

ARTS MIDWEST WORLD FEST

Study Guide Egypt - Country and Culture

Contemporary Egypt

Unlike the days of the Pharaohs and pyramids, life in modern-day Egypt has many similarities to life in the United States. Like your own community, towns in Egypt have markets and roads, and bigger cities have shopping centers, restaurants, highways, and schools. Egyptians like to play sports, especially soccer (although in Egypt, soccer is called football.)

Language: The official language of Egypt is Arabic, however many students also learn English and French.

Economy: The major industries in Egypt are tourism, agriculture, and service. The Pyramids of Giza attract visitors from all over the world. Farms in Egypt produce a variety of crops such as corn, rice, wheat, beans, fruit, and vegetables. Animals in Egypt include cattle, sheep, goats, and water buffalo. Major exports include cotton, textiles (fabric items), petroleum, and crude oil.

Currency: Unlike the green dollar bills that we use have in the United States, Egyptian pounds are bright blue, orange, green, and purple. Since so many people in Egypt also speak English, Egyptian pounds are bilingual, with Arabic words on one side and English words on the other side.

Capital City: The capital of Egypt is Cairo. Cairo has a population of approximately 10.9 million people and is located on the Nile River. Cairo is not just the governmental hub but is also the educational hub for Egypt—there are over 20 universities located in the Cairo area. The oldest university is the Al Azhar University which was founded in 975 AD (more than 1,000 years ago) as a *madrasa*. Madrasa is an Arabic word meaning “place of learning.”



Egypt's capital city, Cairo, on the Nile River.

the middle of deserts. The climate in Egypt is typically hot and dry—some places get as hot as 110 degrees.

The Nile River is very important to Egyptians. It is the longest river in the world. To compare, the Nile is over 200 miles longer than the longest river in the United States, the Mississippi River. Both the Nile and Mississippi are important to



Egypt's official name is the Arab Republic of Egypt.

Geography and Climate: Roughly three times the size of New Mexico, Egypt is located in the northeast corner of Africa. Egypt's neighbors include Sudan to the south, Libya to the west, and Israel and the Red Sea to the east. The Mediterranean Sea forms Egypt's northern border.

Approximately 94% of the land in Egypt is desert. Famous deserts in Egypt include the Libyan Desert and Sahara Desert. Because of the high temperatures and minimal rainfall, farming is very difficult on desert land. For this reason, 99% of Egypt's population lives in the Nile Valley (area along the Nile) and Nile Delta (bottom of the river).

These areas are known as oases, which are fertile lands in

their home countries—they have many uses, including shipping and supplying water.

Current events: In January 2011, Egyptian citizens began protesting against their president, Hosni Mubarak, who had been president since 1981. (Unlike the United States, there are no limits for how long a president can serve in Egypt.) As the protests continued, they became larger and more widespread, which resulted in Mubarak resigning as president in February, 2011.

Egypt is now led by a temporary government called a military junta, which is a committee of military leaders instead of one person. World leaders and the Egyptian people expect that a new style of government will be in place in the fall of 2011.

Ancient Egypt

Egypt is home to one of the world's oldest civilizations. When you hear the words Ancient Egypt, what do you see? Pyramids? The most famous pyramids in Egypt are called the Pyramids of Giza, and were built between about 2700 and 2200 BC, during a period known as the Old Kingdom. Made from limestone and granite, it took more than 20 years to build the largest of the three pyramids. Near the pyramids is the Great Sphinx of Giza—a large statue of a human face on the body of a lion. Very little is known about this Sphinx, and historians still debate who built it and when it was constructed.



An aerial view of the Pyramids of Giza.

Ancient Egyptians were not just builders and architects of pyramids, but were also inventors.

Writing with ink and paper was invented by Ancient Egyptians when they discovered they could make special paper from the papyrus plant. Before papyrus paper, people wrote on clay tablets. Unlike these tablets, papyrus paper was lightweight and could be carried from place to place. It became very popular and was one of Egypt's major exports.

Ancient Egyptians did not write using letters and words like we do today. Instead, they wrote with hieroglyphics, which used pictures and symbols instead of letters and words. The oldest examples of hieroglyphics were discovered in caves and they puzzled people for many years—no one knew the meanings behind these pictures. In 1799, a French soldier discovered the Rosetta Stone in Egypt, a stone that helped historians interpret this written language.

References and Resources

The CIA World Factbook entry for Egypt

www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/eg.html

Information about contemporary Egyptian life

www.yourdiscovery.com/egypt/modernegypt

The Pyramids of Giza

www.unescoworldheritagesites.com/pyramids_of_giza.htm

Memphis and its Necropolis – the Pyramid Fields from Giza to Dahshur

whc.unesco.org/en/list/86/

Learn more about hieroglyphs and their meanings

www.pbs.org/wgbh/nova/pyramid/hieroglyph/



Hieroglyphs on the sarcophagus of Ankhnesneferibre at the British Museum in London.