# FEATHERLIGHT TOURISM

Egypt's Nature-and-Community-Based Tourism Guide

featherlight
Travel Egypt on a light footprint

## WHY A FEATHERLIGHT GUIDE BOOK FOR EGYPT?

Egypt has always been one of the major tourism spots in the world – the many guidebooks on the shelves are a clear indication. So why did we feel the need to add just another one to the already existing collection? The Featherlight team sees that Egypt has more to offer than the many books even begin scratching the surface of. We want to shed light on, and propose a somewhat different way of truly experiencing this unique country. There exists a more environmentally friendly, socially inclusive, and economically beneficial (to the local communities) method by which to travel, made possible for Egyptians and foreigners alike. This guidebook is Featherlight's presentation to you, of all the pathways to a taste of the true Egypt.

## WHICH KIND OF TOURISM IS CAPTURED BY FEATHERLIGHT?

When searching for the right branding of what we wanted to promote, we came across a universe of labels, wordings and definitions: responsible, sustainable, green, alternative, nature or community tourism, or just "eco-tourism" – but none of the terms fully captured the essence of what we wanted to say. So after spending some time thinking, our team decided to stay away from the labels altogether, and concentrate on the actual content. Then came the following question: What characterizes a lodge, an activity, or operator as suitable to be featured within the Featherlight campaign? And to answer this pressing question, we had to clearly identify our purpose.

Our primary objective is to keep the negative impact of tourism low enough that the country may still be able to sustain both the environmental and the local communities it entails. Reducing waste production levels, regulat-

ing water and energy usage, minimizing human impact on natural ecosystems (e.g. corals in the red sea), and preserving local cultural and historic heritage, are all things that every tourist in Egypt should be actively wary of.

However, tourist wariness is not Featherlight's sole objective. Featherlight, more importantly, aims at inducing proactive impacts, mainly by providing local communities with newer and better jobs, through which they could earn higher incomes. This financing of the local communities directly corresponds to local tourism's elevation of the economic value of the country's natural sites and biodiversity. As proactive tourists, the Featherlight Travel Guide's readers contribute to the conservation of Egyptian communities by buying authentic local crafts, travelling to regions that do not profit from tourism flows yet, as well as staying in places that are run by local management teams. In doing this, not only would Egypt benefit tremendously, but so would the tourists, having experienced the genuine Egyptian experience.

Now, given our clearly stated objective, the Featherlight team collaborated in a search for all the places, people, and products in Egypt that would guarantee that you would receive a unique travel experience. Travel entails far more than mere commercial and mainstream tourism; travel entails effective learning and a widening of one's horizon. Travelling the Featherlight way enables mind changing experiences, and a direct knowledge of one's hosts and surroundings. Featherlight challenges you to open your eyes to a whole new definition of Egypt!

Travelling the Featherlight way is by no means the only way by which to experience Egypt in a sustainable manner. Our purpose is simply to introduce mainstream travellers to an alternate option (such as the Green Star Hotel Initiative). Travelling responsibly has the power to both prevent serious environmental hazards, as well as proactively contribute to a country's economic development by way of tourism.

## HOW DID WE COLLECT AND FILTER THE CONTENTS?

When preparing for this project we decided that the most efficient means by which to gather information would be to create for ourselves a diverse Egyptian community, who collectively possess a cumulative knowledge of Egypt. We brought this community together through the Internet, through communicating with Egyptian locals, tour guides, as well as the tourists themselves. And since we all now live in a globally connected, online world, we also asked our indirect global audience for suggestions and input through Facebook. However, seeing as how we were unable to physically visit all the places mentioned in this guidebook, we want to blatantly inform you that all the featured locations are NOT the equivalent to any standard or label for eco-tourism.

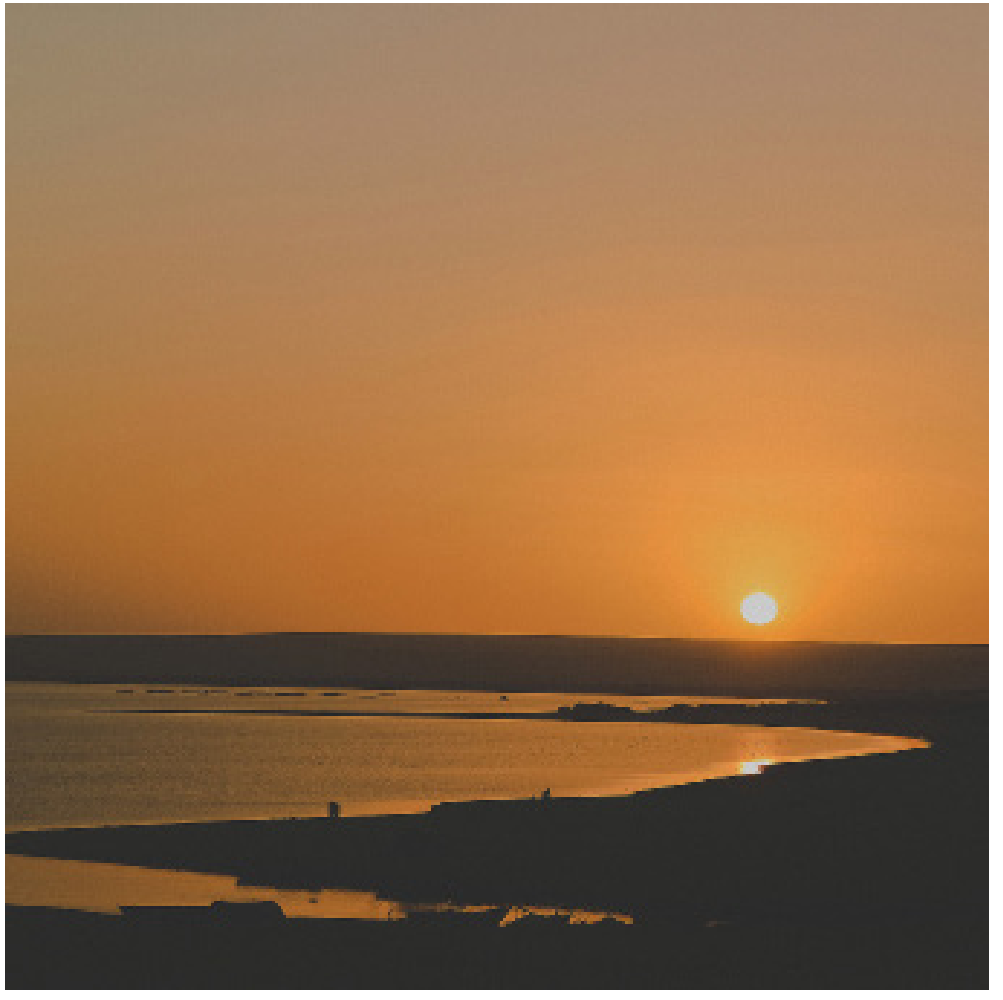
Surveying Egypt, we do not believe that setting a rigid criteria (e.g. the place's provision of 80% renewable energy supply plus 100% irrigation through wastewa-

ter, etc.) would currently be the most useful rubric upon which to decide on the places that are to be featured in our Featherlight guidebook. The fact stands that there are fantastic places that are trying hard to maintain a lighter footprint while also remaining economically viable. Such places need all the support and contribution from all the environmentally concerned, "green" tourists, in order for them to pick up momentum in their objectified direction. Such are the places that are sure to be listed in the following pages of this guidebook.

Having understood the criterion upon which our decisions were made, we highly welcome and encourage your comments, in case you feel as though any of the featured information is not in harmony with all the community based travel that we described. We hope that you will receive all the inspiration that you need to travel "Featherlight" and truly experience Egypt!

# FAYOUM

Got a free weekend and had enough of the Cairo chaos? Traveling just 180 kilometers south of Cairo will take you to an oasis of diverse landscapes; from wonderful green fields to barren desert, it's all in Fayoum. The region is famous for its lush fields and orchards, making a good place to revel in fresh produce. With equilibrium between vegetation, desert, history and civilization, thelifeline of this fertile basin is Lake Qarun, probably Egypt's oldest lake. The nature reserve is not only home to large numbers of migratory birds, but also to many rare animals, and makes for a beautiful picnic spot. Tucked away further along the lake is Tunis village: small, quiet, and perfect for a lazy wander, with lots of pottery workshops to explore. Your visit to Fayoum's countryside shouldn't stop here as there are many similar hamlets around the lake and each is known for its local crafts. A 10 km drive away from Tunis, the lush oasis around lake Qarun suddenly changes into barren desert – Wadi Rayan and the UNESCO World Heritage Site Wadi Hitan begin to unfold.



# WADI EL RAYAN

Situated in Egypt's Western desert, Wadi el Rayan is a nature reserve 42 meters below sea level named after King El Rayan Ibn El Walid, who lived in the area with his army. Wadi el Rayan itself is home to two lakes, which were formed in 1973 as a result of excess agricultural drainage water from the Fayoum region. Since then, extensive reed beds have formed around the shoreline, creating  a haven and breeding spot for many fish and migratory water birds. It is a perfect spot to watch birds. Wadi el Rayan has two fairly large lakes, connected by a little river and is home to Egypt's only waterfalls.

## CLIMB GABAL EL MODAWARA

Around 10 km into Wadi el Rayan reserve, Gabal el Modawara is the definition of beauty. A hike up the peak yields a view that will easily take your breath away and it's a great spot for bird-watching, particularly if you plan to catch a glimpse of eagles or falcons. At the base of the mountain is the Magic Lake and if you linger awhile you'll be rewarded with stunningly beautiful sunsets. Just be careful when climbing down in the dark.

## VISIT THE WATERWHEELS

Waterwheels have provided Fayoum with a prominent source of economic aid. The waterwheels make a way for river water to be elevated and transported to the fields, creating a means by which the lands could be irrigated. There are around 200 waterwheels in Fayoum, and trips can be arranged for visitors to take a look at the ancient technology for themselves (that is of course, if they don't come across them by simply strolling through Fayoum's streets!)

## DESERT CAMPING & HIKING

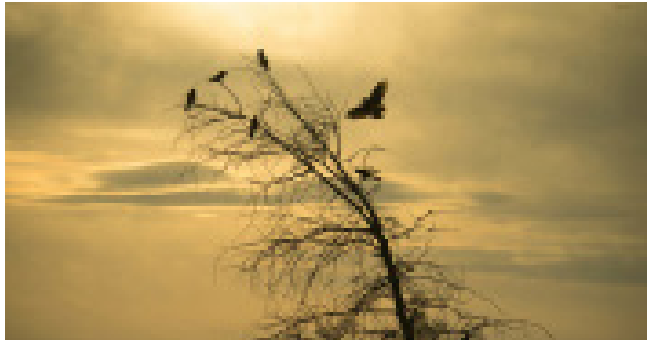
Spend the night at a wilderness campsite in an area that millions of years ago was covered by the sea. The Wadi el Hitan campsite offers natural beauty, barbeque and clean toilet facilities. Just bring your own equipment and firewood and enjoy the fine weather year round.

Cool weather in the winter makes hiking nice, with dramatic cloud formation. October through April are the best months for hiking, trekking and sandboarding as the summer months can be very hot in the desert. There are a number of routes up the hills and soft sands and dunes make for soothing views.

You can also contact the Zwara lodge to organize camping equipment for you.

## CYCLING

Fayoum is a biker's heaven! If you want a smooth, chill ride take your bike on a trip around Lake Qarun. There are no steep hills, just flat land and a scenic route. For those that are up for more of a challenge, there is always the desert where you can take a ride around Gabal el Midawara or to famous Wadi el Hitan. For more specific trip suggestions, contact Bececletta or cycle Egypt.



## BIRDWATCHING

Lake Qarun beside Wadi el Rayan is a central spot for birdwatching in Fayoum. The lake is of international importance for migratory birds that winter there such as waterbirds including the Black-necked Grebe, Podiceps nigricollis, and the Northern Shoveller, Anas clypeata. For detailed information or contacts of professional birdwatchers, contact Nature Conservation Egypt.

## VISIT QASR QARUN ON DECEMBER 21ST

Qasr Qarun was built in the location of the ancient town of Dionysias, which was the beginning point of the caravan route to the Bahariya Oasis. This impressive monument was built between 323 and 330 BC during the Ptolemaic period and it flourished in the Roman era. On the 21st of December of every year, the sun falls perpendicularly over the palace and the people of Fayoum celebrate this incident for two consecutive days.

## SANDBOARDING

Surf the dunes of the beautiful desert of Fayoum. No experience is needed as there are plenty of tour operators offering courses. If you're already a pro, it is recommended to bring your own equipment, get a local Bedouin guide, which can be organized via your lodge and let him guide you to his favorite dune.

## WADI EL HITAN / VALLEY OF THE WHALES

The Valley of the Whales is a UNESCO heritage site 40 km into Wadi el Rayan. It is home to 400 remains of primitive whales, a petrified forest and many other fossils that have been found within the 25-square-kilometer stretch. As of late, an open air museum with an audio-visual theater, as well as a fossil museum that displays the interesting findings of the area that was once covered in water.
Visitors can reach the destination by four-wheel-drive vehicles or their own cars, which are provided by many tour organizers or their own cars. The rest house of Hany Zaki is attached to the pen air museum and is the last point reachable by car before you proceed on foot or camel. By the way, it has clean toilet facilities.

**Zwara**

/ Zwara - زوارة

Zwara ecolodge has existed for over 30 years, and is run by experienced professionals in the North African desert and waters. Zwara is an ideal spot for memorable adventures for business travelers from all over the world. If you're lucky, you meet Amm Hussein. He collects the mountain salt in Wadi Rayan and carries it on his back all the way to Zwara lodge and other places around Lake Qarun to sell it.
Price: low

**Campsite at Wadi el Hitan**

/ Zwara - زوارة

The camp itself is a gem of a beautiful location and sympathetic design, with mud brick buildings housing clean facilities. You can bring your own tents or rent from the rest house. Contact Zwara lodge for more details.

## TUNIS VILLAGE

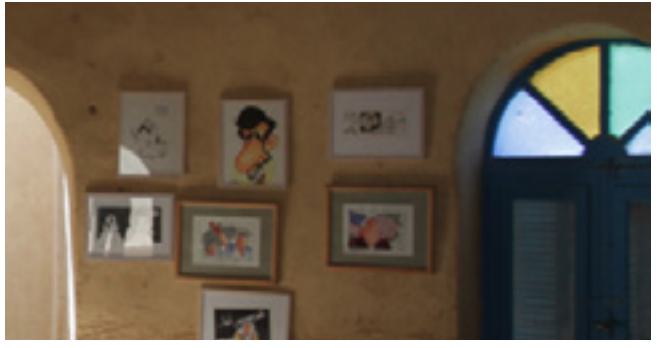
Fifteen years ago, two Swiss potters built a school to train locals in the art of pottery. The school has a very well-stocked shop selling all kinds of crockery inspired by the colors of the local landscape. The charming thing about Tunis village is that urban and local rural culture mix as Cairenes and foreign visitors and organizations converge on the tiny village now renowned for its unique pottery and community development. People are amazingly hospitable. Between the greenery and the old village buildings there are plenty of activities: bird-watching and tracking, horse and camel safaris, and things as simple as picnics by the beautiful lakes.

## HORSEBACK RIDING

The villages around Fayoum are perfect for horseback riding excursions. Most of the lodges in Tunis Village have contacts to locals who organize horseback riding tours or you can contact local tour operators to arrange a ride. While rides are easy to organize, not all owners treat their animals well so please make sure the horses look healthy and well cared for before taking off.

## ROW A BOAT ON LAKE QARUN

The lake is not only an important archeological site with a unique collection of fossil fauna and flora that datesback some 40 million years. It is also a beautiful body of water where you can enjoy by renting a boat and rowing out to play music, watch birds, or just enjoy the silence.



## VISIT THE CARICATURE MUSEUM

The artist colony has more to offer beyond pottery; the incredible Caricature Museum, curated by Mohammed Abla is housed in a beautiful adobe complex in Tunis Village. The main room with a large mud brick dome contains an excellent collection of caricatures and cartoons by Egypt's best-loved artists since the beginning of the 20th Century, as well as sculptures by locals.

## POTTERY SCHOOL

The most famous pottery school is found in Tunis Village founded by Evelyn Porret. Children as well as adults, beginners as well as experts, can apply for courses to learn about the craft of pottery and clay making. Situated in one of the most beautiful locations in Fayoum, Pottery School is a source of artistic inspiration in and of itself.

## POTTERY FESTIVAL

The village is host to a cheerful annual pottery festival, which every year draws more people. There are puppets, musicians and craftsmen displaying their works as well as opportunities for participants to create their own pottery.

## MEET LOCAL POTTERY PRODUCERS

Being the famous pottery source that it is, Tunis Village has many opportunities for visitors to meet with the local artisans and see how the clay is made, how the product is shaped, how the kilns work and how the solidified clay is painted and glazed before it is ready for sale. Just by strolling through the small village streets you can marvel at the beautiful creations and learn about these processes.

## KOM EL DIKKA

Kom El Dikka Agri Lodge

Kom El Dikka isa 45-acre olive farm on the hills of Tunis Village in Fayoum overlooking Lake Qarun. The 30-year old destination has recently been developed into an agri-tourism lodge that is organic and provides its visitors with a variety of activities such as bird watching, sailing, horseback riding, fruit and vegetable picking, animal petting in their very own zoo, hiking, jogging, sailing, duck migration observation, pottery schools, planting, arts and crafts, mountain bike riding, and boat rides on the lake.
Price: high



**Constructing Sustainably**

Constructing a lodge in an environmentally sensitive manner from the onset is the key to fully tap its "green" potential. In Egypt's hot climate this often means allowing for a radical cut in energy consumption through natural ventilation, isolating materials and high solar reflectance. It also means using local building materials which neither harm the environment in their production nor in transportation. At Kom El Dikka you can feel how this changes your experience: the founders did not only apply sustainable building techniques but also heavily rely on traditional architecture, decorations and furnishing.

Traditional mud walls isolate perfectly – keeping cool in summer and warm in winter

A wind catcher brings in a fresh breeze all day long. No need for an AC, even in summer.

Have a look at the traditional decorations making this lodge a special place.

A garden will calm you down after the hassle of Cairo. Wondering about irrigation in the desert? They use waste water recycling.

## ZAD EL MOSAFER

Zad ELMosafer (Guest House)

Zad El Mosafer is the first lodge that was established in the Fayoum province. It provides its visitors with a calm, tranquil environment full of authentic activities by which to create lasting memories and experiences. The rooms are furnished with simple furniture made of palm mid-rib. Almost all rooms have shared bathrooms. The lodge, however, also has some rooms with en suite bathrooms. Call them to check the availability.
Price: low

## ZELAL EL NAKHEEL / PALM SHADOW

fayoum-palmshadow.blogspot.com/

A peaceful, calm and green spot in the heart of Tunis. Palm Shadow offers housing, meeting and parking facilities, a professional catering service and a beautiful 4,000-square-meter garden, in which some of the vegetables for the kitchen are grown. The lodge offers four two-bedroom apartments and one beautifully decorated four-bedroom villa (suitable for six people). All units are fully equipped (kitchen, TV and free WIFI, etc.). All units have access to the roof, which offers a panoramic view over the village and Lake Qarun.
Price: medium

## SOBEK

Sobek Camp

Located in the heart of Tunis Village, Sobek Lodge features a garden and free Wi-Fi. Sobek Lodge has simple but spacious rooms with traditional furniture. Each room has a fan, a closet, and a private bathroom with shower.

Guests can enjoy organic, home-cooked food before visiting one of the nearby pottery workshops, shop in their beautiful little bazar, enjoy the view over lake Qarun, or take a dip in the pool. The owners are very helpful and try to accommodate their guests and can advise you where to get locally made products.

Price: low

## EL MANDARA LODGE

Kamariat Resort - El Mandara

The seven suite El Mandara Lodge is situated on the shore of Lake Qarun, just an hour and a half away from Cairo.The resort was previously a series of rundown buildings before being renovated using local, sustainable building materials including mud brick and palm fronds. El Mandara serves up traditional Egyptian cuisine, including locally-sourced fish, feteer and local honey.

Price: low

## BEIT SAAD

fayoum-palmshadow.blogspot.com

The house of Amm Saad is a small farm house in the beautiful village of Tunis. Since Tunis has developed into a tourist destination, more and more locals are refurbishing houses for rent. The two-story house features two bedrooms and a beautiful and clean bathroom on each floor. The ground floor has a well-equipped modern and clean kitchen with an adjacent living room, which is big enough to accommodate two more people. A beautiful terrace overlooking the small garden offers a view over lake Qarun. Book Amm Saad's house via Palm Shadow.
Price: low - medium

## RAWYA'S GUEST HOUSE

ecoegypt.net

Rawya, the potter, and her family live next to her workshop in Tunis. After having achieved quite a reputation with her pottery work, the family invested in the construction of a beautiful guest apartment on top of their house to accommodate visitors and people who want to learn the art of pottery. The apartment is fully equipped with a modern kitchen and bathroom facilities, has two bedrooms and a beautiful terrace. Contact EcoEgypt for bookings at her place.
Price: low

## HANDICRAFTS OF FAYOUM

As in many of the rural Egyptian communities, women are the main producers of arts and crafts in the Fayoum villages. Aside from pottery, the crafts typical of the area include palm leaf baskets, beaded jewelry, woven embroidery, tent embroidery, puppets, and leather. Fayoum crafts are mostly simple, seeing as how the crafter's main objective is to sell products for practicality and easy usability.

**Nazla Pottery Village**

Nazla Pottery Village Is located in the Nazla valley. The village is site of a project by Past Preservers to save the pottery-making practice that has been handed down from family to family for generations here. Nazla, other than Tunis produces the traditional local functional products.

**Desya Village**

Desya is famous for its handmade carpets of silk and the traditional material of goblan, an industry which has recently gone into decline. It is also famous for the Famous Touristic Coptic monastery, known as Prince Tadharos, which was built in the 18th Century.

**Khaltha – House of Textiles**

Khalta, is a small village on Lake Qarun, neighboring the better known village of Tunis. The women of Khalta decided to enter the patchwork business inspired by the pottery school that had tremendously increased the living standards of the people of Tunis. Ever since Swiss tailor, Doris Frei, has trained the women and together they established the Brand Khalta: Home Of Textiles. Currently they are constructing a green training center in the village to educate more women in the craft.

## FLORA AND FAUNA OF FAYOUM

Located just south of Cairo, the governorate of Fayoum is home to two protected areas, Wadi el Rayan National Park and Northern Lake Qarun Protected Area. Wadi el Rayan is one of the most popular national parks in Egypt, acting as a gateway to the Western Desert where rare animals like the white deer, the Egyptian deer, the sandfox, the nearly extinct slender-horned gazelle or the world's smallest fox, the fennec fox, can be found.

The National Park is also home to Wadi el Hitan, a UNESCO World Heritage Site that hosts a wide variety of marine fossils, most notably the fossilized remains of ancient whales. These fossilized remains are of particular global importance as they present the transition of whales from land mammals to marine mammals. The Protected Area of Northern Lake Qarun is known for its pristine natural landscapes, and is also of extreme archeological importance.

Fayoum is a haven for bird-watching in Egypt, as it combines a variety of habitats, including lakes and wetlands, deserts, as well as agricultural lands. Many migratory birds rest in Fayoum during their long journeys in autumn and spring, and many waterbirds spend their winters by Lake Qarun. About 162 species of migratory and resident birds were listed including: Flamingos, Herons, Waders, Ibis, Spoonbills, Shoveler ducks, Skylarks, Hoopoes and Bee-eaters. The best time to watch birds is mid-September through the end of April with the peak being from mid-December to the end of March.

## CONSIDER YOUR OWN RESPONSIBILITIES

To get the most out of your journey while traveling on a light footprint, consider not only staying at a lodge with eco-friendly facilities but also the way you travel. A few ideas on how you can be a responsible, featherlight tourist:

- **Get involved with people.** Whether you are Egyptian or an international tourist, there is a lot to be learned when you speak with your hosts, are open for a chat with residents and listen to their stories and recommendations. Who knows which hidden gems you might find?
- **Apply the basic rules of saving resources.** 95% of Egypt is covered by desert; saving water while showering or washing should be a daily habit. Moreover, Egyptian habitants suffer from major electricity cuts, especially in summer time. Remember that the most sustainable energy is the energy which is not being used – even if your lodge applies renewables.
- **Treat waste consciously**. Think twice when being offered plastic bags. Make use of recycling/ separation facilities if available. Take your own waste back with you, especially in the desert. Do the extra effort and pick up waste others left behind for the sake of the environment.
- **Buy local.** When looking for souvenirs, make use of the craft descriptions in this guide. They will help you to find the authentic goods that benefit local employment and incomes. Stay away from items made from endangered animals or pirated archaeological treasures. And if souvenirs are not your cup of tea, you can still contribute to local incomes by buying food and drink, trying the local way to brew and drink tea etc.
- **Be conscious of what you give.** When visiting popular touristic sites it is common to encounter children and adults asking for money, food or other handouts. Be mindful about the community and certain situations when giving something might create more harm than good. Ultimately, it's your personal decision. Regarding tipping, be aware that many professions and parts of

the informal economy are sustained in large part, or even entirely, through tips.

- **Dive into local culture.** Ask for local recipes – there are many varieties of cuisine depending on the region, village and even family, and there is so much more to be explored when leaving the capital. Learn and use a few words in local languages – if your Arabic is good, you can still go for Nubian or Siwan.
- **Respect people's privacy.** Dying to take the picture of that shop owner in front of his display? Ask permission first, only promise to send the photo if you intend to do so and do not be surprised if someone wants your picture or a photograph with you in return.

We hope you enjoy this guide and spent some wonderful time travelling Egypt. If you know of a place which is considered one of the best in Egypt and has not been included, please email us the name of the place or post it on our "Featherlight EG" Facebook page.

**Acknowledgements**

Many people have helped in the efforts of putting this guide together. We have relied heavily on many people and organizations in preparing it.

The Featheright Team wants to thank all participants in the ecolodge workshops and ecolodge meetups. Your contributions helped us understand the needs and hurdles of lodges in Egypt. We also want to thank all people who helped us with valuable contributions via Facebook, Email, or simple hints from colleagues and friends. Without you this guidebook wouldn't have been possible.

We especially thank the team of the Cairo Climate Talks for their constant support. They have been encouraging us throughout the way and giving us a platform to present the Featherlight Guide at the 29th Cairo Climate Talks in Cairo. A special thank is dedicated to Lindsey Parietti for her extensive editing work and her valuable assistance and comments.
http://cairoclimatetalks.net

We also want to thank the team of Nature Conservation Egypt that provided us with valuable insights into the Flora and Fauna of Egypt. Especially Noor Ayman was a great help through offering information on nature, birds, and bird-watching, which you now find throughout the guidebook.
http://www.natureegypt.org

Moreover we want to explicitly thank the team of Ayadi Masriya that explained to us the different crafts in each region, introduced us to beautiful products and provided the guide book with beautiful pictures from each destination.
http://www.amfegypt.org/

This work is published on the responsibility of the Private Sector Development Programme and the Responsible and Inclusive Business Hub MENA; The Egyptian-German Private Sector Development Programme (PSDP) is a bilateral technical cooperation programme under the guidance of the Egyptian Ministry for Trade, Industry and Small and Medium Enterprises (MTISME) with Technical Assistance provided by the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH, on behalf of the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ). RIBH . The opinions expressed and arguments employed herein are strictly the authors views and do not reflect the official views of GIZ or BMZ.

**For Reviews or new entries contact us on:**
**Email:** natalie.elassiouty@giz.de
**Facebook:** Feaherlight EG

**Imprint**

**Published by:**
Deutsche Gesellschaft für
Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH

**Registered offices:**
Friedrich-Ebert-Allee 40
53113 Bonn, Germany
Phone: +49 228 44 60-0
Fax: +49 228 44 60-17 66

Dag-Hammarskjöld-Weg 1-5
65760 Eschborn
Phone: +49 61 96 79-0
Fax: +49 61 79-11 15

Email: info@giz.de
Internet: www.giz.de

**Lead Authors:**
Responsible and Inclusive Business Hub MENA, Private Sector Development Programme, Basma Bishay, Sahra Gemeinder

**Edited by:**
Lindsey Parietti

**Photo credits:**
Bernhard Rohkemper, Watter Al Bahry, Mohamed Sedky

**Layout:**
Natalie El Assiouty

**Place and Date of Publication:**
Cairo, February 2015

**Printed and distributed by**
Deutsche Gesellschaft für
Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH

featherlight

Travel Egypt on a light footprint

Featherlight EG – is all about traveling Egypt on a light footprint. It aims to promote and power a more environmentally friendly and socially inclusive way of traveling Egypt. Featherlight EG offers networking space, marketing support, skill-development to tour operators, lodges, handicrafts producers and engaged NGOs. To make a difference, it also addresses the costumers: national and international tourists who want to travel Egypt on a light footprint. Featherlight EG evolved from a joint initiative of two GIZ programs* and community partners in various destinations in Egypt. Join us on this journey and let's show the world that there's a whole country to be explored. And the best, while exploring, you support Egyptian communities with all its treasures! #featherlightEG

*Responsible & Inclusive Business Hub (RIBH) MENA
and Private Sector Development Programme (PSDP)