

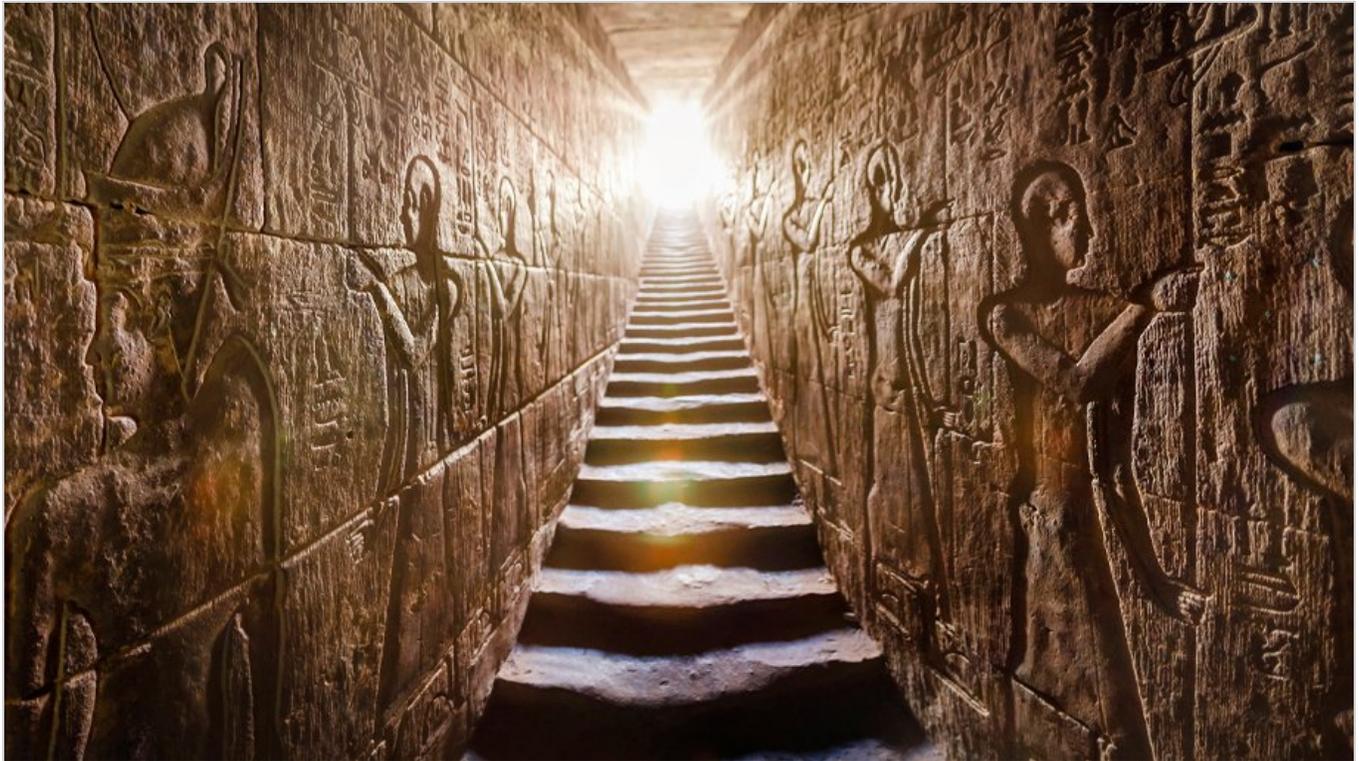
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What's Open Now in Cairo

Egypt is open to US travelers and its capital, Cairo awaits with freshly re-opened luxury hotels, museums and awe-inspiring monuments

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by Gretchen Kelly



*Ed Note: As international travel begins to recover, Business Traveler USA is exploring opportunities now available to US travelers in Morocco, Turkey, Egypt and beyond, with Kenn Laya, CEO of **Vuitton Travel**, (<https://vuittontravel.com>) a bespoke travel concierge service.*

In **the third installment** (<https://www.business-traveler.com/business-traveler-usa-story/talking-turkey-cappadocia-and-beyond>) of this four-part series, Kenn guided us through regions of Turkey beyond.

Today's adventure takes us to Egypt, which is open for tourism from the US. Kenn outlines what it takes to get there, and shares the best of what's open in Cairo to put on your must-do list.

BT: What is the safest, easiest way for Americans to travel to Egypt now?

Laya: I would recommend **Egypt Air**, (<https://www.egyptair.com>) a Star Alliance member, it is the most direct service with flights from Washington, New York and Toronto. As COVID-19 recovery expands that network of flights may increase.

To fly Egypt Air, you must have a COVID-19 negative test 48 hours ahead of time and wear a mask on board. The airline is taking steps to socially distance flights. They are not selling capacity flights at the moment. The New York to Cairo route features the Dreamliner.

Once you get to Cairo there will be a health check for foreign nationals. If you show signs of being ill (a temperature), you will be given a COVID-19 test. If you are negative, you can enter the country. If you are positive you will be quarantined in a hotel or other accommodation and be treated.

BT: How do you get your clients from the airport to the city safely?

Laya: I only do private travel in Egypt, so I do not do large groups. You won't be in a bus filled with strangers on a day tour to the pyramids. You will have your dedicated driver in a COVID-19 safe vehicle with a field coordinator. All the staff I work with have a rigorous COVID-19 hygiene training.

At the hotel, the field coordinator shares your schedule and arranges a pick-up time in the morning where you will meet your private tour guide who will also be an accredited English-speaking Egyptologist.

BT: What hotels are open in Cairo now that you are recommending to your clients?

Laya: I have several properties that I use up and down the Corniche. **The Four Seasons Hotel Cairo at Nile Plaza** (<https://www.fourseasons.com/caironp/>) is my first choice. It is in Garden City, right on the Nile, so you will see the white sails of the feluccas at sunset. It is also in a very upmarket area surrounded by foreign embassies. The hotel is open at a soft opening capacity (50 percent occupancy) as are all the hotels in Cairo, although spa services are not yet open.

The next hotel I favor is the **Kempinski Nile Hotel Garden City Cairo.**

(<https://www.kempinski.com/>) It is another luxury hotel with a pool that has an uninterrupted view of the Nile. Kempinski is such an elegant brand and they have some amazing restaurants on that property.



I also like **The InterContinental Cairo Semiramis.**

(https://www.ihg.com/intercontinental/hotels/gb/en/cairo/croha/hoteldetail?cm_mmc=GoogleMaps_-_IC_-_EG_-_CROHA) It is a large, very opulent property with a fabulous pool deck with a view right on the Nile: one of my favorite spots in Cairo.

There is also the **Nile Ritz Carlton Hotel.**

(<https://www.ritzcarlton.com/en/hotels/middle-east/cairo>) It used to be the old Hilton. It was gutted and refurbished and turned into an exquisite property. Rooms have a view of the Nile from your bedroom or rooms with views of the Egyptian Museum at Tahrir Square. Note that although the spa space is remarkably lovely it is currently closed.

I also recommend two more hotels in Cairo further up the Corniche.

The Conrad Cairo (<https://conradhotels3.hilton.com/en/hotels/egypt/conrad-cairo-CAICICI/about/index.html>) is a nice property and has reopened. And if you're

someone that loves atmosphere you can't do better than the new **St. Regis Cairo.** (<https://www.marriott.com/hotels/travel/caixr-the-st-regis-cairo/>) The chandeliers in the property are mind-blowing and the water features – indoor and outdoor pools – are too. The attention to detail at the property is breathtaking. You open up your closet in your bedroom, and the back of the closet has been wallpapered in beautiful motifs. The signature design motif of the property is the Egyptian papyrus. It feels like a storybook place of a Sultan.

BT: Along with the Corniche, are there other properties in the city that you

recommend to high-end travelers?

Laya: Zamalek is a charming neighborhood on Gezirah Island, which is an island in the middle of the Nile. It is also home to the Cairo Opera and to charming, winding little streets that I encourage clients to go and get lost in because they are fabulous and in a safe and comforting neighborhood.

Here, I recommend the **Sofitel Cairo Nile El Gezirah**, (<https://sofitel.accor.com/hotel/5307/index.en.shtml>) an Accor property. It is around on the southern tip of the island that looks like it is floating on the Nile. The views are stunning. The guest areas are stunning. The outdoor areas are stunning with places for hookah smoking, restaurants, bathing areas and an infinity pool that looks like it is one with the Nile.

Even if you don't stay there, go there for a lunch and sit outdoors and have a fabulous lunch. The property has a French feel to it (Accor is a French company) and French President Emmanuel Macron stays there when he is in Cairo.

Across the bridge in Giza I recommend the **Four Seasons Hotel Cairo at the First Residence**. (<https://www.fourseasons.com/cairofr/>) This is my personal favorite when I'm in Cairo.

What I like about this hotel is the building was not constructed to be a hotel. It was constructed to be apartments. When you walk into the property it immediately feels intimate, as if it is your own private home in Cairo. Rooms are always immaculate. A suite gives you a huge living room, a dining room table, a guest bathroom, hallways with mirrors and fresh flowers. I always stay in a Diplomatic Suite at the hotel, and I feel that I have my own little apartment in the city, a special place in Cairo.

There are great dining options and just recently they have launched the First Nile boat, which does not sail but is moored permanently at the Nile edge at the property. The boat has restaurants like a Brazilian grill and a Greek taverna. There is outdoor and indoor dining. They are currently open but with health and safety spacing.



The last hotel I would consider is the **Marriott Mena House Cairo.**

(<https://www.marriott.com/hotels/travel/caimn-marriott-mena-house-cairo/>) It was an old hunting lodge where famed travelers like Winston Churchill stayed. It is the closest hotel to the pyramids. There is no better peak experience than waking up in the morning and gasping at seeing the pyramids.

If you don't stay at the property, you can just go to the hotel restaurant and bar and soak up the atmosphere of old Cairo that will make you feel like you walked into a movie like *The English Patient* that featured the now defunct but legendary Shepheard's hotel. Just pretend you can't see the big red Marriott sign and you could be in the time of Howard Carter and the discovery of Tutankhamen.

In fact, one of my favorite resources in Cairo is Tarek Lotfy who works at the property and has archived all the famous guests who have been to the hotel. He is a wonderful host for a private tour of the Mena House and has been at the hotel when it was a former Oberoi property.

BT: What is currently open and available to see?

Laya: The Pyramid Complex and the Sphinx at the Giza Plateau are all open and are without question one of the most important sights in Cairo.

I wake up my clients and drive them to the Giza plateau, out of sight from the normal tourist routes. We have a private breakfast set up on the lawn in the Sphinx garden. When you've eaten you walk from the garden to the entrance to the Sphinx enclosure to go between the paws where the curator of the Giza Plateau meets you and give you a 20 minute lecture on the complex.



There are also restaurants at the pyramids like Nine Pyramids Lounge where you can eat, sitting on pillows, at an open-air restaurant facing the pyramids.

BT: Is the Grand Egyptian Museum open?

Laya: The GEM will not be open till 2021 (when we are launching a special private tour with a legendary Egyptologist and former curator) but the classic Egyptian Museum located in Tahrir Square is currently open. There are also less touristed sites that are open like the Step Pyramid at Sakkara. A few weeks ago, archaeologists uncovered 27 ancient coffins that are in as perfect shape as the day they were buried.

While you are in Sakkara you should also visit the Tomb of Mehu. It was discovered in 1944 but remained closed to the public until 2018 and is in immaculate condition. You can also visit the ancient capital of Memphis and see the Serapeum, an underground labyrinth of tombs for the sacred Apis bulls.

Finally, in that area are two places rarely visited and opened recently. Further to the south there is Dashur where you can see The Red Pyramid, which is actually almost red. There is also the Bent Pyramid (2600 BC) named because it is bent on the edges.

BT: How about within the city?

Laya: You'll want to go to Coptic Cairo. It is an area in the city in which you'll see the Hanging Church. It is a church built on pillars, so it looks as if it is suspended in air. There is also the Church of St. Sergius and Bacchus, where it is believed that the Holy Family stayed when they journeyed to Egypt.

In the same area is the Ben Ezra synagogue. Legend has it that the synagogue was built on the site where the baby Moses was hauled out of the Nile River.

Further along you need to go to the Citadel and the Mosque of Muhammad Ali which was built by Saladin in 1176. You will find beautiful views of the city from the Citadel. Do not miss the Museum of Islamic art and Prince Mohamad Palace, now a museum filled with thrones and jewels.

Abdeen Palace Museum is a historic Cairo palace that has newly opened and been completely renovated, much in the style of the palace of Versailles. It is the official residence and the principal workplace of the President of Egypt and it is like walking through Buckingham Place.

BT: How should you say farewell to such a legendary city?

Laya: I take my clients down to the shoreline of the Nile and put them on a felucca cruise. Feluccas are those light and lovely wind-powered sail boats that float on the Nile like white swans.

For an hour-and-a-half, you cruise around the basin of the Nile as day turns into night. I use a felucca cruise catered by The Four Seasons so I know my clients will have a safe and sanitary, peak experience with snacks and drinks that you can enjoy as you watch the sun set over an ancient landscape.

Then I take clients to El Moez Street which you can only access by one of the gates of the old city into historic Cairo. At night that's when people in Cairo go out.

I end my client's time in Cairo with farewell dinner at the Naguib Mahfouz café, a full, sit-down restaurant operated by Oberoi. Then we have a nightcap and coffee at Fishawi's, the oldest coffee shop in Cairo and the best place for people watching. It is a memorable location for a farewell toast to an unforgettable city that is proud of its response to COVID-19 and its commitment to safe travel.

CEO of Vuitton Travel, Kenn Laya is also the author of **“How to Plan an Unforgettable Journey to Egypt”**
([https://img1.wsimg.com/blobby/go/ca5161de-d562-4144-a7a2-ad95a4f2b9ea/downloads/How to Plan an Unforgettable Journey in Egypt.pdf?ver=1600641008374](https://img1.wsimg.com/blobby/go/ca5161de-d562-4144-a7a2-ad95a4f2b9ea/downloads/How%20to%20Plan%20an%20Unforgettable%20Journey%20in%20Egypt.pdf?ver=1600641008374))