

The best MARCO POLO Insider Tips

Our top 15 Insider Tips



INSIDER TIP Festival of festivals

Discover the country's colourful traditions and dances with the Characters of Egypt Festival and sample delicious Bedouin specialties and culinary delicacies → p. 105

INSIDER TIP Ahwa baladi – Egyptian coffee house culture

The *baladi* are places predominantly frequented by the locals and include the *ahwa*, an authentic Egyptian coffee house where you can smoke a shisha, drink tea or play backgammon – the ideal place to people watch → p. 27

INSIDER TIP Moorish mini resort

Backpacker charm and Egyptian hospitality characterise the Inmo mini resort with its Moorish architecture → p. 37

INSIDER TIP Medieval style designer fantasy

Chill out and relax in the elegant and stylish Castle Zaman perfectly located on a cliff above the sea → p. 40

INSIDER TIP Discover your inner

Picasso

Discover the rugged beauty of the Sinai through the eyes of an artist. Bassem Amer, a Bedouin leader and passionate painter, takes you to places where you can paint your own landscapes under his expert guidance → p. 36

INSIDER TIP Clubbing desert-style

A dramatic rock face and lunar landscape are the backdrop to the Echo Temple, or if you prefer you can dance the night away on the deck of the Pacha to the sounds of the waves → p. 46

INSIDER TIP Handicraft heaven

Unique and colourful arts and crafts are on offer by FanSina, Egypt's only autonomous Bedouin cooperative → p. 53

INSIDER TIP Turtles nesting

The nature and wildlife is just as important to the Mövenpick Resort El Quseir as its guests → p. 90

INSIDER TIP Live like the Bedouin

A 300 year old Gebalaya tribal village in the middle of mountainous terrain has been transformed into the Al-Karm Eco-lodge. After your hike to St Catherine's Monastery the simple dinner freshly prepared by the Bedouin tastes particularly delicious → p. 55

INSIDER TIP Kite power in El Gouna

On the northern tip of El Gouna is the kitesurfing hotspot of Mangroovy Beach. Both beginners and seasoned surfers will find the perfect conditions to enjoy one of the world's trendiest sports (photo below) → p. 69

INSIDER TIP Find your balance

A truly tranquil spot that lends itself to meditation and yoga is on the El Gouna Plateau. The location overlooks the St Catherine's Monastery, Dahab and Nuweiba and is the perfect setting to bring body and soul into harmony → p. 55

INSIDER TIP Fata Morgana on a high plateau

The unique ecosystem of the Gebel Elba summit rises out of the desert like a mirage → p. 89

INSIDER TIP Championship golf

South African golfing great Gary Player designed The Cascades, which is now one of the world's top golf courses (photo left) → p. 85

INSIDER TIP Tie the knot underwater

At Shagra Village divers can gear up and take the plunge in more ways than one when they tie the knot and say their vows in an underwater wedding – and the ceremony is legally binding → p. 88

INSIDER TIP Dining in the Valley of Camels

For an unforgettable and uniquely Middle Eastern dining experience – a sunset gourmet dinner in the Fustat Wadi El-Gemal traditional nomadic tented camp in the national park → p. 89



BEST OF ...

GREAT PLACES FOR FREE

Discover new places and save money

FOR FREE

● **Ecotourism**

Take part in the clean-up and monitoring campaign of the *Red Sea Environmental Centre* in Dahab and you'll broaden your marine knowledge in fun group activities that are free. You'll also be doing the ecology a good turn and will qualify for dive trips at special rates → p. 36

● **Mount Moses**

The biblical Ten Commandments were given to Moses on *Gebel Musa* making it one of the holiest sites for Christianity and Judaism. At the foot of the mountain is the Greek Orthodox St Catherine's Monastery where today only 20 monks still live. The World Heritage Site can be visited free of charge → p. 52

● **Swim and sauna as the Pharaohs did**

Hammam Fara'un means 'pharaoh's bath' and you too can swim in the hot sulphur spring water and relax inside the warm cave that makes for a natural sauna – all for free! → p. 59

● **An escapist's paradise**

Let the breathtaking mountain scenery and crystal clear water enchant you. The secluded beaches of *Nuweiba* lie far off the beaten track and do not belong to hotel complexes – and tours into the hinterland are also cheaper here (photo) → p. 38

● **Open air cinema**

Every Thursday at 7.30pm the *Renaissance open air cinema* in downtown El Gouna screens the latest international blockbusters under starry skies. A free and varied evening outing for singles, couples or the whole family → p. 73

● **Mirage on the Suez Canal**

A free spectacle that you can only experience here: sit by the sea shore at *Port Taufiq* and watch the massive oil tankers that seem to float like a mirage through the desert → p. 64

●●● Dots in guidebook refer to 'Best of ...' tips

ONLY IN THE RED SEA RESORTS

Unique experiences

● **Ana masri – I am Egyptian**

Now also a strong presence in the Red Sea: tee shirts with the Egyptian flag, plates, cups and bracelets with slogans of the revolution. Some may see them as kitsch but the Egyptians have every reason to be proud of their country. As a tourist why not purchase one in solidarity? → p. 29

● **Camel steak in a chocolate sauce**

Camel steak in a chocolate sauce, pigeon breast on truffle crêpes or pot roast water buffalo braised in Burgundy? Let Michelin star chef Thomas Bordiehn spoil you with his select creations – that combine traditional Egyptian ingredients with exquisite haute cuisine – at his high-end *Bordiehn's Restaurant* in Hurghada → p. 76

● **Sleeping sharks and mangroves**

The *Ras Mohammed National Park* has to be the most famous dive area in Egypt. It has colourful coral reefs, a stunning variety of fish, sunken shipwrecks and with a bit of luck you may even see some sleeping sharks on the sandy seabed. But if you aren't keen on a dive then a walk through the mangroves and a boat tour is also well worth it (photo) → p. 47

● **Live like a monk**

At the base of Mount Sinai is the *Mount Sinai Eco-lodge*, a lodge run by Bedouins as a retreat. It is off the grid and ideal for some reflection and peace and quiet. A monastery within walking distance makes fantastic homemade food which visitors eat in absolute silence → p. 56

● **Dive all day and party all night**

El Fanar Beach in Sharm El-Sheikh is a diver's paradise by day that turns into a party zone in the evening. The perfect combination for young adventure travellers and for those who are young at heart. Highly rated overall: be it the coral reefs in the day or the boisterous party nights → p. 45

● **Swaying hips and shimmying bellies**

Many hotels offer belly dancing classes but more often than not they have very little to do with the real thing. It's a different story entirely under the guidance of renowned professional dancer, *Keti Sharif*, in El Gouna → p. 71



ONLY IN

THE PERFECT ROUTE

Experience the diversity of the Red Sea all the way from Taba via Luxor to Soma Bay with small detours off the beaten track

CASTLES, PORTS, A FJORD AND A HIPPIE TOWN

The picturesque harbour town of **1 Taba** → p. 48 right in the north on the Gulf of Aqaba is the ideal departure point for a boat trip to the Pharaoh's Island, where you can view a derelict Crusader fortress. Only a short distance south is **2 Castle Zaman** → p. 40, a designer hotel and the perfect place to lounge by the pool with a drink in hand while soaking up the medieval atmosphere. 15 km/9mi south of Highway 35, that hugs the coastline, you'll reach the **3 Marsa Murakh** → p. 49 nature reserve. There you will find the inviting crystal clear waters and unspoilt coral reefs of the **4 The Fjord** → p. 49 – ideal for snorkelling and diving. Then continue on via *Ras Shaitan* (Devil's Head) where you'll find **5 Castle Beach Camp** → p. 40 with its secluded sandy beach before you head to **6 Nuweiba** → p. 38, a Goa-style hippie town.

THE DESERT, THE BEDOUIN AND BIBLICAL SITES

Highway 37 now branches off into the interior. When you reach the **7 Coloured Canyons** → p. 41 (photo above) leave your car and explore the fascinating valley on foot. Then head along main road number 36 to the biblical **8 'Ain Khudra Oasis** → p. 40, where you can set out with the Bedouin by camel along the pilgrim paths of antiquity to **9 White Canyon** → p. 40, a true marvel of nature. The route continues on number 36 right through the middle of the Sinai Desert leading to *Nabi Sahlih* and from there to the *St Catherine Nature Protectorate*. Must-see attractions here include **10 St Catherine's Monastery** → p. 52 and **11 Gebel Musa** → p. 57 (Mount Sinai), the biblical site of the Ten Commandments and the burning bush.

BY THE SEASIDE

On the coast is **12 Ras Abu Ghalum** → p. 38, one of Egypt's most biodiverse national parks. In atmospheric **13 Dahab** → p. 34 you can take a stroll along the seaside promenade, go windsurfing or enjoy culinary delights in *Friend's Restaurant*. After a short stop at **14 Nabq National Park** → p. 47

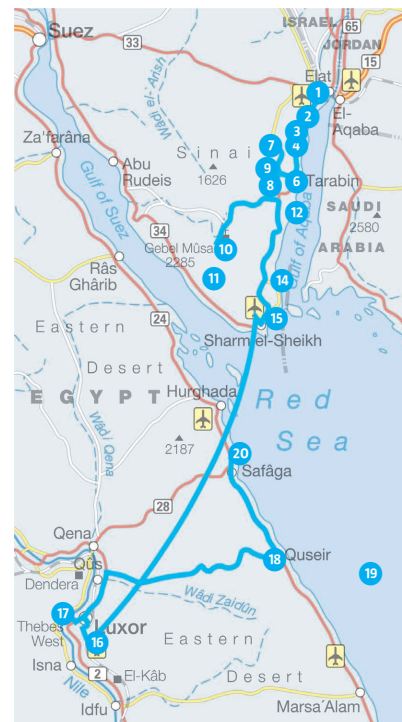
to admire the world's northernmost mangrove forest, it is back via Highway 35 to the chic seaside resort of **15 Sharm El-Sheikh** → p. 42 (photo below). This is where the Egyptian upper class like to spend their holidays, surrounded by beautiful beaches.

ANCIENT CIVILISATION

Now you will continue your journey by air. Scheduled flights take an hour to **16 Luxor** → p. 94 where you can take in the impressive temple complexes of Luxor and Karnak, as well as the modern Luxor Museum. Then the route goes via a Nile ferry crossing to **17 West Thebes** → p. 94 and into the realm of the dead, the Valley of Kings has Tutankhamun's tomb while the Valley of Queens has the tomb that Ramses II built for one of his principle wives, Nefertari. Other highlights include the Colossi of Memnon and Pharaoh Hatshepsut's breathtaking temple, Deir al-Bahri.

SHEER RELAXATION

The route now continues back along main road 29 to the Red Sea and the idyllic harbour village of **18 El Quseir** → p. 89, which – in contrast to other seaside resorts – has a centuries old history as a trading town. From here you can go on excellent dive safaris to the pristine coral reefs around the **19 Brother Islands** → p. 99. Then you continue along the scenic coastal Highway 24 as it meanders to **20 Soma Bay** → p. 84 where you can pamper yourself with the treatments offered at *Les Thermes Marines des Cascades* or, if you are more energetic, you can try your hand at a round of golf at the nearby award-winning golf course.



1945km/1208mi. Estimated driving time 15.5 hours. Recommended duration of journey: 3 to 5 days. Detailed map of the route on the back cover, in the road atlas and the pull-out map.