

SEE THE PYRAMIDS

A sanity-saving plan of action for taking in the earth's most iconic (and eternally mobbed) monuments. By A. Christine Maxfield and Sarah Rose

INCONGRUOUS AND DAZZLING in the desert sun, the pyramids peek out over a frenetic metropolis of 16 million. Your first glimpse comes on Cairo's Ring Road, a 20-year-long public works project that was finally wrapped up late last year. With crazy traffic, more ruins than you can count, and temperatures reaching 104 degrees Fahrenheit in the height of summer, your choice of where to go, and how to get there, is a weighty one. Whether you want to visit the classic Giza complex surrounded by cemeteries full of *mastabas* (tombs); the quieter, and slightly farther afield, pyramids of Dahshûr, or the emerging discoveries at Saqqara, we've mapped out an insider's guide to help you ditch the millions of others trying to do just the same. Wherever you head—and whomever you're surrounded by—these ancient immortal structures celebrating the immortality of kings stand lonely against a duneland devoid of life, a scene mankind has been marveling at for the last 5,000 years.

In Your Words

"The pyramids of Giza sit just outside the city wall like grand old gentlemen keeping a watchful eye. One guidebook says Cairo is a tough city, but if you love her, she'll love you back. Right now, Cairo and I are in strong *like*."

—BILL AULWES
LONG BEACH, CALIF.

At Giza, the Great Pyramid of Khafre, identifiable by its intact limestone cap, rises over the crowds



1

Giza is home to the closest pyramid complex—and the second largest suburb in the world (pop. 2.5 million). Admission to the complex is \$10. Tickets to the burial chamber of Khufu are an extra \$18 and are limited to 300 per day in high season, September to March—150 in the morning (line up by 8 A.M.), and 150 around noon. After the pyramids close at 4 P.M., hit Cairo's Egyptian Museum, which is open until 6:45 P.M.—and holds, among many others treasures, all the relics from the King Tut show. Admission \$9, mummy room admission \$18

2 →

The footprint of the former capital of Memphis, the necropolis of **Saqqara**, 14 miles south of Cairo, has 11 pyramids, including Egypt's first, the Step Pyramid, as well as the Imhotep Museum. What sets Saqqara apart: freshly unveiled wonders, including, since 2007, mummies and sarcophagi, and, as recently as January, large tombs. The 40-or-so-minute taxi from Cairo should cost about \$30 for a round trip. *Step Pyramid and Imhotep Museum admission \$10.75.*

3

Twenty-five miles south of Cairo, two Old Kingdom pyramids remain intact at **Dahshur**: The Red, the world's oldest example of the classic style, and the Bent, the work of an over-ambitious pharaoh who changed the angle of rise half way up, so that the structure appears rhomboidal. *Dahshur complex admission \$5*

4

GETTING THERE

More than 11 million passengers a year pass through **Cairo International Airport's** new Terminal 3—double the capacity of the other two terminals. It's 12-and-a-half miles northeast of Cairo; a taxi ride into the city center should run you \$5.50 (most hotels also offer free pickup and drop-off).

GETTING AROUND

BY CAR The most popular way to reach the Giza Plateau, 16 miles from city center is by **Ring Road**; plan on anywhere from 20 minutes to 3 hours, depending when you set out. Rent a private car and driver for a full day (smartlimo.com, \$73) or take a metered yellow Cairo Cab—a mere \$7 one way.

BY METRO In 2000, in an ill-fated effort to reduce Cairo's

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congestion, the city unveiled a station seven miles south of the city of Giza. During rush hour, going by subway can save you at least 60 minutes—though you still have to catch a \$1 cab ride to the pyramids. Line 3, known as the Myth of Cairo, is slated to open in 2011. *About 25¢.*

7

BY HORSE One way to beat the traffic: Hoof it! From Giza, Saqqara and Dahshur make a perfect desert day trip. Rent an Arabian horse from **FB Stables**. *Gamal Abdul Nasser St., Giza, fbstables.com, half- or full-day rides \$18/hour.*

8

WHERE TO STAY **Talisman Hotel de Charme**, in downtown Cairo, is 24-room boutique hotel in a colonial mansion, with bright walls, Moorish-style furniture, and Oriental carpets. *39 Talaat Harb St., talisman-hotel.com, from \$118.*

