the Maestro network.

AFS suggests that US\$1,000 in traveler's checks or a debit card should cover your spending money for an entire year.

Safety and Support

Your highest risk of injury in Egypt comes from public traffic. Streets are extremely crowded in the big cities, especially in Cairo, and there seem to be no traffic rules. Otherwise, Egypt is a safe country. The crime rate is low compared with other Western countries. But of course, you should protect your valuables; always keep them in a safe place or carry them close to your body. In addition, it is advisable to ask your host family or AFS volunteers about local risks such as where not to be alone at night.

During your stay, local AFS volunteers will be available to assist you as you learn to live as an Egyptian. In the event of an emergency, AFS staff can be reached 24 hours a day by you in your host country and by your natural family at home.

For the welfare of participants, AFS worldwide has two rules: no driving and no use of drugs for non-medicinal purposes. Any student who violates either of these rules will be automatically sent home. AFS Egypt may have additional rules.

Health Precautions

In addition to the precautions mentioned above, AFS suggests that you discuss the health recommendations for Egypt (which you can get from your government or easily find on the Internet) with your personal doctor, to determine what is best for you and your personal needs.

If you require medical assistance during your stay, your host family or local volunteers will be ready to help find it. As an AFS participant, your medical expenses are covered for illness or injuries incurred while on the program, exclusive of pre-existing, dental or visual aid expenses.

Documents

You must have a passport that will be valid for six months longer than your intended stay. In addition to your passport, you also need a visa to enter and reside in your host country. Visas are obtained through the consular offices of your host country, and requirements often vary from consulate to consulate.

Consulates charge fees for their services, and obtaining your visa can be a complicated and lengthy process requiring a great deal of paperwork, patience and persistence. AFS will help you obtain the visa and provide you with instructions regarding the required documents.

Program Prices

Please [contact the AFS office in your home country](#) for information about program price and scholarship possibilities and what the program price covers for the various program offerings. In most cases the program price covers the following: round-trip international travel with your AFS group; travel in the host country to your host family; travel from your host family to your international departure point; AFS's medical plan; placement

with your host; orientation in your home country and your host country; 24 hour emergency assistance in your home and host countries; a global medical assistance organization to support extreme emergencies; a network of trained volunteers who support you throughout your experience.

In order to keep costs low and provide good service, AFS utilizes a network of volunteers and staff in 50+ countries around the world. Volunteers need training, support and assistance from professional staff in each country. Other expenses you will normally need to pay in addition to the program price: passport and visa fees, required inoculations, expenses for eyeglasses, contacts and dental care, school uniforms (where applicable) and personal spending money. Your housing and food are provided by your host family as part of their commitment to our program.

Country Information

Geography and Climate

Egypt lies in North Africa, bordering Libya to the west, Sudan to the south and Israel to the north. The heart of the country is the river Nile that serves the country with water. This is why about 90% of the population lives in the narrow Nile Valley, where they are able to grow fruits and vegetables. The rest of the country is very dry desert. There are only a few oases where people live. The capital of Egypt is Cairo, one of the biggest cities of the world and home to about 19 million people, almost a quarter of the entire population.

Egypt's weather is mainly hot and dry, except in the winter months from December to February. Then it can get quite cold, and few houses have heaters. So if you will be in Egypt during these months, bring a jacket and some jumpers.

Population

The vast majority of Egypt's inhabitants live in the Nile valley and delta, and the rest of the country (about 96% of Egypt's total land area) is sparsely populated. Most modern Egyptians are of a complex racial mixture descended from ancient Egyptians, Berbers, sub-Saharan Africans, Arabs, Greeks and Turks. Approximately 67 million people live in Egypt, and about 5% belongs to the upper class.

Language

Arabic is the official language. There is a wide difference, however, between the language spoken on the streets and classical Arabic, which is the written language and used in prayers and on the radio or news on TV. If you want to learn Arabic before you come here, learn the Egyptian dialect. In addition to Arabic, many educated Egyptians also speak English and French.

Government

Egypt has been a republic since 1952 and is governed under the constitution of 1971. The president, who is nominated by parliament and approved by public referendum for a six-year term, holds executive power. The legislature consists of a people's assembly and an advisory council. The government must approve the formation of political parties, and those based on religion are illegal. However, the largest party, the Muslim

Brotherhood, has been permitted to operate openly at times. Administratively, Egypt is divided into 26 governorates.

Religion

About 95% of Egyptians are Sunni Muslims, and most of the rest belong to the Egyptian Coptic Orthodox Church. Egyptians are very much influenced by their religion. So your host family might pray five times a day, and the women in the family might wear scarves to cover their hair. Girls traditionally do not have boyfriends, but today this custom is observed mainly in rural areas, so you can find more and more girls who actually date (mainly in the big cities such as Cairo). If you are a girl, you must ask whether you will be allowed to date. In most families, a boyfriend will not be allowed into the host family's house.

Even if you are hosted by a very religious family, you will not be required to attend services on a regular basis, though you may be expected to attend a religious service at least once to have an understanding of the family's practice.

Launching Your AFS Experience

Evaluations by previous participants support our belief that those students who prepare prior to leaving have the best experience. In order to get ready, first make every effort to learn some key Arabic words and phrases so that you arrive with at least some basic knowledge of the language.

To familiarize yourself further with life in Egypt, make use of your local library and/or the Internet. A lot of general information is available about Egypt and its culture.

Although each participant's experience is unique, we strongly suggest that you speak with a recent AFS participant to Egypt. This person will be an excellent resource regarding living as an Egyptian. If you do not know any alumni, please contact your local volunteer or national AFS office. In addition, AFS Egypt will provide you with a special packet of country-specific information.

Egyptian people will be curious about your home community. You may be surprised to find out how much they already know about your country. Therefore, it is also helpful to be as informed as possible about current events in your community and country.

If you have not already received a full AFS application packet, please contact your local AFS volunteer or national office to request one. We wish you a wonderful experience!

Curiously Egyptian

- ✱ In ancient Egypt, priests plucked every hair from their bodies, including their eyebrows and eyelashes.
- ✱ Both Easter and the coming of spring are symbols of new life. The ancient Egyptians and Persians celebrated their spring festivals by coloring and eating eggs. This is because they considered the egg a symbol of fertility and new life. The Christians adopted the egg as symbolic of new life, the symbol of the Resurrection.

- ✱ "Mummy" comes from the Arabic mummiya, meaning "bitumen," a dark, waterproof substance sometimes used to coat mummies.
- ✱ We owe our calendar of 365 days to ancient Egyptians. They were the first to divide the day and night into 24 hours and to use clocks.
- ✱ Egypt is a land of many firsts: ancient Egyptians invented beer. There were more than 17 varieties. Ancient Egyptians were the first known people to fish for pleasure and to keep bees for making honey. And the earliest toilet seat in the world comes from the Egyptian city of Akhetaten, circa 1350 B.C. (toilets with wood, pottery and stone seats were placed above large bowls of sand).
- ✱ Egypt's first above-ground pyramid—rising 62 m. (204 ft.)—was built ca. 2630 B.C. for Pharaoh Djoser. Until then, pharaohs had been buried in underground tombs.
- ✱ The oldest Egyptian hieroglyphs ever found date from between 3400 and 3200 B.C. Do they reveal ancient religious rituals? Civil laws? Important pronouncements of pharaohs? No. They are labels from containers of cereals, oils and textiles.
- ✱ An ancient Egyptian cure for baldness was a mixture of crocodile, goose, hippopotamus, ibex, lion and snake fat.

How to Apply

To become a participant in this country's School Program, contact your nearest AFS office. To locate an AFS office, go to <http://www.afs.org/contact>

Student age (upon arrival)	16y to 18y	
Country data	Size	1 million sq km
	Population	67 million
	Official language	Arabic
	Government	Constitutional republic
Currency	Egyptian pound	
Useful websites	www.egyptbot.com www.sis.gov.eg www.ahram.org.eg/weekly/	
AFS Egypt website	http://afsweb.afs.org/CountryP.nsf/Pages/Egypt	

AFS program destinations are not always available to residents of all countries. If a program interests you, please contact your nearest AFS office to find out if it is an option for you. You can locate your nearest AFS office at <http://www.afs.org/contact>

