

Where Ancient Meets Modern – the Egypt Golf Backstory

Play golf in the land of the pharaohs – from historic Cairo to the eternal blue skies of the Red Sea

Playing golf in Egypt is like teeing up nowhere else on earth. Its fairways are laced with history, some within sight of one of the Seven Wonders of the World and close to one of the cradles of civilisation, Cairo.

Others offer a kaleidoscope of colours, their verdant fairways, tees and greens contrasting with parched desert sands and the azure waters of the Red Sea, sparkling under vivid blue skies 365 days of the year.

Egypt's golf roots date back to the 19th century when the first courses were built by the British. Yet, today, golfers can tee it up on world-class new courses, several created by some of golf's most famous designers, and with practice and teaching facilities to rival many established golf destinations. Luxury hotels alongside some of them offer sumptuous accommodation, spas, fine dining and leisure and recreation facilities that appeal to non-golfing partners and families as well as to the golfers themselves.

Beyond the fairways, exciting adventure options range from deep-sea fishing, windsurfing or scuba diving among coral reefs alive with fish to 4x4 safaris and camel rides through the desert. Explore Old Cairo and marvel at the mighty Pyramids of Giza, try haggling in a souk, seek out excellent restaurants. After dark, pump up the volume with the vibrant nightlife of Egypt's Red Sea resorts and the versatility of Cairo's Nightlife, which truly is a city that never sleeps.

For a more relaxing option, take a hot-air balloon trip to glide past the Valley of the Kings. Sail on a traditional felucca along the Nile. Or simply lie back and relax on beautiful sandy beaches.

This backstory highlights why Egypt has no parallel as a unique golf destination.

Ancient and Modern – Tee up on Designer-Label Courses Surrounded by History

Play new courses designed by some of the top names in golf

Egypt is synonymous with history and grass fairways first appeared over a century ago. Yet today, its golf scene is very young. Like Egypt's proverbial phoenix, the modern era of golf rose and began spreading its wings in the late-1990s. Since then, courses have sprung up around its capital, Cairo, and along the Red Sea coastline, with designs including those of some illustrious golf architects.

The first household name to put his stamp in Egypt was South Africa's Gary Player, whose critically-acclaimed signature creation, The Cascades, is a "desert links" layout set on low cliffs edging the Red Sea at Soma Bay. That has since been joined by the signature designs of The Allegria Golf Club by Greg Norman and Nick Faldo's Katameya Dunes, both on the outskirts of Cairo.

PGA Tour player Fred Couples co-designed the course at purpose-built Red Sea resort El Gouna with Gene Bates. The newest course in the Cairo area, Palm Hills Golf Resort, is a Nicklaus Design. Other designs include courses designed by revered designers such as Peter Harradine, Karl Litten, Yves Bureau, John Sanford and Tim Lobb.

Feel the quality

One aspect that stands out about golf in Egypt is the quality of its golf, especially on its foremost courses. As an example, leading global golf management group Troon Golf manages The Allegría Golf Club, where facilities include a clubhouse and golf academy west of Cairo. It is part of a planned, high-end residential development aimed at young families.

You'll find extensive practice facilities, including practice holes, greens and bunkers, as well as driving ranges – some even floodlit at night. Courses also boast golf academies with state-of-the-art teaching aids. Clubhouses are like sanctuaries, offering lounges, bars, restaurants and terraces, besides well-stocked pro shops and rental golf clubs, buggies (carts) and trolleys. Rental clubs are generally good standard with golfers having access to a choice of Wilson, TaylorMade, Callaway and Tour Edge clubs at the majority of the clubs.

Egypt surprises many golfers with its beautifully-landscaped lush, green fairways, looking like velvet carpets laid over the arid desert. Despite the constant sunshine and summer heat, the courses are excellently maintained and greens run true. Red Sea courses feature paspalum grass, which is salt water tolerant and can be watered with brackish and waste water, thus saving precious fresh water. The desert comes into play on several courses, such as the waste bunkering at Soma Bay, but golfers will also come across plenty of water hazards in the form of artificial lakes, some even with cascading waterfalls as at Makadi Bay and Cairo's Mirage Golf City, and canals as well as the Red Sea.

Easy access

Egypt is 'golf without hassle' when it comes to getting there and getting out onto the fairways. There are direct flights to Cairo and Red Sea resort Hurghada, as well as to Sharm el Sheikh in the Sinai Peninsula and Luxor. Much of Europe is just a four-hour flight away, while flights from the UK take around five hours.

Once you land and are on your way from the airport, you can be on a golf course in only an hour or so. The closest golf course to Cairo's international airport, Mirage City Golf Club, is less than 15 minutes away by road and both Katameya Heights and Katameya Dunes are 30-45 minutes away. The courses at the top of the Red Sea, Stella Di Mare and Sokhna Golf Club, are about a 90-minute drive from Cairo airport and can easily be combined on a trip with Cairo's courses. Underlining that, Stella Di Mare's slogan is "Easy access, easy golf". The courses at Soma Bay, El Gouna and Madinat Makadi are all within an hour's drive of Hurghada airport.

Unhurried golf

Golfers enjoy playing on courses where they can have a leisurely round, without being constantly held up in front or pushed from behind. Egypt's courses offer a laid-back experience, with uncrowded fairways and plenty of available tee times. In summer, you might be the only golfer on some courses, notably on those around Cairo which don't benefit from the sea breezes that temper the heat on coastal layouts.

Courses are busier in the winter months, particularly Red Sea resort courses in peak school holiday periods, but even then tee times are still available. Some courses, such as Katameya Heights and Katameya Dunes, have limited tee times for visitors at weekends but welcome visitors from Sunday to Thursday. Fairways are also clearly marked with yardages, typically on sprinkler heads and with regularly-spaced marker posts, saving golfers from guessing distances or needing to resort to GPS units or smartphone apps. Tee box signage is also very good, showing players where the holes go so they can just relax and hit their drives. Some courses also have yardage books (course planners).

Round, round, get around...by buggy or on foot

All Egypt's courses offer buggies for golfers to rent – offering welcome shade during the hotter months. But you can also choose to walk the fairways, with trolleys (pull carts) available to rent at all courses. They are a popular option on Red Sea courses, where the constant winds from the sea throughout the year help to keep the temperature down and make walking a pleasant experience. You can also rent golf shoes at some courses.

Golf courses also generally have food and beverage stations as well as clean toilet facilities located at regular intervals in addition to the halfway house. Some also have beverage carts that drive round the course, offering snacks and drinks for golfers to purchase.

Even in busy periods, there are plenty of buggies and trolleys to go round. Most courses have over 50 electric buggies and 75 trolleys available, while the courses in West and East Cairo have large fleets of 80 golf buggies.

Value for money golf

Golf in Egypt represents excellent value for money. Green fees at even the elite signature courses are below \$100 for visitors, while those with attached resort hotels generally offer cheaper rates to guests and much cheaper green fees for multi-round packages. Hotel guest rates start at around \$45 for a single 18-hole round but are typically \$60-\$80. Green fees sometimes include bottled water, tees, yardage book and use of practice facilities. Discounts of up to 50% are offered to junior golfers. Rental clubs cost from just \$15 and golf buggies from around \$15 per golfer. Caddies are available at courses throughout Egypt and typically cost around \$20 for an 18-hole round.

Enjoy the clubhouse experience

Among the most striking aspects of Egypt's courses are its clubhouses. Some are positively palatial and offer extensive leisure facilities including swimming pools, saunas and gyms in addition to other facilities normally found at golf clubhouses – turning a round of golf into an enjoyable social experience for golfers and their non-golfing partners and families.

The clubhouse at Madinat Makadi has an outdoor 15-metre-long pool and outdoor pub. Mirage City's imposing clubhouse includes a gym and spa, and free use of snooker and pool tables. El Gouna's stylish clubhouse includes an Angsana Spa. And Dreamland's Indiana Jones-style clubhouse features waterfalls and boulders, a bridge with lashed-rope supports and a wooden terrace on stilts.

Men's and women's locker rooms in clubhouses typically feature showers and lockers for clothes and personal possessions. Pro shops stock high quality clothing, golf clubs, accessories and shoes, and some also offer regripping services and club repairs. Bag drop and pickup is offered at all courses and all have golf bag storage facilities.

Relive the round at the 19th hole

After their round, golfers like to sit down and relax with a drink or meal to discuss their best shots, or unlucky misses. Egypt's welcoming clubhouses offer comfortable lounges, bars and restaurants, often with an outdoor terrace so they can dine al fresco and some overlooking the shimmering waters of the Red Sea. Bars and restaurants are open during the day and in the evening, serving up excellent food from bar snacks to three-course meals and stocking everything from soft drinks to beers, including excellent locally-brewed brands such as Sakara and Pharaoh Lager, as well as spirits. You can even try an Egyptian red or white wine, enjoying a tradition dating back to pharaonic times.

Swing in the Sun –by the Shores of the Red Sea

Play by the Red Sea...in guaranteed sunshine

Few destinations can guarantee year-round sun for golfers to enjoy, but Egypt's Red Sea serves up wall-to-wall blue skies pretty much 365 days a year. The sun really does shine every day! No wonder the ancient Egyptians worshipped the sun god, Ra. Hurghada's hot, dry climate sees an average of just 4mm of rain per year, and just three days with precipitation. Even when it does rain, the clouds soon give way to sun again.

Thanks to the ever-present sea breezes, golf can be enjoyed on Red Sea courses even in the hottest months. Average daytime high temperatures reach 37°C in July, and while Europe is shivering in the depths of winter, January highs in Hurghada and the Red Sea are a comfortably warm 22°C, with nine hours of sunshine each day. From November to February a sweater or light jacket might be needed in the cooler evenings.

Golfers will be the envy of their golf club locker rooms when they return from a holiday in Egypt relaxed and tanned after a warm winter golfing break while their home courses have been snowbound or deluged by rain.

Red Sea golf and beaches just 90 minutes from Cairo

Two of Egypt's courses – the 18-hole Stella Di Mare and 27-hole Sokhna Golf Club – are located right at the top of the Red Sea, in the Gulf of Suez resort of Ain Sokhna. The closest Red Sea resort to Cairo, it is just 90 minutes by road from Cairo's airport and two hours from the Pyramids of Giza. The courses both form part of golf resorts with adjacent hotels, making a city and beach twin-centre golf break and the option to visit Cairo and its pyramids a very attractive option with minimal transportation involved. Few other golf destinations can offer such an appealing and contrasting combination.

Classy resorts with golf on their doorstep

The advantage of choosing a golf holiday on the Red Sea is that all of the golf courses have hotels right next to them, so golfers can literally walk out of their rooms straight onto the first tee, while the beach is close at hand for non-golfing partners and families.

All the Red Sea golf courses have several associated hotels within wider beach resort developments, and in some cases free transportation is offered where the course is too far to walk to. Guests staying at resort hotels in El Gouna can reach the golf course by shuttle bus, three-wheeled tuk tuks – not recommended for those who have golf bags with them! – and shuttle boats that ply the resort's maze of canals.

Accommodation ranges from self-catering apartments and villas in resorts such as El Gouna and Ain Sokhna to family-friendly hotels and chic, five-star havens of luxury, among them the Jaz Makadi Star & Spa and Steigenberger Makadi Hotel at Madinat Makadi, La Residence des Cascades at Soma Bay, the Steigenberger and Moevenpick resorts at El Gouna, Stella Di Mare's Grand Hotel Ain Soukhna and the 436-room JW Marriott Hotel Cairo, which overlooks the Mirage City course. All of them offer spas with massage treatments and facilities including high-speed internet access, typically with free Wi-Fi in public areas.

Shop and flop

When the going gets tough, the tough go shopping – according to one version of the well-known idiom. In Egypt, the going is easy and the shopping is even easier for golfers and their partners, with shopping just moments from their rooms.

Guests staying at the eight hotels in Madinat Makadi have the Souk Makadi, with 145 shops selling everything from clothing, souvenirs and perfumes to exquisite Egyptian jewellery as well as a pharmacy right in the heart of the resort complex. At El Gouna, the Downtown area is styled after an Upper Egyptian village with shops, cafes, bars, restaurants and a free open-air cinema, plus the Marinatown area, with exclusive shopping and dining alongside the Abu Tig Marina designed by Italian architect Alfredo Freda. The JW Marriott Hotel Cairo runs a free daily shuttle to Cairo's biggest shopping mall, the City Stars Mall. West Cairo Golf Courses boast some of the biggest Malls in the Middle East on their doorstep and even Hurghada on the Red Sea has markets and shopping malls to browse.

Once guests have shopped till they drop, they can stretch out on golden sands lapped by the warm and inviting waters of the Red Sea. You don't have to be on the sea to laze on a beach, though. The JW Marriott has Cairo's only themed water park, The Beach, offering a wave pool with a sandy beach and beach volleyball as well as water slides.

Learn, Improve, Relax & Play

Hone your game on some of the best practice facilities you will find

Whether you are a beginner or improver, the extensive pre-game practice facilities in Egypt are second to none. All courses have driving ranges with grass bays, some shaded from the midday sun. There are double-ended driving ranges on several courses, and some ranges are floodlit so that you can sneak a quick practice session before or after dinner. The ranges will never be full; Cairo's new Palm Hill Golf Course, for example, has 50 practice bays spanning 120 yards. Stella Di Mare and El Gouna both have aqua driving ranges, where you hit into a lake using floating golf balls.

You will also find practice putting greens – Stella Di Mare has an 18-hole "Himalayan" putting green with severe slopes – short-game practice areas and practice bunkers. Madinat Makadi takes it even further, with three full-size practice holes comprising a par 3, a par 4 and a par 5 in addition to an 80-bay dogleg driving range!

Several courses have nine-hole, executive par 3 courses in addition to their 18-hole courses, ideal for sharpening up your long iron and wedge shots, enjoying a quick 90-minute game or for venturing out with golf clubs as a new convert to the sport. With some courses requiring handicaps of 28 for men and 36 for women, they are also ideal for those who have not yet attained that standard.

Get tuition from PGA pros in state-of-the-art golf academies

Another huge plus for golfers heading to Egypt is the high standard of its tuition facilities. Golf academies staffed by PGA professionals provide individual or group lessons, in English and other languages, as well as playing lessons with the pro. At some, there are teaching rooms and state-of-the-art electronic and video aids, to help golfers work on their swing when they return home.

Pros from overseas clubs are encouraged to visit courses with their club members. They will often be given free golf for a set number of golfers in their group and allowed to use the range to give tuition themselves.

Smiling caddies – there to help

A happy caddy always helps to enhance the enjoyment of a round for a golfer, and Egypt's caddies are always smiling. They speak good English and often speak other European languages, too. The caddies are trained by the courses and will offer golfers advice on club selection or the line of a putt if needed.

Go as a Couple – or Take the Family

Two's company

With their resort hotels alongside, Red Sea hotels are particularly well suited for golfers taking either a playing or non-playing partner. For those who don't play, the hotels offer extensive facilities to relax and while away the morning or afternoon while the golfer is on course. With the facilities offered by some of the clubhouses, they can even spend the time there, meeting up with their partner for a drink or meal after they have finished playing.

Pars and spas

The spas at Egypt's golf resorts are some of the best to be found in the entire region, some of them independently managed and others operated by global spa companies Les Thermes Marins and Angsana. They offer a huge array of massage, beauty and wellness treatments and facilities including thalassotherapy seawater and seaweed treatments, aquatonic and hydromassage pools, hammam rooms, Jacuzzi pools, saunas, herbal baths, steam baths and steam rooms, scrubs, wraps, facials, pedicures, manicures, mud treatments and more. Some spas have couples treatment rooms so couples can share the experience.

It's a family affair

Egypt is very much a family destination, even more so for golfers. For golfers whose children want to follow in dad's spikes, some resorts have mini golf and academies often offer free introductory sessions for beginners. They can then join in group lessons or they can have teaching sessions just for their family with a golf pro. After that, the youngsters can test out their new-found skills on one of the executive par 3 courses. Courses in Egypt offer up to 50% off green fees for juniors proficient enough to play on the full-size, 18-hole courses.

If the children are too small to play golf or are not interested in the game but both mum and dad want to play, resorts have kids' clubs that will keep the young ones occupied while they enjoy a relaxing round. There are also lots of family-friendly activities available at the resort hotels, from water parks including the Makadi Water World at Madinat Makadi and JW Marriott's The Beach.

Dine in style

Dining is an epicurean adventure at Egypt's golf resort hotels. You will find an array of gastronomy styles and food of the highest quality in eateries from cafes and buffet restaurants to a la carte fine dining establishments. Hotel restaurants specialise in cuisines including Japanese, Lebanese, Italian, Asian, Arabian, Mediterranean and International, with some focusing on steaks, fish and barbecues, among other styles. Clubhouse restaurants often open up to the general public at night, an indication of their quality. And resort complexes El Gouna and Madinat Makadi offer many dining options beyond the hotels.

Leisure palaces

While golfers will want to fit several rounds in during their holiday, they will also want to make the most of the hotel facilities. Egypt's hotels have plenty to keep them occupied away from the fairways, whether it is lagoon-style swimming pools, tennis, fitness facilities, squash, cycling, water sports or other activities on offer.

1001 night options

For night owls, bars in hotels and resort complexes stay open into the small hours and they can dance the night away at clubs playing the latest hits or popular oldies. Alternatively, they can try their luck in a casino. Others may prefer to linger over a leisurely meal at a restaurant with a view over the Nile in Cairo or watching the moon shimmer over the Red Sea.

There is a very modern bar and club scene in Cairo, very open and accessible to visitors keen to experience the modern as well as the ancient in this vibrant metropolis.

Pharaohs & Fairways – Golf amidst Ancient History

Explore 3,000 years of history after a round

Combining golf and sightseeing with some of the world's most iconic sights is one of Egypt's trump cards. Golfers don't even need to step off some courses to enjoy mesmerising views. Dreamland and Palm Hills Golf Course are just minutes from the Pyramids of Giza, and they are visible from both courses.

Dreamland is 10 minutes from the pyramids and they can be seen from some holes of its nine-hole Pharaoh Course. The pharaonic connection is highlighted by pyramid-shaped tee markers on both that and its Championship Course, where the information signage for each hole is displayed on obelisks. Palm Hills is even closer to Giza at just six minutes away and not only do golfers get a view of the pyramids from different parts of the course, but they can also enjoy a sweeping vista of them from the clubhouse restaurant terrace.

The Allegria is just over half an hour from the pyramids, and all three courses on the western side of Cairo offer golfers the opportunity of visiting the city after playing, as do the courses close to Cairo's airport to the east of it. Key places to visit in Cairo include the Egyptian Museum, the Citadel, the Greek Orthodox Church of St George, the Hanging Church and the Museum of Islamic Art.

Souks and the city

Nowhere better can you get a feel of Cairo's true spirit than at night in the labyrinthine narrow streets of its atmospheric Khan el Khalili bazaar district, surrounded by some of the city's oldest mosques. Traders loudly cajole passers-by into haggling for the hand-crafted items that adorn the many shopfronts, while locals, many of them families, stroll through the nearby park or sit on steps and chat. It's a timeless scene

Day trips & excursions

A must for visitors fascinated by Egyptian history is a visit to Luxor, site of the Luxor and Karnak Temples and where many pharaohs' tombs were discovered in the Valley of the Kings. Visitors can do a day trip flight or longer excursion from Cairo, while it is accessible by road from Hurghada area resorts. Sakkara's pyramids can be visited from Cairo, and the historic monasteries of St Paul's and St Anthony's in the Eastern Desert are day trip options from Ain Sukhna.

Golf & Adventure – Soak up the Wild Side of Egypt

Explore the Red Sea's underwater paradise

The Red Sea is one of the world's foremost diving locations and has the closest coral reefs to Europe, so it is very popular with visitors wanting to venture into the crystal clear waters and see its incredibly diverse marine life. Hurghada is the Western Red Sea's main departure point for diving excursions and has numerous dive centres. There are also diving centres at Madinat Makadi, El Gouna and Soma Bay for golfers to mix time on the fairways with a scuba adventure.

Red Sea boat trips

Offshore islands in the Red Sea can be explored on a day trip or evening sunset and barbeque cruise, watching out for dolphins on the way. From Hurghada and Makadi Bay, boat trips go to the beautiful national park island of Giftun, setting passengers down on a secluded, sandy beach for them to spend the day lazing, swimming and snorkelling. From Soma Bay, Tobia Island is a small, sandy island popular for tourist boat trips. For a more romantic touch, board a sailing boat in El Gouna and search out coves and unspoilt islands. Luxury motor yachts can also be chartered from El Gouna.

Get the wind in your sails

Constant winds make the Red Sea particularly popular for windsurfing and kitesurfing. Soma Bay is one of the best spots, with shallow inshore lagoons and deeper offshore sailing areas providing different experiences. The funnelling effect of nearby mountains means wind speeds reach an average 20 knots or more after building through the mornings.

Take a desert safari

Action and adventure await in the huge expanses of desert behind the Red Sea resorts. Take half-day or day-trip excursions into the desert to go camel riding, quad biking, take a 4x4 safari or visit a Bedouin village and enjoy a barbeque dinner under the stars.

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