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The Local's Guide to Cairo, According to an Egyptian Street Food Expert



There's more to Cairo than ancient ruins (although these guys are pretty cool, too). Photo by [Dario Morando](#).

Farah Abouseif shares the best things to eat, see, and do in Cairo, Egypt.

"I think anyone coming to Cairo—besides the pyramids and the museums—should come with an interest to learn about the people. We have so many cultures, east to west, north to south, everyone with a different set of principles and beliefs, even accents. I'm still learning and I've

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lived here all my life,” says 28-year-old Farah Abouseif, who lives 30 minutes outside of downtown Cairo.

Abouseif is a travel expert and executive at Travel Plus, where she started working with her dad—but not before she studied political science at university and worked for UN Women, where she developed a passion for service work. Even now that she has a less philanthropic 9-5, she still makes time to visit underserved areas of Cairo for various charity endeavors—just one of the many ways she remains connected to different sides of her beloved Egyptian city. Here, Abouseif shares how she would spend a typical day in her hometown—from her favorite outdoor coffee spot to felucca rides along the Nile.



The Museum of Egyptian Antiquities is getting a major makeover in 2020. Photo by Spencer Davis.

Farah Abouseif's Perfect Day in Cairo

9 a.m. — Coffee craving

I prefer Turkish coffee every morning, but if I had to get coffee out, it would be in a place called Qahwa close to my home. It's in an outdoor area, outside of the downtown, so it's calm and very very nice in the morning.

10 a.m. — Full Egyptian breakfast

My absolute favorite breakfast place is called Andrea, and they're only open on weekends. It's on a hill, so you can see the houses, streets, and cars from above. This place serves traditional Egyptian breakfasts with eggs, fava beans, falafel, cheese with tomato. My favorite thing there is the *feteer meshaltet*, which is a layered pastry. You can have it with cheese, but I prefer mine with molasses and some tahini. YUM.



Cairo is often overlooked by tourists seeking Egypt's famous antiquities, but 2020 just may change that.

Photo by Omar Elsharawy.

11:30 a.m. — Temple run

I don't like closed spaces so I'm not a huge fan of museums. But with all the temples we have in Egypt, I don't see the need to go to a museum. I go to the gym every morning, and I love



Some of the best food can be found in Egypt's markets. Photo by Alex Azabache.

working out outdoors. The temples are in full view on my route, and I sometimes stop at one I haven't seen in a while or recently read about.

2:30 p.m. — Ladies who late lunch

Koshari (spiced tomato sauce over noodles and rice with garlic, vinegar, and chickpeas) is the best thing you can eat for lunch. It's filling and nutritious enough to get you through the day. The sauce has a lot of garlic though so it's not a preference for everyone. One of my favorite restaurants is Khan El Khalili Restaurant and Naguib Mahfouz Cafe, which is definitely a cultural experience. While the bazaar is well known to tourists, places like Naguib Mahfouz or the local cafes are true hidden gems as nobody ever goes there. Even many of my friends didn't know these places existed.



Sail the Nile on a felucca, a traditional wooden sailing boat used in the eastern Mediterranean.

Photo by [Payton Chung](#).

4 p.m. — Nile River dreamin’

My favorite thing about the city is the Nile. A felucca ride in the afternoon (or at sunset or sunrise) is the best thing you can do to disconnect. I never realized it, because growing up in Cairo, we take the Nile for granted; it’s just there. But when I started working with my dad and got to go on felucca rides for work, I decided it’s a nice thing to do personally as well. I’d also definitely recommend visiting the [Sound and Light Show at the Pyramids](#). If I need a late afternoon snack, I’ll stop at [Cake Cafe in Zamalek](#) in the heart of downtown.

7 p.m. — Docked out

One of the best options for dinner is a place called Carlos In Zamalek, which is on a docked boat. I order vine leaves, hummus, rice with pigeon meat (similar to quail), and *mombar* (sausages stuffed with rice). It's all food I would eat at my grandma's house.

9 p.m. — Monkeying around

Cairo's best bar is Monkey Bar, also in Zamalek. Izakaya is a great place for dancing, and it's also one of my favorite restaurants. They serve Peruvian and Japanese food and at night they have all the music one needs. The best late-night bite is Semsema for shawarma.



The Four Seasons Nile Plaza has some of the best views in Cairo.
Photo by Paul Thuysbaert, courtesy of the Four Seasons.

The Cairo Essentials

Where to stay in Cairo

Four Seasons Nile Plaza is my absolute favorite. With the right room, you can get a view of the pyramids on a clear day in the distance. Airbnb isn't very common in Cairo, although it is outside in places like Gouna, in Hurghada.

What to read before visiting Cairo

Anything related to the history of Egypt after the Ottoman Empire collapsed.

What to Know Before You Go

We have the best weather. In winter, our mornings are beautiful, but at night it gets a bit cold (though a jacket or a light coat will do). Our summers are quite dry, so anyone coming in the summer should pack a lot of sunblock and hats. As for etiquette, Egyptians are friendly and very hospitable. Tourists tend to think that tipping is offensive, but it's what people working in the industry depend on. Waiters, guides, and drivers all appreciate tips. Also, Cairo isn't as conservative as some people believe. I don't disregard the close-minded part of Arab culture, but it's definitely not dominant in Cairo.

Interested in experiencing Cairo like Farrah? Book a tour through [Big Five Tours and Expeditions](#).