

# cairo

DISCOVER THE NEW, OLD KINGDOM

BY JEN ROSE SMITH



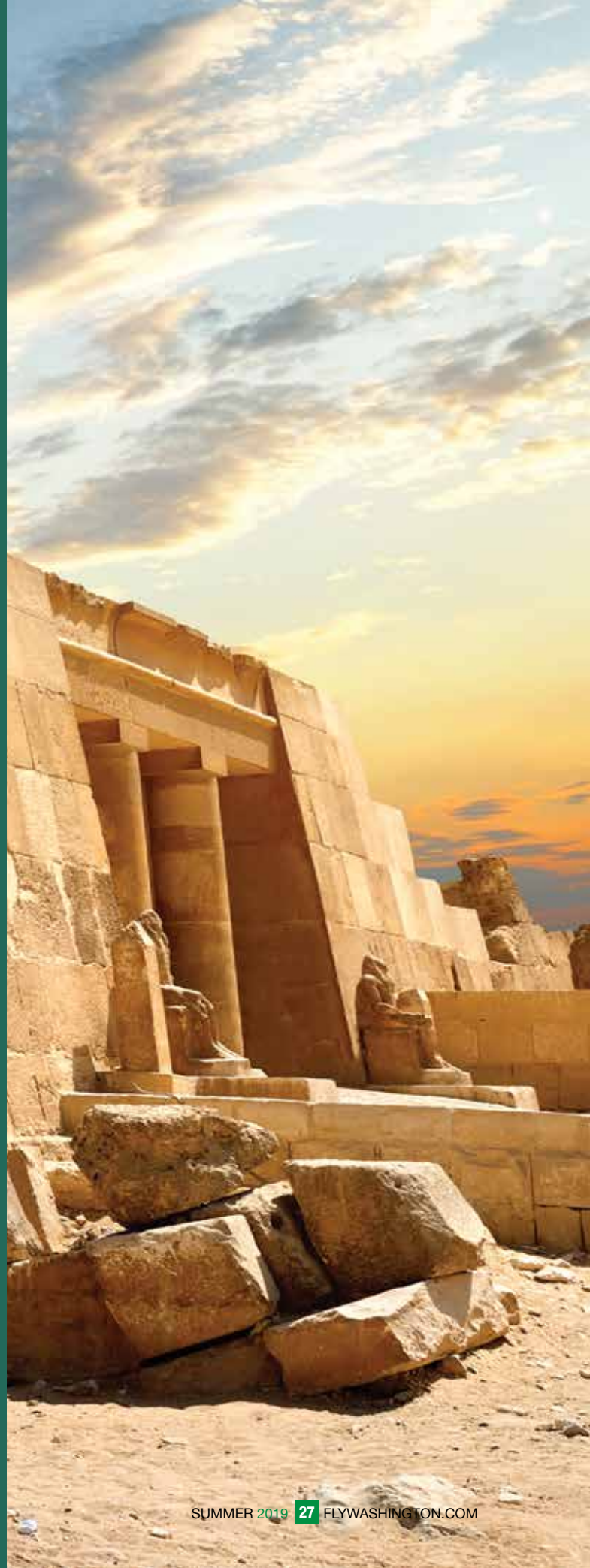
## ANCIENT HISTORY PROVES FERTILE GROUND FOR CREATIVE CULTURE IN THIS NILE-SIDE CITY

When the billion-dollar Grand Egyptian Museum opens in Giza in 2020, Egypt's oldest treasures will gleam within a brand new frame. In the soaring, modernist atrium, you'll be face-to-face with the monumental Colossus of Ramses II, a 3,200-year-old statue lost to the sands for millennia. Wander the adjacent galleries to find everything from a gilded chariot to King Tut's jeweled sandals, both newly restored to a high shine. All told, 100,000 artifacts create a history-making elegy for one of the world's great civilizations, and the museum's blend of archaic and innovative is a fitting tribute to Cairo itself.

Cairo's streets also invite a kind of creative time travel, thanks to an eclectic cityscape of ancient pyramids, Ottoman mosques, Art Deco facades, Coptic churches, and modern skyscrapers. You can start the day browsing hand-woven kaftans at a sprawling market, and pause for coffee in an 18th-century café before checking out contemporary art galleries and colorful street murals simmering with creative energy. Skip across the Nile to the Giza Plateau to lock eyes with the Great Sphinx, then, visit the city's first food hall for new takes on Egyptian street food.

Even in the realm of the Old Kingdom, new discoveries keep Egypt fresh, and the charismatic capital rewards inquisitive travelers with a vibrant history, diverse culture, and young energy.

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## WONDER

Sole survivor of the ancient world's seven wonders, the **Great Pyramid of Giza** has astonished travelers for more than 4,500 years. Exploring that towering monument — the world's tallest structure for millennia — is a Cairo essential. At the **Giza Plateau**, go full explorer by riding a camel around the base of the three main pyramids; the Great Pyramid is flanked by the **Pyramid of Khafre** and the **Pyramid of Menkaure**. Next, pause at the feet of the mysterious **Sphinx**. With the head of a human and a lion's body, the colossus is carved from a single, massive piece of limestone.

Monumental as they are, these tombs are just a hint of Egypt's ancient riches. Peer even deeper into the past at the necropolis of **Saqqara**, 20 miles south of Cairo, where you'll find the oldest pyramid on earth. With chunky steps and a flat roof, the **Pyramid of Djoser** shows how ancient architects worked towards the smooth lines that you saw at Giza — and there's even more hidden beneath the sands here. In 2018 a **royal tomb**, untouched for 4,400 years, was opened to the public, revealing brightly painted statues, floor-to-ceiling hieroglyphs, and five shafts whose treasures have yet to be excavated.

## SHOP

The maze-like and marvelous **Khan el-Khalili bazaar** is a knot of colorful stalls and shops in Islamic Cairo, where merchants have been striking deals for centuries. There are both treasures and trinkets here, and it's worth the trip just to soak in the vendors' silky-smooth patter as you wander twisting lanes.

Skip the stuffed camel souvenirs and aim for unique gifts like a leather-bound travel journal at **Abd El Zaher**, one of Khan el-Khalili's historic shops. The family-owned bookbinders will emboss your purchase with golden arabesques or your initials. Pause for a cup of freshly squeezed pomegranate juice from a roadside vendor, then, continue into the heart of the market to browse hand-woven carpets, delicate blown glass, and pottery from the Fayoum oasis.

Downtown hustle gives way to tree-shaded streets in **Zamalek**, a neighborhood on an island in the middle of the Nile River. This is where to experience Cairo shopping at its most stylish and rub shoulders with the city's creative class. Bring home a bit of their inimitable style by stocking your wardrobe with sleek kaftans and embroidered handbags by Egyptian designers at **Mounaya Gallery**, then head to **Azza Fahmy** to check out a gleaming collection of artisan-made jewelry. If not making the epic journey to the Siwa Oasis in the western desert, the next best thing is a trip to **Siwa Creations**, where you can find dreamy, woven robes that look like they're straight from Scheherazade's closet.

## GET INSPIRED

Rich detailing and lattice-work on the sand-colored facade of the **Museum of Islamic Art** hint at a trove within, and the landmark museum delivers with one of the world's greatest collections. Treasures from palaces and mosques fill 25 galleries, flaunting the remarkable breadth of Islamic artwork. Head to the north wing to follow Cairo's own art and architecture through chronological exhibits, then, continue into the south wing for a look at Islamic art from outside of Egypt. Here, you'll find wildly decorative calligraphy, screens, and ceramics by artisans from Istanbul to Iran.

Not that Cairo's art scene is stuck in the past — anything but. To encounter the creative minds of today, visit **Ubuntu**, a gallery in the Zamalek neighborhood with an eclectic mix of emerging artists and established names such as sculptor Halim Yacoub. Rotating, bimonthly exhibitions bring fresh energy, along with the chance to learn the who's who of Egyptian artists like Abdelrahman Elborgy and Eman Barakat before they get big on the international market.

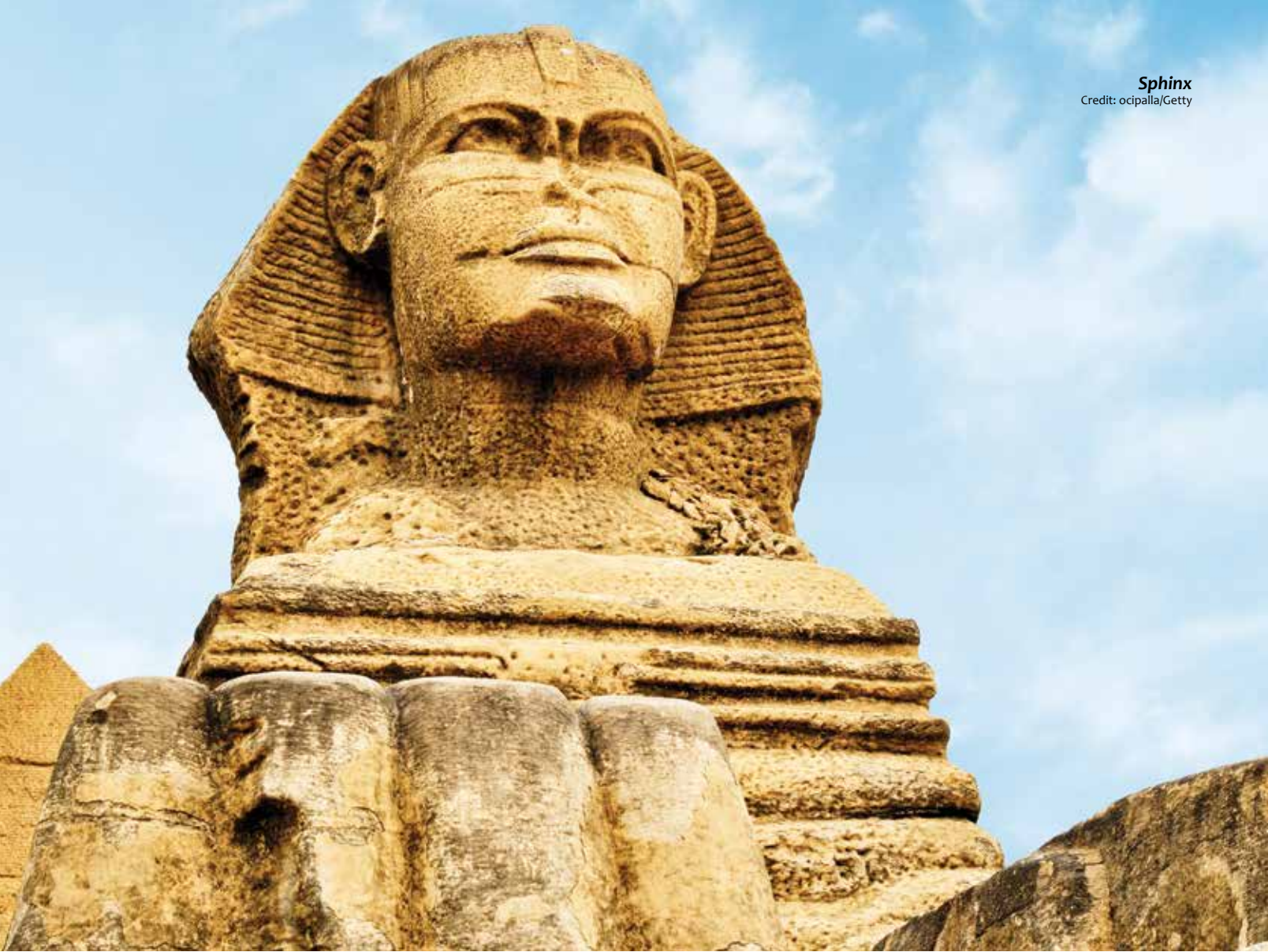
Just one block away is **SafarKhan**, a gallery founded by Egyptian art maven Sherwet Shafei. While you'll find plenty of young work here, Shafei's deep roots in the local art world keep the displayed work rooted in Cairo's creative tradition. Before leaving Zamalek, make a final stop at **Al Masar Gallery**, where the spotlight shines on modern and contemporary art. A long list of celebrated artists such as Sami Aboul Azm, Hazem Taha Hussein, and Ibrahim El Dessouki are represented on the walls of this gallery, which features beautifully curated solo exhibitions as well.

## SAVOR

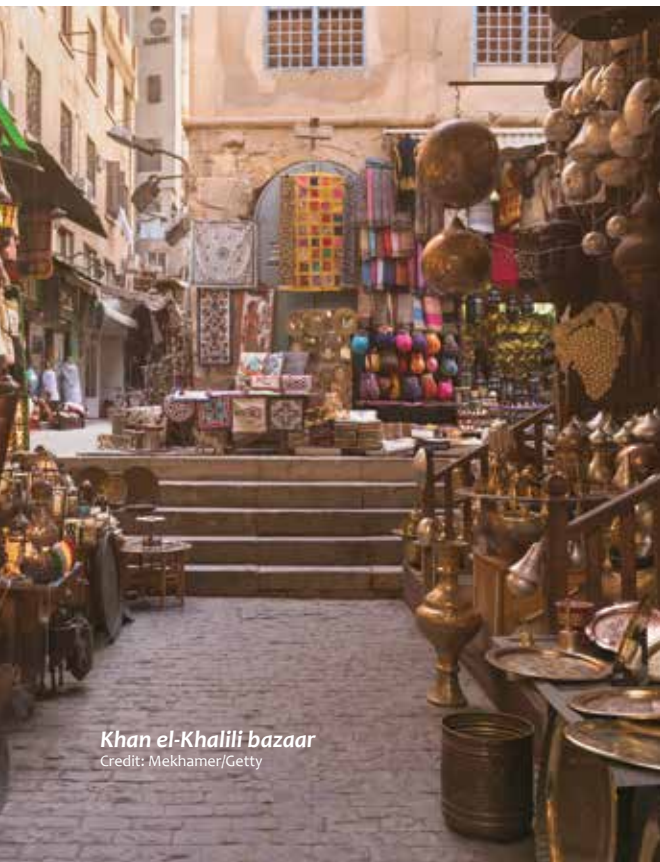
Cairo's café culture means tiny glasses of Arabic coffee, sipping sweet hibiscus tea, and endless conversation — this is the place to settle into a corner table and watch the world drift by. Start with **El-Fishawi Café**, founded in 1797, inside Khan el-Khalili bazaar. The brisk waiters have served everyone from Napoleon to Naguib Mahfouz, a Nobel Prize-winning Egyptian novelist who penned loving tributes to his city's coffee shops. Keep up the literary theme at downtown's **Café Riche**, a writers' haunt since the doors opened in 1908. Faded portraits of Cairo intellectuals line the walls, adding to the spot's dusty charm; time seems to stand still as regulars sip chilled Sakara Gold beers under lumbering ceiling fans.

For the main event head, cross the Nile River to Giza, where the new **Zaitouna Food Hall** gathers the city's buzziest flavors under a single roof. Walls are decked with bright murals and greenery, there's a kids' play area, and dining options range from Lebanese plates to Egyptian classics. A highlight is the reimagined Cairene street food at **Zaza**. This is the perfect place to try feteer, a layered pastry loaded with butter and savory fillings, but you can also sample the spicy sausage, sogok, and taste shewerma roasted over glowing coals.





**Sphinx**  
Credit: ocpalla/Getty



**Khan el-Khalili bazaar**  
Credit: Mekhamer/Getty



**Khan el-Khalili bazaar**  
Credit: efesenko/Getty

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## SLEEP

Sharing the streets with honking taxis, donkey carts, and the bustle of 20 million people leaves travelers craving an escape from the urban noise. Fortunately, you can sleep like a pharaoh in Cairo, whether you're looking for a chic, Nile-side getaway or you want to luxuriate in more historic digs.

For an updated take on Cairo hospitality, soak up the African sunshine by a rooftop pool at the **Kempinski Nile Hotel**. You can watch the triangular white sails of traditional feluccas ferries on the Nile River, or just stay in for an afternoon nap on Egyptian cotton sheets. Its location in the Garden City neighborhood means blissfully quiet mornings here, but you're still just a 10-minute walk to the Egyptian Antiquities Museum in Tahrir Square.

With a royal location near the Giza Pyramids, the **Marriott Mena House** is among the city's most storied hotels. Built on the site of an Ottoman hunting lodge, it welcomed its first travelers 1886 and has hosted royalty, presidents, and Hollywood stars ever since. Book one of the hotel's pyramid suites and to sip your morning coffee on a balcony that overlooks swaying palms and the Great Pyramid.

And if you're just touching down, **The Gabriel Hotel** is a convenient and stylish pied-à-terre in Heliopolis, a high-end neighborhood that abuts the international airport. Modern design is front and center here, from jet-black bathrooms to contemporary artwork in the glow of delicate chandeliers. Kid-friendly amenities make this a comfortable spot for families — but night owls can join an attractive crowd at the see-and-be-seen rooftop bar, complete with DJ-spun music, craft cocktails, and shisha pipes.

## GETTING THERE

**EgyptAir will begin nonstop round-trip flights from Dulles International Airport (IAD) to Cairo International Airport (CAI) three times per week starting June 3, 2019, aboard a Boeing 787-9 Dreamliner. Upon arrival in Cairo, reach the city by taxi, shuttle, or bus.**



**Teahouse in Cairo**  
Credit: efesenko/Getty



**Pyramid of Djoser**  
Credit: MarcPo/Getty