

CairoGuide for MedicalStudents

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With this little guide I would like to share my experiences in Cairo during my studies at the Asr Alaini Hospitals of Cairo University.

I will try to cover the most important issues of daily life to give you the best start for your own stay here in Egypt.

Some information may only be useful for medical students or Germans, but I decided to write this report in English so students from other countries may use it as well.

University

The university hospitals "Asr Alaini" [19] are divided into an old and a new part.

The old part is located on the northern end of the island of Manial, directly next to the Grand Hyatt Hotel.

Its new counterpart, the French Hospital, is just a few hundred meters away on the right side of the Nile.

While the treatment is more or less free in the old hospital, patients have to pay in the new hospital. Therefore, the old hospital is the first place to go for patients that could otherwise not afford medical treatment. This is one of the reasons why you will encounter a huge flow of patients, many of whom arrive at the hospital at a late stage of disease and present a big range of symptoms.

Hospitals

If you are working in an operative field you have to buy your own scrubs for the operation rooms. Shirt and trousers can be bought as a set for around 35 pounds at one of the many small shops near the university.

Customs are different depending on the department you are in. In most of them you have to bring the scrubs with you and change in the operation department. After work you should take them home with you for washing. If you don't have access to a washing machine you can use a washing service for a reasonable price.

In most operation rooms you do not need to bring special shoes. You will get blue plastic covers for the shoes you wear outside. In Orthopedics everything is a little stricter. There you can ask one of the doctors to organize you a pair of gumboots.

Outside the operation rooms a white coat is recommended.

Spending time in the emergency room is very beneficial. You can check out what's going on in the main ER itself, and if it's quiet you can just walk over to the specialized emergency rooms for orthopedics, surgery or internal medicine. You can join morning shift, late shift or night shift.

Dermatology is also a great department. You can join a doctor in the morning and check out the different patients that step up to the table one after the other. Every minute a patient comes with a common skin disease and gets a diagnosis.

I can not really recommend Anesthesiology, because you cannot do much yourself and you do not see as many patients as in other specialties.

In Gynecology you will be able to join the operation rooms and the outpatient clinic. Most interesting is the delivery room, where around 50 babies are born every day. You can assist and gain first experience in cesarian sections there.

Lectures and Classes

Most medical students take private classes in addition to their ordinary lectures.

I had the possibility to join a private class for internal medicine, which was held in English. In the practical units of this class, students are given the possibility to exam actual patients with typical symptoms. These patients are chronic cases that earn money from students learning on them. This method sounded very strange to me in the beginning but proved to be very effective. No doubt it is better to learn auscultation of heart murmurs on a real patient than on a rubber doll.

Living

Weather

During the summer it gets pretty hot here in Cairo. I strongly recommend an air conditioning for the hot months of the summer.

In winter it may be quite cold. Even though temperatures ususally do not drop below zero degrees celcius you should not forget to bring enough warm clothing.

If it is getting too cold for you, you can always book a flight or train to upper Egypt where it is always a little warmer.

Rain is very rare in Cairo, but on the northern coast, like Alexandria, rain is common in the winter months.

The spring months are famous for their sandstorms. This is when it gets even more dusty in Cairo than usual.

Hostel

For people only coming for a month I recommend the youth hostel [20] that is offered by EAIMS. It is located three minutes away form the University Hospitals. Rooms have three beds, a little bathroom and air conditioning. Students coming alone may get two new roommates every day. Single rooms are not available, except if you are willing to pay for three beds. The hotel recommended by EAIMS is one minute further down the street.

EAIMS offers vouchers to eat in the university's cafeteria. If you do not want to eat there every day and you would like to have some more variety in your food, you can pay cash every time you eat instead of buying the vouchers in advance.

Flat

Everyone staying longer should concider renting a flat.

The email group CairoScholars, offered by the university of Texas, is very useful. Almost every day you find people posting open flats or trying to find a flatmate. Of course you can take the initiative yourself to find people or open places by writing an e-mail to the group. To join CairoScholars there is two options. Either you subscribe at:

<https://utlists.utexas.edu/sympa/info/cairoscholars>

Or send the subscribe command:

subscribe CairoScholars@utlists.utexas.edu

to:

sympa@utlists.utexas.edu

I found my flat by looking at the pinboard at AUC. You will find it right after the entrance to the gate of the main campus facing the McDonalds on Mohammad Mahmoud street. Pass the security check, you will be asked to leave your ID or passport since you are not an AUC student, and you will find the board on your left hand side.

If you cannot find a suitable flat this way you may need to use a simsar. One of these guys may find a flat for you and charge you a fee of one month's rent. To find a good simsar ask people on the e-mail group mentioned above.

Nice areas to live near the university are Garden City or Doqqi.

Garden City is a very quiet part of the city with a lot of embassies. Its unique curved streets were designed by the British during colonial times.

Doqqi, located on the Giza side, the westbank of the Nile, is a little more active.

Further away, the most European districts are Mohandessin and the island of Zamalek. These quarters are very popular with the international students of AUC (American University in Cairo). Here is where the foreigner life takes place, including most of the alcoholic nightlife...

Telephone

There is one company offering landlines: Telecom Egypt.

Mobile phones are available through two companies: Vodafone and Mobinile. Prepaid cards are available. For short stays, Vodafone offers special tourist cards that work for one month. Can can get new credit buy buying a card at one of the many little kiosks. For a 20 pounds card you will actually have to pay 25 pounds, because of taxes and fees.

Internet

There are two possibilities to access the internet via the phonline in your apartment:

Dial-Up

There are free dial-up phone numbers you can connect to by using in analog modem. All you pay is the usual phone rates as if you were calling another land phone. The free number offered by TE-Data is 0777-7777.

DSL

In Egypt you have the choice between several DSL providers. All DSL providers have a similar structure in their prices. Prices seem to be regulated by the government so the only differences you will find are in service and quality.

The company I used was TE-Data [34]. They have a free hotline, which I had to call quite a lot. Some providers like TE-Data offer discounts for students. Since my flatmate studied at AUC we got a discount of 20 percent on the regular price. You can not get the discount directly in the branch. After signing the contract you will have to call a special hotline. There is no discount for students at Cairo University like us as far as I know.

Getting the DSL may be a bit complicated. For me it took about 6 weeks to get it. First you have to apply at the office of TE Data in Mohandessin. You should bring ID and a document stating that you are actually the owner of the phonenumber. A telephone bill is enough for verification. I did not have a bill so we had to solve it the Egyptian way: After a convincing talk with the employee in the office, they did it without any documents.

A problem you might encounter is that the phonenumber in your flat is not a copper line ("ardi nakhaasi") but a "burging line" whatever this may mean. You then have to go to the Egyptian Telecoms "Centraal" in charge of your area. You will then have to change your line to copper. For me this process took several weeks waiting, a few days in different office buildings in different parts of the city, quite a few phonecalls and many talks with all kinds of people. I finally succeeded to change my phonenumber by insisting to meet the director of the institution.

Internet Cafe

If you don't want to use either of the methods above, you can go to one of the internet cafes. Students living in the hostel can use the cheap internet cafe in the basement.

Hot Spots

You will find many cafe and restaurant chains offering free wireless hotspots. This extra service is much more common than in Germany. For instance, nearly every McDonalds offers free wireless.

The cafe which is closest to the hospital is Haseera. It is located a bit south on the same street as the hostel. Its a cheap place, where it is not ideal for girls to go. Beans Giza Branch [4] just across the University Bridge is perfect for girls to bring their laptop.

The French Cultural Institute [25] offers free wireless too.

Transportation

Taxis

The taxi will probably become one of your most important means of transportation. They are really quite cheap, but it is sometimes hard to get a good price as a foreigner.

The easiest way is probably to ask an Egyptian what the usual price to your destination would be so you can tell the driver before how much you are willing to pay.

Buses

A much cheaper way to travel is the microbus. you get in the bus and pay approximately one pound to the driver or his assistant. If you sit in the back part of the bus, just give the money to a person sitting in front of you. They will take care of it.

Metro

The metro was designed by french engineers so it works just like you might know it from Paris. You buy a ticket for 1 pound, which you have to insert in the machine when entering the building. Keep the ticket since you will need to put it into a machine again to get out.

Metro-Boat

If you cross the university bridge to Giza and turn right directly you will find an orange striped roof next to the Nile [30]. From there you can take the metro-boat for a few piasters. This is basically the cheapest way to have a boat tour on the Nile.

Eat and Drink

Many restaurants and cafes in Egypt have a minimum charge. It is useful to ask how much it is before you order to avoid any complications. Sometimes they even reduce it for you if you ask before.

Eating

For people wanting to eat near the hospital, I recommend the following:

First of all there, is a restaurant called Baghl [3], which means Mule. Here you can buy traditional food like fool and ta3meya (falafel) and schawerma for unbeatable prices. There is always heaps of people around so food does not become old. The place is especially popular with students form university and the surrounding schools. Food tastes nice and is definitely better (and cleaner) than the stuff you buy from other local takeaways.

Directly on the Nile, a little further up the river from the hospital and the hostel, is the restaurant Happy Dopolphin [14]. It is actually a real restaurant with a separate take away branch. That's why they have a good kitchen, but offer very good prices. Unfortunately, the menu is only in arabic, but there are a lot of pictures in it too ;-)

The best pizza in Cairo may be found in one of the branches of Maison Thomas [35]. You will find the closest one to the hospital in Zamalek. If this is too far for you you can take advantage of their free delivery service.

Almost every restaurant offers home delivery. To get an impression of the different restaurants I recommend to check out Outlob [32]. This is an online-service to order. But even if you prefer to order via phone, you will find details about the places and their prices on this site.

Drinking

During Ramadan you will, except for the expensive hotel bars, not find any alcohol for sale. Even shops that specialize in alcohol like drinkies [16] are closed during that time.

So if you do not want to miss drinking during that time you better buy some bottles in advance to be prepared for this period of time.

Here a list of some places to go out at night:

Deals Pub has several branches in Cairo. The one in Mohandessin offers Karaoke on Daturdays. Harry's Pub [22] is located in the Mariott Hotel. On thursday nights you will find Karaoke. Minimum Charge is 60 pounds.

Fridays Pub has a branch [33] on a ship on the Nile not far from the hospital. Minimum charge is 100 pounds. There is also a Fridays restaurant one floor down

Absolute [2] is one of the fancy places in Cairo. If you are there too early you can hang out for a while in the cafe Sangria on top of the building. The cafe is a stylish place directly on the Nile. Cairo Jazz Club [9] is one of the few places without minimum charge. The only thing they care about is that you have to bring girls. No chance for single guys to get in unless you know people there.

Some places like the disco Latex [28] in the Nile Hilton Hotel have a strict policy on not letting veiled girls in.

Cafes

Grand Cafe [6] has several branches. The one in Maadi is directly on the Nile and very nice. If you like you can have some food, or just relax having a beer.

Casino [7] is similar to the Grand Cafe, but much closer to the hospital. Just cross the University bridge to Giza and walk up the river. Shortly before the next bridge you will find the cafe. Especially nice is that you can sit on a pontoon directly on the Nile. If its too chilly there they have a very stylish indoor area with Nile view too.

Shopping

You can easily buy the stuff you need for daily life in a little shop around the corner. But if you want to make sure not to be ripped off as a foreigner, you better go to one of the supermarket chains.

A good place to do shopping for food is Metro. There you get everything you need. The three branches in range are the one on Manial [29], the one in Doqqi [15] and the one on the island of Zamalek [36].

You can even get dark German bread and Muesli.

If you do not feel like leaving the house, you can get home delivery for a fee of three pounds. It takes approximately two hours until you get your stuff. For people that want to shop themselves but do not feel like carrying the bags home, Metro offers the ShopAndDrop service.

There is also a supermarket chain called Alpha. On top of food and things like that, they offer also clothing, sporting gear and so on.

Outside of Cairo you can find the huge Carrefour, imitating the big french supermarkets.

Sightseeing

in Cairo

things you have to see

KhanKhalili

Citadell

Egyptian Museum

Pyramids

outside Cairo

The perfect daytrip from Cairo is to Alexandria, which 2.5 hours away. Trains depart several times a day from the Ramsis Train Station. To get to the train station you can easily take the subway, which is a 10-minute walk in eastern direction from the hostel.

The Alexandria train station is the last one, so you do not need to worry when to get off the train. Just wait until the last people are leaving the train.

In Alex you should not miss the Library which can be reached walking from the main train station.

There is also great seafood available near the Fortress. This part of the city is called Bahary. I can recommend one restaurant which is called Elaa. First you tell them how many kilo of what kind of fish you would like, then they cook it for you the way you want it.

Sport

Gyms

In Cairo you will find gyms from very cheap to really expensive. The gyms and health clubs in the hotels are usually quite expensive.

Prices start from 3000 pounds for a one year membership in the Intercontinental Hotel [26]. The hotels closest to the hospital are the Grand Hyatt Hotel [24] and the Four Seasons Hotel [21]. Club Olympus [24] in the Grand Hyatt for instance charges 6000 pounds a year, Four Seasons even a multiple of this price.

Still expensive but very popular is the international chain Golds Gym [17]. The branch in Giza can be found on a houseboat on the Nile, you can even see it from the hospital.

A middle class gym would be World Gym in Giza [18].

For small money you can train in one of the cheap gyms, starting from something like 35 pounds a month. Even though you find very cheap gyms, a decent one is probably more expensive than back home in Germany.

Running

For a small fee of two pounds you can use the Gezira Sporting Club's [10] running track. This is one of the few places in Cairo where you can actually do sports outside.

Culture

If you are interested in cultural events here are some destinations:

Opera The opera is situated on the southern end of Zamalek.

French Cultural Center The French Center [25] offers an event of some sort almost every evening. You will find something like little concerts or movies.

There is also a french library where you can get a students one year membership for 60 pounds. To get a membership bring ID, students ID and a passphoto.

Besides the books, they rent out french DVDs which costs an extra 110 pounds a year. There is no shorter memberships available. But even if you are not a member they will probably not mind if you go in there, read a book, watch a movie or use their free wireless lan.

El-Sawy Culture Wheel The El-Sawy Center [8] is situated in Zamalek under the western end of the 26th of July bridge. They host different cultural events, like concerts and theatre.

American University in Cairo At AUC [23] you can find interesting and important people holding speeches from time to time. It takes place mostly in the main building on the main campus.

There is also a book store [5] on the main campus where you can get Cairo maps, travel guides or dictionaries and all kinds of other books.

If you do not find the book you are looking for there, check the Diwan Bookshop in Zamalek.

Religion

Catholics

Catholics can find various churches and communities in Cairo.

First of all, I would like to mention the German-speaking catholic community [13]. Pfarrer Joachim Schrödel offers a sunday mass every sunday at 9:00 o'clock. It takes place in the church of the german school [12] belonging to the Borromäerinnen. The church is located on the third floor of a building in the back of the school area.

Should your working hours collide with church, you have the possibility to attend the German saturday evening mass in Maadi.

A monthly magazine informs about the communities activities and can be taken home from church. English, French or Italian speaking Catholics find a nice community in St. Joseph [27] on Zamalek.

Protestants

Protestants can find information about religious activities of the german speaking protestants in the magazine mentioned above.

Formalities

Visa

As a German citizen you can obtain a tourist visa upon arrival at the airport. Choose one of the little branches of the major banks in Egypt and buy 15 dollars worth of stamps. If you pay 15 Euro you will get some Egyptian Pounds change. These stamps will be put in your passport and stamped by an officer.

If you stay longer, you have to get a visa for a longer period at the "Mugamma" [31] in Tahrir Square. If you go there early at 9 am you don't have to wait a lot and can pick up your visa an hour after handing in your application material. You need passport photos, copies of your passport and around 100 pounds depending on how long you need the visa for.

Drivers Licence

If you ever think about driving here, which I do not recommend, you might need to get the Egyptian drivers licence. You have to go to the government place ("muruur") that is in charge of your area and do a test in their driving area. You need to bring a medical certificate for eyes and health, a document from your embassy stating where you live, as well as 4 passport photos. To do the medical tests I recommend to go to the mosque in the middle of Manial. They have a little hospital there, where you can get the documents for 21 pounds. You will need to bring 2 passphotos to the medical test.

The real time-consuming thing is, that before you can do the test, the national security will check your identity which takes one month.

Instead of going to your embassy you can also go to the police department where you are registered and get a statement where you live there.

Egypt has different ways of managing these bureaucratic issues. But once you start knowing the local customs, things will go easier.

Language

It might be useful to learn some arabic while staying in egypt.

You might want to buy a little dictionary for the Egyptian language. I found the book Egyptian Arabic by The Rough Guide quite useful. You can get it for 40 pounds at the AUC bookstore [5].

If you want to learn Arabic in a language school, I can very much recommend the Fajr Center [1], which has several branches in Cairo. One advice: don't learn classic Arabic, only the Egyptian dialect will be useful for you in the streets. Ask for a discount for students of the University of Cologne. You can tell them that I got one when I did a language course there.

There is also a language school owned by the Catholic Church in Zamalek [11].

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